

*Diamond
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Acknowledgments

The Diamond Journal started out as a class project in 1987 in Linka Corbin-Mullikin's English 10V class. Since then it has grown to a campus-wide publication open to all levels of writing courses, gaining strength, support, and respect. Through their written works, students are able to share their experiences, feelings, and dreams with more than just a few of their classmates. This magazine is, and always will be, a treasured memento for those who have had the courage and confidence to share a part of themselves.

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English 22

Kākā'āko Incident

By Jayson Antonio

At about three o'clock one Saturday morning, after a night of dancing and partying, four of us decided to go to Kākā'āko Park to cool down and talk for a while about our night. The time passed quickly while we talked. Soon we were exhausted and ready to go home. We walked carefully through the park toward my friend Steve's car. David wanted to get a drink of water, so we left him and walked on towards the poorly lit parking lot.

When Steve started the car, David jumped in. We all rolled down the windows to get a breeze of fresh air. As we debated about who was going to be dropped off at home first, Carol noticed a tall guy about twenty feet away from the car walking our way. He looked like a football player and had a dazed expression on his face. We didn't think anything was wrong. I thought he was going home, too.

Suddenly, he came up to Steve's window and asked him if he had any money for gas. Now Steve is the type of person who can stand up for himself when it comes to a conflict with another person his size, but compared to this guy, Steve was like a cockroach ready to be stomped on. Steve told him he didn't have any money on him. I could tell by his voice that he was nervous and scared. We all were, but I was determined that this guy was not going to get a penny out of me.

After a few more questions from this guy, two of his friends came along. One of them came to the side of the car where I was sitting, in the back seat on the passenger's side. The other stood at back of the car. I believe he stood behind the car to block us off. We could not go forward because there was a fence. Now we couldn't go backward, either. It was a sure bet that we weren't going to get out of the car. These guys weren't playing.

There was a pungent odor in the air around us, the bitter smell of beer. It was obvious that they had been drinking quite heavily. Now this whole situation had been brought up to a new level. David would be the person to reason with them, but reasoning with them seemed out of the question.

I truly believed that we were done for. Carol, being a religious person, told us to pray, and I, being religious also, asked God to help me and my friends through this.

By this time, I had broken out into a cold sweat. My heart pounded a million times a second.

The first guy, who was on Steve's side, put his hand on the inside of the door to find the lock. He turned out to be the keen one of the three. The other two were followers. Suddenly, David busted out a ten-dollar bill and gave it to the keen one. "Here, take it," he said. I could not believe that he would give money to these harassers.

They laughed with great joy. Now I was thinking they wanted more. The leader communicated with his friends in his native language. I could not understand what they were saying to each other. By this time, I had broken out into a cold sweat. My heart pounded a million times a second. I wanted to leave, but just couldn't talk. I was frozen like a statue.

I didn't want to believe this was happening to us. This was definitely too much for one evening. Steve's window was still rolled down, but the rest of us had slowly rolled our windows up when the other two guys seemed to be coming near us. Everybody sat motionless in the car while the guys outside knocked constantly at our windows.

Maybe the knocking symbolized how much time we had left. Soon, the harassers began to talk to each other once more, fabricating yet another plan to squeeze more money out

of us. In a soft, troubled voice, Carol said, "Hurry, Steve, put it in gear. They're not looking."

It seemed to take Steve forever to do it. He did put the car into gear, but first we had to reverse before we could drive off.

Steve caught them off guard by reversing quickly. The guy behind the car was startled and moved away. Steve rolled up his window. When Steve changed the gears from reverse to drive, a full beer bottle was thrown at the window where I was sitting. The bottle cracked and the beer poured out and dripped down the side of the door. Luckily the window did not break. Steve drove like a madman. None of us had the guts to look back to see if they were following us.

Minutes and miles later, I turned back to see if those guys were coming to get us. I told my friends that no one was following, and we all sighed in relief. We knew we were lucky to be alive, but we were still disturbed. We went to Carol's house and washed the beer off the car. We checked for damage, but the car had only minor scratches. After that Steve dropped the three of us off safely at our houses.

I Never Thought It Would Happen to Me

By Daisy M.A. Carvajal

On December 22, 1994, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. After that she became a whole new person. My entire family has gotten closer. We have also become very aware of each other's health. My mom's faith grew stronger each day. She still managed to continue working as an accountant. She was always known as the "fighter." Everyone loved my mom, especially my close friends, who thought we had the "coolest" family. I thought my mom was the coolest, too. Though she was struck by a deadly disease, she continued to live her life. She wouldn't let anything get in the way of what she wanted to do. She wasn't about to let this stop her! She joined a prayer group where the members said nightly rosaries. By this time, she had convinced me that she wasn't about to let go and that she would have a whole lifetime ahead of her.

My mom had been in and out of hospitals from Guam to the Philippines for almost two years. Then, on May 29, 1996, when she was admitted to Queen's Medical Center in Hawai'i, her condition was obviously severe. Before my mom left Guam, she made plans with her oldest sister in Los Angeles to meet her in Hawai'i so she would have someone with her at the hospital. In the meantime, I had a high school graduation ceremony to attend on June 1, 1996. Five days later, I departed Guam and arrived in Hawai'i to take care of my mom at Queen's Hospital. I had also planned to attend school at Kapi'olani Community College. Once I arrived on this beautiful island on a hot summer day, my auntie flew back home to Los Angeles, thinking that my mom was going to be okay because the doctor had told her that she should be out of the hospital the following Friday, June 14, 1996. I only had to be there for my mom to keep

her company and assist her in any of her needs. My mom was receiving radiation therapy for the inflammation in her brain, so she would get tired very easily.

Friday came, and I was still the only one here taking care of my mom. My dad was working and my older sister was taking care of my younger brother. They were all on Guam, trying to arrange the next open flight to Hawai'i so they could help me take care of Mom. It wasn't easy for me at all. I was an eighteen-year-old, one hundred pound, sixty-one inch girl, taking care of a one hundred-eighty pound, sixty-four inch tall, forty-eight-year-old woman. I was not able to get my mom out of the hospital. The doctor felt it was almost impossible for me to care for her all by myself. Of course, I didn't believe a word he said, but there was nothing I could do. I lived in that hospital with my mom. I had breakfast, lunch, and dinner in that room. I slept there overnight, but sometimes I had sleepless nights

and often would go two to three days without showering.

As we both waited for the rest of our family members to arrive, it seemed as though my mom only got weaker and weaker each day. We would spend our evenings praying for miracles to cure my mom of her illness. We never gave up hope.

On the morning of June 17, 1996, the doctor spoke privately to me and told me that my mom had only one week left to live, and if she was strong enough, she would have two weeks at the most. My heart dropped. It pumped so hard, I felt its throbbing in my throat and all I could see were eyes staring at me with concern. At the same time, I became angry. But I had no intention of showing any negative signs around my mom, so I was very calm, and I

She wouldn't let anything get in the way of what she wanted to do. She wasn't about to let this stop her!

chose not to believe a word he said. I still had hopes for a miracle.

The next day, my dad, sister, and brother all came in from Guam. I bravely informed them of everything the doctor had told me. We were all shocked, but we never gave up hope that she would be okay because we knew how strong my mom was and that she would never stop fighting. That night, my mom told me to go back to my apartment and rest. She knew how exhausted I was. I held her hand, kissed her on the cheek and said, "I'll see you tomorrow."

The whole family was with her the next day at the hospital. My sister and I took turns warming and massaging her numb, cold hands. By this time, it was already three o'clock in the afternoon. I had just finished drawing a portrait of Jesus that I had

promised my mom. I showed it to her. She opened her eyes real wide, smiled, and softly said, "Wow." I placed it on the wall so it would be facing her, then sat beside her and held her left hand while my sister held on to her right hand. I turned to my left and saw my brother shriveled up in the chair with his chin leaning heavily on his chest. I slowly let go of my mom's soft, cold hand and went over to my brother.

As I held him in my arms, I glanced back over to my mom lying on her bed and saw her take one short breath, and that was it. I never thought this could happen to me. A part of me, a part of my heart, had died and was gone forever.

A Personal Experience

By Daniel Jezek

I was sitting at home alone one morning watching television when I heard the phone ring. I thought about not picking it up and letting the answering machine do its job. But on second thought, I picked it up and answered a tired "Hello." I heard a slow, low voice on the other end talking to me in my own Czech language. It wasn't my mom or my dad; it was a man I had never heard from before. He asked, "Can I speak to Jaroslav?" (Jaroslav is my dad). I answered that Jaroslav was not at home, and asked who was calling.

"This is Jan. I am on my way from Prague to Tokyo and I am here in Honolulu for only three hours. I am Jaroslav's brother," he said.

"Jaroslav doesn't have any siblings. He is an only child," I said.

"I must know better," he said angrily. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"I must know better," I replied. "I am Jaroslav's son."

"Jaroslav has no sons. He even has no daughters," he insisted.

"I must know better," I said.

There was a longer discussion. Finally, we came to the agreement that I must know better than he if my father had a son or not, and he must know better than I if my father had a brother. This came as a great surprise to me, as my dad had never mentioned any family relations.

I was not able to arrange their meeting. My parents were on a trip to Olomana. They are not good climbers, but they wanted to see Kailua from the top of Mount Olomana, so they left with their friends for the whole day and there was no way to let my father know. But I was very curious to see the man who claimed to be my uncle. He also wanted to meet me. Fortunately, my parents had left in their friends' car and our car was there for my use. I made it to the Honolulu Airport in less than forty minutes.

He was a very strong man, quite unlike my father. I immediately came to like him. He was two years younger than my dad. I soon learned why his existence had been kept hidden from me. This was because my mother dislikes boxing, and my uncle was the Czech champion in this sport. My father never admitted to my mother that he had a brother because then he would have had to admit that the brother was a boxer. Because he had kept the secret from her, he also had to keep it from me. The two brothers had not seen each other for twenty years. They only exchanged postcards each Christmas. They had not much to say one to the other, as one was a scientist and the other, a boxer.

I was not able to remember my father saying that he had no siblings, exactly. He always said that one should speak the truth under any circumstances. Well, he was telling the truth when he kept his silence. But, I felt it was not fair. This uncle was so great. I had never thought that there was one like him. I learned that afternoon that back in the Czech Republic, the country where I was born, I also have a cousin who is a champion figure skater. I was eager to learn everything about my extended family. My uncle promised that the next time he went to Tokyo, he would stay longer. He gave me his address and I was immediately thinking about writing a letter to my newly-discovered cousin.

Later that day, I came to the decision that, not only would I always tell the truth under any circumstances, but would also not keep any secrets from my children if ever I had any.

War

By Chan Tue Nguyen

Boom! Boom! Boom! The sound of gun shots echo throughout Saigon. The cannon is wildly roaring like a monster. Frightened shouts and rushing footsteps can be heard coming from outside. In a single instant, chaos begins to develop everywhere in the peaceful summer night.

Waking up in terror, I wonder where my mom is. I shudder to think that I am abandoned here. I am about to cry, then my mom appears.

She quickly cuddles and hugs me, "Oh, my God! Don't cry, baby! Vietnamese communists are coming. Saigon is not safe anymore. We've gotta go!"

I grimace as I hear her words, "Leave home right away??? Why don't we wait for Dad?"

"No! We can't! Dad is stuck at Tansonnhat Air Base. We'll contact him later. Don't ask me anything! Just go!" she gasps.

We hurry downstairs. What I see is a horrifying surprise to me, a nine-year-old girl. Everything is a mess! The house looks naked since the front door is smashed. The walls are seriously damaged by stray bullets. Broken glass and pictures are scattered all over the floor. I feel injured to witness the ruin. Glancing at my mom, I know pain is overwhelming her, too. Sighing with sadness, she grasps my arm and whispers, "It will be okay."

I realize my mom is lying, not only to me but also to herself. I understand she is trying to escape from the bitter fact that our house, even the whole city might be razed to the ground in some more minutes. Bombs are dropped one after another on the city. Both Vietnamese communists and the South Vietnamese Army are tearing Saigon apart.

They dispute every inch of this city, ignoring us, innocent civilians. We have

been victims in the thirty-year civil war between them. We have borne heavy losses. We have gained nothing.

War, the destroyer, is always ruthless. It makes my blood boil, and drives me crazy. "I hate war!" I storm as loudly as I can, yet the shrill screaming of the machine gun far transcends my voice in volume. It shatters my eardrums and haunts me as I flee Saigon with my mom.

Tears stream down my face while I join the long lines of evacuees. Next to me, my mom silently keeps walking. She is plunged into despair because of the heavy losses she has suffered. In the darkness, we go as aimlessly as a

herd of sheep lost in a maze. However, flame, smoke, and corpses along the roads arouse our instincts for survival. We nervously seek refuge, but we are given no mercy!

War follows us anywhere. It sweeps over the country, leading us to the black days of misery. The number of evacuees increases. The guns spit over and over. They combine with the endless howling of someone to scare

me. I ask myself whether this traumatic sight is an illustrative picture of a hell on earth or not.

I look at the sky. The sun is slowly rising. My mom often tells me sunrise symbolizes a good future. For me, the future ahead is a zero. No hope, no prospect, no happiness. The exhaustion is torturing me!

I throw myself on the cold cement floor in a ravaged church, when we evacuate to Hocmon. It seems peace is around here. War is less severe in this small town. Once in a while, a rifle somewhere gives a straggly cough. After running four miles through the night to arrive here, I want to rest very badly. I cover my face with my jacket, and sleep.

I am dazzled by the hot sunshine from a big

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hole in the church's roof. I guess it is noon already. Crowds of people here and there surprise me. I overhear my mom talking to another woman, "The war is over!" Wow! I exhale a sigh of relief. I feel as if I won the lottery.

The moment on that day, 30 April 1975, has stuck in my mind for ages. It is the first time for me, a kid, to perceive what the significance of peace is. Its necessity is so unbelievable! Life is handicapped and meaningless without peace. It is the oxygen people need to breathe. It is the sweet candy I enjoy sucking all my life.

Three months later, we reunite with my dad. In his warm embrace, I murmur, "War! A nonsense!"

"Yes, it certainly is," my dad says as he smiles cheerfully.

Description of Myself as a Writer

By Hoa Nguyen

I really love to write because writing can express my ideas and my heart to everybody. As a writer, I want to write whatever I want. I want to write the truth. I want to write poems.

First, I want the freedom to write. I don't want anybody to force me to write about a certain topic. I want to write for myself, to express my ideas. I am happy to die for the freedom to write what I want.

Then, I want to write the truth about myself. I don't want to write lies. I want the readers to know what I know, to feel what I feel. I want to give them my real experiences and knowledge. My readers and I will enjoy it.

Finally, I want to express myself by writing poems. When I was young, I didn't know what a poem was, just as I didn't know what love was. When I was really very sad in my heart, I didn't

have anyone to talk with about my problems. Then, I discovered that poetry was my best friend. So I expressed my sadness and my heart by writing poetry. I didn't like to keep my sadness inside my heart. After I wrote a poem, I felt much better. I had a poem book that I loved more than anything I had in this world because it was my knowledge, my heart, my treasure, and my lover.

As a writer, I will use my words as a weapon against everything that is unfair. I won't be afraid of anybody. I will stand up for the truth because I am an honest person. I will use my poetry to reflect the real life and my life.

The Hidden Reason

By Michelle C. Samson

I had seen movies showing how new Army recruits were treated, but I had always said, "It's just a movie." Of course, my view of the Army changed when I joined. I'll never forget two things about recruit training: One, the strictness the Drill Sergeants showed to the new recruits; and two, the reason they were so mean.

Voices were screaming left and right, telling me to do this and then do that. I stood erect, hoping the voices would go away, but they just got closer and stronger. I was at the beginning of basic training for the U.S. Army. Sixty-five recruits were packed in a cattle truck that was 6 feet tall, 6 feet wide and 15 feet long. All I remember was being shoved into this truck, which had no windows and no seats. The only thing I heard was girls weeping.

When we got to our destination, a Drill Sergeant yelled out loud in his deep voice, "You have five seconds to get out and three seconds are gone!" Everyone tried to rush out of the small exit with their fifteen-pound duffel bag. We had to carry this duffel bag while we ran around the building and inside the building to the third floor. The stairs seemed like they went on forever.

A day didn't pass without a Drill Sergeant yelling at one of our faces. One Drill Sergeant would usually start from the front; then all the others would gather around us from the back, left, and right side of our bodies. Whether the Drill Sergeant was tall or short, he always seemed so much taller than any of us.

The Drill Sergeants and the recruits had all their meals together in the dining hall. The Drill Sergeants would be in the center while we sat at their far right or far left. The aisle was the only space that separated the Drill Sergeants' tables from our

tables. One time in the dining hall, a girl forgot that she wasn't supposed to cross the aisle near the Drill Sergeants' tables. A Drill Sergeant made her lie on her back in the middle of the dining hall screaming, "I will not bother the Drill Sergeants while they are eating!" She had to repeat this over and over until they were satisfied.

This, however, isn't as bad as it got. Another female soldier forgot to lock her locker when she went to the bathroom. When she came back, she found her mattress and all her personal belongings stuffed inside her locker and the bed frame pushed against it. The worst part was that she was ordered to wake up every hour that night to report to the Drill Sergeant in charge. She also had to be in full metal jacket every time she reported. Full metal jacket consisted of a working uniform, a bag called a rucksack, an ammunition vest, and, of

course, a kevlar, commonly known as a hard helmet.

No one knew why the Drill Sergeants were so mean, and no one bothered to ask. However, when Pvt. Brown accidentally shot herself, everyone probably began to understand their strictness. It was a normal day. Everyone did the same as they had the day before. It was a range day. This means that we went out to the field and practiced firing our M16 weapons. Pvt. Brown was in front of me, inside a hole dug in the ground especially made for extra protection from bullets. She and all the others were waiting for orders from the control tower. They were given the order to open fire and stop after their first 20 rounds.

Pvt. Brown did exactly that, except she forgot to turn the click on her weapon to safe. As she was adjusting her sand-filled leverage bag, a rock acciden-

All I remember was being shoved into this truck, which had no windows and no seats. The only thing I heard was girls weeping.

tally pulled the trigger of her weapon. The sound of her weapon going off made a noise so loud that I thought it had gone off right next to my ear. The noise, however, was not what caught my attention. Rather, it was the hole in her forearm that exposed her bone. Her arm was bleeding so much that the sand turned red. Pvt. Brown was so shocked that she didn't even make a single noise. All she did was stare at her arm.

Sgt. Clark, one of the Drill Sergeants, however, came to her aid by taking off his jacket to wrap her forearm, to control the bleeding. Just when he had finished wrapping her arm, Pvt. Brown screamed loudly from the pain. Sgt. Clark, in a voice none of us had ever heard said, "It's okay, darling. Don't worry about it. Everything is going to be just fine." Pvt. Brown was taken to the hospital, where she had an operation on her arm. She stayed in the hospital a long time, but she did slowly recover.

Those of us who stayed behind at the range and saw exactly what had happened looked at the Drill Sergeants differently from that day on. Even though they yelled, I came to understand that the Drill Sergeants were also human beings. They yelled constantly at our faces, but only to make sure we recruits came to understand what they were teaching us. Their strictness taught me responsibility and agility. They may not have gotten through everyone's head, but I know that most of the soldiers understood their actions, including me.

My Grandfather

By Yasuo Shikakura

I loved my grandfather. He was short of stature, about five feet three inches. His hair was gray and combed straight back from his forehead. He had gentle eyes. He was a placid man. Whatever happened, he was never surprised or agitated. He was always tidily dressed because he was a tailor, and he also made many clothes for me. I liked these clothes very much.

My grandfather had warm and gentle hands. They would wrap around my hands. His hands were a great comfort to me. As the sun would feed a plant, his hands held me and inspired me.

I can not remember my childhood without my grandfather. When I was young, he often gave me an allowance. The coin in his hand was always warm, and I went shopping with the warm coin. When I arrived at a store, it was still warm. I sometimes felt that I did not want to use it while it was still alive in my hand.

As I grew, we had discussions without hands. He was a good advisor, and we had a heart line to each other's minds. For example, when I got depressed, he always encouraged me. When something was wrong with him, I only had to look at him like a good friend.

He passed away peacefully when I was eighteen. Death comes to people in different ways. At the last moment, he called my name. We held each other's hands tightly for a long time. His hands were thin and drawn from his illness, but they were gentle and kind like the sun, the same as in the old days. I will not forget his warm and gentle hands. It is now an old memory, but I will never forget my grandfather because I loved him and respected him. Above all, he loved me very much.

The Flower of Green House

By Xinhong Yu

There were seven members of my family about twenty five years ago, as far as I know: Grandmother, Dad, Mom, three brothers, and I. I spent most of my childhood with my grandmother and my brothers because Mom and Dad were very busy making money to support the family. Memories about my childhood are very sweet. Although I didn't have expensive toys, my brothers and I had our own methods to enjoy life. I followed my brothers and enjoyed fishing and swimming with them. Sometimes they liked to climb up a tree for some birds' eggs. In the family, I am the youngest and the only girl. I was the favorite in the whole family, and my grandmother called me "the flower of green house."

"What does 'the flower of green house' mean?" my uncle asked my grandmother one day.

"She is a pretty little girl, and like a flower in a green house, is too delicate to put out under strong wind and heavy rain," my grandmother answered. This was the first time for me to understand what she really meant by "the flower of green house." It was very true because I was always sick, even though I got the best food in my family. A flower is always beautiful and its life is always comfortable, since it receives more care, more sunshine, and less wind or rain. I wish "the flower" would have had that life a little longer. However, heavy rains and strong winds were coming. The "Cultural Revolution" changed all of my life. At first, my dad and mom were forced to separate from my family because they had followed the so-called "capitalist system." Second, my grandmother, a pious adherent of Buddhism, was forced to give up her faith. At that time, religions were treated as superstitious, so she had to leave the town where we were living and stay in the countryside.

My family's peaceful, routine life was altered completely. I had to do what my grandmother had done before—washing, cooking, and shopping. At that time, I was only ten or eleven years old, while my oldest brother was serving in the Army and my third brother lived in the countryside with my grandmother to take care of her, since she had a serious sickness—bone cancer.

Life was so difficult for all of us. Many times my second brother and I went to school hungry, because we got up too late or were unable to ignite the coal oven. During that hard and dark period, I

cried many times. I envied some of my friends who still lived in their "green house." Third, when I graduated from high school, I had to go to the countryside to accept "re-education," as it was called at that time. The University did not admit high school graduates until they had more than two years of re-education. I still remember the situation of the day in which my peers and I were leaving the

town where I had stayed for over 18 years. At the bus station, most of my classmates and friends cried in their parents' arms because they had to go very far away from their parents and their "green house." I didn't have parents with me, only my brother, but I didn't feel so sad since I had already experienced too much sadness at that age. My only hope was that my new circumstances would be better than my previous living situation. "Flower" left the broken "green house" with a cool feeling.

I was in the countryside and did heavy labor like a local farmer. The primary agricultural plants in the village I went to were tea trees. I started to learn how to grow tea and do other farm work. Spring was the best season to harvest tea of the highest quality; in summer, some Chinese medicinal herbal plants were planted between the tea trees, to improve economic efficiency; in fall,

*A flower is
always beautiful
and its life is al-
ways comfortable,
since it receives
more care. . . .*

mulberry trees had to be trimmed; finally, in winter, we tilled the land on which the tea trees were planted, to have a better harvest the next year.

The people living in that area were very pure, and they treated me very nicely. They would warm my dinner for me if I came back too late. My heart was warmed by their touch and care. Although my life during that period was not as sweet as that in childhood, I was growing and becoming strong. "My grandmother would not call me 'the flower of green house' any more if she could know my changes after I have experienced years of re-education life," I said to myself.

In 1978, after I had spent four years in the countryside, the Cultural Revolution had finished and I was able to start at the University. In 1982, I became a mathematics instructor at the Zhenjiang Medical College. Recalling my past, I don't regret having spent three years in the countryside for re-education, although those years are the best age for school. Those three years of training were very important in my life. Later on, I went to college, got my job, and now I am staying in completely new circumstances in the United States.

My attitudes were primed from those three years' experience. Since then, I am not afraid of any difficulties and challenges anymore. I learned that "The more ploughing and weeding, the better the crop," which means that if you want gain, you have to give first. I learned why it is important for people to help each other. I also learned that we should cherish what others create, the value of time, and the opportunities of school. If I hadn't had these years of experience, I might still be a "flower of green house," which would not bear heavy rains and strong winds, and could only depend on someone else for its whole life.

An Unexpected Meeting

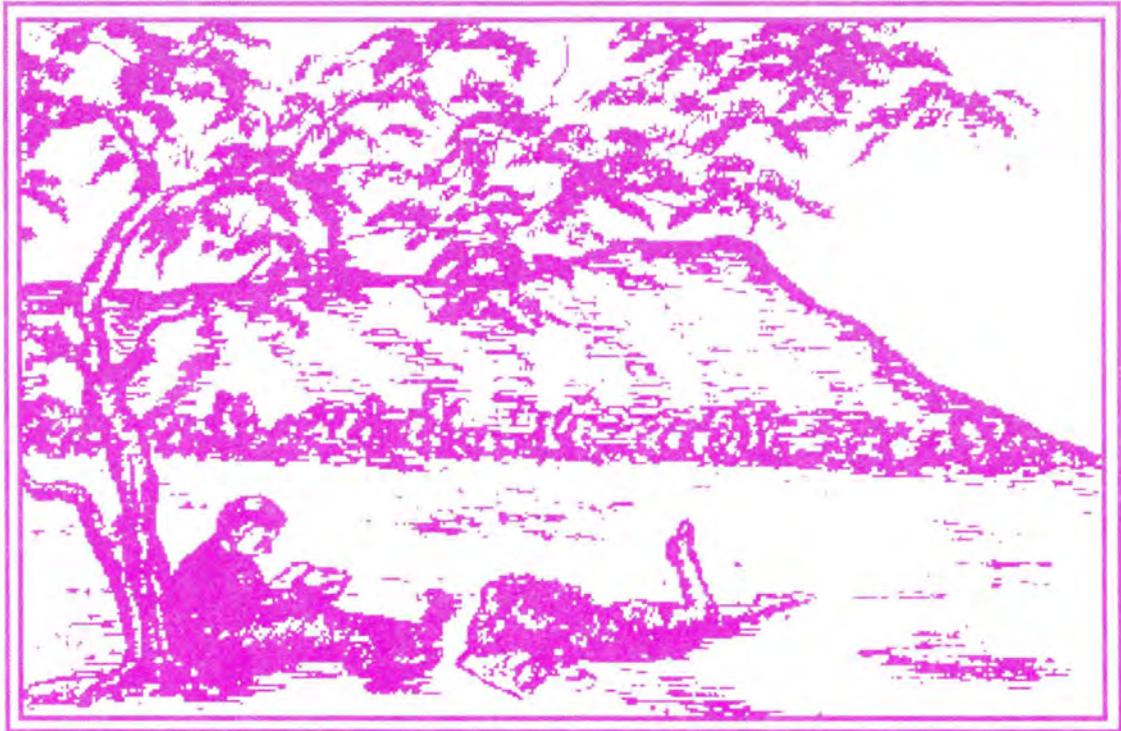
By Guqiao Zhong

About five years ago, when I was in a college in China, I first heard Phil Collins' songs. At that time, listening to English songs was popular in my school. His "*Another Day in Paradise*" was broadcast frequently by the school's radio station. After I came to the USA, I saw him in a Grammy Awards ceremony on TV. I never thought I would meet him in person.

One day last summer, I was working at a T-shirt store. The small store was as hot as a food steamer. Business was slow. I was folding T-shirts, hoping that I would be able to make a big sale. At that moment, a man came in wearing slippers. I guessed he was about forty, since his forehead was bald. He was short and stout, a quite ordinary person. This was my first impression of him. He said, "Hello," with a confident smile. I greeted him and continued folding my shirts. Judging from what he wore, I assumed that he would not spend too much money on T-shirts. The man browsed and stopped at the table where all the shirts were on sale. I told him the prices and the sizes. He nodded his head. While he was selecting the shirts, he asked me some questions and paid attention to my responses. However, I was tired and gave him

short answers. When he was ready, I directed him to the cashier. "Do you have a pair of scissors that I can borrow?" he asked me. "Sure." I gave him the scissors. I thought there was an odd piece of thread that needed to be cut. Once he got the scissors, he cut the two sleeves into strips without hesitating. Then, he put it on and said: "That is my shirt." "What a strange man he is," I thought. I just smiled lightly, in order to look mature. After he got his change, he did not walk away. "You do not recognize me?" he said. I was asking myself, "Is he an actor or an athlete?" I shook my head, embarrassed. He wrote down his name on a piece of paper and I saw the name was Phil Collins. I know my mouth must have opened wide at that moment.

Since then, every time I see Phil Collins on TV, I recall the day I met him. I pay more attention to him than ever before, since he is the only American singer I have ever met face to face.



English 100 & 214

Coffee Talk

By Candace Ah Nee

The rain had been much worse in Salzburg. I felt my face turn numb from the stinging wind and rain as I briefly gazed at Mozart's birth house. It was great to have been in Austria, even under those conditions. I had thought about how good a cup of coffee would have tasted as I ran back to the tour bus to avoid the punishing weather. There wasn't enough time for coffee until we reached Vienna.

I was relieved when we finally reached the hotel. I immediately liked Vienna. It was a bigger city, but just as charming as Salzburg. Caterina, the tour director, was accurate in her descriptions of cities. Vienna has a good mixture of centuries-old buildings, surrounded by modern conveniences. I sometimes wondered if tour directors ever got tired of saying the same things and answering the same questions on every tour. As Caterina checked us into the hotel, she gave us directions to "Demel," one of Austria's oldest and most famous coffee houses.

My mother and I needed dry clothing before going anywhere, though we were only going back out into the wind and rain. We watched the weather report in our room while drinking very bad instant coffee that came in something like a tea bag. I could hardly wait for the real stuff. I watched a satellite picture of rain clouds covering central Europe and realized that a weather report is recognizable in any country. Rain looks like rain.

We decided to leave the hotel when the rain slowed down to a light drizzle. The wind and rain were biting as we walked in the direction of Demel. I was starting to enjoy it, after a few minutes. It was part of the journey in a great adventure, and it made getting a good cup of coffee an exciting challenge. My mother and I would appreciate it even more.

It started to rain hard again as we watched an umbrella fly away because of the continuous, forceful wind. The sight of it made us laugh, then we laughed at ourselves for being foolish enough to walk in wind and rain for coffee when we could have taken a taxi. We never thought about bringing an umbrella from home.

However, I was wearing a useless, plastic poncho that I had purchased from K-Mart for 99 cents. The hood was too small for my head and the bottom part of it would continually fly up, allowing the rain to hit me. I took it off, thinking that if I was going to get wet, I was going to do it properly by getting completely soaked. It basically only gave me 99 cents worth of protection.

As the wind and rain whipped across my face, I thought about what it could have been like at the turn of the century, drinking coffee at Demel. Caterina told me of its history, and of its being an important place for artistic, political, and other intellectual conversations. I also wondered why there wasn't a well-known pub where people could have done the same over a couple of pints of beer.

We started to recognize street names and knew that we were close to our destination. Had it not been for a black and white vertical sign saying "Demel," we would have missed it in the row of inconspicuous shops crowded together. Clusters of buildings are common throughout Europe, since space is both valued and limited.

We were greeted at the window with beautifully displayed desserts. The use of pink doilies made me cringe a bit, but it didn't hinder the dessert's tantalizing effects on the senses. As we stepped through the door, the aroma of fresh coffee, cinnamon, and chocolate filled our nostrils. My mother was as

I don't understand why a country would take bags of coffee along while invading another country.

surprised as I was. Neither of us had ever been in a coffee house like this one. I couldn't even imagine any place like it in Hawai'i. "Frilly" would best describe the decor. With the use of silk flowers and lace, I felt like I was at a wedding reception. I was definitely amused.

We looked into a display case of different types of desserts, most of which looked delicious, but all I really wanted was something that looked familiar. Something that was chocolate and didn't have a surprise filling would make me happy. A woman in a pink French maid-like uniform finally had us seat ourselves and took our order. I wondered how she was going to find us in the mess of people. I was really starting to feel anxious for my cappuccino. We sat at a corner table, not far from Caterina and some other people from the tour. She was happily surprised to see us and let us know by exclaiming, "Ooh-la-la, you both made it!"--one of her many humorous expressions.

As I waited impatiently for my cappuccino, I had a hard time imagining that Demel was once a center for artistic and intellectual conversation. It had to have looked completely different. Though it did have a strange and amusing charm, the atmosphere wasn't anything close to what I had imagined. I suppose I had expected a room full of college students, or at least more people under the age of fifty. The only other young people I could find were a couple of Canadians. I knew where they were from because of the maple leaves sewn on their backpacks. They do that so as not to be mistaken for Americans, or so I'm told by my Canadian friends.

The desserts and coffees finally arrived. We didn't hesitate to start munching. I burned my tongue from the hot cappuccino and didn't care. As I continued eating and drinking, I remembered the history Caterina had told me about Turkey invading Austria and how coffee bags were left behind in the process. I don't understand why a country would take bags of coffee along while invading another country.

Austria definitely had the strongest and most delicious coffee I had ever tasted. It was much stronger and tastier than American coffee. The coffee house tradition started in Austria, and we can thank the Turks for leaving their bags of coffee behind. The chocolate cake I had ordered was as rich and delicious as it looked. It was so overwhelming that I ordered another cappuccino just to wash it down. I could also see that my mother was enjoying herself with each bite and sip that she took.

When we returned to the hotel room, I had one last cup of the horrible instant coffee. It didn't matter anyhow, considering that I had ingested enough caffeine and sugar to keep me up for a long time.

It had been a great day in a series of great days throughout Europe with my mother. I didn't know when or if I'd be back again. The wind and rain added to the adventure. Whoever said, "It's not the destination that matters, it's the journey," knew how to enjoy the little things in between in life. I'd like to buy that person a cup of coffee.

Monkey Go Home

By Gerard Donlin

My life hit rock bottom in July of 1995. I had gone from business executive to criminal drug addict in less than one year. Now, I was under investigation by various state and government agencies for drug related offenses and by Child Protective Service's concern about my daughter's lifestyle. If that wasn't enough, we were all going to be kicked out of my mom's house since she had gotten her fill of the whole situation.

There were no more places to run and hide. I felt as if my back were against a wall. Anyway, enough was enough! Over twenty-nine drugs were the means I had used to avoid life's responsibilities. Though I had escaped responsibility, I couldn't escape from the monkey on my back. The monkey wasn't always the same, but when one jumped off, there was another to take his place. The name of my current monkey was "Swako" (slang name for someone's ice pipe) and he was the heaviest and hungriest of all. If I was to salvage what was left of my life, he would have to leave. So, I swore off drugs and told him, "Monkey Go Home!!!"

I still live in the same house I grew up in as a child. For the past ten years, my family and I have lived downstairs from my mother. During that time I had never made any improvements to our house or yard. They, like my life at that time, were in a state of total disrepair. Looking around me, I saw how my inner nature was manifested and reflected in my surrounding environment. By replacing the bad aspects of my environment, would it also affect my inner-self? By becoming one with nature would I become one with myself? I decided to test these theories by using myself as the subject; after all, what did I have to lose?

I started by staying away from the people I had

gotten into trouble with and replaced them with drug-free people. One of the places I found was at a fellowship that met at Central Union Church. Though I didn't drink, I felt a connection between us. We both used glass containers—theirs held the liquor, while mine held the rocks. The more meetings I attended, the more I related to the other people there. I saw that I wasn't judged by them for things I had done in my past. I became aware of how people in similar situations had overcome their setbacks by living life, "one day at a time."

So, I tried taking things one day at a time and for the first time in twenty nine years I started to regain the self-esteem that was lost so long ago. I had taken the first of many steps on the path to a new and better life. My monkey began to worry as his grip upon me began to loosen and his weight diminished.

The next environment I worked on was my home environment. The inside of my house was a disaster area filled with the accumulation of ten years of neglect. Bags upon bags of garbage, along with various pieces of broken, worn out furniture, were taken out for the trash man to collect. A semblance of order began to appear and I found myself becoming more organized. I repainted walls, installed new floor tile, and remodeled some of the rooms. I started to feel good as I gained more control over my surroundings. I completed the entire interior of the house by Thanksgiving Day, 1995 and thanked God for all the help He had bestowed upon me. Looking around the house, I could not believe the transformation that had occurred. It felt as if I was being reborn myself. For the first time in my life, I had completed something without my monkey's help. I had completed the entire renovation of my home while being sober. My monkey's

By becoming one with nature would I become one with myself? I decided to test these theories. . . .

disorientation increased as I became more organized and his weight began to feel lighter as I ignored his hunger pangs and fed my soul instead.

With the holiday season approaching, I started to think of the next phase of my plan—my immediate outside surroundings. I knew I needed some kind of hobby to occupy my time while keeping my monkey off balance. My first choice was gardening. What started as a small herb garden outside my front door has evolved into a “Green Monster” who keeps gobbling up my yard. Now, a sunken vegetable garden, various raised flower beds, window boxes, hanging baskets, along with assorted fences and pathways have combined to form a unique oasis in the midst of Kaimuki town. The entire area now has a life all its own; bees and butterflies returned to add their unique sounds and delicateness to the serene, colorful scenes painted each day by the various flowers and trees in the garden. Life was flourishing around me and I began to flourish along with it. I was growing within myself, becoming the person I could have been, if only I had taken the time to do so. All I had to do was start taking things “one day at a time.” I now appreciated the simple things in life that I had once taken for granted—stargazing at night, watching a flower as it blooms, sitting next to my dog under a tree to stare at the different faces the clouds make as they look down over us. I can now see that the best things in life are free and to enjoy them my monkey must leave and never come back. So, I told him again, “Monkey Go Home!” and added, “Don’t ever come back!”

Now it was time to change my home life. I decided to remarry and recreate a wholesome family environment. My new wife was my old wife, who had been my ex-wife once before. We’ve known one another for over twenty years, and during this time she has stood by me through thick and thin. By working out our differences, we plan to avoid the pitfalls and road blocks that littered the road of our previous relationship. We began to walk down a new path laid down before us which winds toward a new and better lifestyle. It was a path that could only be taken without my monkey coming along for the ride. So, I told him, “Sorry, no hitchhikers allowed! Monkey Go Home!”

The final thing I changed was my learning environment. Graduating from the “School of Hard Knocks,” I enrolled in the Culinary Arts Program offered by Kapi‘olani Community College. It was a means of embarking on a new career, while becoming the first person in my immediate family to earn a college degree. Since attending the fall semester, I feel I have been given a second chance in life; by changing my different environments, I have changed my outlook on life and my opinion of myself. My life looks much brighter without you-know-who controlling it. Once in a while I hear his knock at my door, and when I do, I yell out, “Monkey Go Home!” and smile to myself as I listen to his retreating footsteps.

Eight Legs and Silk

By Ashleigh Ferguson

Nature, with its many treasures, can show and teach us much. The spider is an example of nature at its best.

I first became interested in spiders during a school trip to Germany. We were an all-girls group from high school. Our trip was arranged by our German language teacher and, although it was many years ago, I remember we arrived on a cold, dark Christmas night. Our class of sixteen was split into groups of four girls per room at the hostel. After the sleeping arrangements were made, we proceeded to prepare ourselves for the night. Even though it had been a long haul from London, we were far too excited to sleep, so we sat on the bunks giggling and chatting in anticipation of the discoveries to come. Suddenly, one girl let out a shriek that surprised and startled us. We all turned, wide-eyed and curious, toward the alarming sound, to discover, to our horror, a huge hairy spider. It was about three inches in diameter, creeping stealthily down the wall. It was “destination school girl” for the spider; ours was a chaotic scramble to the other side of the room. We huddled together, staring at the creepy bug, asking ourselves: “What will happen next?” and “Who will get that nasty thing out of the room?” Even though I was as much afraid of the bug as the next student, I decided to be the paladin and capture it. Running through my head was the question, “What would I do if it jumped at me?”

I had to stay calm and try to control my trembling torso. Cautiously, with heart pounding, I swiftly pounced and trapped the object of fear between a cup and a postcard.

Something strange happened to me at that moment as I gazed at the spider through the plastic cup, watching the eight hairy legs trying to feel

their way out of prison. I realized that it was just as afraid of me as I was of it. I wondered where it came from and what its purpose was.

I used to suffer from arachnophobia. I, like most people, felt that spiders are dangerous and nasty creatures that should be wiped away with a cloth, sucked up by the vacuum cleaner, or smashed with a newspaper.

My curiosity has led me to investigate this magnificent and beautiful creature. I have uncovered so many things about these arachnids that I am now amazed and awed by their interesting habits. Sometimes I think of them as tiny robots roaming a house, cleaning up maggots, eggs, flies, larva, and other living creatures hidden away in every crack and crevice of a home. Not only do they do this, but their service is free of charge. Now, if I see a spider spinning a web, I take a closer look.

I am especially captivated by its amazing web. Sometimes, the spider appears to be just sitting there, waiting for lunch to fly by. On closer inspection, I see it manipulating the silk threads, properly repairing a hole, or completing its web for the day.

The common garden spiders make the most elaborate webs that, I feel, look the most magnificent, shimmering in the sun after a rain shower. To build such spectacular webs, spiders must, in their way, measure distances, calculate angles and draw threads parallel to one another. A web is truly a masterpiece of engineering design. I find this amazing since no spider has ever taken a math class!

I have also discovered that spiders have eight eyes, but despite this, most have poor eyesight. It is also believed that they cannot hear or smell; however, they make up for this by

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possessing a remarkable sense of touch through their body hair and feelers. Even though I find this fascinating, I'm not sure that I want one to run up my arm yet.

After interviewing a few of my classmates, I didn't find one that liked spiders. One, in particular, summed up the general consensus, saying that they are creepy, scary, and frightening to look at.

My appreciation has grown from many of the facts I have learned. Spider silk is stronger than Kevlar, a synthetic material used in bulletproof vests. Imagine the possibilities of such a material. Spider silk has allowed engineers to design things like car bodies that absorb the energy of impact. Doctors are researching the use of spider silk in medicine. Its use for sutures might cause less scarring and bleeding in surgery. The silk, being a protein substance, would also integrate more effectively in the body. Artificial ligaments made of this material, for example, would benefit from its strength, flexibility, and elasticity, enabling them to retain their shape better. It seems inconceivable to me that these little creatures could help with such medical advancements.

I'm not afraid of them in the way that I used to be, and I don't run away screaming. I think that all I have learned about spiders has lessened my fear dramatically and helped me to accept the odd one into my home. I still trap large spiders and then, after inspection, give them their freedom, only this time outside the house.

Basic Training

By Robert Gilliam

For an eighteen year old orphan kid, with a history of juvenile delinquency, in and out of reform schools and institutions, joining the Army to beat a prison sentence seemed like the right thing to do. Little did I know how much it would change my life.

I showed up at the Army induction center in Oakland, California with hair down to my waist and an attitude problem. Both I would lose by the end of basic training. In their place I would acquire new principles, including hard work and pride of accomplishment.

To perform this seemingly impossible change of personal identity, the Army has created a program designed to tear a man down and then build him back up to their standards. My initial contact with training personnel was disastrous. I was yelled at, berated, and told I was the scum of the earth. This went on for several days, while I was led from place to place to get all the things I needed to be a soldier. First, I got a uniform that didn't quite fit; next, it was off to get a pay voucher. It was just enough money to get the things that were required, such as toothpaste, razor, soap, all the toiletries, along with towels and brass polish. The list went on forever and used up all my pay. Not once in the first week did I sleep in the same place. Finally, I was led to a barracks that would be my home for the next fifteen weeks. By the time I got there, I was thoroughly confused and disoriented from not having had very much sleep; the Army isn't very big on sleep. Naturally, all I wanted to do was grab a bite to eat, get some sleep, and be left alone. **FAT CHANCE.**

Reveille woke me the next morning at 5:00 and training began, but not before one last act of humiliation. They cut off all my hair. It wouldn't have been so bad, except the barber's chair was set

up in a room with mirrors everywhere. They were on the ceiling, in front of me, and to both sides of me. It was like being in the house of mirrors at a carnival, and I had to watch. Another act of mental domination. While all this was sinking in, I had a feeling the barber wasn't just a barber. He looked like he had definite sadistic tendencies. I know he took particular delight in shaving off my long locks. I could tell by the look in his eyes. I felt like the victim of some kind of predator just before it strikes; there was a feeling of unreality

about it. And then, in the blink of an eye, I looked like everybody else. Now the last of my identity was gone and the rebuilding could begin.

The change was hard. I was worked to exhaustion almost every day. The motto of our company was, "We run second to none." Yeah, I was with the road runners and had to run everywhere we went; this just

added to my misery. If I was caught walking, I was punished with things like low crawling in the mud for fifty yards, endless pushups, or maybe standing at attention for a couple of hours. Sometimes I would assume the dying cockroach position, a pretty remarkable thing. I had to lie in the mud on my back with my hands and feet in the air and maintain that position for however long the drill sergeant wanted me to. Looking back, it seems I was running forever, and if I wasn't running, I was marching; we never stopped.

I had night infiltration classes where I had to move through two hundred yards of obstacles with live rounds fired over my head, and hand grenades set off all around me. Very scary stuff, but by the time I took part in that maneuver I had been well-trained and was prepared for it. We were also trained to crawl under barbed wire without getting hung up. Sometimes the drill instructors would let off tear gas over

Sometimes I would assume the dying cockroach position, a pretty remarkable thing.

our heads while we were trapped under the wire. That was to teach us not to panic while putting our gas masks on.

Now, there is another strange thing I had to go through, tear gas training. To teach us to recognize the smell, taste, and feel of tear gas, which invades the whole body, I was put in a metal hut with nine other guys. Two canisters of tear gas were thrown in and the doors closed. I had to stay in there for about five minutes. At one point, we had to run around in a circle singing *Jingle Bells*. I know it would probably be a pretty funny sight from the outside, but it wasn't for me. With my eyes burning, tears running down my face, and my lungs screaming for air, all I could think was "GET ME OUT OF HERE!"

I learned a lot more during those fifteen weeks, like hand to hand combat, the use of small arms, and night vision techniques. Between classes and maneuvers we did calisthenics endlessly, and, by the end of fifteen weeks, I was just what the Army wanted: mentally tough, physically capable, and very confident.

In the last couple of weeks my company came together as a team. We had earned each other's trust and respect and learned to work together. By the end of basic training, I had learned that desire and determination can overcome any obstacle. The Army had taken this kid from the streets of Los Angeles and turned him into a dependable young man, prepared to accept the responsibilities of life.

The Blue Elephant

By Emma Gunterberg

“**M**om, I don’t want to get up. Please let me sleep.”
 “Emma, we have to get ready for our big trip.”

I jumped out of bed. I had completely forgotten that we were moving to Kuwait. I was so excited! I had never even been on an airplane during the seven years of my life. My father had been selected for a doctor’s position in Kuwait. All the members of my loving family were looking forward to this enticing adventure. A new culture, a new language, and a new climate awaited us.

“New English School” was the only school in Kuwait that accepted non-English speaking students. The only condition was that additional English classes had to be part of the curriculum. I was placed in a class of my contemporaries. The sole contrasts between us were hair color and types of language difficulties.

Fear struck me when my mother left the hot, sunny classroom. I was alone with all these foreign looking strangers. My only salvation from complete paralysis was the last words Mother had whispered to me: “Stay close to your nice teacher, she will help you.” I could not even recall my teacher’s name, but I knew it resembled the word “muffin,” so in my mind I called her “Mrs. Muffin.”

The room was hot and dry. I could feel my heavy, navy-wool school uniform stick to my moist skin. The new location for my education was a large, well-worn room painted in pale yellow. I could see paint chips lying adjacent to the dirt-white ledge. Thirty small desks, suitable for children, were lined up in perfect order. They were obviously newer than the building. Most desks were occupied. The sweet smell of Arabic spices

found its way up my nostrils. It almost made me dizzy. Except for the ineffective ceiling fan’s dull sound, the room was dead silent. All the other children observed me, the alien. I seated myself close to the teacher’s desk, keeping in mind Mother’s advice. Mrs. Muffin appeared big, soft, and comforting. She looked like she had baked too many apple pies, but in an odd way it became her. Her reddish curls framed her freckled, plump face.

The ends of her bangs were divided into separate locks, glued to her forehead by perspiration. Her long, wide, flowery dress swung around her ankles as she strode around the room.

“Now class, it is time for play-hour. Please, take out your coloring books.” I was thrilled, because I loved to draw and paint. The huge box offered a large selection of colors. My petite pale hand grabbed

a blue chalk. I discovered a cute elephant in my big coloring book. Immediately, I began to smear blue color within the contours of the adorable elephant. My anxiety slowly faded. The dark-skinned boy with warm brown eyes next to me even broke out in a smile.

Suddenly, I heard a sharp voice from behind. “Emma! Don’t you know that elephants aren’t blue? They are GRAY!” I turned around to witness the transformation of the warm, comforting Mrs. Muffin into a witch. The big, mean “Broom Hilda” demanded that I walk around the room and show each and every classmate my blue elephant. The unfamiliar faces laughed at me and my dreadful blue monster. My posture deteriorated with every step I took to complete the gauntlet. A knot in my belly made its presence known. I felt my face heat up and glow. Tears were pressing against my eyelids. I tried my best to trap them. Perhaps a few escaped; I don’t

My anxiety slowly faded. The dark-skinned boy with warm brown eyes next to me even broke out in a smile.

remember. The hag informed the class that my behavior was not tolerated on her premises. She had obviously interpreted my choice of an unrealistic color as refractory. I was convicted and sentenced to face the blackboard for the remainder of the play hour. My shivering must have made the dusty floor vibrate. I was pleased that the sentence allowed me to hide my face from the crowd, due to the humiliating, obtrusive tears.

Seconds, minutes, hours, days, and weeks passed. I calmed down on the outside, but inside of me the knot grew bigger and bigger. I had been punished for my childish, carefree imagination. I was humiliated and separated even further from the group. Any sense of belonging and acceptance by my peers was now unattainable. Even my dear mother had betrayed me. Her judgment of character could no longer be trusted. Mrs. Muffin left me with a strong and vivid memory filled with anxiety. In retrospect, it's funny how a silly thing like coloring an elephant blue can scar you forever.

Every morning before I was sent to school my tummy ached, but Mother could not seem to understand why. Today, millions of years later, I know the reason; the knot that was formed the day I painted that damned elephant blue, never untied until I left "New English School."

Kansas on Kaua'i

By Danielle Howe

I had been in several natural disasters before—bad thunderstorms in Texas, earthquakes in California—but nothing mentally prepared me for a hurricane the size of Iniki.

Jason and I had been living together for a year and a half on Kaua'i in an area called Kapahi, which is up in the hills above the town of Kapa'a. We had rented a small one-bedroom house in a rural area. There were several other houses on either side of us and across the street. Cows grazed in the fields behind us. A one-lane road connected Kapahi to Kapa'a.

We were alerted by the weather bureau that an extremely forceful hurricane named Iniki was headed our way, but the weather service was not sure if it was going to veer south and head toward Oahu or turn north and come towards Kaua'i. Jason was a native of Kaua'i and had been in a hurricane 10 years earlier. If Iniki was coming to the island, he knew what we had to do to prepare for it. That night we went to the grocery store and stocked up on canned goods and food for my cat. We also made a quick stop at the gas station and filled both of our cars up with gas. When we returned home, we took all the pictures off the walls, put away what small stuff we could, and taped the windows with masking tape. I packed two changes of clothes and put them in my car along with my picture books and other invaluable items.

The next day dawned with light winds and rain. Low, dark, angry clouds rapidly moved in. It quickly became rather gusty. On my way to work that morning, I stopped to give my manager a ride. We drove about a half a mile when we realized that the winds were getting stronger. My manager decided it was probably not a good idea to be out in the streets, so I turned around, dropped him off, and went home. I called Jason at work and told

him that I was not going to work.

"Hang tight," he told me. "Don't worry. I'll be right home."

I brought my cat, Oz, a big orange tabby, into the house and found myself nervously pacing the floor until Jason arrived. By the time he got home, the winds had really started to pick up, and the rain had become a downpour. We decided to direct the wind through the house by leaving the front door open. We knew that this would keep the air pressure inside the house the same as outside, and this, we hoped, would prevent the roof from coming off the house.

As the eye of the storm passed over, everything became eerily quiet and still.

Once everything in the house was in order, we settled down on a futon that we had in the kitchen. The weather became more and more tempestuous. We could see the telephone wires dancing on the poles. The cows had hunkered down in the fields. We watched TV, listening for

news about the storm, until the electricity went out. By then the rain was coming down so hard that we could barely see our neighbors' houses across the street. We calmly settled down to wait out the storm with juice, sodas, and a couple of good books.

Soon the winds became unbelievable. The sky was ominous. Every now and then, it would light up with a flash of lightning, followed almost simultaneously by a burst of thunder. We saw wooden debris and pieces of corrugated tin flying through the air. I watched in disbelief as our neighbor's roof slowly started to peel away, and as the wind got underneath it, it tore right off and flew out into the grayness of the storm.

As the eye of the storm passed over, everything became eerily quiet and still. With a slight rustling of the trees and the sound of water rushing off the road, we decided to redirect the wind again. This time we closed the front

door, thinking the wind would be coming from the opposite direction due to the known nature of hurricanes. We had a couple of broken jalousie windows in the back of the house that had let in some water. As we were cleaning up the glass, the winds started up again. We had just finished straightening up and had walked back into the front room when a tremendous gust of wind came off the mountains and blew the door partially off its hinges. The cat ran out into the fury of the hurricane.

"Go get my cat!" I yelled at Jason.

"Im not going out in this," he replied rather sharply as he crouched behind the door and tried to close it. I immediately tried to help him, and the next thing I knew the whole house had twisted and was at an angle. In a split second, I went sliding across the living room floor and crashed into the corner. Rain seemed to be everywhere. We were both drenched. My clothes were clinging to me and my hair was plastered to my head. Oz had left. Animals seem to have a sixth sense about things. This told Jason that we had better get out.

"Dani, can you make it to the Blazer?" Jason asked.

"Yes," I replied, trying to be brave. "I can make it."

"Then get out," he said. "Get out now!"

I fought through the storm to the Blazer and jumped in. Jason was right behind me. As we sat in the car, we could see the house had tilted off its footing stones and looked forsaken.

"What are we going to do?" I asked Jason. My voice seemed an octave higher than usual.

"I am going to try and get us to some shelter," he replied.

"You can't drive in this," I said, my voice pitched even higher. The next thing I knew the whole house had lifted up in one piece, just like in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. It twirled around and flew into the pasture, landing upside down.

I was dumbstruck. I could not believe what I had just seen. All I could say in a flat tone was, "My house." The neighbors began coming out of their homes. They thought that we were still in the house. Once everybody saw that we were okay, the Victorinos waved us into their home.

"Can you make it around the fence?" Jason asked.

"Yeah, I can do it," I said. I jumped out and made a dash for safety. Jason was right behind me. Once we were safely at the Victorinos', I peered out the window and saw the total destruction of our house. The house had landed on its roof and was smashed flat. Our personal belongings were spread out as far as I could see. Suddenly, I just couldn't look any longer. Every time the wind gusted, I was so scared I hid on the floor at the back of the pantry.

When night fell and the storm had moved off, everyone ventured out of their houses to assess the damage to the neighborhood. Jason and I tried to salvage what we could with the help of our neighbors. Little things that had some importance to us we gathered and put in the Blazer. We thought we would try to make it to his family's house. As we were leaving we ran into our landlord's son, who was checking on the area. He invited us to stay at his house, as the road to Kapa'a was impassable. It was dark, so we took him up on his offer. That night, as I was standing on their balcony, the full realization of what had happened hit me. I started shaking and crying. I could not believe how lucky we had been.

The next six weeks were an endurance test, both physically and mentally. Jason and I moved into a smaller house that our landlords owned. We tried to recover what little we could of our belongings, but not too much was salvageable. Oz showed up at the site of the old house two days later. We rewarded him with love and whatever treats we could find to give him. If it hadn't been for Oz, I would have opted to stay in the house.

After the storm, Jason and I spent a lot of time together. We shared a closeness that is still with us today. After realizing how close we had come to losing our lives, I have a new appreciation for life today. I also have a new-found, deep respect for Mother Nature's power.

Mama, My Alarm Clock

By Angie Hui

“Hey sun la, chi dou la!” Grandma said.
 “Wake up. You are going to be late.”
 She always woke me up in the morning. Ma-ma was like my alarm clock. I was never late for anything. Even if I had a nap, she would wake me up in time. “Ngo gum man lao fan bei lei, hou ma?” Ma-ma would say before I left the house, “Do you want me to save dinner for you?”

I had a traditional grandmother. She was a short, chubby lady, with a kind heart; a heart with smiles that gave the whole world a certain glow. Ma-ma also had dentures. I remember times when she would be watching television, and fall asleep; as she breathed out, her teeth would slowly come out and as she breathed in, her teeth would go right back in place. The fun part was that when she was asleep, and I’d call her, she would wake up with a quick deep breath and she would try to quickly place her teeth back in her mouth.

She would go on her walks every morning, up and down the hill where we lived. Taking her time going down the hill and coming back up, she would greet the same people she saw every morning. There was one problem—she did not know how to speak English; she only knew Chinese. So when she greeted the people, she would greet them in Chinese; amazingly, they would respond with the right answer.

Even though she was traditional, she was fun to talk to. When I had a boyfriend, she was the first person to know in my family. The best part was when I would go to her room and call my boyfriend. Even when my parents called for me, she would cover for me. She would yell at my parents that I was helping her with something. We had fun fooling them.

Another way she supported me was to urge me

to get a job. Ma-ma would encourage me to work, but my parents would not allow it. Ma-ma would even talk to my dad so I could work. Eventually, my dad had to listen because she gave him reasons for allowing me to work. She told him that it was the 90s and if he wanted me to have a good future, he should let me find my way now. So I started working, and she was happy that I had a job and used my spare time wisely, instead of goofing off.

Ma-ma was also religious. She believed in Buddhism. For every Buddhist ceremonial event, the house would be full of incense and she would burn the artificial gold nuggets (that she folded herself), little lanterns (that she also folded herself), and other things that are needed to worship or pray for Buddha.

She did not go through such rituals only on ceremonial days, but also in remembrance of a death in the family or some kind of important family event. For example, on my grandfather’s death date and birthday, she would place a table in front of his picture and cover it with roast pork, duck, chicken, fish, shrimp, four settings with four bowls of rice, four tiny cups of tea, and four tiny cups of wine. The reason for the four settings was so my grandfather could bring ancestors to join him. On these dates family members are supposed to come over and give their blessings, put incense in the urn, and, after everyone finishes praying, eat the food for lunch.

My grandmother was 90 years old going on 91. If you had met her, you would have thought she was between 75 and 85 years old. She was the healthiest 90-year-old woman I knew. She could remember birthdays very clearly (both Chinese and American birthdays). She could remember everyone’s birthday—seven sons and daughters, plus their spouses, 22

Ma-ma would encourage me to work, but my parents would not allow it.

grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren. If I am correct, this is how big the family is (not including some of her grandchildren's spouses).

Even though the family was big, Ma-ma loved everyone. Yet we can't forget that she was a traditional grandmother, which meant she favored the boys. It really didn't matter much, but in Ma-ma's view it would be better if the child was a boy. My father is the youngest of seven, and she favored him the most. Because my father was the youngest male in the family, my grandmother lived with us. As for me, I am the youngest girl to carry the last name "Hui." She cared for me, but not as much because I will not carry the family name for the rest of my life. My younger brother is the last boy in our generation of the family to carry the last name "Hui." Ma-ma pampered him as much as possible. At times I would get upset, but I could do nothing about it. It was important to her to have someone in the family to carry the family name. Besides, it is part of the culture.

In the Chinese tradition, when you reach a certain age, you have a big celebration. She was ready to celebrate her 91st birthday last August. It would have been a big event for her and she could not wait. Ma-ma had already called one of my aunts in Hong Kong to place an order of gold plates made for each of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She also had her invitation cards designed and ready to be printed in Hong Kong. Ma-ma was also looking forward to holding her first great-grandchild of the next generation to carry the last name "Hui."

"Hey sun la, chi dao la!" she said to me. I woke up and was off to school. Later, after classes, I had gone home to change for work. "Sek jio yeh mei ah?" she asked, "Did you eat yet?" I answered no, and talked to her for a while before I left the house for another class at school. "Ngo gum man lao fan bei lei, hou ma?" she asked, "Do you want me to save dinner for you?" Of course, I said, "Sure."

By the time I was finished with class and ready for work, I got a phone call from friends telling me that my house was on fire. By the time I got home, the firemen still had not retrieved Ma-ma from the house. About fifteen minutes later, when my dad arrived, they pronounced her dead at the scene.

She did not make it to her 91st birthday party, nor did she get to hold her first great-grandchild. After she passed away, my cousin had a baby boy. They named him Vito Zi Keung Hui. One month after my nephew was born, my other cousin also had a baby boy who will be the second boy of the next generation to carry the family name.

This past August would have been the grand reunion of our family, to celebrate Ma-ma's birthday. Instead, we had a grand reunion two weeks after her death, to send her off to the next world.

Ma-ma's funeral was heartwarming. Even though it was supposed to be sad, I know Ma-ma was happy. The funeral was huge and people were amazed to see how close our family was. The funeral was very special to me because it was a traditional Chinese funeral and because it was the last time I could see her. Yet, I was not allowed to see her, go near her coffin, or even touch anything that was to be burned for her. I had my monthly period. In the Chinese tradition, if a woman is menstruating it is not good for the deceased because she could block that person's passage to the next world. I was upset about this rule, but I was not the only one. My cousin and my niece accompanied me, but did not take it as hard as I did. The family burned artificial money, and many toy objects—telephones, a huge house, a Mercedes Benz, a chauffeur, two servants, and more money. This was so she would have a lot to spend, live a happy life, and not worry about anything.

My grandmother was like the Queen, but she was also the King, because my grandfather had left us long ago. Ma-ma was the knot that held us strings together. Now that the knot is untied, the strings are not as attached as they once were. We were the stars that orbited around her as she was the sun that gave us light. If the sun was missing, there would be total darkness. It seems that way now. The family isn't as close as it used to be.

Life is very different without her. I guess I'll have to buy an alarm clock, one that can really wake me up. Good alarm clocks are very hard to find. My alarm clock was the best, and it can't be replaced.

It's Not My Shame

By Kimberly K.

I didn't want to be there the morning it happened. My mother and aunt had to do something that day and they thought that being eleven years old was too young to stay home alone. So I was to go with my two-year-old cousin to Grandma and Grandpa P.'s (distant relatives) house for the day. Grandpa P. was an outstanding man in his church and the community. He was loved by many. I wanted to love him, too. However, I was afraid of him for some reason, though he had never done anything to me before that day.

As I walked up the stairs to the front door of the white, single-walled house, the smell of mango filled my nostrils from the fruit that had fallen to the ground earlier. When I entered the living room, Grandpa P. was sitting on the sofa. He looked up at me. I gave him and Grandma P. a kiss on the cheek, the way you do out of respect for your elders. After a while, Grandma P. and my cousin went into the bedroom to watch TV. I wasn't sure if I was welcome to go along, so I stayed in the living room with Grandpa P.

He was still sitting on the sofa when he looked up from the TV to where I was sitting. With his hand, he motioned for me to sit by him on the floor. I was afraid to disobey him. I was brought up to obey and respect others, especially my elders. I didn't question his reasons or intentions. I sat on the floor in front of him and faced the TV to watch it.

Then, all of a sudden, he grabbed my head and pulled it back. One of his arms had me in a headlock; the other hand was under my jaw. He began to molest me. I don't remember if I struggled. I just know that I was scared about everything. I was scared because I didn't like what was happen-

ing. I didn't know how to make him stop, and he didn't stop. I was scared to run; I didn't know where to run to. I was scared to scream, because if someone came they would see what was happening. I screamed in my mind. Even if I were to try to make a sound, how could I when he had his damn tongue crammed down my throat?!

After what seemed like forever, he finally stopped. I got up quickly and hurriedly walked down the hallway to the bedroom where Grandma P. and my cousin were. As I stood in the doorway, they saw me but didn't motion for me to join them. So I figured I wasn't welcome to come in. I wondered if maybe Grandma P. knew what had just happened and that was why she didn't want me to come sit with them. I turned around and started walking back down the hallway. As I did, my whole body quaked with fear. I was petrified because I knew that when I returned to the living room, IT would happen again. I was right. The moment he saw me, he motioned for me to sit in

front of him and IT happened again.

The first time it happened I was in shock. But the second time was more difficult, because I knew what was going to happen and there was nothing (I thought) I could do to stop it. It seemed like it was going on for such a long time that surely Grandma P. would have heard or seen something. But then I figured she was too embarrassed to do anything. And then IT finally ended.

But the story doesn't end yet. As ashamed as I felt, I decided to tell my mother. I don't remember that conversation very well. I do remember that I got the impression that she wasn't sure what to think or do. Her reaction was not anger, but shock at what I had just told her. I asked her not to tell my aunt, but not

The first time it happened I was in shock. But the second time was more difficult, because I knew what was going to happen. . . .

long after that conversation, she did. I remember that conversation very well.

We were at my auntie's house and I overheard my mother telling my auntie what I had said about Grandpa P. So I hid in the hallway and slowly peeked into the living room to better see and hear what was going on. My auntie spotted me. Her eyes grew larger and she looked at me (I felt) in disbelief. I had never felt more ashamed or betrayed than at that moment. I was expecting to be scolded or punished, but instead—nothing. The rest of the day went by without another mention of it. Maybe I was just imagining it, but it felt like in the days that followed, the whole world knew about what had happened to me. I felt that people, including my family members, looked at me differently. If I wasn't included in something, it was because I was somehow bad or different. At this point, I wanted someone to say something or to punish me or just do something! But, after a while, since no one acknowledged it, I started wondering if it really ever happened. After years went by, I started wondering if I had made the whole thing up.

For years it was buried. It was ignored. The people who knew about it acted as if it had never happened. But it did. By ignoring it, they have hurt me more. By their actions, they made me believe that I did something wrong, that I was to blame.

I just completed counseling and have finally come to realize that I am not to blame. A friend who also helped me work through the effects of molestation said that an end result of bringing this secret out from hiding would be that I would no longer let this horrible thing have power over me; that something so ugly could turn into something beautiful. Now I understand what she meant. What used to be a poison sitting in the pit of my stomach for many years has become a symbol of survival and strength. I can finally talk about it because I know that it's not my shame.

Summer Fun - Punalu'u Style

By Louise McKee

“Okay, gang! Pack up your gear; we’re off to Punalu’u!” Such happy words filled with anticipation of a fun-filled summer! With our car packed to a bulge, we looked like the movie characters in *Tuttles of Tahiti*. Can you imagine five cheerful kids, Mom and Dad, a bewildered Tutu, and our dog Mac all stuffed in our 1953 Chevy? The joys of summer in Punalu’u!

Our house in Punalu’u was deteriorated and in dire need of paint. There were no locks on the doors or glass windows, just screens. When the gentle sea breeze blew over our faces, it would bring with it all the essence of the sea.

When we were in bed, we could taste the sea salt on our lips and feel the stiffness in our hair. We also loved the sound of the rain, as it landed on our roof.

“Ting-ting-ting,” was the music in our ears.

Living in Punalu’u was so different than living in St. Louis Heights. We didn’t have the luxuries of city living. We were without television, buses, shopping malls, or traffic sounds. Our evenings were quiet and we had each other to keep us entertained.

In the early morning, we would stroll on the beach and gather different kinds of shells, bits of coral, and even a glass ball or two. The aroma of seaweed as it washed up on the shore was pungent. It was always fun to take the glass box out into the water and gather up the seaweed we liked to eat. If we were lucky, we’d find a squid to bring home for the family to enjoy. We didn’t always swim or surf or just play; but the fishermen who lived there taught us many things. They taught my brothers and me to take from the ocean only what we needed. They taught us how to catch fish, squid, lobster, and crabs, and never waste. They taught us how to clean and prepare all that comes from the

sea. They taught us respect for the sea and its creatures.

We always waited for ‘oama season. ‘oama is the baby *weke*, and during the summer, these tiny fish would swim in schools around the Island. Groups of people would stand in waist-deep water with their bamboo poles waiting for the ‘oama to take the bait. We five kids and the neighborhood children would form our own circle. Each of us had hopes of catching enough fish for lunch.

Other days were spent hiking to Kali’uwa’a-Sacred Falls. My mom would advise us not to destroy the plants or the fruits we found there. After a mile hike, we were ready to dive into the cold and inviting pool at the foot of the falls. Our bodies would tingle with every stroke. Later, we would gather ‘*awapuhi-kuahiwi*, the mountain ginger. The flower

makes the best shampoo, which we enjoyed as did the early Hawaiians. On our way back, we would pick guavas, *liliko’i*, and mountain apples. We put them in our *ti* leaf bundles and took them home with pride. Our mom always made the best jams and jellies—enough to last the entire summer.

Our mountain adventures took us to the cane flumes. These flumes were wooden troughs built alongside the mountains. They provided water for the sugar cane fields below. To journey those cane flumes was like riding on a roller coaster.

Land listen to the legends of the past. There were many stories about Kama-pua’a, the demi-god, because Punalu’u was his home.

Now that we’re older, my brothers and sister treasure those memorable days at Punalu’u. Looking back, I am thankful to have learned respect and love for our mountains and sea. We share one thought: Wouldn’t we love to spend one more glorious summer at Punalu’u?

Groups of people would stand in waist-deep water with their bamboo poles. . . .

Mr. Oguni

By Makiko Mori

Mr. Oguni was my violin teacher. Every Wednesday I tried to come up with a good excuse, so I wouldn't have to go to Mr. Oguni's for a private lesson. Of course it never worked, and my mother would hurry me to get ready. We would ride the trains for two hours to get to Mr. Oguni's. Mr. Oguni's place was a fine, semi-European style house on a corner in a quiet suburb of Tokyo, where people passing by would constantly hear the faint sound of the violin. A heavy, wooden front door was always open so that Mr. Oguni wouldn't have to be interrupted in the middle of his lesson and open the door for the next student. His students were expected to go inside to the Japanese-style waiting room as quietly as possible and patiently wait for their turn. There were big glass windows on one side of the waiting room, but the sunlight was never seen from the windows because they were shielded with iron shutters.

"Maki-chan, your turn!" My mother said rather sternly. I staggered to my feet, which had become numb from sitting on my bent knees for a long time. Grabbing my violin, I walked nervously into the lesson room. The small room was filled with smoke and an old tulip-shaped lamp on a faded black antique piano dimly lit the room. Almost half of the room was buried under a huge pile of musical scores and a couple of old Italian rugs were spread on the floor. Mr. Oguni was leaning on the piano, making creases between his eyebrows as he deeply inhaled the smoke from his cigarette. He was very short for a man, but because of his large frame, people did not realize it until they got really close to him. He had a well-defined face, like a Caucasian's: large, sunken eyes, bushy eyebrows, and a large, prominent nose. His eyes looked dull and yellowish, probably from the long-term abuse of

smoking and drinking, and around his eyes were dark circles that made him look tired. His cheeks were flabby, like a bulldog's, and he always wore something gray which matched his untamed gray, wavy hair. I never knew how old Mr. Oguni was. It was a great mystery. He looked as though he were in his late forties, but his youthful voice made people wonder if he was actually in his middle thirties.

Mr. Oguni smashed his cigarette into a silver ashtray and turned to me to say, "Good afternoon." Then, he drew a wooden, round stool toward him and sat down. I bowed to him and started playing my violin. My fingers were shaking from nervousness, and it appeared in my music. Mr. Oguni was listening to my violin with his eyes closed, but suddenly he yelled out, "Stop!" With a start, I almost dropped my bow. He walked toward the old piano and took out his little whiskey bottle. He had one sip, looked at me, and asked calmly, "Did you practice this week?" I could never lie to him because he seemed to see through my lie immediately. I stood still, not being able to say anything.

"I'm not forcing you to do anything, you know," he continued. "If you don't practice, that's okay with me. But I don't need a student like that. I only take students who are willing to learn."

As I listened to his calm voice, something welled up in my throat and tears fell from my eyes. "Crying will not do any better. Okay, now, do the next one." He often made me cry like this. I never hated him for it, though. Instead, I would try extra hard the following week so he would praise me on the next lesson and, when he did praise me, I felt inexpressible satisfaction.

So, I learned the violin under Mr. Oguni every week for three years. Then, one day my mother decided that it was time for me to change to

*...when he did
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another teacher. It was too painful for me because I was so attached to Mr. Oguni after three years. However, in order to learn a new technique, I had to have a new teacher. When my mother talked to Mr. Oguni, he understood and wished me good luck. I wanted to say something to him, but I couldn't because I didn't know what to say, and I knew I would cry if I heard his voice.

A couple of years later, we got a post card. It was from Mrs. Oguni. It said that Mr. Oguni had died of cancer. Unable to believe it, my mother and I rushed to his house. The door was open as usual. For a moment, I felt as if it were all a joke, as if he would be inside smoking and would ask me, "Oh, what happened? Did you come back to me?"

As we went inside, Mrs. Oguni came out from the waiting room. Her eyes were red and puffy. "Thank you for coming. Oguni is waiting for you." She led us to the waiting room. I hesitated to go inside. I felt like running home. I didn't want to see Mr. Oguni, because I felt somehow guilty that I had betrayed him.

"Maki-chan, would you say good-bye to him? I'm sure he wants to see you." Urged by Mrs. Oguni, I slowly went inside. There he was, lying on a clean, white sheet with his eyes closed. He was pale, but he looked very peaceful. His mouth seemed to be smiling slightly, as if he would start talking to us.

"Oguni was very concerned about you, Maki-chan," said Mrs. Oguni, gazing at Mr. Oguni's face. "Even after he was hospitalized, he often mentioned that you did very well at the concert and was wondering how you were doing." Seeing him lying down right in front of me, I still couldn't believe that Mr. Oguni had died. I didn't want to believe it. I hung my head and prayed for a long time, trying to hide the tears in my eyes from Mr. Oguni.

It's already been seven years since Mr. Oguni passed away, but even now I regret that I didn't have the courage to talk to him on the phone, that I couldn't say good-bye to him when he was still alive.

The World of Fairy Tales

By Tuong-Han Nguyen

It was in my first year of secondary school that I received my first writing assignment. I had no feeling about writing. I thought writing was just another subject in school, like any other. I neither liked nor hated it. Maybe that was because I never figured out how much trouble I would get into with writing.

My first writing assignment topic was to describe my own study room or my favorite place at home. I took the assignment home, and during that long evening, I did not know how to start the paper. Actually, I had never had my own study room and I had never thought I had a favorite place at home. As a result, I described what my home looked like in only a few sentences. Of course, when I received my paper back, the first grade of my writing was three, while the highest grade was ten. After that, writing became the subject that I was least interested in. I not only hated writing, but I also never had sympathy with my writing teachers.

I had no pleasure in writing. Reading was the most attractive entertainment to me. I could spend all of my spare time in a day reading all kinds of books and novels. I especially loved fairy tales. I remember that at that time there were some bookstores around the city where we could rent books and novels as we rent video tapes today. I started with the bookstore near my house. After I read all the books over there, I went to one farther away to hunt for more books, especially fairy tales. So, the further I went, the more I read. I loved fairy tales so much, I could read each one of them over and over again, without feeling bored. I read "The Story of One Thousand and One Nights" of India every night before I went to sleep. The story told that there was a

beautiful little girl who knew plenty of fairy tales. Every night, she was sent to the king of India to tell him one story before he fell into sleep. I wished I were that little girl. I also read "Cinderella," "Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs," "The Frog Prince," and so many more. The world of fairy tales was my own world. In this world, I lived in a magnificent palace with a talented king, a gentle queen, and a handsome prince. In this world, I was a beautiful princess who never had to worry about writing assignments.

In this world, I lived in a magnificent palace with a talented king, a gentle queen, and a handsome prince.

I still neither progressed in writing nor liked my writing teachers, until my last year in secondary school. Miss Phuong Thao was my writing teacher that year. She was younger than any of the other teachers in my school. Students, as well as teachers, said she was the most beautiful teacher in my school. She was pretty tall, but she wore high heeled shoes which made her

look graceful. She wore light blue blouses and trousers of bright colors. She said she liked the color because she loved the nice, bright blue sky. When I looked at her, she made me feel elegant. The first time she went into my class, she did not talk about writing, her subject, and my worst enemy. She always called all the students in my class, "The whole class." She asked us, "Does the whole class know any songs? Will the whole class sing me a song? I like to start teaching by hearing the whole class singing." After a few minutes of asking each other, we agreed to sing the song "The Baby Sun," which we had just learned an hour before in music class. My class leader said, "This is a new song, and we have just learned it. We don't think we can sing it very well." Then, we clapped our hands rhythmically while singing the song. After we finished, she said, "What a lovely

song!” She asked us to teach her how to sing that song. Our first time in writing class, we sang together.

Her next class was two days later; we still did not talk about writing. This time, she asked who wanted to volunteer to tell a story for her and the class. Most students in my class raised their hands to volunteer to tell their stories. Of course, I wanted to tell a fairy tale that I had read before, but I was too shy to stand in front of the class. So many students wanted to tell their stories for her, but she couldn’t decide to choose any of them. Then, she said, “I will tell the whole class an allegory. But the whole class must tell me your stories, too. Today, after the whole class goes home, you tell me a story by writing it on paper.” I had never wanted to write like that before. That night, I tried to finish all my other homework early. I skipped the television program; that surprised my family. I didn’t answer my mom when she asked, “What happened?” when I rushed to sit down to start writing Miss Phuong Thao my story. At first, I wanted to tell her the Indian tale “The Story of One Thousand and One Nights,” but I thought I might need one thousand and one nights to finish it. Then, I decided to tell her “Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs.” I also wanted to tell her how and where I read the fairy tales. So, I started my paper, “I took all the money my mother gave me last week to Saigon’s Bookstore to rent some books as usual. This time, Old Ba (the old man who worked in the bookstore) gave me the biggest book that I have ever had. It is *The Collection of The Best Fairy Tales in The World*, with “Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs” on the first page. Then, I continued, “Once upon a time. . .” I remember that from then on, it seemed that I didn’t write any more, but that I drew pictures of the stories with words. I kept drawing until the end of the story, without stopping. When I finished, I was so tired that I fell asleep and dreamt that I was carrying my paper into a magnificent world of fairy people.

After a few days, I got my paper back. I got the grade of nine. I had never received any grade in writing higher than a four before. All of a sudden, I felt such admiration for Miss Phuong Thao. It was even stranger that I wanted to write more and I looked forward to the next writing class. Miss Phuong Thao often asked us to write something that was related to reading. Reading was my favorite hobby. After that, whenever I received any writing assignment, I spent a few minutes finding it in the world of books that I had read before because the world of “Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs” had helped me to have the best grade in writing. It seemed the more I read, the easier it was for me to write. My grades in writing became better and better. I began to be interested in writing as well as in reading.

It is such a long time from then until now, almost over ten years already. I don’t like to read fairy tales any more, as I did as a small child. The world of fairy tales has somehow faded in my mind. Now, I don’t feel afraid of writing. I see writing as the way to express my own thinking. But how the world of fairy tales helped my writing, I will never forget.

The Flesh Concern

By Derek Sakamoto

My fascination with tattoos began when I was about nine years old. I remember buying gum that had tattoo transfers enclosed. These were not the watery, purple sort that came with Japanese bubble gum that had tattoo transfers enclosed. These were like real tattoos—or at least they seemed that way to me at the time. The colors were bright and vivid, in hues of yellow, orange, red, blue, and green. The designs were detailed and bordered on elaborate. I'd run into the bathroom, rip open the pack, and immediately place the tattoos all over my arms and legs, holding them under a stream of running water, just like the directions said to. And, when that was done, I'd run out of the bathroom sopping wet, ready to show off my new tattoos. That first impression of tattoos as exciting and wildly fun has always stayed with me. Now, sixteen years later, I find myself with six real tattoos of various sizes and designs all over my body.

Usually the first question someone will ask me after they see one of my tattoos, especially the piece on my left arm, is, "Did that hurt?" Sure it hurt, but not in the way most people think. I always say that since it's self-inflicted, the pain is quite sublime. I compare the feeling to having someone scrape your flesh open and, at the same time, tip their cigarette ash into the wound, although that's never happened to me personally. The physical feeling of getting tattooed is like nothing I have ever felt before, and after all these years the pain/pleasure is still exquisite.

I've had many memorable tattoo experiences but, as the saying goes, it's never as good as the first time. I remember that day vividly. It was a Tuesday, November 27, 1990. How

we got there seems a blur, but my best friend Dawn and I found ourselves at China Sea Tattoo on Smith Street, probably the seediest part of downtown. We had tossed around the idea of getting tattooed for a while, and this just turned out to be the day.

China Sea was an amazing place. Every square inch of wall space was covered with tattoo designs, from the smallest Japanese character to huge portrait-sized pictures of mermaids and devils and dragons. The whole place smelled sterile, like rubbing alcohol, but you could also catch an underlying whiff of something spicy with a distinct musky odor. That's when we met Rollo.

Rollo was a massive, intimidating man. The kind of man who immediately makes you feel very small. Well over two hundred pounds, he was covered, literally dressed, in tattoos. His arms—a picture book come alive, telling of exotic places and exotic people. His coarse, gray beard and fat cigar added to his crusty, well-worn

look. He lumbered out of his office and eyed my friend and me with casual amusement. It was obvious to him that we were tattoo virgins.

After a price of sixty-five dollars each was settled on, Dawn and I picked out our designs from among the hundreds surrounding us. Hers, a simple heart crossed with a banner, surrounded with colorful flowers and birds, and mine, the same heart with banner—the heart pierced by an arrow with a tiny drop of blood at the tip. For both of us, the words "FEAR ME," which had become our new favorite motto, would be etched across our hearts.

We had to wait half an hour before it was our turn, and we watched in fascination and fear as he finished up the design on his current victim. I distinctly remember the buzzing sound of the

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needle, loud and angry like some sort of crude torture instrument, or a hive of bees disturbed. That sound was enough to crawl up my spine and strike a nerve just behind my eyes.

Finally, it was our turn in the infamous chair and it was agreed upon, without any hesitation on Dawn's part, that I would get worked on first. I decided to wear my heart on my shoulder blade, rather than on my sleeve. I took off my shirt and straddled the chair, hugging the backrest tightly. It was an awkward position, but necessary in order to stretch the skin.

He sprayed the area with astringent and took a disposable razor to my skin, to make sure he had a smooth canvas. He transferred an outline of the design to my shoulder blade, turned the machine on, and just like that, he began. I could hear the buzzing sound behind me, but couldn't look to see its source. My body tensed, anticipating the needle. All of a sudden, I felt it.

I didn't expect getting tattooed to feel this way; I thought for sure it would be a quick sort of sharp pain. To my surprise, it was slow and precise, throbbing with a burning sensation.

Rollo worked meticulously, using quick, deep strokes. I felt like a coloring book. Everytime the needle passed over bone, I winced and clenched my fists because the pain was so acute. After a few minutes, the throbbing dulled, and, in a strange way, I actually found the rhythmic movement relaxing. Just as quickly and suddenly as it had begun, it was over. Rollo sprayed my new tattoo with alcohol, dabbed a little bit of lotion on the area, and bandaged it.

I was left feeling so tough and wild with my sassy new tattoo; I had finally done what I had always wanted to do. Since that Tuesday six years ago, I've gotten about one tattoo a year. They're getting bigger and bigger. But, no matter how many tattoos I end up with, that little two inch heart on my right shoulder blade will always be my favorite.

My Life for Fifteen Cents

By Esther Saleh

It was the Autumn of 1964 in Brooklyn, New York. I lived in the Red Hook Projects, near the docks. My father was a very strict authoritarian parent, and my mother went along with everything he said. My brothers could come and go as they pleased and were able to take care of themselves. It was totally the opposite for the girls. My sisters and I couldn't leave our apartment without a chaperone.

I had just turned thirteen. My sister Eva, who was twenty-three, was studying hard for her nursing exams and planning her wedding. I shared a bedroom with her, and we were very close. I told her all my secrets, and knew I was going to miss her terribly after she'd married and moved away.

"Will you have time to see me and share secrets like before?" I would ask.

"Of course, we will. Don't worry," Eva reassured me. "I found an apartment near here," Eva said, in her sweet, caring voice.

After the wedding and honeymoon, Eva received a letter from the nursing board. It had been sent to our address. I was so excited for my sister and eagerly volunteered to deliver the letter to her.

"I don't know, Esther. I think one of your brothers should deliver the letter to your sister," Mom said.

"Mom, I can do it," I pleaded. "Besides, it's still early. I'll walk there and then take the bus back."

"Please! Please!" I begged, until she eventually gave in.

I didn't waste a minute more. I was afraid she'd change her mind, and my father and my brothers were nowhere in sight.

I arrived at my sister's apartment in 20 minutes, walking. Eva was so excited when she saw the letter and she quickly opened it. She had passed her exams. We both jumped for joy

and hugged each other.

"I can't wait to finish school and become a nurse like you," I said.

"Just study hard, and you will, Sis," Eva replied.

We talked and time slipped away. It was getting late.

"Look at the time!" Eva said. "I'll take you home and then I'll get a cab back."

"No," I said. I'll be fine. I'll take the bus back. I told Mom I would. It's still daylight. I'll be home before you know it."

"Are you sure? I know how Dad is," Eva said.

"Dad's not home yet," I told her.

"Here's 15 cents," Eva said.

"Take the B61 crosstown bus. It's coming in about 10 minutes, so hurry!" Eva said.

I had been able to convince her to let me go home alone. I felt sure I'd

be okay. I decided not to listen to her. Instead of taking the bus home, I disobeyed her and put the 15 cents in my pocket. I would spend the money on candy instead.

I took Lorraine Street, a short-cut home. I felt like I was walking through a war zone. The buildings were demolished. People jogged along the street, and traffic was light. I was glad I had started walking, since it was 5:30 p.m. and quite dark already.

One moment, I was surrounded by people and moving traffic, and the next, I was in another dimension. There were no people or cars in sight. I could hear my sister's voice saying, "Are you sure you'll be okay?" Maybe I should have listened to her. But it was too late now.

I started walking faster, hoping to see more joggers around. Then suddenly, a black car stopped about twenty feet ahead of me. I didn't know what to think, or what to do. I couldn't turn

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back now. I was half way home. I felt my feet racing before me and I had to catch up with them. My heart was pounding fast, but I knew I had no choice. I had to walk by that black car.

The driver rolled down his window and shouted, "You wanna ride, kid? Get in."

"No. I have two legs, I'll walk home myself," I shouted back at him without stopping for a moment. I was pretending to be tough, and a smart aleck, but inside I was scared and trembling.

The man stopped his car again, but this time he got out of his car, and leaned against the door with his legs crossed. The man was waiting for me to get close. I felt trapped. This time I knew he was up to something. I started praying fast and said, "God, my life is worth more than 15 cents. Please! Help me!"

I started to walk with my arms swinging back and forth. I was very nervous and scared. I passed him. I could still see him leaning against the car.

Suddenly the man started running behind me. I couldn't breathe. My heart was ready to burst. I lost control and fell to the ground. I quickly got up, but he had caught up with me. We started to struggle. I could smell his whiskey breath and feel his powerful hands pulling me towards his car. I was speechless. No one could hear me if I screamed. I had to fight for my life. I didn't want to die.

Somehow I managed to free myself from his powerful hands. I started to run and run. I had this dynamic energy inside of me. My feet were now taking over. My arms were the wings of an eagle. My athletic coach, John, often teased me about my long legs and my ability to run faster than anyone on my team. But now I was afraid to look behind me to see if the man was still chasing me.

I saw Red Hook Park, where I used to play when I was a little girl. I remembered there was a hole in the fence. I ran through the park and then through the projects. I saw many familiar faces of kids I had grown up with. I still kept running. I knew I had to get home before my dad did, or else.

"I'm home, Mom," I said, as soon as I was safely inside our apartment. I was trying to hide my emotions. I wanted to cry out and tell her what had happened. However, I was afraid she would tell my father, and I couldn't let my sister Eva take the blame. I could have been raped, killed, or both, for a lousy 15 cents.

"Dinner's almost ready, Esther," Mom said. "Your father will be home soon. Wash your hands and help me set the table."

I was so glad to be home safe.

Lessons Gleaned from the Weed

By Laurel Silva

On the surface, weeds appear to be insignificant creations of nature. My first reaction is to equate them with the useless cockroach. Trying to find redeeming qualities in either of them immediately brings up disgust and contempt; however, unlike the cockroach that can be killed with the swat of a shoe or tricked into entering a sticky “hotel,” the weed requires more physical labor to exterminate its existence.

In the late 1950s, I lived a sheltered life in a quiet community with my three siblings. Dad was a strict disciplinarian and the pastor of a church, so I was a “P.K.”

(preacher’s kid). Our home was void of TV, radio, record player or magazines; idle time was “Satan’s playground.” I remember the daily rituals all too well—noses in the books, knees scrubbing the floors, and hands in the garden soil. Everything was work, work, work, and more work, and when that work was done an order reverberated through the thick silence to do another assigned robotic chore. We never lacked “elbow grease” around our house.

Bordering the back of our property was a large garden that supplied our main source of food throughout the year. It bordered a farmer’s wheat field known to be a breeding ground for ticks. Vivid memories come to mind of those darned old blood-sucking parasites that always managed to “jump” over the fence, looking for a new home in the waist band of a warm-blooded, two-legged vertebrate. There was no way to avoid the constant reminder of those huge, itchy, irritating welts, especially while pulling weeds, or lest I forget, those frequent sightings of garter snakes that I swear were really cobras.

We harvested a large variety of fruits and vegetables, including turnips (yuk!), and rutabaga (double yuk!). Producing healthy,

bountiful crops required rich soil, sun and water, not to mention backbreaking “child-labor” hours to eradicate the weeds, which choked off valuable nutrients and prevented the fragile seedling roots from taking hold in the soil.

In the mid-west, cultivating a garden was a seasonal experience. With the dawning of spring came a well-thought out diagram for the new crop, detailing where each seed would be planted, how far apart the seeds would be spaced, who was going to do it, and when it would be done. We

wore our grubbiest clothes as we toiled in the soil with cultivating tools to prepare the earth to receive the seeds of new life. We used a sharp, pointed hoe to make the shape and depth of each row to the specifications needed for each type of seed. No machinery was used; it was all done by hand. God forbid if I lost or damaged my cotton gloves, because the pain from the broken blisters would remind me of my carelessness.

When summer arrived, it was time to pick the harvest and “put it up” for the winter. I really looked forward to picking the ripe, juicy blackberries and strawberries. I salivated until I got home and dipped them in some confectioners sugar or smothered them with fresh whipping cream. M-m-m-good! The remaining berries were cooked down to a liquid mush, forced through a sieve, and poured into sterilized Kerr jars. A quarter inch layer of hot liquid paraffin wax was poured on top of the cooled jam before the rubber seal was placed on top.

Then there was the day-in, day-out “sweat shop” experience of pressure pots steaming their way through the blanching process to prepare the vegetables for freezing. After blanching, the vegetables were cooled, measured and placed in freezer bags. This was the moment I waited for,

Vivid memories come to mind of those darned old blood-sucking parasites.

watching them be placed in their final resting place—the two large, white deep-freezers, along with the chicken, rabbit, and half a cow (including the tongue—triple yuk!!!) that was cut into meal-sized portions. When the winter came, and the garden lay bare, it sure was nice to go to the freezer and enjoy the rewards of our hard work.

After the winter frost let up, I would dread the prospect of having to go out into the garden to start the cultivating process all over again. Immeasurable time and energy was spent on my hands and knees eliminating those worthless, pesky weeds from the garden, but over the years I have grown to appreciate their value and existence in the larger scheme of things. There is only one purpose I can conjure up in the most remote areas of my cerebral cortex that could account for the experiences I had with weeds, and that was to teach me patience.

On occasion, I look over my neighbor's fence and periodically observe her weeding the yard. For some reason, I perceive her to be taking this mundane, monotonous, ho-hum chore to a whole new height that I've never experienced. She almost seems to be enjoying the "no-brainer" task, as if it were a peaceful respite from the everyday demands of life and a calming therapy for her soul

and spirit. During these reflective times of silent labor, I wonder how many memories of her past flash on the screen of her mind, or how many new ideas are generated to simplify her hectic life. I wonder how many positive changes were made in the lives of her family as a direct result of those quiet, reflective moments of self-evaluation.

One must never underestimate the value in the lessons to be gleaned from the weed. I am convinced it was in the garden where many values were instilled into my character and, like a multi-faceted diamond, I, too, have been chiseled into a more valuable, precious jewel. I can see in my journey through life how other kinds of "weeds" have temporarily choked out nourishment and stunted my growth, until I was willing to dig in and do some weeding out of old programs and behaviors that weren't working for me anymore.

Weeds. . .weeds. . .weeds. . .weeds. . .I've hated and loved them!

The Good Old Days

By PiiLani Smith

As I drove through Palolo Valley and stopped at Anuenue Elementary School, now nearly some forty odd years later, I tried looking for any visible evidence of my roots.

I remember, right at this site, we lived on a big complex that housed four families. The perimeters of the land ran along Palolo Stream and 10th Avenue. The pleasant remembrance of our compound was the fact that the families were my aunts, uncles, and cousins. Chickens and roosters ran all over the property. White, brown, and black rabbits hopped in and out of their cages and played with the other animals on our land. We also had cats, two pit bulls, two bull dogs, and two poi dogs which slept under our houses during the day and were free to run all over Palolo Valley at night. Looking back, I'm able to understand where my love for animals came from.

My grandfather let his pet bull graze down by the stream so when it got loose, the bull could not take the clothesline down with my auntie's wash. Since the kids were *kolohe*, or rascal, and thought it was fun to tease the bull, Grandpa felt it would prevent the kids from getting hurt if the bull was tied down near the stream. After being warned again not to go near the stream, my older brother and cousin decided to sneak down the hill. Since our property had numerous trees, the bull normally grazed under the *kiawe* trees and in the long weeds. Both boys climbed up the tallest *kiawe* tree and waited for the bull to come by. When the bull got under them, they jumped on his back. From up the hill, we heard a loud wailing. Apparently, the bull threw both boys off and had them up the *kiawe* tree. When they fell on the bank, they both fell in bull droppings, tore their clothes, and were *pilau* (bad smelling). However, they didn't

care; they just scrambled up the tree because the bull had charged them and had been snorting, kicking up his front legs and banging against the tree when Grandpa went down for them. As we saw the boys coming up the hill with Grandpa, all of them were crying because Grandpa had given them good "lickings" for disobeying him, and Grandpa was grumbling in Hawaiian because the boys had made him spank them. I thought for sure the boys had learned their lesson, but they continued being *kolohe* until they became young men.

This incident made me learn that Grandpa was not being mean, but there was a reason for the warning. I have learned to respect my elders; after all, these were the people whom we loved and trusted most.

Our homes did not have plumbing yet. So, every time I had to go to the *lua* (outhouse). I always made sure that one of my cousins went with me. It was

such a spooky place to be, especially at night because of all the creepy spiders, fat lizards, giant centipedes, and flying cockroaches that crawled around on the floor and up the walls. These bugs were big to the eyes of a five-year-old who was not yet three feet tall. Besides, being little, I needed someone to hold the kerosene lamp. Although there were bugs in the *lua*, my mom and aunts made sure it was clean and fresh smelling. Sometimes, while we were in the *lua*, my cousin would be eating and I would be going. If my auntie heard sounds coming from the *lua*, she always knew someone was eating and would yell, "How come you folks eating in there? The *lua* not one place to eat and play. Hurry up and get out before you guys get lickings." It really felt weird to sit on a board with a deep, dark hole going nowhere. Sometimes I picked up a splinter in my *okole* which my mom had to dig out with a sewing

After being warned again not to go near the stream, my older brother and cousin decided to sneak down the hill.

needle. My dad and uncles made sure they buried everything deeper and burned the inside of the hole with gasoline. When we finally got a real live toilet, all the kids were amazed because the bowl actually had a round board with a hole in it that did not leave splinters on our *okoles*. I remember all of us taking turns pulling the chain to let the water go down this odd looking pipe. Each time we pulled on the chain, we thought that the water would overflow on us. It was wonderful not having to use the bathroom with the bugs. The outhouse makes me feel so grateful for the conveniences we have today.

I can remember summer days when we filled ourselves up with sweet lichee, tart and tangy tamarinds which we mixed with shoyu and sugar, red, juicy mountain apples, mouth-watering tangerines, *ukapila* Hayden mangos, sweet guavas, big *popolo* plums, yellow *liliko'i*, apple bananas, and fresh macadamia nuts. All these fruit trees grew on our land. The older boys would climb the trees to pick the fruits and toss them down to us, and we would all sit around on the ground and enjoy our pickings. We would end up telling stories, having food fights, and having fun. When the boys threw the macadamia nuts down to us, the younger ones had to find rocks large enough to break the outer green layer, then the older ones would pound the hard shell off with a hammer. Gosh, I can see myself devouring the fruits and nuts. Was it ever 'ONO! With this experience, I have learned to appreciate all the gifts of nature and because of the love we all felt for each other, I learned to share and work with others.

Among the four families, there were fourteen kids so that when one child had to be disciplined, all the kids were spanked or punished. When we got spankings, each child lined up from the oldest to the youngest. My younger brother was last and I was second to the last. By the time it got down to the last four, we were already crying loudly, hoping that if the four of us screamed at the top of our lungs, my dad would change his mind. Some-

When we got spankings, each child lined up from the oldest to the youngest. . . .By the time it got down to the last four, we were already crying loudly. . . .

times it worked, but most of the time it didn't. Today, this act would be considered child abuse. Back then it was just the way it was. My dad meant well, but the discipline also helped to shape my beliefs about child rearing. Thank God, I never used that method with my own children.

My auntie had the job of baby-sitting all the kids as the other adults worked off the grounds. As I look back, my auntie gave so much of herself. She was like our second mother. We went to her for everything. She made sure we were all fed and took our baths. Bath time, what a trip that was! She would yell, "Au'au time (take a bath). Come on, *ho'omÅkaukau!*" The kids had to *ho'omÅkaukau* which means "get ready." When

she yelled at us to get ready, the boys would take the buckets down to the stream and bring the water up to the big *kapu*, or tub, to make hot water. When the younger kids heard this, we would strip down to our birthday suits and get in line. We wanted my auntie to 'au'au us first so we could have some hot water. However, it never failed; Auntie always started with the older kids first. By the time the we got into the *kapu*, the water was cold and soapy. Nevertheless, we

always had fun splashing about in the tub, especially when someone would fart. We would laugh so hard and tease each other. There was no shame or embarrassment. It never dawned on anyone that this practice was unsanitary. The girls and boys were never separated even during 'au'au time. This was just one of our traditions. This practice is unheard of these days. From that memory, I have learned to have respect for other cultures just because of traditional differences each has.

My grandfather was the *kahu* (pastor) of Kawaihao Church. Every Sunday, the entire clan attended Sunday School and church where we learned to love God, to respect our parents, to respect our elders, and to respect others. We were taught to treat everyone the way that we wanted to be treated. Although we were poor, I remember that every Thanksgiving and Christmas, Grandpa would

have all of us visit other church members and take food baskets to those who didn't have as much as we did. The baskets were filled with fruits and nuts from our complex: home-baked cookies, bread which my mom and aunties baked, and cooked chicken. Yes! Those were the same chickens that ran around in our yard! I know my grandpa taught me to open up my heart and "Love thy neighbor." I can hear him saying, "You have to have to be kind to others; there's always going to be someone else who may be worse off than you."

I still have my *'ohana* today, and we're all still very close. We still enjoy one another and get together often. We have so much fun retelling our memories to the younger family members. I feel sad at times, because our children and grandchildren will never get to experience the beauty of old Hawai'i, when life was simple enough to live off the land and when family was the most precious gift to have. I shall always be grateful for my past and my memories.

Dream Recollection

By Joni Tanuvasa

Where was I? The smell of sterilized materials and soiled sheets overwhelmed my senses as a blur of white walls and bright lights spread before my eyes. My mouth tasted like morning breath, and I wondered how long I had been asleep. I turned to look around in search of some answers, and found a crowd of family and medical staff surrounding me. They were all pushing me—on a stretcher! I found a person in the crowd who resembled my mom and asked her pleadingly, “What happened? Where am I?” She gently responded, with an obvious effort to stay calm, that I had been in an accident and that everything was going to be just fine. Panic struck. “If everything is going to be fine, why am I in a hospital? Why am I in this contraption? Where am I going?” A million questions and thoughts ran through my mind. The feelings of fear, frustration, and anger all came over me at once. My palms and forehead began to sweat and tension filled every muscle and joint in my body. I wanted to scream and cry, but nothing seemed to want to come out of my mouth. Finally, I surrendered my momentary insanity and calmed myself down to a rational state of mind. At least I’m not in pain, I thought. My body relaxed and my mind slowed down. I felt much better.

I had thought too soon. The stretcher came to a stop and nurses proceeded to lift me onto a bed. I couldn’t feel the hands carrying me, but I could feel pain. The pain shot up from my legs, as if someone were testing their strength on me at a carnival. The pain surpassed agonizing and was unbearable. The pain I realized I had, after all. Lying propped up, exhausted physically and mentally, I got an opportunity to see the source of all my pain. What I saw I concluded was a combi-

nation of blood, meat, and muscle. Both my legs bore large lacerations that had left inches of my flesh open and exposed. Rivers of red, fed by the ocean of my injuries, dried up and remained caked onto my skin. A thin piece of gauze covered the wounds, but it was evident that no attempt to clean and stitch up my legs had been made. Anger built up inside and urged me to yell at the doctors for not fixing me, but I didn’t have the strength. All I could do was helplessly lie there and not think a single thought, just suspend myself in time. I fixed my eyes on the clock hanging conveniently on the wall in front of me and lulled myself to sleep as the hands went round, and round, and round. . . .

I loved the thrill and excitement of riding on the tailgate, the wind in my hair and the open sky above. That evening had graced the heavens with its beauty, as a vast deepness of blue and millions of

tiny sparkles lay scattered across the infinite planes. Distracted by the greatness of my surroundings, I wasn’t aware that the El Camino I’d been riding in was speeding. It so happened that our driver and another driver in a white Mazda pick-up decided to prove their masculinity (boys being boys—stupid), and challenged each other to a race. There were no formalities, just an understanding that the car in the lead proved worthy of being the winner. So, as I sat in my own little world of splendor, the El Camino raced down the freeway at speeds of ninety to one hundred miles per hour. I waved my hands vigorously in the air, as if I were riding a roller coaster, and sang along with the song thumping away in the cab of the car. I closed my eyes and let the rush of the wind fill my lungs with the cool, crisp air. My mouth became dry as my tongue tasted the breeze, and my body succumbed to the

The power of speed and the rebellion of night grew within me. I was floating on cloud nine.

pressure and push of the ride. The power of speed and the rebellion of night grew within me. I was floating on cloud nine.

But my exhilaration soon came to an end. The El Camino spun out of control and zigzagged across the freeway, leaving the smell of burnt rubber and black streaks on the surface of the road. My face turned expressionless. I couldn't think; everything was happening too fast. My body tightened as my hands grasped the sides of the bed in an attempt to prepare myself for whatever lay ahead. Everything turned black.

"Joni, the doctor is here." My mom woke me from my slumber with a shake of my hand. I opened my eyes to a tall, Caucasian man wearing a long, white overcoat and a tag identifying who he was (something, something, M.D.). A typical doctor. In one hand he held a thin, sharp object and

in the other, a coil of clear plastic cord. I didn't look too hard or listen to his name, nor did I pay much attention to what he was saying; I just felt relieved that someone had finally come to clean up the mess made of my legs. The nurse injected the anesthesia directly into my lacerations, luckily producing only a stinging sensation to my already-numb legs. The doctor pulled on his disposable rubber gloves and began to prepare his needle and thread. After the medicine had taken effect, the doctor proceeded to sew me up, my skin as his fabric and he as my tailor. There had been so much to stitch that it took nearly an hour, but I wasn't aware of this. I sat oblivious to the world, thinking about the dream I had just had. The dream that wasn't a dream anymore.

Everything I Know about Life and Death I Learned from My Fish

By Natasha M. Tezak

One of the things that I miss most about my childhood is the innocence that came along with it. There was nothing that could have made me doubt, question, or judge anything in a bad light. However, that innocence began to fade away by the time I had reached the ripe old age of five.

It was April 11, 1983, the day of my fifth birthday. I had just woken up and was making my way toward the living room. As I approached the doorway, I looked up and saw two dresses hanging from hooks my mother had fixed onto the door. One was an apron dress made out of yellow and white gingham. The other was a baby-doll dress made out of blue and white checkered fabric with scattered cherries. My eyes grew wide with excitement as I pulled my stool toward the door and reached up for the dresses. After careful observation, I decided that the blue and white cherry dress was more to my liking.

There was no one in the house that I could show my new dress to. I ran out into the back yard looking for some sign of life. As I dashed through the door, I was stopped in my tracks by a group of people shouting "Surprise!" and singing happy birthday. My parents had set up a quaint little get-together to celebrate the occasion. People were patting my head and pinching my cheeks from all directions. It was as if my mother had set me up for the attack of the old people.

Although most of the faces in the crowd were unfamiliar, there was one face that I always looked

forward to seeing. As I stood in the middle of the yard, frazzled by everything that was going on around me, I managed to see my grandmother making her way toward me. She was dressed in her favorite pink *mu'umu'u*, with a pink hibiscus in her wavy, light brown hair. As she got closer, the smell of her Nina Ricci perfume along with her comforting smile eased my mind.

"Grandma, I am so happy that you're here!" I shouted.

"Why don't you wait for me in the living room, Pupi (a nickname she had given me), and I'll be right there."

"Okay!" I called as I headed joyously for the house.

About ten minutes later, Grandma opened the front door. In her hands she held a small bowl containing an enormous goldfish. I leaped off the couch as Grandma placed the bowl on the coffee table.

"Is she for me?" I asked.

"She's all yours. Happy birthday, Pupi!" she answered.

This was my first official pet. After watching my fish circle the bowl several times, Grandma took my hand and led me into my room. On my dresser I saw a fish tank that made the fish bowl look like a puddle on the road in comparison to a monstrous lake. The bottom of the tank was covered with blue and green pebbles along with clusters of plants that swayed from side to side. Ceramic houses and caves that would serve as hiding places were strategically placed along the bottom as well. We immediately

People were patting my head and pinching my cheeks from all directions. It was as if my mother had set me up for the attack of the old people.

transferred my fish into the tank from her restrictive bowl.

"So what are you going to name your new pet?" Grandma asked.

"I'm going to name her Justina, after you Grandma."

I had abandoned my party so that I could spend some quality time with Justina. I fed her, attempted to converse with her, and watched as she adapted to her new home. It soon became my daily ritual to run home from school as fast as I could just to watch Justina. She would hide in small crevices, dash from one side of the tank to the other and swim to the surface to suck my finger. Justina was my favorite thing in the whole world. Her extremely round body, multi-shaded orange scales, and bubbly eyes captivated me.

Months went by until, to my amazement, the captivation gradually transformed into sheer boredom. I wanted to see something new swimming around my fish tank. One morning at the breakfast table, I announced my desire to acquire more fish.

"Natasha, aren't you happy with Justina?" my father asked.

"Yes, but I want different fishes too!" I whined.

"You should appreciate what you have," my mother pointed out.

I whined about the matter all day long. Usually, this was how I would get my way, but it didn't seem to be working with my parents on that particular day. I picked up the phone and quickly dialed Grandma's number.

"Hello," a voice said on the other end of the line.

"Grandma, Mommy and Daddy won't let me have more fish!" I cried.

"Why not?" she asked.

"I don't know. I guess they don't love me anymore."

Now that I think about it, I was quite a con artist at such a tender age. But it

worked. Grandma rushed over to the house and stormed into the living room. Before I could figure out what she was going to do next, she had already gathered up my Care Bear and favorite red purse and taken hold of my hand. We hurriedly headed out the door and into the garage where we climbed into Grandma's somewhat aged vehicle. It was an ancient Dodge that had belonged to my grandfather. There were patches of rust creeping up along the sides and eating away at the already faded blue paint. The seats were discolored and had dozens of small cracks running across them. Grandma didn't seem to mind its condition. She was always quick to point out the fact that it took her where she wanted to go.

After a short drive, we reached the mall. I jumped out of the car and bolted toward the pet shop as Grandma trailed behind. I was in awe as I viewed the many tanks which housed hundreds of different fish. I had already decided on the fish that I wanted by the time Grandma made her way to the tanks. They were considerably smaller than Justina, blue and yellow in color,

swimming extremely quickly. Grandma agreed that they were pretty.

When I arrived home, I victoriously walked into my room and placed my new fish, which I had already named Tom and Jerry, into the tank. The tank now looked much more interesting and I was pleased with my decision as I went to bed that night.

The next morning I woke up extra early to see how Tom and Jerry were acclimating to their new environment. The two were swimming back and forth, but Justina was nowhere in sight. I began to panic and ran into my parents room, crying and screaming for them to go and look for Justina. My father picked himself up off the bed and, with numerous moans and groans, headed into my room. I sat on the bed as my father searched the tank for Justina.

"Where is she Daddy?" I yelled.

There was no response.

The two were swimming back and forth, but Justina was nowhere in sight. I began to panic. . . .

“I want to know now!” I demanded.

Hesitantly, my father said, “She’s sleeping.”

My father reached down into the tank and pulled Justina’s limp body up from behind one of the ceramic houses. She wasn’t twitching as she usually did when I would take her out to clean her tank. I immediately knew that something was wrong. It was then that I realized that a movie I had seen a few days earlier had used the same scenario to explain a death. I spent the next few days burying my head in my pillow and weeping for the loss of Justina. I couldn’t understand how such a thing could have happened.

“How did Justina die, Daddy?”

“Well, it seems that Tom and Jerry had a fight with her and bit off her tail. We were not supposed to mix those two types of fish together.”

I felt that Justina’s death was all my fault. I blamed myself and refused to bond with anything or anyone in fear of another loss.

It was suggested that we flush Justina down the toilet, but I decided that Justina would be buried in the back yard next to my grandmother’s hibiscus plants. I built a small cross out of two Popsicle sticks and stuck it into the ground as a memorial.

Justina’s death was the first chipping away of my childhood innocence. Trying to understand death was a very difficult lesson for me to learn. Over time, especially after losing my grandmother a few months later, I realized that life can end very unexpectedly and that is why it is so important to appreciate what you have while it’s still there for you to enjoy.

The Humunga Cowabunga

By Jennifer Thompson

It was the summer of sixth grade and of my unforgettable visit to the water park, Typhoon Lagoon. Upon packing for the trip, I had forgotten my bathing suit—so I was left with two choices: a) borrow my mother’s horrid yellow and black bikini that had to be straight out of the 70s, or b) spend the entire day sulking in my grandparents’ Winnebago watching Lawrence Welk reruns with Grandpa.

After much consideration, I made my way to the RV’s airplane-sized bathroom and tried the little bumble bee suit on. For several minutes, I bumped around the bathroom trying to make it fit as Grandpa barreled down the freeway swearing at the other drivers. As I looked in the mirror, I caught sight of myself in an out-of-style, stretched out, sun-faded, padded polka dot bathing suit.

“Mom, there is absooolutely NO way I am gonna be caught dead in this get-up!” I squealed from behind the plastic accordion door. “If anyone I know sees me, I’ll die.”

“Honey, don’t be ridiculous. That’s a designer Cheryl Tiegs swimsuit,” Mom replied, in her “shut-up-darling” tone of voice.

“Euuuhhh, that just means it’s from SEARS, from like a hundred years ago!” I whined, rolling my eyes. Just then, Grandpa slammed on the brakes and began to cuss in Italian. That was my cue to put a sock in it and go peacefully, no matter what I had to wear.

As we stood in line at the front gate of Typhoon Lagoon, I felt the sweltering Florida heat beating down on my shoulders and my bathing suit bottom creeping up forming an ever-so-uncomfortable wedgie. I proceeded to nonchalantly extract my garment, making sure that nobody noticed (especially the cute lifeguards), and silently

vowed that I would never again allow myself to be talked into wearing such a monstrosity. You see, the bathing suit was not only prehistoric, it was several sizes too big as well; no matter how much I tugged, tightened, and rearranged myself in the top, the shoulder straps would just not stay put.

Trying to make the best of a very bad situation, I decided I was going to have a good time no matter what. I looked up and there it was, a waterslide as big as a mountain, hovering above the park at a nearly ninety degree angle. It was

aptly named, The Humunga Cowabunga. I stood there staring in awe as I watched and planned my escape from my family. It was easy to sneak away, since they were too busy applying their sunscreen and arguing, as usual. I was free at last.

As I approached the ride I saw a rickety, weathered sign that read: “BEWARE: People with heart conditions should not board

slide—Riders will travel at speeds of up to 35 mph. . . .” Obviously, this sign was meant for old fogies, not twelve year olds.

Thus began my trek up the long, steep stairs that made the path to the top of the Humunga Cowabunga. I became winded and a bit overwhelmed with the magnitude of this slide I was about to go down. It made all of the other rides seem minuscule in comparison. I wiped the sweat off of my brow and adjusted my baggy swimsuit one last time.

“Next?” The blonde Zinca-laden slide operator motioned that it was my turn.

I inched my way towards the starting gate and peered over the edge to see hundreds of feet of menacing blue metal, slickened by the water’s frothy jet-stream. Shaky, I crawled down onto the slide, balancing my feet on the trap-door as Zinca-

It made all of the other rides seem minuscule in comparison. I wiped the sweat off of my brow. . . .

man spoke.

“Body straight, arms folded, legs crossed, don’t forget to lock your ankles,” he recited.

“Okay, um, fold arms, cross legs, lock my aaaaannnnkkklllezzz.” Before I could get positioned, my trap door was released and I was off like a shooting bullet. “Holyyy Sh*!,” I shrieked as my infamous bathing suit began to come undone. In my state of panic, I began to flail around, in hopes of getting the straps re-tied. This attempt proved unsuccessful and, in turn, attracted the curiosity of hundreds of “Typhoon Lagooners,” who wanted to see the source of the banshee-like screams from above.

The seconds seemed like hours, and the inevitable became a reality as my 1970s mom-sized bikini top flew off. People of all ages had flocked

around in response to my screams and had encompassed the bottom of The Humunga Cowabunga. I plummeted towards my audience, with arms and legs flailing, and splashed into the stagnant pool at a speed of 35 mph. While underwater, the words of the omniscient Zinca-man rang in my water-filled ears. “Body straight, arms folded, legs crossed, and don’t forget to lock your ankles!”

If I had just kept calm and followed his words of wisdom, I would not have ended up minus a bikini top and with my bottoms resembling dental floss.

Big Mac and Me

By Dung (Madeline) Truong

When undressing yourself in front of the mirror, have you ever noticed that you have gained a couple of pounds here and there? Your legs flap like bowls of jelly; your chest sags, as if Mother Nature has been especially overgenerous with her gift giving; your triceps flap like two chicken wings ready to fly north; your belly hangs over the waist of your pants, as if you were nine months pregnant and waiting to deliver; and, worst of all, you cannot fit into the clothes that you would normally wear. I'm pretty sure that sometime in your life you have experienced being overweight. I experienced this drama myself during my last two years of high school.

During the summer between my junior and senior years in high school, I gained 60 pounds. When I walked, my legs rubbed against each other like two stones rubbing together hard enough to result in fire. That's how I felt when I was gaining weight. My school required us to wear a uniform, and the skirt had to be below the knees. Since I had gained so much weight, I wasn't able to fully button my skirt and zip it up, so I didn't fasten the top button, unzipped my zipper, and rolled my skirt up a couple of inches to prevent the skirt from slipping down. I was afraid to tell my parents to buy me another uniform because uniforms were expensive, and also because my parents were constantly telling me to lose some weight.

Not only did my body change, but my face changed also. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt as if my eyes were getting smaller; the blubber around my face dominated everything. To make the matter worse, not only did my face blow up, but I had zits. It looked as if 10,000 bees

had stung me all at once. My face was that swollen up. My image of myself was

hopeless because I looked so terrible that I thought I looked like a poky pine tree. My body was all out of proportion. I was a snow-woman, but not only during winter time. I was a snow-woman for all seasons. I was desperate to lose weight, but I didn't know what to do.

I gained 10 more pounds by Christmas of my senior year. My school was right across the street from McDonald's and every day I would stop by to visit my friend "Big Mac." The smell of those two slices of hot grilled, greasy beef with layers of

melted cheese between the buns made me want to sink my teeth into that sandwich. A Big Mac was my snack, but for dinner I would have TWO Big Macs, one order of sizzling french fries and a large coke. For dessert, I would go to Bubbies and order a vanilla ice cream cone topped with hot, thick chocolate syrup, sprinkled peanuts,

M&Ms, Hershey's Kisses, whipped cream, Oreo cookie crumbs, and one red cherry.

One night, after finishing my dinner and dessert, I went home as usual to face my depression over my weight gain. I locked myself in my room and stared at my body in the mirror. I had to unbutton one more button of my skirt and veg out on my bed.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Go away!" I reached for a pillow and covered my ears with it. I knew that my mother wanted me to take a walk with her around the block. I imagined my mother pressing her face closer to the door, her body shifting to one side, her right hand resting on her right hip.

"Darling," she said through the closed door, "please take a walk with me today. It will take less than 15 minutes."

"I told you NO!" This time I screamed extra loud through my thick pillow, hoping that she

A Big Mac was my snack, but for dinner I would have TWO Big Macs. . . .

would leave me alone. I waited for a couple of minutes to see if my mother would respond. Nothing.

My mother looks good for her age. She doesn't resemble a skinny model who puts on leather pants and rides motorcycles; instead she is a plump, short oriental lady, who likes to feel healthy by taking a walk after dinner. From the corner of my eyes, I took a look at myself in the mirror, and I started to cry.

The next couple of days were harder for me, because I could tell that my breathing was different. It seemed as if I was breathing more heavily than before.

One Monday night, as I was lying on my couch, I heard a squeak coming from the couch springs. I knew I was getting heavier and my depression was getting deeper. Looking through a magazine, I saw a skinny model in fashionable clothes standing next to a handsome boy. I hated that beautiful image as I took a bite of my Hershey Bar.

My father walked into the living room carrying his tennis shoes. He asked me, "Would you like to play tennis with me tonight? It will require a lot of running, which will be good for your legs."

"No," I answered. "I don't think I have time tonight because I have tons of homework to do, and besides I have a test in Physics tomorrow." I covered my face with the magazine trying to hide the lie that I had just told him.

"Madeline," he said, "you know you should join a gym or some kind of after-school sports to help you lose some weight." He was tying his shoe laces.

"I will someday," I said. I was trying to hold back my anger at being so fat.

The next day, for the first time in two years, I realized that I really wanted to lose weight. We had a family reunion coming soon. I had not seen my long-distance cousins for five years and, before they saw me again, I wanted to lose weight.

The first two weeks were hard for me, but I pulled through. I didn't stop at McDonald's after school, instead I put on a pair of sneakers and ran from McDonald's to the Ala Wai Canal and back. Rather than going to Bubbies, after eating a decent

dinner, I chewed on carrot sticks. After eating my dinner, I would take a walk with my mother for an hour around my neighborhood. Furthermore, after taking my walk, I did three sets of twenty sit-ups. Later, before going to bed, I would do at least twenty minutes of yoga exercise. I was losing weight, a little at a time, but I knew I was making progress.

Two months passed and I had lost 20 pounds. I felt so good that I decided to treat myself to a low-fat frozen yogurt. I chose snacks that were low in fat to munch on, because in order for me to lose weight I had to change my eating style as well as my life-style.

Then, I was inspired to lose even more weight. I joined a gym and, for a couple of months, I exercised at the YMCA. Soon I lost more weight than I had ever expected to, and more people treated me much better than before. My parents were very proud of my accomplishment and were very supportive of me as I lost more weight.

At the family reunion party, I saw my cousins. They weighed 20 pounds more than I did! I realized that I had been working so hard to lose weight not to impress my cousins, or my parents, or anyone else. But rather, I was losing weight and becoming healthier and more physically fit to impress myself. Since that night, I have lost 20 more pounds, and I feel great!

Drill Sergeant Shakir

By Nam Vo

We scrambled out of the light blue, rusty bus with our luggage in one hand and a package of paper in the other. I searched for a line to get into while the drill sergeants yelled at me. We walked uniformly under the sizzling hot sun and I was thinking about the fun I had had at my family's Fourth of July picnic. Tired and thirsty, we finally spotted the old drab building we would call home for the next eight weeks.

A taped military sermon was playing as we marched into the refreshing air conditioned room. Military weapons and paintings of rankings and emblems decorated the white walls. A glossy wooden stage lay in front of the room, with two sets of bleachers positioned perpendicular to it. In the right corner of the room we could see the star-spangled banner, and a couple of military flags.

Standing next to the flag was a man in his Class B uniform. He had on a green button shirt, black slacks, and a dress cap. Above his left pocket you could see all the ribbons and patches he had earned as an infantry man. The shoes he had on were so shiny that you could see yourself sitting in the bleachers in their reflection. He stood there like a stone statue, scanning through his newly recruited, baldheaded privates. He stepped out of the shadows of the flags and introduced himself to everyone. The words "Drill Sergeant Shakir" boomed around the room like a cannon being fired from a deep, dark, and hollow cave.

Every morning at precisely 4:30, he would stomp into the white-bleached barracks and wake everyone up. Anyone not off his gray bunk by the time he reached them had to do

push-ups. They would be on the ground, licking the floor until he got tired of counting. He made the knuckle-heads carry their green wool blanket around with them all day long as punishment. Every time they saw him, they had to wrap themselves with their blanket and crawl away from him like a worthless little worm. When they completed that task, he would make them beat their face on the ground about ten times and then let them go on their way.

Three weeks into Basic Training, I had an encounter with him that I would never forget. He told everyone in the dimly lit hall to smack their camouflage cap on their thigh before entering the classroom. We all filed in in an orderly manner, but I had forgotten what he had just instructed. He demanded that I go out into the hallway and try it again. I stepped out of the room and waited for him to signal me inside. I went back in and whacked the hat on my thigh as hard as I could. Just as I was

stuffing my hat inside my leg pocket, he yelled, "Are you rolling your eyes at me, private?!"

I replied, "NO, DRILL SERGEANT!"

"I think you are, Private. Get your ass outside and give me ten."

I was on the smooth, cold concrete doing my push-ups while he was hollering and screaming at me. All of a sudden, three more drill sergeants crept in from outside and started yelling at me. As soon as I stood up, they made me drop back down on the ground. Finally, they let me return to the classroom after I did about seventy push-ups. Drill Sergeant Shakir told me that I had only three seconds to return to my seat. I dashed over as quickly as I could, but he told me I was too

*He stood there
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slow. I jogged back to him and he gave me another three seconds to get to my desk. I rushed to the chair, and once again he told me I was moving like a turtle. We did this a few more times, until I got there within three seconds. I sat on the chair with sweat dripping down my face and my body trembling with fear, humiliated and ashamed that everyone in the room was staring at me.

From that day on, Drill Sergeant Shakir did not punish me all by myself. We usually got punished as a platoon, or I would witness other privates suffer more than I did. The day we graduated, he took us out into the damp grass field and made us do push-ups and sit-ups for no particular reason. Relieved and ecstatic, we proceeded back to the light blue, rusty bus in a military manner. We could hear Drill Sergeant Shakir's low echoing voice punishing his new platoon of baldheaded privates as the bus drove away.

Two Week Revelation

By Daniel Martinez

Words. What power do words have? After all, they're just letters grouped together on a piece of paper or sounds that we form with our mouths. Who's to say they have any strength? Are the words you're reading at this moment of much notoriety? Yet, we are often moved by a person's speech or a literary work of much merit. There's no denying the power of Martin Luther King Jr.'s single phrase, "I have a dream." And almost any American can complete the phrase "One small step for man. . . ." But are the words the muscle behind those statements?

For most of my life, I believed that the strength in words derived from the speakers' ability to articulate themselves. I used to feel that the selection and arrangement of words was the key to the feelings being evoked by the statement. I still believe this to a certain extent, but I recently found that certain words carry tremendous power either standing alone or in any context. I've discovered a handful of words of utter tragic connotation, and two unlikely words that exude sheer beauty.

Not too long ago, I had been ailing from a sore throat. I stopped by to see my family physician to make sure it wasn't serious. The doctor peered down my throat and gave me his diagnosis. "It's really red. It's probably sore and irritating you," he said, in a rather astute manner.

"What a waste of time," I thought. I was somewhat speechless as he handed me a prescription. For I all I knew it probably said, "stop swallowing." Regardless of my ill feelings towards his medical and mental aptitude, I thought I'd bring my left arm to his attention. I had had a few bumps on my forearm for a while, and although they were only a millimeter or two

in diameter, they seemed to be growing and getting darker in color over the past few months. My doctor took a long look at my arm and let out a "hmm," which was followed by a dramatic pause. He put a hand to his chin in a pensive manner and I could almost hear the gears turning in his head. With each second that went by, a feeling of unrest grew within me. An appointment that had started out with treatment for a sore throat was growing darker, and I was getting worried. The doctor spoke again and nonchalantly stated that I probably had skin cancer.

"Cancer." Now that's a powerful word; just say it aloud. It's also not a good word. You don't hear "cancer" in light conversations. "Hey Bob, my mutual funds are growing like a cancer." It just doesn't happen. I don't think there are too many jokes with the word "cancer" in them either. Even the astrological sign of the same name has an eerie feeling about it. I never really cared for the word and I certainly didn't like

hearing it in my doctor's diagnosis.

My life passed before my eyes on the drive home. I don't say "flashed" before my eyes because it was slow and rather gradual. If I were being shot at, my life would flash before my eyes. Since I wasn't in any imminent danger, the memories just slowly rolled through my mind. It's ironic that we all know we are going to die someday, but just a mention of a word like "cancer" strikes a chord of fear within us. The sorrow I felt was in the knowledge that I might not live as long as my daydreams depicted, that my children might have to grow up without a father, or that there was a chance that I might not even have children. This knowledge, given to me by the mere mention of the word "cancer," damn well scared the bejabbers out of me.

I used to feel that the selection and arrangement of words was the key to the feelings being evoked by the statement.

My doctor made an appointment for me to see a dermatologist to verify his diagnosis and to seek further treatment, if need be. There was a two week backlog of patients and I'd have to wait to receive a confirmation from a specialist. I compare my wait to that of a criminal who has already been convicted of a crime, but has to wait a few weeks for a sentencing hearing. He is already doomed. He just doesn't know to what extent his punishment will be.

Sometime during those two weeks, I rented a video called *Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead*. I only bring it up because, if I had watched the movie at any other time I probably wouldn't have noticed anything, but given my situation, one particular scene stood out. A woman is speaking about her own confrontation with cancer. She simply states, "'Malignant' has got to be the most frightening word in the English language." This phrase would echo in my mind. As if I hadn't enough to wrestle with after being given the word "cancer," I now contemplated the word "malignant" and all its consequences. I concluded it was one of the scariest words a person would ever have to hear, and I prayed that I wouldn't have to face it.

The day of my appointment arrived and my anxiety had reached extreme levels. I was afraid of what the day had in store for me. Once at the clinic, I was shown to an examination room where I'd have to wait a few minutes for the doctor to come around. Those few minutes, waiting in angst, had to be the worst part of the two weeks. The pressure was enormous. The tension in the room was tremendous. A nurse arrived to "prep" me for the dermatologist. I described my affliction and my previous doctor's diagnosis and she wrote some notes on a clipboard. I was able to peer over her shoulder and spot the phrase "lesions on left arm." I know that "lesion" is a catch-all term for afflictions of the skin but, by that time I was a bona fide hypochondriac. I immediately connected the word to the type of lesions that are a symptom of the AIDS virus. Even though I had no knowledge of any possibility that I might be infected with it or to what extent the lesions on my body were similar to those of AIDS victims, the word "AIDS" boomed inside my head.

If "malignant" is one of the scariest words of the English language, there is no doubt in my mind that "AIDS," even though it's really an acronym, is the scariest word of all. With no cure in sight, I believe it will go down in history as the top dog of frightening words. In two short weeks, I went from the trivial ailment of a sore throat, to being slapped upside the head with the biggest voodoo word of them all, "AIDS."

Finally, the doctor entered. In my state of mind, he might as well have been wearing a pointy black hood with peepholes for his eyes. Of course, he was dressed like any other doctor, except for the magnification lenses fitted into the headpiece he wore. I assumed they were standard issue for dermatologists. The doctor moved quickly and spoke equally as fast. He wasted no time. He grabbed my arm and examined it through his lenses. "Looks like a viral infection. We'll pop those suckers right off!" he said rather quickly, his two front teeth protruding further out than the rest of the others. With a hook-shaped instrument in hand and a few flicks of his wrist, he gouged the lesions out of my arm, leaving three tiny craters with blood slowly welling up within them. The doctor advised the nurse to hand me a gauze to stop the bleeding, then left the room as quickly as he had entered.

While she was attending to me, I asked the nurse what my affliction had been. "Molluscum Contagiosum," she replied without hesitation. "Call us if you find anymore bumps." A few bandages later, I was out the door and on my merry way.

Life can be peculiar that way, I guess. In those two weeks, I climbed a staircase of tragedy in my mind, each step labeled with a different word. And just when I thought I was at the top, about to plummet off the edge, I was kindly informed that I had merely stepped onto the curb of a slight botheration. Despite it all, I did learn that certain words do have a power all their own. Some can be so ugly, so menacing, and so evil; they strike fear and sorrow into the hearts of men and women. But I did find a couple of words that are absolutely beautiful: "Molluscum Contagiosum." Now that's music to my ears.

Ties That Bind

By Gertrude Chock

Editor's note: Ms. Chock's essay was originally published in the Spring 1996 edition of *Diamond Journal*; however, due to an error in the publication process, a portion of the piece was omitted. This reprint of "Ties That Bind" is presented here in its entirety.

Summertime in Kaimuki meant wakening to the incessant jabbering of mynah birds among the *kiawe* trees as they pecked at the dangling seed pods that oozed a sticky substance. Their mischievous sounds would stir my thoughts—today I'd climb high enough in our mango tree to spy on the boys who lived two doors away. I had ambiguous feelings about them; more often than not we were at odds, yet I had a curious admiration for them. Some days I was barred from their shenanigans; other days I was a bona fide partner in crime. On days when we felt really daring, over a small fire fueled by twigs, we would boil wild peas in an empty Van Camps pork and beans can, savoring each meager bite, not only because it was our own concoction, but because it was forbidden. Even if my mother did not know the extent of my activities, she was well aware of my affinity for the outdoors.

The summer that I was eight or nine years old she decided that I should spend that time in the rural town of Honouliuli with my maternal grandmother. It was there that my mother was born and raised, a small plantation town near the larger sugar plantations of Ewa and Waipahu. Occasional visits there were always fun, so her proposal initially appealed to me. Yet the thought that I would be separated from my family and friends nibbled at my mind.

A week or two into that summer, I was

shuttled to Honouliuli. An oblique sense of time or distance made it impossible to tell how long it took—sights, sounds and smells were better gauges. When the acrid odor of burnt sugar cane seared my nostrils, I knew that we were more than halfway there. The charred remains of the recently harvested sugar cane lay stricken, in stark contrast to the verdant two-foot stalks that had pushed their way through the soil that nurtured them—their undulation a silent celebration of life abutting fallow fields. In the distance, smokestacks of the sugar mills stood like sentinels watching over the

endless rows of sugar cane that stretched as far as the horizon. Occasionally could be heard the groan of boxcars piled with harvest, en route to the mill.

Not much later we reached the town of Waipahu where the first signs of human life appeared. Mahogany-skinned laborers, some with skinny roll-your-own

cigarettes hanging from their lips, idled in front of the garish pink theater. This was their chosen haunt even when there was no movie scheduled. At about this time my cramping legs, which were conditioned for climbing trees, not taking long drives, told me that very soon we would reach my grandmother's store.

Her store was small and nondescript, identifiable by the man-sized poster adhering to the wall that faced oncoming traffic. That poster extolled the merits of the loose tobacco known as Bull Durham, portrayed fittingly by a picture of an enormous bull. But it was the interior of the store that held the most fascination for me. The noxious smell of kerosene needed for stoves and lanterns melded with the fragrance of soap, tobacco, and candies—a potpourri of incongruent odors. My grandmother's stock ran the gamut from kerosene to an insignificant button,

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and only a practiced eye could find everything. Next to a box of shoelaces, flat, round crackers with the puzzling label, Saloon Pilots, nestled in oversized glass jars with screw-top lids. With nostalgic attachment my mother also stored crackers such as these in an identical jar. Similar jars, with knobbed lids, boasted of colorful jaw breakers, lemon drops, and other confections, on a level conveniently within my reach.

A sloping driveway next to the store led to the entrance of the yard. Several yards from the gate stood the outhouse, its presence readily signaling a dubious welcome. In the style of most plantation houses, a railed verandah ran the length of two bedrooms. A glance into one of those rooms satisfied my curiosity that the netting under which my mother had found haven from mosquitoes still veiled the bed she had slept in fifteen years ago.

A short flight of stairs led down to the partially enclosed kitchen area where my mother had shared meals with her family as I would for the rest of the summer. Looking out the back window I could see the ubiquitous sea of green stretching beyond my line of vision. Time and distance were now less of a blur; I began to understand how far I was from home.

Questions that had been captive in my mind now pushed their way to the front lines. Am I here because my mother thinks I am incorrigible? Is my sister being kept at home because she is the favored one? (I had always suspected that she was.) Will I lose the favor of the boys back home? Suddenly my longing for home could not be quelled even by the expectations of summer fun.

My cousin, who was ten days my junior, could not detect my feelings, but in his naiveté unwittingly dispelled my pangs of homesickness. Without too much forethought he quickly suggested a number of things we could do starting the next day: we could climb up to the

roof of the house to pick some mangos or maybe hike down to the train tracks and retrieve some lengths of sugar cane that might have fallen from the box cars. Much as I missed home, I was lured by promises of adventure. Tears of homesickness mingled with anticipation on my first night away from home.

The next day, getting up to the roof meant eluding the watchful eye of my grandmother. The most efficient way to the roof required that we get a toehold on the walls that sheltered her precious shrine. There she made daily offerings of food to her Chinese ancestors whom she summoned with the burning of pungent incense sticks. Had my mother joined

her in the same rituals? We knew we had not escaped my grandmother's detection when we heard her words of admonition coming from below. Overjoyed that we had made it to the roof, we grabbed the succulent fruits and stripped the skins from their fleshy ripeness, ignoring the trickles of juice that snaked down our arms. After gorging ourselves,

we tossed the remnants to the two pigs enclosed in pens near the far end of the house. With them we shared our euphoria. How soon I had forgotten the anxieties of the day before.

Sometimes, in the garden that was fenced off from straying chickens, we would hunt for four-leaf clovers which supposedly would bring good luck. Would I find and treasure one as my mother once had? I would consider myself lucky if I found the elusive prize. But I did not need a four-leaf clover to bring me good luck. I had summertime.

One day we visited some distant relatives who raised watercress and children, in what order of priority I did not know. Deviating from the dusty roads, we took a shorter route through the fields where *honohono*, a tough, weedy vine, grew rampant. The tall weeds clawed at us and tangled

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between our legs as if resenting our intrusion of their primal grounds. What a relief it was to plunge our feet into the icy water bubbling up from the spring that irrigated the watercress ditches. While the mother placidly nursed a baby, several children milled shyly around her skirts, embarrassed by the presence of a stranger.

By the end of summer I was no longer a stranger to country living. Sounds once unfamiliar to me, like the adenoidal snorts of the pigs as they groveled for their morning slops and the shuffle of my grandmother's footsteps as she made her way along the verandah to open shop, were now as familiar as the cacophony of mynah birds.

Many years after my experiences of that summer, my mother and I reminisced, as people well along in years tend to do, about her youth and mine. As we shared our memories, I realized that the summer I had enjoyed in the milieu of her upbringing were echoes of a life my mother knew and cherished. I had felt the pulse of her past—a part of my heritage; I was linked to my mother's roots.