Diamond Journal

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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.

A special mahalo to members of the KCC community who helped in the production of this issue of Diamond Journal, especially the following: Wini Au, whose continuing generosity and kindness we appreciate and Gene Phillips, whose advice and patience we value.

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Finally—and most importantly—Diamond Journal thanks all the writers who submitted their work for consideration. Your efforts, along with your creative writing talents, continue to make Diamond Journal possible. Because we had so many excellent essays to choose from, selecting those for publication was no easy task. We wish you success in all your future writing and hope you will consider submitting once again to Diamond Journal.

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About the contributors . . .

Young Soo C. Harrison was born in South Korea. Her academic focus is on Christianity education and she would like to be an instructor of English in a foreign country. She likes to read and sing. She would like her readers to know that she is a housewife who started studying English late in life.

Sujin You came to Hawai‘i from Seoul Korea. She is attending KCC in order to improve her English skills and feels that sharing her experiences about her adjustment to life in another culture is important.
Twelve years after the war in Korea, life was very difficult. The South Korean government established a new form of government in the country and villages under the Semael Movement whose mission was to build roads and do farm work. People worked hard together in each village even though there were no companies, no jobs, and not enough money. Many people were hungry and many young children couldn’t attend school. For that reason there were many petty thieves causing increased violence.

Fortunately for me, I was working in a city office in Seoul. One morning my boss told us surprising news. A woman taxi driver was working around midnight when a young man about twenty years of age signaled her to stop. He sat beside her. The woman driver asked him, “Where are you going?” He answered, “Take me to the north suburbs.” When they had almost reached the suburbs, the young man pointed a sharp knife at her and asked for all her money. She was frightened by him, but she didn’t lose her courage. She said to the man, “OK, I’ll give all my money to you and I’ll help you in your future as well.” She spoke with a very soft voice and kind eyes, smiling at him. She began to open up about her life. She talked of her past and her suffering and how she learned to stand alone. She had one brother like the young man, so she could understand him and what his situation was now. She said to him, “I want to know your difficulties and to help you with what you need for your life.”

The young man cried and talked about his life. “My father is ill and my mother has five children, so we cannot go to school and we don’t have food. I need money to pay for school and food, so I wanted to rob you.” He wept loudly for a few minutes. They hugged and cried together and the woman driver promised to help him with his future. She said to him, “You’ve got good health. I can help you learn to stand by yourself.” So they became good friends and began to understand each other.

I will never forget that true story. We live in a society where violence sometimes occurs. Her example helped me to have an idea of how I might handle a violent situation. It took courage for this woman to talk to this desperate young man. I think she is a wonderful model for me.
Growing up in Vietnam, I worked hard for my family and had little time to play. I sold goods such as medicine, cigarettes, drink, and food. Our lives were all right until my father was forced into a prison camp by the Vietnamese government because he believed and followed the Americans during the Vietnam War.

He was in prison camp for eleven years. My family and I tried hard to visit him often, despite our busy schedule. It took three days by train to see him. After his release from the camp, the American government sympathized with my father’s actions and gave us permission to live in the United States. From that point on, we began our journey towards a new life.

On my vacation to Vietnam after five years of absence, I had hoped to see the country improve, but, to my surprise, it was nearly the same. People were still working very hard to make ends meet. No matter how hard they try, most people cannot seem to get beyond the poverty level. My old neighbor recently developed brain cancer. He needed two surgeries to make it better. The first surgery cost $500.00 and the second cost the same. But he and his family could not afford the surgery. I helped him with the payment, but his condition was getting worse. He did not make it through the surgery and died the following day. The government in Vietnam does not help the poor and the sick. It is up to the individual to help himself.

I visited Vietnam for a month and found that pollution, crime, and poverty were still the main reasons for slow development. Children followed their elders on the street, begging for money and food. I felt sorry for them and tried to help them by giving them some money.

Most people get up around 4 a.m. and begin selling their goods on the street. They need to prepare the food and find customers who want to buy. They usually go through the same street every morning, hoping that their usual customers buy from them. At the end of the day, they count their money and prepare their food for the next day. They work very hard, but their profit is very little. They do
not have enough money to buy things other than food. This is why most people in Vietnam want to get out of the country and move to the United States. They want to live a life of financial security and freedom. They want to make a difference in their lives. I know, because I did. I came to Hawai‘i with my family to make our dreams come true—our dreams of stability, financial freedom, and happiness. We are now working hard for those dreams.

Living in Hawai‘i for five years has made me realize how sad life in Vietnam is. I hope the government will help their people. Five years from now I hope to see a better Vietnam on my vacation.
When I met my husband in Korea he was living in Hawai‘i, so I found myself moving there. I was pretty excited because I had wished for a long time to get out from under my parents’ strict supervision, and my wish was going to come true. My father was very strict and conservative. He always expected his daughter to be well-educated. Therefore, he was not reluctant to advise me about my behavior. He never allowed me to stand in front of my elders or him. He never allowed me to wear strong make-up or have a manicure. Wearing socks or slippers was also not permitted. I couldn’t even laugh loudly and never spoke out in front of him. I loved him very much, but I didn’t want to listen to what I was supposed to do as his daughter. So, when my flight from Korea took off, I felt I was totally free from any restrictions that had tied me down and controlled much of my behavior and my lifestyle. When I first arrived in the new land, I had a great time for a while. My behavior, no matter what, seemed to be acceptable. I woke up whenever I wanted to, ate whenever I felt hungry, and watched television while lying on the sofa or carpet. I wore any kind of clothes and stayed out very late. I did everything that I was never allowed to do under my parents’ supervision and this made me absolutely free.

However, even before totally enjoying this kind of irregular life without any interference, I came to realize that these were not all the factors that could make me satisfied with my life. I was getting into problems that I had not expected. Above all, I had to face up to a language barrier. I had thought before I started my life in this new place that I could survive with the English that I had learned at school in Korea without any big difficulties. I tried to speak correctly. But the more consciously I spoke English, trying to make my speaking better or more perfect, the more mistakes I made. I hated to make the same stupid mistakes, but it was unavoidable. Even worse, listeners laughed at me. Finally I became so self-conscious that I could rarely speak in front of people.

This withdrawal led to my isolation from the outside world. I spent most of my time at home. I was reluctant to make friends.
with non-Korean people, especially people who didn’t understand the Korean language. I watched Korean television programs all the time. English became my enemy; therefore, I was not willing to improve my English skills. My life became boring, and I began to condemn the people or the society which was making my life boring and isolated. I started to miss my family. I even missed my parents, whom I had once really wanted to escape from. I missed my close friends who might have helped me through this kind of negative experience. I missed the food that my mother used to make for the whole family. I imagined the scene of the living room at my parents’ house where all of my family would gather, talk, laugh, and even argue. I missed almost everything that used to be linked with my life in Korea.

I flew back to my parents’ house in Korea to ease my yearning. But the result was the opposite from what I had expected. I didn’t belong there anymore. The room that I used to use was occupied by my new sister-in-law’s belongings and my position was also replaced by her. Besides, I was not enough of a child anymore to receive my parents’ care. So, on the way back to Hawai‘i, I made a new resolution. I decided to start my life again in Hawai‘i. I would open my mind and try to adjust myself into this not-totally-new culture which I had once refused to accept or assimilate into.

I started to take English classes to fight my biggest barrier to survive, and made many friends who were not Korean to make my life affluent. I also got deeply involved in the studio where I made pottery a hobby. I tried to be active and positive in this new culture. Unconsciously, in the process of challenging myself in a new place, I became familiar with a new culture. Actually, it is not a new culture for me anymore. This place has become my second home now.

I don’t live in Korea anymore. Even though I still watch Korean television programs, and it sometimes gives me a more comfortable feeling when I socialize with Koreans than with non-Koreans, and I go to Korean restaurants to look for my native country’s atmosphere, I am sure I’m changing now to assimilate into some parts of American culture very naturally and the other parts of American culture that already exist in me. I’m being Americanized.
About the contributors . . .

**Penny Carter** hails from Fort Worth, Texas and is currently in the liberal arts program.

**Joshua Hee** graduated from Pearl City High School. His plans are to acquire a degree in criminal law and pursue a career in espionage. He enjoys writing poems, reading Shakespeare, hunting, hiking, fishing, and watching action flicks. He would like his readers to know that he welcomes comments about his essay.

**Ho Anh Nhi** is originally from Viet Nam. She is a liberal arts major who enjoys swimming and skiing.

**Angela Simon** is a graduate of Farrington High School, studying hotel operations at KCC. She likes shopping, going out with friends, and talking on the phone. She believes that writing helps her reflect on life and its lessons.

**Ayako Stolpe** attended high school in Japan. She is a liberal arts major who enjoys hiking and diving. She intends to get her Bachelor’s Degree in an undisclosed major.

**Babita L. Upadhyay** hails from Nepal. She is a liberal arts major, with an emphasis in the humanities. She likes writing and intends to pursue a career as a journalist. Her advice to her readers is “There are many things which you don’t like, but don’t be frustrated because you can’t change them.”

**James B. Yamanoha** attended Waialua High School and is currently in the culinary arts program at KCC. He would like to be a chef. He enjoys body boarding, surfing, cooking, and cruising with friends. He turned nineteen in June and would like his readers to know that he is proud to say that he will become a dad, too.

**Yuko Yabuki** moved to Hawai‘i from Osaka, Japan. Her professional goal is to become an accountant. She enjoys dance performances and watching movies.
Two Six-Packs
at Thirteen Thousand Feet
by
Penny Carter

Upon opening the aircraft door, I bundled up and hurried down the mobile stairs, ran across the tarmac and into the Third World terminal building. Entering the airport with only twenty minutes of stopover time, I quickly scanned the colorful booths along the wall, looking for the most enticing. In seconds, I visualized my route of choice and began the spree. The deals were endless, from tiny wooden Aymaran dolls to llama sweaters, blankets, and hats. My few U.S. dollars were spent way beyond my expectations! The register rang madly as my hands were grabbing, and the gift list in my mind was running a mile a minute!

With no time to spare, I proceeded to the next booth and suddenly my eyes locked on some beautifully handcrafted alpaca gloves of many different sizes and designs. As I picked up a pair of gloves, the store lady yelled, “Two dollars!” I replied in surprise, “Two U.S. dollars a pair?” Before she could answer “yes,” I had gathered her entire stock and asked if she could have more next week when I returned. After agreeing to my request, she leaned forward and said to me, “Would you buy my husband some underwear?” Although spoken with an accent, her English was good, so I waited for more of an explanation before replying. “My husband loves your underwear from the States. It feels good to him. Those stretchy fruity kind,” she said, explaining with her hands.

Because the lady referred to them as my underwear and because I was a U.S. citizen, I felt a true sense of obligation to agree to her wish. “Of course I will,” I told her, “I’ll be back next week.”

After explaining to my husband why I was in the market for Fruit of the Loom men’s briefs, size 36, he chuckled strangely and proceeded to take me to Walmart for the big buy.

My order seemed so important that I bought the lady two six-packs of briefs. I felt so proud that this lady and her husband were awaiting my return with the precious cargo.

One week later, I returned to the snow-peaked Andes and to the same little airport above the clouds, repeating my routine from the week before. I hurried directly to the particular lady’s booth and was happy when I saw that she was there. I stepped up and proudly
delivered her order with anticipation of approval. “Thank you! Thank you!” she said very pleasingly. “These are perfect! My husband will love these!” My mission was accomplished.

Taking off from the runway at thirteen thousand feet for the last time, I stared down at the small airport and visualized the lady and her husband so happy about this underwear which was made in the USA. It really made me appreciate how easy we have it living in the United States and how much we take for granted. I was so excited gathering souvenirs for pleasure, when all this lady wanted was a good pair of underwear for her husband.
The Pig
I Learned From

by
Joshua Hee

I remember the day was sunny and the sun was directly above me. That Sunday my father and I were pig hunting on Mount Ka‘ala. I went up the mountain as my father went in the opposite direction. It was great not having my little brother with me because he always made too much noise. I was excited and I anticipated the moment of the kill. I had no idea that I was about to experience something that was going to change my perception of life forever.

As I moved up the mountain, I locked and loaded my rifle, checked my canteen, and checked my radio. I crept slowly and kept my ears open. I listened for distinct sounds that resembled unnatural movements in the forest. The wind was calm and I could hear every leaf that fell to the ground. My eyes scanned the terrain. The smell of guavas led me to a valley where several guava trees stood. Large tusk marks scarred the bark of several trees. On the ground beneath the guava trees the remains of half-eaten guavas and tracks the size of my fist were everywhere. The squalid smell of pig dung led me to steaming feces that had flies swarming over it.

I followed the tracks up the valley for at least an hour. I could hear the sound of leaves and branches cracking. In the distance was an open area free of small bushes. I saw a large dark object that moved. I realized that I was looking at an animal. At that moment my heart pounded with excitement. Sitting down, I slowly aimed my rifle and waited till I could positively identify what I was about to shoot.

Losing track of time, I watched the dark animal as the wooden stock of my rifle became slippery.

As I released the safety on my rifle, the sound of the switch gave my presence away.

After I observed its every move, I could now identify that my target was a very large boar. As I released the safety on my rifle, the sound of the switch gave my presence away.

At a distance of approximately thirty yards, the boar turned and stared at me. His large tusks moved up and down as if he was defending his territory. The hair on his back stood high and signaled aggression. My breathing was heavy and I had a hard time putting the boar in my sights. He grunted and charged straight for me. The sound of his hoofs as they hit the ground resembled the clap of thunder. My arms were shaking and I cursorily pulled the trigger a number of times. I was relieved when the boar dropped a few feet in front of me, since I had
unknowingly shot all ten of my bullets.

The boar lay partially paralyzed on the ground. Dust spewed into the air as his heavy breathing grew pernicious. We looked at each other eye to eye as I sat on the ground, the boar still in my sights. I noticed my chamber was open, which meant I had no bullets left. I took a deep breath and loaded a bullet. I stood up and looked down at the boar. His feet were still kicking as if he were charging. I raised my rifle and rested it between his eyes, and, as I gazed at him, I pulled the trigger.

I called my dad on the radio and waited for him. The size of the boar was awesome. This was the largest boar I had ever shot. As I caught my breath and stared at the boar I counted the number of bullet holes. I wondered what had angered this boar to attack with such ferocity. What prompted such belligerence from a generally peaceful animal? Maybe I had invaded his personal space. Maybe he did not enjoy being hunted. I will never know.

I felt an enormous sense of remorse. I can still see the eyes of the boar that nearly killed me. When we looked eye to eye, I could feel his every emotion. The boar gave me a valuable and rare lesson in life. The experience that Sunday taught me that life is a gift that I should appreciate, because someone or something could take it away from me in a flash of light.
Vietnamese New Year is coming, and this is the third year that I have celebrated in a strange place—Hawai'i. Tet is translated from two words, “New Year,” in Vietnamese. Tet can be considered the happiest day of the year in Viet Nam. Every time Tet comes, it reminds me of my first date.

Going on a date is different in America than in Viet Nam. A girl is not asked to go out. A boy is supposed to come over to a girl’s house, if he has been invited. Nam was given an invitation to my house on the fourth day of the New Year in 1992. That day was as sunny as I felt. However, I was also nervous while I was waiting for my first date. I worried even though he and I had been classmates for two years. He was supposed to be at my house at 8:00 in the morning. It was still early, yet I kept looking at my watch as I walked back and forth. Finally, he arrived. After he finished parking his motorcycle in front of my house, I asked him to come inside and started introducing him to my parents. He greeted them and wished them all good things for the New Year. He was also wished happiness and given a red packet for good luck. After that, he and I were left in my living room. I showed him the chair to sit on while I sat across from him. We chatted for a while, then I asked him what he would like to drink. He said that he would have the same as I would.

In Viet Nam, at that time, there was no canned juice. However, it would not take long to make two glasses of orange juice. I left him, saying, “I’ll be right back.” I went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator to get some oranges and ice. If I added sugar, then our drinks would be well done. However, I was in a rush since I worried that he could be bored sitting alone. Therefore, I tried to make the drinks as quickly as possible. After a while, I brought in two glasses and passed one toward him with a smile. He took it and smiled back at me, saying “Thanks!”

Being a guest, one is supposed to keep having a drink, whereas the host need not. So that was what he did. He took a sip of his drink once in a while. I noticed that every time he drank, he smiled secretively. I could not guess what was so funny or what he was thinking at that time. I really intended to ask him, but I was
short of courage. However, I could not stand the fact that he kept smiling about something which I did not know anything about. I felt there must be something wrong, either with me or with his drink. "Would you mind telling me what is so funny, Nam?" I finally asked him.

At first he refused to tell me. Perhaps he was afraid that I would get mad at him if he did not let me know what it was.

"Fine! I will tell you... but..." he said.

"No, but... please! Say it now... pretty please?" I was interrupting him.

"Are you sure you really want to know it?" He asked me again, laughing.

"Yes... hundred percent yes... would you please?" I begged him with a big smile, too.

"You put ajinomoto in my glass instead of sugar, Nhi," he whispered.

I shouted, "Oh... nooooooooooo!"

I could not believe what he said to me was true.

"No kidding!" I said, hoping that was a joke.

"No kidding." He shook his head with a big smile again.

I just wished that I could disappear somehow. I was totally ashamed. I did not dare to look at him or even speak up anymore. What would he think of me? Would this awful mistake be kept a secret? My head was spinning around with these unanswered questions. He probably did not know how terrible I was feeling at that moment though.

Moreover, he started teasing me: "No wonder!... I didn’t see you drink at all." He added, "You really hate me, don’t you?"

"You just realized it now, huh?" I was kidding him back.

"That was not your fault, was it?"

He looked at me while I was trying to explain the accident. I did not know that those jars were put in the wrong place. I apologized to him and changed our drinks. He accepted the drink, but not my apology since he knew that I was not that mean. After that he said, "Don’t blame yourself, Nhi. I know you didn’t do it on purpose. Just forget it, okay?"

"Yes," I answered and gave him a nice smile.

The conversation continued. However, we both know that we can never forget that special day.

Thinking of the past will bring either happiness or sadness. People love to recall only the good times, the same as I do. Celebrating Tet in Hawai‘i is much different. It just seems like a normal day, going to school or work instead of being with my family. However, the smoke of fireworks brings me back to the old Tet with all sweet memories of home. Tet not only makes me homesick, but also makes me miss Nam and my first date more since he is far away from me.
Standing Up
by
Angela Simon

It was a cool Saturday morning, the weekend before Halloween, when my cousins and I finally decided on what we were going to be that Halloween. I was six, and it was the first time my parents allowed me to go trick or treating with my cousins. My cousins Norbert, Nixion, Charlie, and Ferdinand usually went by themselves while I went with my parents.

“No, clowns are stupid, let’s be vampires!” suggested Norbert. We all agreed it was a great idea. However, after giving it some thought, I felt the warm sensation of anger surge through my body; then the feeling of sadness hit me. The reason I felt this way was not because I didn’t want to be a vampire, but because my cousins hardly took any of my ideas seriously. Just because I was a girl, if I were to challenge one of my cousin’s ideas, they would back each other up.

Since we were at Grandma’s, Nixion asked Grandma if we could use some of the scrap material that she kept from her sewing to make our vampire costumes. Grandma naturally said, “Yes.” That afternoon we went through boxes and boxes of material until we found the perfect pieces for our costumes. When we found what we wanted, we helped each other piece our costumes together. At the end we were satisfied with our creations.

Finally, Halloween arrived and I was filled with so much anticipation and excitement that I almost forgot to bring the temporary hair color, which was a crucial part of our costumes. We all had decided to meet at Grandma’s to get dressed. By seven we were ready to go. About an hour later, when we reached Kalihi Valley on our route, we turned into a street where dim lights flickered. As we made our way down the street, filling our bags with goodies, we spotted an old house with shrubbery all around the front. The house was completely dark, except for a single light by what looked like steps leading to the house. I felt the hair starting to rise on the back of my neck. “Let’s go,” I said flatly. “Why? You scared!” taunted Charlie. “No! It’s just that I don’t think they’re giving out candy,” I said in an unsteady voice. “Yeah, right! You scared!” Nixion said with a look of disbelief on his face. So I told them that I would wait for them at the end of the street while they went up to the old...
house. I was patiently waiting for my cousins to emerge from the house, when all of a sudden, Charlie ran towards me, followed by the rest of my cousins, screaming for me to run. When we got to a well-lit street, we stopped to catch our breath. I asked them what had happened. They told me that I was right. The owners of that house weren’t giving “treats.” Instead, they gave my cousins tricks that they would not forget by sending their dogs to chase my cousins away.

The lesson that I learned that night is one that I use every day of my life. It is the lesson of standing up for myself and my beliefs, even through times when I am alone.
People feel emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger in their lives all the time. Some of these emotional experiences are forgotten over time, while others remain in their memory for a lifetime, especially bitterness which makes people sad, angry, and regretful. I would like to express mine.

Six months ago was a wonderful shopping day for me. I went to the Saks Fifth Avenue Outlet Store in Waikele, found a nice black linen jacket, and decided to buy it. I was in a hurry because my husband was waiting for me at another store, but all the lines were busy. I picked the shortest line with three people in front of me. One of them, a salt-and-pepper-haired, left the line to shop in the jeans section with her husband. She didn’t come back for a long while, so I stepped forward to pay my bill. When my turn finally came, I put the black jacket on the counter for the cashier.

Suddenly, the salt-and-pepper-haired woman came back to the opposite side of my cashier, but this time she was not in the line.

The cashier, who looked like a very mean woman, glanced at the other customer, then grabbed my jacket and threw it back at me. With a cold voice, the cashier said, “No, not you. She came first.” The salt-and-pepper-haired woman gave me an arrogant look and said, “Yes! I thought so, even if I left the line.” I was so angry that I was speechless and unable to translate my thoughts from Japanese to English. In my mind, I protested to myself in Japanese, “No, I was here first. You left the line for a long time, and you, you mean-faced cashier, how could you treat a customer like this?” My face was very red with anger and intensity. At that moment, I should have left the store and tried to forget about the black jacket, but I was in a hurry and angry. I could not think straight. The mean-faced cashier and the arrogant looking woman exchanged foxy smiles. When my turn came, the cashier looked at me with the same scornful eyes and still threw the jacket and the bag at me as she had done before. She knew I could not say anything; she thought I was just another Japanese tourist.

After I went home with my husband, I regretted my stupidity. I should have said something even if it was in broken English. This incident has remained with me for a long time. I tried to forget it, but for a few nights, I woke up in the middle of the night with bitter
feelings; sometimes I cried, holding my breath and not letting my husband know. Days later I could not concentrate on my studies because the incident was still bothering me. I thought that time would heal the bad memory, but it never left my mind.

A week later, my husband noticed something was wrong and asked me what had happened. I told him everything. I had been afraid he would say, “Forget about it,” but he did not. He understood and told me that I should not hold these feelings inside. I must speak up!

The next morning, he took me back to the store. When we went inside, I found the mean-faced cashier. She remembered me and gave me the same scornful look. My husband immediately noticed she was the one whom I was talking about. According to him, her eyes expressed, “Come, I will fight with you.” However, we did not come to fight with her. Instead, we went to talk with the store manager who looked like a very kind, understanding woman. My husband explained exactly what had happened to me that day. She listened carefully and apologized to me. I felt much better. I wished that the arrogant woman who had jumped in front of me was there; then I could prove I was not an idiot by saying in good English how rude she was.

The reason that I was very upset was the cashier’s attitude. I have heard there have been many Japanese tourists at the store, but they do not usually complain. Maybe she thought I was one of these tourists who would not challenge her.

Recently, I have visited the store many times, but I no longer see that cashier. I do not know what happened to her. I hope she never works anywhere where there are customers.

What I learned from my bitter experience is to speak up, even if I can not speak perfectly. Nobody knows what I’m feeling unless I say something. Nobody can help me unless I appeal. I appreciate my husband who gave me a clue on how to survive in American society.
I was born and raised in a South Asian country, Nepal. I used to think that America is the best place in this world, where everybody has a nice house, is well educated, smart, and intelligent enough to handle his or her life. I thought that Americans do not have many problems in their lives and that everything is good in America. I have no idea how I got this stupid thought, because I don’t remember my parents, my relatives, or my school teachers ever telling me this. However, I had a dream that one day I would visit America and see all of this goodness. Finally, I got the chance to visit this “Land of Freedom.”

On the 17th of November 1995, with excitement and nervousness, I flew from Nepal to join my husband in Honolulu. After a thirty-six hour flight, the aeroplane landed at Honolulu International Airport, where my husband and his housemate were waiting for me with two beautiful leis.

After we picked up my luggage we went to a cafe near the airport, where my husband’s roommate talked about himself. I didn’t pay attention to his conversation because I was too excited about being in America. However, I did hear that he had a five-year-old son, but that he was unmarried. I was confused and wanted to ask him, “How can you be a father without being married?” However, I could not ask because I had a feeling that my English was not good enough. This was the first American culture shock for me.

On the second day, we went for a walk (I don’t exactly remember the place because it was just America to me) and I saw coconut trees everywhere. I love to eat green coconuts, so naturally I looked up to check out the coconuts. I could not see a single coconut on the trees. I asked my husband about this, and he explained to me that if the coconut fell on people’s heads they would sue the city. That is why all the baby coconuts have been taken from the trees. I asked myself, “What kind of a country is this, where people have a right to sue the city but the coconut tree has no right to have its fruit?”

After a week, I went to visit one of our friends who has three children: two daughters, seventeen and six-years-old, and a...
twelve-year-old son. We were sitting at her house talking about my country when the older daughter entered the house with her boyfriend. They did not say “Hi” to us, instead, they went straight to the bedroom and closed the door. I looked at my friend to check her reaction. She was embarrassed. She told me that if she objected, her daughter would leave the house because pretty soon she would be eighteen years old and the law then allows her to make her own decisions. For me, what’s the point of being a mother if you can’t tell your children what is right and what is wrong?

The next week I was watching a talk show on television where three eight-year-old kids were telling their mothers that they wanted to have sex. I was really shocked to hear about such a demand from eight-year-old kids. On the same show I found out that in America, if parents slap their children, they can be charged with child abuse.
Early morning, Waimea Bay, fifty feet and glassy. That’s what my uncle would have rushed. He was the type of guy to forget about everything and just surf. I guess that’s where I come in.

My uncle took care of me when I was small. He had to because no one else wanted to. However, before I was born, he was one of those surf freaks that had no care in the world. Then I happened. He treated me as his own, I guess. In fact he was the one who taught me how to dive, swim, and surf—all in one day.

It started with a simple question, “Uncle, I like go swim. You can teach me?”

Well, I got my wish and more. My uncle took my cousin (his own son) and me out on the long board several miles out, then tossed us overboard. While breathing in water, I noticed that my cousin could swim already. He saved me. We got back on the board and as soon as I coughed up half of the Pacific Ocean, back I went.

While almost drowning, I began to move under the water and then above the water; I was swimming and diving. Though it took five times of nearly drowning to learn to swim, I got it.

At about this time, the waves began to get a lot bigger, and we started to head in. I noticed that we were going a lot faster than before. I finally realized that Uncle had caught a wave and we were surfing.

So I learned how to swim, dive, and surf all in one day from my uncle who seemed to be trying to drown us before going surfing. What a guy!
My Own Experience
by
Yuko Yabuki

During my stay in New York about five years ago, some unique experiences helped me to grow in my emotional strength. I was very emotional living in this new city that was crowded around the clock. In this new country, I got involved with different kinds of people from all over the world and I used a different language which was a second language for me. These new conditions made me sad and lonely, but also happy.

For example, my first day at New York University was so miserable and lonely because I didn't know anybody and I didn't know my way around. Of course, I knew there were other students like me. However, for them, it was totally different because of my poor English skills and the cultural differences. I felt very isolated, sad, and lonely.

Another example was recognizing the physical differences between American students and me. I was very concerned about my figure at all times, especially because I was studying ballet. American students were taller, bigger, and more powerful than I. Moreover, their figures were very balanced with long, straight, beautiful arms and legs, small faces that matched their bodies, and clean, beautiful white skin which was good for ballet. These differences were very obvious. I was so sad and disappointed when I looked at myself in the mirror. It took a long time for me to accept my potentially beautiful figure.

Not only did the different figures make me sad but also the different dance techniques which were new to me. I did not know these new dance techniques such as modern dance, contemporary ballet, tap, and jazz. One day my teacher asked us, "Who knows tap dance?" And everybody said they knew except me. No one helped me because they were busy trying to remember the combination that our teacher showed us. I was completely isolated and lost. One thing that occurred to me was how my teacher could be so unaware of students from foreign countries. However, I learned to be much more talkative and active in class after my first tap dance class.

Most of all, I was lonely for my family, especially my grand-
mother who had raised me. I didn’t realize how helpful my grandmother was before I came to the strange, crowded, and dangerous city of New York. On another occasion I had a very bad cold and couldn’t attend school. I needed to stay at my apartment all day. No one took care of me. I felt something missing in my room. It was my grandmother’s delicious food, kindness, and smile. I realized how much she encouraged me every day with just a smile. I missed her very much, and I thought about how significant she was in my life.

On the other hand, I had some totally opposite experiences. I enjoyed studying and staying in Manhattan, New York. I received a scholarship from Princeton Ballet School for the summer session. I didn’t think I could get a scholarship and when I checked the mail, I couldn’t believe it. After struggling with studying and dancing for two years, I received the scholarship and felt the accomplishment of taking one step toward my goal. This experience made me confident and strong.

I feel it was worthwhile spending time in New York. These unforgettable experiences have shaped and strengthened my character. I am adapting to Hawai‘i very well because of having broadened my viewpoints and my ability to accept differences.
About the contributors . . .

Tammy L. Glynn graduated from La Serna High in Whittier, California. She is a liberal arts major at KCC who enjoys hiking and racquetball.

Ron Gose is a graduate of Damien Memorial High School, pursuing an Associates of Arts Degree from KCC. He intends to transfer to UH Manoa to get his Bachelor of Arts in art after graduation. He enjoys art, classical guitar, Cindy Crawford, foreign films, and, without a doubt, loves pizza.

Adrienne Chisato Ishihara is in the liberal arts program at KCC and plans to become either a preschool or kindergarten teacher or study veterinary medicine. A graduate of the Lutheran High School of Hawai’i, she likes horseback riding, ice skating, and hula. Ms. Ishihara is a caring person who loves to meet new people.

Corinne Kealoha is a graduate of Honoka High School, and her professional goal is to be a special education teacher. She enjoys reading, listening to music, and being around children. Although she is an adult, Ms. Kealoha says, “I still enjoy looking at life through a child’s eyes.”

Nancy Lai is originally from China. She attended Sacred Heart Canossian College and is majoring in liberal arts at KCC. She enjoys playing tennis, swimming, and listening to music.

Kathryn Lee is studying business/human resource management at KCC and intends to attain a Bachelor’s Degree. She is a graduate of Kaiser High whose interests include reading, collecting coffee cups, dogs, and horses.

Ilona A. Loli is a graduate of Sacred Hearts Academy, majoring in liberal arts. She will be pursuing a career in secondary education. She enjoys writing and dancing.

Shanon Peltier, an alumnus of James B. Castle High School, is in the culinary arts degree program at KCC. As his essay reports, he is an avid hunter and fisherman.

Derek Sekiya, a graduate of Iolani High School, enjoys shooting pool, diving, and just kicking back and talking story. He would like his readers to know that he is not always as stubborn as his paper portrays him to be.

Jake Masao Shimabukuro, a Kaimuki graduate, plans on pursuing a career teaching music. Indeed, he states that he loves performing and composing music, but is also interested in diving and fishing.

Paula Souflis is a liberal arts major at KCC and intends to pursue a career as a teacher. She enjoys many activities, but her focus is on her children: “I’m a stay-at-home mom by choice. I’m trying in every way, with my husband, to provide our children with loving support and security that will enable them to be strong, confident, and healthy individuals in their adult lives.”

Keiichiro Taniguchi hails from Hiroshima, Japan. He is in the liberal arts program at KCC and intends to continue on to pursue a Master’s Degree in an undisclosed discipline. He is a runner and enjoys tennis.

Gregory W. Wilinski, originally from California, is pursuing a degree in culinary arts at KCC. He enjoys surfing, snorkeling, fishing, cooking, camping, and gardening. Mr. Wilinski asserts, regarding the subject of his essay, that his accident might have been a negative event in his life, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Sally Koo Ying Yi was born in Shanghai, China. She has many interests and would like her readers to know that she is an active girl with a pleasant personality.
I had a dream. The dream was to travel to Europe some day. In 1987 my dream came true when my best friend Wendy invited me to go to Europe with her. We stayed in her villa in the South of Spain. Our plan was to stay in the villa for one month then travel all through Europe for two months. We traveled by train and spent the nights in youth hostels.

While we were in Spain we lay on the beach topless by day and partied by night until the early morning. “When in Rome!” One of our favorite discos was called The London Underground. One night while we were dancing I met a sweet young man named Luc, from Belgium. He was on holiday in Spain also. We became quite close over a two-week period and he invited me to Belgium to stay with his family.

I was on the last leg of my trip, exhausted and running low on money, when the train pulled into Brussels. I gave Luc a call and he promptly picked me up. His house felt warm and friendly. It was a large two-story house with wood floors and a fire burning in the family room. I will never forget that feeling of being home. The whole house smelled so delicious, and I was ravenous. Luc’s father pulled out a chair at the dinner table for me and introductions began. Luc’s entire family couldn’t take their eyes off me. I wonder what they were thinking. “Who is this American girl with a backpack and what does she want with our son?”

Later in the evening, Luc took me sightseeing in Brussels. The city was beautiful at night. First we went to the center of town. In Europe each old city has a town square where all the action takes place. The architecture which surrounded us was magnificent—enormous buildings with century-old detail and sculptures of saints, kings, and gargoyles. There were groups of people milling around from all over the world.

It was a brisk evening in Northern Europe and everyone was bundled up. People were laughing and talking in their native tongues. The sky was full of stars and I felt very lucky to be alive and to be there at that place at that time. Slowly we turned a corner of the narrow cobblestone street and saw a group of people observing something. It was a four-foot tall bronze statue of a young boy relieving himself. The statue and fountain were lit up...
beautifully. I asked my tour guide, Luc, “What is this called?” He said, “Mannequin Piss.” My first impression was that of embarrassment. Quickly Luc reassured me that this was a famous work of art.

Thousands of miles from home, I found myself once again a part of the human family. Despite our differences, there is a common thread of humanity which binds us all together. From the beaches of the Costa Del Sol to the Grand Place in Brussels, there was always something to make me feel at home. From humor to beauty, genuine kindness to the spirit of adventure, there was some of me in everyone and some of everyone in me.
New Year’s Eve is a favorite time of year for my family. We have a potluck, reflect on personal growth, and share New Year’s resolutions with each other. And, of course, we have fireworks.

On New Year’s Eve when I was ten years old, my older brother, two younger sisters, and I hurried to finish our dinner as our father reminded us to be careful when playing with fireworks. “Boys, pay attention to what you do,” said Dad with a familiar authoritative inflection. “Don’t set off anything and throw it at each other. Watch your sisters and make sure you start their sparklers for them.” I nodded my head to acknowledge his instructions and I almost laughed when I caught my brother rolling his eyes in response to the brief lecture he found so absurd and unnecessary. My sisters, as always, just smiled. We loved fireworks, firecrackers, snappers, and sparklers and couldn’t wait to start playing with them, so we gathered the familiar packages and ran outside. My brother and I unpacked the firecrackers, put them in a pile, and threw away the wrappers to avoid starting a fire. Then we divided the snappers, those little white things that make snapping sounds after being thrown to the ground, between our sisters and also promised to light their sparklers.

My brother and I lit our punks and focused our attention on the miniature sticks of dynamite that never failed to amuse us. For ten minutes or so, we discharged one firecracker at a time to show our sisters how to safely handle them. “This is how you do it,” I said with bravado as I ignited one and effortlessly threw it into the air for my sisters’ enjoyment. During that time, my brother brought up the subject of spy movies we had seen. “Remember the one where the secret agent melted a door lock using that special bubble gum?” asked my brother. “Yeah,” I said recalling the scene, “that was cool.”

The discussion eventually led to our annual competition to make the loudest firecracker bomb. “I know who’s going to win,” insisted my sister, annoying me. In past years I had been no contest for my brother, but I was prepared to put forth a real challenge that evening. We sent one of our sisters on a mission to get a roll of tape and some string from Mom’s desk and made it clear that she would be tortured...
if she failed. After she returned with the materials, the contest began.

We constructed bombs in a variety of shapes, took turns setting them off, and measured our competence by the degree of our sisters’ applause. Within an hour, we had about two hundred firecrackers left, so we split them equally and went to opposite corners to build our finest devices—the bombs that would ultimately declare the champion.

I assembled my bomb in three phases. First, I made nine small bundles by taping ten individual firecrackers together. Then I used some string to bind the bundles together with the fuses meeting on the inside. Finally, I spared the remaining firecrackers to fashion a short fuse and attached it to my invention. The end product looked like a big cherry bomb. To display a little finesse, I planned to ignite the bomb while holding it, after which I would throw it into the air. It was the perfect creation.

We were ready for the finale. “I’ll go first,” asserted my brother as he stepped forward with his brainchild which was shaped to resemble a giant firecracker. He placed it on the ground, touched his punk to the long fuse, waited for the sparks, and quickly backed away from it. In seconds, it burst in quick succession from left to right and produced a loud noise that peaked at the end. “Wow,” whispered my sisters simultaneously as they applauded the display.

“Oh, please,” I said nauseously, indicating that it was my turn. As I went to my mark, my sisters flattered me by covering their ears. While holding the bomb in my right hand, I brought my arm in front of me, angled it slightly downward, and mentally rehearsed the timing sequence that was crucial for a successful execution: ease punk to the fuse, wait for the sparks, swing arm upward, and let go of the bomb.

I eased the punk to the fuse, saw the sparks, and felt the upward swing of my arm. The bomb unleashed a deafening explosion that was certainly worthy of victory. “Whoa, he’s definitely the winner!” uttered one of my sisters as the smoke dissipated. But my thoughts were not of triumph. The firecracker bomb never left my hand. The initial shock combined with the smell of spent sulfur produced an odor of charred flesh. When I inspected my hand, it looked twice its size, had traces of red paper on it, and the skin took on a frighteningly grayish hue. By the time my brother and sisters came up to me, my hand was so numb I could no longer feel it. At that point, my sisters decided not to play with their sparklers. And as my brother’s hand came to rest on my shoulder, he said quite affectionately, “You win.”

Twenty-one years have passed since that incident, and I am still a very competitive individual in many ways. But the occurrence taught me that physical competition at any level requires one to take safety precautions from beginning to end. Incidentally, I no longer play with firecrackers because the sulfur makes my eyes teary and my chest tight. The allergic reaction evolved over the years and, ironically, continues to be the prize I won for making a short fuse.
He is cold. His skin is ash gray—he is an addict. I know this because this person is me, living a depressed, destitute life in northern California August 5, 1994.

Being tired can be a feeling or it can be a lifestyle. For me it had become the lifestyle I chose for myself. I had just turned 21, and my life was falling into nothingness, a void that nothing could fill but drugs and alcohol. With nowhere to turn, I had just enough intelligence left to realize my life had to change. With a little humbleness and desperation in my voice, I placed a call to my parents, with whom I was already on bad terms. I was honest with them and, though they were appalled at all I had done to myself, they afforded me one last chance. It was a chance I had to take or I wouldn’t be writing this paper today. One week later, I was on a plane and enrolled in Habilitat, a school of survival.

There are no words that can make a person understand Habilitat and its unorthodox ways. Habilitat is what is regularly known to society as a long-term treatment community. To me it was a warm bed, three meals a day, plenty of friendship, and a time to redeem myself. Once inside Habilitat, one is stripped of everything one knows of one’s old lifestyle. Habilitat takes the cold, gray, homeless, the addicted... and teaches them a new lifestyle through education. Habilitat is completely self-sufficient and privately run, so no one can interfere with the operation of the facility. Most important of all, there are rules to live by, a concept I had erased from my mind a long time ago.

Being in Habilitat was the hardest thing I had ever experienced in my life because I had to earn everything that I had at one time—money, clothes, and a good relationship with my family. Upon spending twenty-four months on the same two acres of land, I had earned my way into actually working as an upstanding citizen in society. I could wake up in the morning and be a functioning person who had grown up and become an adult. I could look in the mirror and feel good about what I had become. I graduated and took the opportunity to give back what I had been given.

It was at this time that I found my love for cooking. I had always played with the idea of becoming a chef, much to Father’s...
dismay. Once given the opportunity to get acquainted with the function of a full-size kitchen, I put all my focus into my newfound love and, after a while, became good enough to completely manage the Habilitat’s kitchen. My mentor, Calvin Ford, gave me all the training that I would need to become an executive chef. With all my experience both in and out of Habilitat I was able to enter the “real world” again and deal with things that I couldn’t overcome before.

Since my departure from the “school of survival,” life has shown me both good times and bad. I cannot ever forget the cold gray person that I once was in order to keep going in the positive direction I am now going. Those days still haunt me, and I hope never to return to the insanity I lived in for many years. I have come as close to death as I ever would like to this young in my life. I now realize what I am capable of as a human being, both good and bad.
Ssplaaashhh! It sounded like a bomb had been shot out of a cannon and landed into the pool. I wondered who it could be since my cousin Pua and I had just finished swimming. I said, “Could it be my brother, Alika?”

“It couldn’t have been. He finished swimming a long time ago,” Pua replied.

Then all of a sudden screams for help came from outside the change room. Pua and I ran outside to see who was screaming. It was my brother, Alika. Alika was about three years old and didn’t know how to swim.

Whenever Alika went swimming with Pua and me, he wore a suit with foam cylinders around his waist to help him float. This time he wasn’t wearing his suit; he was just wearing his shorts. My parents, aunties, uncle, and grandma were in the house talking story. They had told my brother that he could go outside since Pua and I were swimming. Little did all the grownups know, Pua and I had finished swimming.

Pua and I were like little fish; we swam and swam every time we were in the water. The grownups didn’t worry too much about keeping an eye on us; they looked outside every so often and listened for the loud racket we made. I was crowned as the little lifeguard. I swam and played with Pua and Alika. I kept a close eye on my brother. The grownups trusted me to keep a good watch on all three of us.

Pua and I had already finished swimming and were dressed and dry. My brother, Alika, was panicking and screaming. I looked at my tiny little brother gasping for air. I knew I had to save him.

Pua said, “What should we do?” I said, “You get my mom and dad and I’ll get Alika. Now go!” She ran and I dived. I was only five and back then I didn’t know how to rescue a person the right way. As I dived into the water I ran my hands along the bottom of the pool. It felt like rough sandpaper.

Alika was in the shallow area of the pool, and it wasn’t hard getting him to the side of the wall. All I knew was that Alika needed to have his head above the water. Alika was screaming, “Adri, HELP ME!!!” The only thing I could think of was to swim under him and between his legs. Then I could lift him
up above the water with my head. That’s what I did, and it was a success.

Still underneath Alika, I swam to the side of the pool and pushed him onto the deck. By that time, my parents were already outside and waiting on the side to help my brother and me. When I pushed Alika, my mom grabbed him and asked him if he was all right. I was still in the pool waiting for his answer. Alika cried, “Adri hurt my side!”

My mom was shocked and scolded my brother saying, “Lolo child, your sister just saved you!”

My brother looked at me and said, “Thank you Adri, I love you.” My mom carried my brother into the house.

My dad helped me out of the water and said, “Thank you Adrianne. You are such a good girl.” My dad and I smiled and he gave me a hug. Then my auntie, uncle, and grandma all started telling me I was a good girl saving Alika.

I went to shower, change, and eat some lunch. When I went into the house, my favorite Auntie Leilani said, “Adrianne is such a good girl!” I smiled.

Then my Auntie Emo, the one no one cares for, came up to me and said, “Next time, instead of saving your brother yourself, you call an adult.”

I didn’t say a word. I just walked away because she had hurt my feelings. It felt like building a sandcastle and having a mean kid come and flatten it.

My mom came up to me and started hugging me like there would be no tomorrow. She was saying, “Thank you, Adrianne.” It didn’t help my sadness go away. My mom saw my unhappy face and asked me what was wrong. I told her what had happened and my mom told me not to listen to Auntie Emo. My mom told me I had done the right thing by saving Alika. My mom then told me to play with Alika and Pua.

As I walked towards Alika and Pua, I saw my brother looking so happy and carefree. I thought to myself that I would never let his life be played with in such a manner again. I learned never to think twice about saving a person’s life.
Fun, Free, and Wild,  
I’m a Child Again  
by  
Corinne Kealoha

In my mind I can picture myself as a small child about the age of eight. I am wearing red shorts and a red and white striped T-shirt. I visualize myself with short black hair falling softly to my eyebrows. My facial expression is a happy one with a content smile. I can sense some glee and peace of mind as the child moves in motion. I can feel the freedom of an almost spontaneous run or jump for joy coming on, only to be held back by a waiting cue from my mother, “You can go now,” or “You can go play now.” I am surrounded by tall green trees and ginger patches. I can picture myself happily, gently picking the ginger flowers from the patch. The fragrance of the ginger flowers smells fruitfully sweet. I remember carrying the flowers in my hand most of the day, till they were slowly lost, or I made it home in time to put them in a cup of water.

I remember the grass being very tall and green. As I walk through the grass, the grass is high to my waist. I can see myself adventurously wandering through a trail of guava trees, looking for some old collectable glass bottle. In my mind the weather is perfect. The fresh gentle breeze feels cool and clean on my face and arms. As I look up to the heavenly blue sky, I can feel a sense of freedom, peace of mind, and contentment the child has for the life of the land, making it a special place to be.
The delicious smell of fried eggs slid into my endless dream and woke me up with my stomach drumming. Then the warmth of sunlight brought me further into reality and announced that a delightful day had already started. I opened my eyelids a bit. A familiar structural timber blocked part of the daylight and suddenly all the memories came back to my mind. I was back, back in this old house where I had lived for nine years, where I could still recognize every single nook and cranny. Also, I was back to the person I had missed so much—my grandma. No one could be more familiar with her gestures, tone of speaking, and way of walking than I was.

While struggling with sleepiness, I glanced around the small attic. Everything was the same; the white walls and sparse furnishings made the room look bigger and brighter. This was an attic of a three-story house in Shanghai. It used to be a storeroom for wood, cleaning utensils, and unwanted furniture. Since his marriage, my eldest uncle occupied the living room on the second floor, which meant that my grandma had to move to the attic. The ceiling of the attic was strangely shaped and very low; anybody higher than five feet could not stand straight in it. Moreover, there was a bulging ceiling timber hanging right in the middle of the room, which was very easy to hit if you were not careful enough. My heart ached every time I saw my grandma hit her head on the timber because she was over five feet tall. Seeing her climbing those steep stairs and having to sit on a bamboo chair to get her breath back also made my heart twist.

With my eyes half opened, I went to the bathroom. "Why don't you get some more sleep?" a voice full of concern said behind me. I replied with a childish smile, "Your cooking smells so good, it makes me hungry!" Grandma laughed when I gave her a wink.

I followed her to the kitchen where the familiar food cabinet and the table setting had not changed since I left; however, all the coal bars we once used were now replaced by two new gas stoves. Grandma was moving around the kitchen and working with an expert's ease. I asked her, "Anything I can do to help?" While she was bending down to pick up a bottle of milk, I rushed forward and picked it up for...
her. Her face became very red and her breathing quickened due to the bending action. "No, no. Just go up and change your clothes. Breakfast is ready."

Tears filled my eyes when I returned to the attic. Grandma used to be very active in our home town. She had been the representative of the local district for many years. She always walked with her back straight and her chin up. Also, she always wore a broad smile and chatted with anyone she saw and knew. Grandma used to look so energetic and enthusiastic. Many times her loud voice had stopped me from playing games and pulled me back home for dinner. Whereas now...

Grandma looked much older than I remembered. Silvery white hair had replaced what was once black silk, and her back was bent. The wrinkles on her forehead reflected the ruthlessness of time. I wanted to give her a big hug and tell her that, though her appearance had changed, she smelled and felt exactly as I remembered, even if this is not the way the Chinese express their feelings and love.

The sound of footsteps pulled me from my memories. Grandma, with a plate of fried eggs, Chinese deep fried rice-cakes, and a glass of milk, was climbing up the stairs. "I think you might like these; they were your favourite! Tell me what else you like to eat and I'll make it for you tomorrow." While I took the plate from her, I replied, "Next time you just relax and take a seat and let me take the plate myself." She simply said, "Eat! They are still hot!"

My throat tightened when I saw Grandma sitting in her old bamboo chair, watching me eat with a satisfied smile. I thought to myself, on the first day of returning to Shanghai, I was already afraid of leaving!
Mud Puddles
by
Kathryn Lee

It takes a good rainstorm to form a good mud puddle. I remember a lot of really good rainstorms when I was a child. I can remember both the anxiety of being frightened by the loud booming thunder and the brilliant flashes of crackling lighting, as well as the anticipation and excitement of the possible, probable, good to great mud puddles that I knew were being created. One of the best ones I remember was about knee deep! Just imagine, soft like lumpy poi, all ooey and gooeey, sticky and wet, freshly made real mud. And—would you believe, the very best of the best mud puddles were right in the little drainage ditch in my very own backyard?

Now, providing the sun came out shining nice and warm on the day after the storm, we knew what fun could be in store for us—“us” referring to myself at four years old and my big brother Eddie, who at the time was six years old. For if that sun would just come out, we knew that Mom would be only too glad to get us out of the house. So we would wait and wait, and watch. “Oh yeah!

There it is, it’s coming out. Mom, the sun is out and shining bright and warm. May we please go out and play?” We knew she would say yes and as always, when we were let loose, we raced as fast as our little legs could move to check out the ditch. Were there any good mud puddles out there today? As our eyes took in their first sight, they danced with the joyful gleam of excited happiness for there it was . . . our mud puddle.

There were now several choices of fun activities ahead of us. Now what should we do first? Play bakery and make mud pies, mud cakes, doughnuts, and the like? How about a mud pie fight? Or we could bring out the army men and play Army! “Let’s see, you be the Confederate Army and I’ll be the Union Army,” my brother would say. “You make your fort over there and I’ll be over here on this side. The battlefield is in the middle, now fight!” Oh, there were just so many things we could do. Why, we could even go swimming! What fun! And we could play for hours and hours.

Then, just as we were really involved in this wonderful activity, Mom would
call us to come take a bath. Naturally, as young children, ages four and six, being this involved in our play, who was ready for a bath? Eventually Mom would appear to retrieve us, and boy what a surprise it would be for her. We were covered in mud from head to toe. Off came the clothes and on went the garden hose. She said, “You’re not tracking in all that mud into my house!” But then, even though it was cold water, that was fun too, being hosed down outside before the dreaded bath.

Now, as I look back to those times, it gives me a nice, warm, and fuzzy feeling. It makes me smile. It reminds me of the innocence of a child’s capacity to appreciate the little simple pleasures in life, something that’s so easily forgotten these days. Today’s society is so busy, and people, including myself, always seem so wound up in its commercialism. Every so often I have to take a step back, relax, and look beyond all the commercialism around us for a simple pleasure in life, like my mud puddles. It could be as simple as watching a spectacular sunset, or riding a swing at the park with my seven-year-old daughter, or going to the beach with my eighteen-year-old son. I hope that by remembering this I instill in my children the appreciation of life’s simple pleasures.
Although I am only finishing my teenage years in a few days, I feel that I have already become strong and complete in my beliefs. About four months ago I became pregnant for the second time in my life. This became a very trying moment in my life and my beliefs because I now had to decide whether to have this child or have an abortion. What came out from those three months of debating taught me a lesson on love and faith which I will never forget.

As an adolescent my parents surrounded me with Christian beliefs and morals, which is probably why this was so hard for me. Throughout my school years I had always been the one student who expressed such strong and clear disapproval of abortion in any situation. I knew that abortions were wrong and immoral, but how could I do this all over again? My life had changed so much by having my first son Darin. I could only imagine the worst of how another baby would affect it. I constantly asked friends what they would do if they were in my situation. Everyone whom I questioned told me that they would, without a doubt, have an abortion, but I still could not get myself to accept that. Critical thoughts constantly ran through my mind and I did not have one silent moment for almost four months. This proved to be the hardest decision I had ever had to make on my own.

After three months of deliberation, I still could not face my family with the fact that I was pregnant once again. I brought myself to call Planned Parenthood and made an appointment for an intentional termination of pregnancy. Sitting in the clinic, I could not convinced myself that this was definitely what I wanted to do. I remained there until they called my name to start the process. The only thing that kept going through my mind was that it wasn’t too late to change my mind.

As I followed the nurse into the cold room, I stopped at the door to think one last time and pray to God to help me do the right thing. I was injected with a local anesthetic and had to wait until it took effect. I thought to myself that these would be the last three minutes of my daughter’s life if I went through with it. When the doctor came in the room, I began to cry.
finally told myself what I should and must do if I was ever going to live with myself after this incident. I sat up on the table and told him that I couldn’t do this to my baby. He had a confused look on his face and told me that he had never experienced a last minute change of mind such as mine.

After clearing everything up with the front desk and starting my drive home, I began to cry frantically. I was crying, not because I was sad or disappointed that I hadn’t gone through with it, but because I then realized how inhumane it was for me even to get that close to doing it.

As I walked into my room I felt overwhelmed with happiness and I realized how proud I was of myself and couldn’t wait to tell my mother how my faith in God and His plans for me had overcome my sense of shock and fear of the unknown. That night was one of the most complete and satisfying moments of my life. As I slept with my son in my arms, I suddenly felt a pain come over my body. I passed it off as a cramp, but for some reason I felt inclined to visit my doctor the next day.

I walked in the door at my mother’s house crying so hard that I could barely stand. At my visit to the doctor’s office I was told that they could no longer find the baby’s heartbeat. I’m proud that my faith had prevented me from committing a murder which I could never forgive myself for, but I’m still depressed over the fact that God took her from me without a chance to show my love for her. I loved my unborn daughter with all my heart because on that day, I knew she was simply testing my love for her and my faith in God when they were starting to fade. She changed my life forever in such a positive way that I will never forget her. I love you, baby Keana.
Hunting and hiking are some of my favorite pastimes. Even on the worst day, when it is windy and rainy, they are still enjoyable and relaxing. Does everyone feel the same? This essay prompted me to find out. Most of the time it is usually my friend Greg and I that go hunting, but, on occasion, there are a number of other hunters that we hunt with. This is how one of my hunting days usually goes.

Waking up at 3:30 in the morning is exceptionally hard for me, but this time it is very easy. It is a hunting day, my day to get out and hunt for pigs. The loud beep of the alarm wakes me up in a flash. No snooze alarm today. This is the day that I have been waiting for all week—Saturday! At last! Greg and I have already planned over the phone where we will be going, when we will meet, who is coming, and how many dogs each of us will bring. Today, on this particular hunt, there are ten of us. I change quickly, drink my cup of coffee and go outside to get the dogs ready. The morning air is cool and calm as I approach the kennel. The dogs sense that they will be going and the familiar yapping starts as I get them ready. Within half an hour my dogs are loaded into the truck. I am covered with the smell of the dogs from putting their collars on. I am on my way to Greg’s house to pick him up, then to meet everyone else. We are the first to arrive, then another truck arrives, then another. When the last truck arrives, we follow each other to Halawa Valley where we will be hunting.

To my surprise, there are other hunters waiting, too. Soon after we arrive, four trucks other than the ones in our group also arrive. Two trucks are in front of us and four in the back. What a crowded hunt this will be! I turn off the engine, get out, and observe how each group of hunters reacts, because it is very unusual to see so many hunters in the same area at the same time.

Everyone is courteous and friendly. “Where are you going?” “Which area do you plan to hunt?” “How many are in your group?” “How many dogs do you have?” These are questions that are asked of each of the different hunting parties. These are very important questions because everyone wants to know exactly where the other party is going to be so
that there will be no trouble. Two of the trucks in back of us decide to leave because they feel it is too crowded. The most noticeable hunting party is the one that arrived first—two older men with six younger men in their early twenties. The younger ones are quiet and do not say anything while the older men do the talking. What jerks! They feel that because they were first, they should be able to go anywhere they want without concern for everyone else. What started out as a friendly atmosphere has soon turned hostile as the others begin to get upset. Seeing what is happening, the jerks get into their trucks and drive into the mountains. That is the last we see of them today.

Dawn is here and we all drive to our preplanned hunting areas. As we let the dogs out and begin our hunt, it starts to rain. The smell of the foliage seems to intensify with the rain’s dampness. It rains off and on all day, but it does not dampen anyone’s spirit. This is my kind of weather, cool with sprinkles of rain. I feel the rain on my skin and am thankful for its coolness. It certainly beats a hot, sunny day and I can see that the other hunters also appreciate the rain.

Throughout the hunt, the eight of us younger hunters follow the dogs, taking them into gullies, small valleys, and up the ridges. There are twenty dogs total. That’s quite a bit, but if we were to come across a big boar, we would need every one of them. The two older hunters, who have seen many a pig, stray behind us. They take their time enjoying the beauty of the forest and the conversation. This slightly upsets some of the younger hunters, because they claim the noise might scare any wild pigs close by. But I see the look of contentment in the younger hunters’ faces. As they watch the dogs working and searching for the hidden game, their expressions are filled with the anticipation of catching something at any moment. Unfortunately, on this hunt, we do not catch anything. However, not one of the ten in our group is disappointed. Even though we are tired, hungry, soaked, and reeking of perspiration, we are all just happy to be outdoors in the mountains enjoying each other’s company.

On an earlier hunt I experienced a totally different situation. My partner, Greg, arrived at my home at around 4:30 in the morning with his two nephews. They looked strong and fit, but looks can sometimes be deceiving. I was already waiting for them, even though they were an hour early. We sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee and talking. The two boys were telling me how excited they were and could not wait to get going. So we loaded the dogs into the truck and were on our way. We arrived at the hunting spot and started walking. The boys were still talking as we began, but soon, there was silence. From behind me, I could hear them breathing heavily. I turned around to see both of them stop to take a break and smoke a cigarette. Just then I realized what was about to happen, and I knew that they were not going to enjoy this experience at all. As we walked further, I could hear them complaining, “Do we have to go down there? Why do we have to go that way. Isn’t there an easier way? Can we rest already?”

During this trip the weather was beauti-
ful, with a sunny blue sky and a slight breeze. Again, as always, I was enjoying every minute of this one-of-many hikes. I cannot say the same for the two boys. We were not even halfway into the hike when they were already really tired and ready to drop. “Are we going home yet?” they kept asking. They were so tired that they didn’t even bother to duck under any branches but just crashed through the trees. They kept making a lot of noise, still complaining, but in louder voices. Right away, they had drunk all their water and eaten all of their food. After about an hour of listening to their whining, I had had enough and told them we’d be turning back. The boys were elated to hear this and staggered along. We stopped to rest and they fell asleep for about one hour. During the brief stop, I realized that these boys would not be coming back to hunt with us again. They were young and strong but could not handle the hike. I thought if we had caught a pig, they would be crying if they had had to carry it out. We did not get a pig though, so that was a blessing for them.

We began again to go toward the truck and one of them asked for water. As I passed my canteen back to them, I knew that the cool stream water which I had filled it with must have tasted sweet and satisfying to them. The hike was almost over, and I commented to the boys, “The truck is just ahead—ten more minutes away.” “Thank God,” one of them said. “This is the last time I’ll do this.” Looking at their tired faces, I know they meant what they said.

Although hunting and hiking are strenuous activities, they are two of my favorite pastimes. To me they are enjoyable, adventurous, and relaxing. But there are many people who consider me crazy and have completely opposite reactions.
God damn kid!” I hear my father yell in the bathroom next to my room.

I hear his impatient footsteps trodding down the hallway to my room. Knock, knock. My bedroom door swings open. My father’s short frame and bare, chubby stomach occupies the doorway as he holds my clothes and towel in one hand.

“Jesus Christ!” my father annoyingly yells, “Can’t you pick up your clothes and hang up your damn towel once in a while?”

Not knowing what to say, and stubbornly wanting to ignore him, I lie in silence on my bed.

“You know,” he continues, “your father goes to work, six o’ clock every morning, and has what to look forward to when I come home? Do you know what I have to look forward to when I come home? Huh?”

I haven’t moved; my body remains still as if not to acknowledge his existence.

“I get to clean up all your crap!” he shouts as he throws my things across my room. He’s getting very frustrated now, and his gold framed glasses lay at a tilt as he continues, “You know, I don’t ask for much, OK, but obviously even the simple things I do ask you to do are too difficult for you,” he adds facetiously before walking away. I rest my eyes, and with a sigh of frustration wonder how I’m going to deal with this, day in and day out.

This went on for years, and slowly built as we sometimes unintentionally irritated each other back and forth. Our conversations were reduced to barking questions and commands with the occasional lecture from my father, and the simple “Yes, no, or I don’t know” answers accompanied by a stink eye from me.

As I grew older, the situation only seemed to worsen. I tried to be home as little as possible. Jobs after school, girlfriends, and friends all helped to keep me away from home. Poolhalls, bowling alleys, and arcades became regular havens that could keep me out until the wee hours of the morning. Then I went away to college. This was to be the event that changed it all, or at least so I thought at the time. However, it didn’t. Over three thousand miles apart, talking on the phone every other week, for less than five minutes at a time, we’d manage to accomplish the same result. He’d ask the same questions in his low,
almost raspy sarcastic voice. In return I’d give
him short sharp answers in an impatient tone. I
didn’t have to see him every day, or even talk to
him, so the situation allowed me to easily ignore
the relationship. Then, halfway through my
second semester my father called and told me of
my grandfather’s passing. I took a week off from
school to come home for the funeral.

As the Yukon (a Buddhist form of a
wake) ended, and the family got in
their cars to leave, my father and I stayed
behind. My father was talking to the funeral
director as the last of my family drove off. I sat
on a bench outside and noticed there were but
two cars left in the parking lot. My father and I
had managed to park in the same row, but almost
at exact opposite ends—my ’94 Chevy truck on
the right, my dad’s ’73 Mercedes on the left. Just
as I began thinking back upon what a great guy
my grandfather was, my father came and sat
next to me.

Both of us sit silent, looking straight
ahead. I see him in the very corner of my
peripheral vision. This seems to be a contest,
who can be in “deep thought” more. I aimlessly
gaze out at the setting sun’s flickering light as it
filters through the trees, and my father does the
same. Then out of the blue, “You know, you
were Grandpa’s favorite. He always would tell
me that I’m too hard on you. Here.” He reaches
into his shirt pocket, pulls out his cigarettes, and
bumps one halfway out. “I don’t know why you
smoke, but here.”

“I have my own cigarettes in my
pocket,” I thought to myself. “Besides
my father smokes non-menthol,
while menthol is all I smoke, but I’m not about
to ruin what seems to be an attempt to bury the
hatchet.” So I pull the cigarette from his pack,
and lean over for a light. The sun slowly dips
below the green trees of Nu’uanu as my father
lights our cigarettes.

“You know,” he says as smoke bellows
out of his mouth and cascades from his nose,
“Your hair for one thing. When I was your age,
if my hair in back was to even touch my collar, I
had to get it cut. But you, you have hair in the
front of your head that can go all the way back
into your collar, and what would Grandpa say?”

“Looks good,” I reply in a chuckle of
guilt, remembering how in my grandfather’s
eyes I could do no wrong, and how I took
advantage of that.

“Whoah you,” my father sighs.
“Yap, not too good,” I add as I bow my
head and tears of regret fill my eyes.

My father and I talked for what seemed
like hours. For the first time in years we were
talking, not about something that needed to be
done, or something someone didn’t do, but
actually just talking. Our hearts for that moment
seemed to open themselves to each other. We not
only spoke of what we really thought, but also
listened to each other. We seemed to be together.
However, in reality those hours were merely
minutes, and when the last puffs were taken,
when the cigarettes we smoked were smashed in
the ashtray, it ended. We walked across the
parking lot to our cars parked on opposite ends,
and drove off, never again to just sit down and
talk of life the way we did that Thursday in
Nu’uanu at my grandfather’s Yukon.
one of the most valuable lessons I've learned in my life was taught to me by a wrestling coach during my final year in high school. He taught me how to feel good about myself. He made me believe that before you can enjoy life and all of its wonders, you must first learn to find peace and happiness within yourself. Now, thanks to my coach, I will never be afraid to overcome any of life's tremendous obstacles, because I know, in his eyes, I will always have the marks of a champion.

There I stood, on the first Saturday of June 1994, waiting impatiently in my shiny white gown complimented by a rich, satin-finished cap. My palms were sweaty, my mouth was dry, and you could almost hear my empty stomach grumbling from a mile away. This was the moment, the first milestone expected by both mother and father to be reached by their sons and daughters before entering the adult world.

As the guest speaker neared the closing of his speech, he asked all of the graduates a familiar question. He said, “Was it all worth it?” For a split second, I could’ve sworn he directed that question personally to me. “Was it all worth it?” That was the same unanswered question I had asked myself many times throughout the beginning of my senior year. It was the same question that everyone asks himself once in his lifetime before he spends the rest of his life trying to answer it.

Throughout my entire high school years, I was a prime victim of the word, “responsibility.” I was heavily involved in student government positions, clubs, leadership workshops, and district council programs. In addition, I had other interests such as music, paddling, and the female species. I remember it as if it were yesterday. There I was in the gymnasium, singing and playing my ukulele on stage at every pep-rally. I would get a major rush just hearing the roar of almost two-thousand spirited high school students yelling and stomping at the bottom of their seats. These were the only times I actually felt really good about myself. Deep inside, however, there was still something missing. Soon, I felt that I needed something to inspire and motivate me all over again. With that in mind, I joined the wrestling team.

... deep inside, there was still something missing. Soon, I felt that I needed something to inspire and motivate me all over again.
There he stood, the coach, a medium-built Chinese man, just about four inches under an even six feet. I remember him standing in the mildly-lit practice room with a ring of three hundred keys in his left hand and a shiny, silver whistle tied loosely around his neck. He usually wore his grayish, Kaimuki Bulldog T-shirt that was tightly tucked into his faded green sweat pants. To complete his entire workout wardrobe, he wore the same old wrestling shoes that looked as if they’d been wrestling long before he even bought them. Despite his initial appearance, he was very encouraging and understanding when I explained to him that I was interested in joining his wrestling program.

Towards the end of the semester, I had wrestling practice every day from 2:30 p.m. through 6:00 p.m. Because I was one of the less experienced wrestlers on the team, I had to work extra hard in practice. The coach really admired my level of commitment and encouraged me to fight and push myself to the very edge.

Two weeks after joining the wrestling team was my moment of truth, when the first tournament of the season opened. I clearly remember that cold, early morning as I stepped outside for a breath of fresh air. The sky was barely lit by the sun, and the road glowed from the flickering of the street lights. Almost all of the cars parked along the curbside were tinted with a layer of glistening water drops. Not a sound was heard from miles around but the brushing of the icy breeze across my arms.

When it was time, I threw my uniform, head gear, and a dark red apple into my little bag before running off to meet my teammates. After we stretched, the coach gathered us together to say a few words. As he began speaking, I couldn’t stop thinking of how much he believed in me and encouraged me to do well in practice. I could feel my stomach tightening up and a huge knot twisting in the corner of my throat. Then I heard him say it. He said, “This is what all of you have been training for. So go out there and make it all worth it!” That was all I needed to hear. Before I knew it, my butterflies were gone, and I was about to face my first real opponent. Then, as I turned around, I saw my coach sitting in my corner. He looked at me and nodded his head as if to say, “Just do it.” Well, it wasn’t easy, but I pinned my opponent in the second round. After that, I won my next three matches and took first place in my division for that tournament. My coach was proud, my friends were proud, but most of all, I was proud of myself. It was the greatest feeling in the world. With that good feeling, I was inspired to finish my last year of high school and enjoy the last days that I had left at Kaimuki.

Finally, as they called my name, “Jake Shimabukuro,” I casually walked across the stage, head straight, with a slight grin on my face, and recalled what the coach said at our first tournament. He said, “This is what all of you have been training for. So go out there and make it all worth it!” As the lady handed me my diploma, I asked myself, “Was it all worth it?”

Yes, it was.
I like to be able to grasp the essence of a summer day with all my senses fully aware, unencumbered by things that may alter my perception of what lies before me. Though my eyes were closed, the sun was shining brightly, so much so that I had to reach into my bag and retrieve my dark glasses. The breeze carried with it the faint smell of teriyaki warming on a grill, and as I lay there experiencing my warm skin being cooled by the gentle wind, I could hear all the familiar sounds that make a visit to the beach such a special experience. The water gently lapping at the wet sand a few feet away, the laughter of small children as they chase the winged scavengers looking for an easy snack, the splashing by a couple of lovers teasing each other in the deeper swells of the water while a mother scolds a toddler for once again throwing sand at his older sibling; these are the sounds that comfort me and bring peace to my heart and soul when the world’s priorities confuse my own.

I rolled over, and out of the corner of my eye I caught a little sand crab scrambling for cover, as a runaway beach ball came a little too close. As I reached in my bag for the current novel that would enable my retreat into fantasy, I heard the sound of an old Volkswagen bus pull up. Since the beach provides such a casual and unobvious sanctuary for people watchers, I glimpsed to see who would be my new neighbor for the day. It was a typical sight: beach van-driving, long-haired, slipper-wearing, bare-chested, surfboard-toting surfer looking for the ride of his life. The van sputtered even after he seized the engine, and gave one last kick just before he slid open the door at the curb. I was about to return to the pages of fiction when my eyes caught an unexpected sight.

The sun, being blocked before the tint on the windows, now shone in on three little people in the back seats. I was intrigued as I watched the surfer pull out, one by one, each beautiful little girl who smiled at him with love and excitement in her eyes. I put the novel down all together, as my heart melted at the sight of those little girls. Each waited expectantly as he doled out her beach equipment and then, as if in formation, they waddled through the sand down to the water’s edge. I was baffled by what I saw next.

The surfer removed his board from its racks on top, locked up the old van.
and headed out after them. How can it be? Did this man actually expect to leave the children on the beach alone while he paddled out way past the reef to catch a wave? I kept the anger that was swelling within me in check as I reasoned. He must have someone he was meeting here to help; yes, that was it.

The subject matter at the beach was becoming far more interesting than that of the book, so I returned the book to my bag and retrieved instead a bright, crisp, red apple. As I flopped into my beach chair and bit into the juicy, sweet fruit I had brought from home, I watched the surfer withdraw from what appeared to be a backpacker’s type of diaper bag, a bottle of children’s sunscreen. He had a hard time keeping the other two away from the water as he slathered the youngest with sunscreen from the tip of the ear to the tip of the toe. She relished in the success of her final attempt at freedom as she ran toward the water’s edge with a plastic bucket in hand. I waited to see if at any moment the woman who must be coming to join him here—the woman that would complete the picture—would appear. But, as he had sunscrened both the other girls, only admiring passersby stopped to ask about their ages and then went on. It seemed obvious the girls were sisters, not by appearance, but by how they interacted with each other.

The oldest, though she stood only a few inches taller than the second child, was very lean and had blond hair like the surfer’s that formed into tight little ringlets which fell just past her shoulders. Her eyes were green, and her skin was a deep olive color. She spoke with authority to the other two, but not without respect.

The second child seemed very submissive to the eldest though she also had a strong will of her own, traits that seemed to me perfectly matched to her exotic appearance. She had dark hair that reached in loose curls down to the small of her back, and large dark eyes draped in long thick lashes. Her face was like porcelain, her arms and legs golden from prolonged exposure to the summer sun. Her smile lit up her whole face, and her fuller build silently assured her respect from her siblings. She practiced her authority on the baby, probably just under two years old, who nodded in full agreement as they worked together in the construction of their salt water pool.

The baby was beautiful. She was a perfect model of a full-scale adult with tiny defined muscles in her upper arms, calves, and thighs. She appeared a perfect synthesis of the other two girls. She had dark curly hair that was highlighted in streaks of gold from the temples back, and her little face was set with fine features. Her eyes were large and her skin, though not olive, was very, very dark.

The surfer assisted in the digging of the hole at the water’s edge that filled with water as the next swell rolled in, and the girls squealed with delight as their bodies were instantly submerged by the cool ocean water. The surfer laughed with pleasure as he swept all three up in his arms when a large swell overcame the walls of their creation. Then the four chased up and down the beach. The girls giggled and bumped into each other at times, and the surfer caught
each, and threw her into the air. While heading back to their things for a snack, the second tripped and fell face first in the sand. At the sound of her shrill cry, the surfer, obviously father first, swept her up in his arms, dusted her face gently with his hand and then rinsed the remaining sand out of her eyes and nose with fresh water from a water bottle he found amongst their belongings. He cradled her in his arms and lulled her until her sobbing ceased.

I was relieved, as I was finishing up my apple, to find that the woman I had pictured never materialized. The events I was witnessing would have been altered had another person appeared to assist, and by this time I didn’t want to share their father with another person. That is not to say that I had any romantic interest in this man and his children, but rather I found in him the father that all fathers should strive to be. I recalled having read an article in a local paper that declared that the amount of quality time a father spends each day with his child is an average of thirty-seven seconds. That was a figure I found appalling and yet, right before my eyes, was a father unlike the average.

The sun became ruthless as it beat down through a cloudless blue sky. While I munched inconspicuously on my bag of pretzels, the father had set up an umbrella and served lunch to his girls with the expertise of a top waiter in a crowded banquet hall. This was no weekend father. There was no awkwardness in his aid to his children. He was confident and completely successful in every effort to help them. This is not achieved by only thirty-seven seconds of quality time a day.

Throughout the afternoon, I watched as he nurtured the loving bond between them all. It was wonderful! After lunch, he waxed his board and helped each child to learn the techniques the surfer uses to conquer the waves, from balancing flat and paddling out, to sitting and standing on the board. They all laughed as they worked and played together, and even I laughed aloud at their antics.

Eventually the girls began to tire, so the father allowed them to play a little longer while he trekked back to the old van with all their belongings. Then, grabbing a clean towel, two pairs of tiny panties and a diaper, he beckoned them to the showers where he rinsed each of them thoroughly and dried them off. As the baby began to fuss a little, he carefully put a diaper on her and placed her in her car seat. He did the same with the other two and had them climb into their car seats side by side, directly behind the first. As they waited the few moments it took their father to fasten the board down on the top of the van, the younger two began to doze in contentment while the eldest watched her father as if making mental notes. I was sad to see them go.

I settled back down on my tummy in the warm sand while the setting sun caressed my back, and the gentle trade winds whipped a few strands of my dark hair across my face. I watched the van drive away after the father wisely buckled himself in, and I longed for the family I don’t yet have. I sent a blessing to follow him and then contemplated
the events that had taken place before my eyes.

I decided to examine the checklist I have in my mind which consists of the necessary qualities required of a man to be considered by me as a potential life partner. As I thought, there was nothing in there about the amount of quality time he must spend with our children. After downloading every moment of that day’s experiences under this entry, I added that it wasn’t absolutely necessary for him to be a surfer, but it would be nice.

With my priorities intact once again, I packed my bag and headed home. It was one of the most meaningful days I had ever spent at the beach, and as I glanced down the road before hopping into my own dilapidated Volkswagen bug, I sent out a silent thank you to the family that had shared their day with me.
In childhood, everyone respects his or her father and regards him as a great man. I was not an exception. I, a third grader in an elementary school, also respected my father, especially because of his profession. My father worked for an automobile company as a designer. He was a typical workaholic in Japan. He came back home at 10 p.m. when I had already gone to bed. And he usually worked on Saturday which was supposed to be a day off. As Sunday was for just taking a rest, he couldn’t afford to play with me. Although I felt full of frustrations because of this, simultaneously, I was proud of him. The day when he drove the new car he had designed was the moment I was the proudest.

That night, my sister and I were looking forward to my father’s coming home. We were doing homework on the second floor. However, we couldn’t concentrate on our studying. In the morning, while having breakfast, we had heard that my father would drive the car which he had designed.

"Today I will drive a new car. It is my most recently designed car. Let’s go driving in the evening."

"Really, Dad? What is that car? What time will you come home?" I showered questions on my father without giving him time to answer. Because of this information, it was difficult to sit in front of my desk. Whenever I heard the sound of an engine, I opened the window to see if it was my father’s new car.

Finally, I heard a car which had an engine with an unfamiliar sound park near my house. Before my mother called us, we went down immediately. I went out of the house and looked down the road from the entrance porch. A brand new, pearl white sedan was parked there. It was larger than the last car, the five door hatchback. "That is our new car!" I shouted in my mind. I went downstairs and got near the car. When I opened the door, the light turned on and I saw the light brown interior. "This is the car. It’s big and nice," I said to my father who was sitting in the driver’s seat. "Yes. This is our new car. I designed it," he proudly replied. I quickly sat in the back and touched the seat. It was smooth and rich and even shiny. I found the arm rest in the center of the back seat. I pulled it out and sat in a lordly manner. "I am like a president..."
of a company!” I shouted for joy. Next I looked for a handle to open the window. However, I couldn’t find it. Instead, there was a small button. “This has power windows. It’s almost a high-class car,” I said to my father. “Actually, it’s not a high-class car,” he answered. But I couldn’t understand his answer. This car had an armrest in the back seat and power windows. I tried them all at once. I continued pushing the buttons over and over again.

We drove on the national road along the sea. Because the car shut out the outside sound, its inside was like a drawing room. I don’t remember what we talked about during this night cruise. However, I guess I didn’t speak about anything and, instead, looked around and checked every button and every detail in the car.

That night, I saw my father’s different side. It was not my Saturday-working-father or my Sunday-sleeping-father. He was a professional designer. He designed this car, and thousands of these cars would be shipped not only all over Japan but also all over the world. That night I felt the proudest of him and thought of him as a great man.

More than fifteen years ago this took place. Since then the car has changed models a couple of times and that model is hardly seen on the roads today. However, once in a while when I see one unexpectedly, I am very pleased and remember that night. When I see that model in Hawai‘i, I feel that my father, who lives in Japan, is here with me.
From the Men’s Department to the English Department
by
Gregory Wilinski

For the past twelve years I was an automotive painter. The money was good and I enjoyed what I was doing, even though it was a fast-paced, deadline-intensive, and very stressful position. Painting cars was the only type of work I had ever done, and I especially enjoyed it because of the ability to see a finished product. Cars would come into the body shop dented and damaged but return to their owners straight and shiny.

My family members and friends wanted me to change occupations, since there were a lot of hazards associated with my job: exposure to chemicals, physical strain, and mental stress. However, since I was used to making a decent income, I knew I could never afford to change my occupation—I was locked in.

My whole life changed one Saturday evening in July. My oldest brother was getting married in a month, and I had to purchase slacks for the wedding. I drove to the shopping mall and headed straight for the men’s section in a large department store. After trying on various sizes, styles and colors, I decided on a pair of brown linen slacks. I made my purchase and left the Men’s Department.

I was walking through the store, down a wide aisle with various sales displays strategically placed in the center. These displays consisted of rectangular tables with silk-screened printed T-shirts for sale. My path became blocked by a group of people in front of me who saw their friends shopping and stopped to talk story with them. Instead of waiting for the group to finish talking, I decided to walk around them and continue on my way.

All I remember next was that my feet flew in the air and I was trying to break my fall. My right hand and right elbow both hit the cold, hard floor. It was a nasty slip: I broke one of my favorite black rubber slippers, and also bruised my pride in front of what seemed to be the whole world. I wanted to find a rock to crawl under! As I stood up to face the onlookers, all the muscles in my back immediately contracted and I doubled over in pain. I could not stand erect; it felt like somebody had cracked me in the back with a baseball bat. Looking back at the area I had just walked through, I saw a puddle of dark brown liquid on the floor. I had slipped on somebody’s spilled coffee or cola. I had slipped due to somebody’s negligence.
The seven months following the accident filled me with stress and anxiety. Even though I experienced stress as an automotive painter on a daily basis, it ended when I clocked out. This stress haunted me every day and every night.

I was not able to work because of my injury and had to survive on a meager, temporary disability allowance. The department store refused to accept liability for the accident, so I was forced to hire a personal injury lawyer. I was shuttled from one doctor to the next and given various tests and examinations. Soon my disability benefits ran out and my medical coverage was canceled. The doctors were impersonal. The extent of their interest was to inquire if I had discussed my lawsuit with the attorney and to ask about the status of the case. The attorney that I hired in desperation rarely returned my phone calls, was often out of town, and got into an argument with me when I questioned the status of my case. It seemed to me that all these professionals associated with my case were only interested in the almighty dollar and could care less about the welfare of their clients.

At the point when I hit rock bottom, I realized that nobody would help me but myself. I refused to rely upon a quack doctor or an ambulance-chasing lawyer to determine my future and my happiness. The spring session at Kapi'olani Community College was about to begin, so I took it upon myself to enroll in school and try to get something positive out of a negative situation.

In my younger years I had never considered myself to be a “school person,” and that view of myself did not change with time. After high school my priorities were unclear; instead of attending my college classes I would skip school and drive to the beach. I enrolled in an autobody class one semester, and seemed to have found my calling. Through that class I obtained a full-time position in the industry and realized that I did not need a degree to work and make money. Thus began my career as an automotive painter.

The thought of returning to school after twelve years filled me with anxiety and self-doubt. Would I remember anything? Would I be able to handle it? How would I survive financially? Could I adapt to my new environment? Would my back pain allow me to attend classes regularly? What if I had an anxiety attack in class? This was a major life decision for me, and it was not easy.

I forced myself to face these fears and enroll in college. All the classes and homework and exams could not be as bad as staying home for seven months, unable to work or do any physical activity that would jeopardize my court case. I chose to attend Kapi'olani Community College because of its well-respected Culinary Arts department. I wanted to become a chef, since it was something that had always interested me. One of my doctors reminded me that I would have to lift twenty-pound turkeys, but I refused to let this influence my decision. I was tired of allowing other people and this injury to dictate my life.

I have been in school for about a month so far, and it has not been easy. However, I enjoy the challenge. This challenge seems to raise my
self-esteem and confidence with each passing day. I have done things that I never thought I could do, would do, or want to do, like write essays and wait on tables. It still scares the hell out of me, but I know that in the future I will look back on these years and have good memories of my accomplishments.
The violin which I always have with me reminds me of my Uncle Fong, although we are far apart. He was a talented violinist, very smart, sensible, and industrious. He was the one who not only taught me violin and musical knowledge, but also taught me how to face challenges and the correct ways to reach my goals.

I can still remember the first time I saw him. I was in Shanghai at that time, living with my grandma, grandpa, and mother. On a hot summer afternoon he came back from Beijing because he had just graduated from the prestigious Music University there. He returned to Shanghai to begin his career as a violinist for the Shanghai Orchestra.

I opened the door. Uncle Fong, who was twice as tall and twice as broad as I, stood in front of me. I looked at him with curiosity and respect. "What a giant," I thought. I noticed that his neck had a red mark on the left side. I wondered what it was. However, since I had just met him, I did not ask him. His left hand carried a violin which looked as if he had cherished it a lot. The violin was inside a leather case which was very rare and expensive in China, especially as Uncle Fong was poor at that time. Even his luggage was old and repaired. From this I could tell that the violin must be very important to him.

I always liked to sing and dance in front of people. All my relatives liked to watch my performances. When Uncle Fong observed that, he started to teach me to play the violin because he thought I had talent in music.

At that time, all my relatives treated me like a little queen and I was spoiled by them. However, he never, ever spoiled me. He was a very strict teacher.

One day, I should have been practising at about two o’clock as I normally did. However, I realized that my uncle had not come home yet, so I decided to go out with my playmates to the nearby park. When I returned, I heard the beautiful sound of his violin coming from the living room. I went to the door and glimpsed inside. Uncle Fong was playing a marvellous piece. His facial expression told me that he was very focused and was really enjoying the music.

"To be successful, one mostly depends on two elements: wisdom and effort. Among them, effort counts for eighty percent."
I was so afraid at that moment because I knew I would be punished. To my surprise, he didn’t scold me. He asked me with a sincere and kindly voice, “Why didn’t you practise?” My heart was beating like a drum and my face flushed. I looked down at the floor to avoid his piercing eyes. “I... I don’t understand why I have to learn to play the difficult violin. It... it... so... so... so... so... so... bo... ring,” I answered in a low voice. “Because Uncle likes you and I know you have talent in music, I don’t want you to waste your inner gift. Do you understand?” he said in a strong voice. He repeated, “I don’t expect you to be a musician, but learning music is good for you. It is a valuable thing to do.” Since I was just a kid, I didn’t fully understand his words. However, I was quite sure that he really liked me and cared about my future.

I changed a lot afterwards. I dared not do any lazy things as I had done before. I didn’t want to disappoint him, so I started to practise two hours a day. I usually felt pain as my arms had been working for a long time. The tips of my fingers also became tough as they had been pressing the strings so often. Sometimes he came and saw me practising; but he never asked me to stop for a while. He just said, “Good. Keep going,” or “You’ve improved,” or “Practise thirty minutes more.” I hoped he would be a little bit more merciful; however, during lessons he was even stricter with me. He never laughed or smiled. I had to listen to his words very carefully to make sure I didn’t miss anything.

At that time, my father left us and went to work in Hong Kong. Uncle Fong became my “acting father.” He always took me to the park on the weekends and watched me running, jumping, and rolling on the grassland. He laughed at me—something he never did during lessons. Sometimes he told me some funny stories that made me laugh a lot. He was a totally different person while he was teaching me than he was after lessons.

As time went by, my violin skills improved a lot. I started to learn some beautiful pieces. I began to enjoy music. Meanwhile, Uncle Fong also suggested that I participate in some violin competitions. I entered several competitions, but I didn’t win any prizes. I felt sad and angry. I really wanted to break the violin into pieces and throw it away.

However, Uncle Fong had always taught me to be patient. So I followed his suggestions and swallowed my anger and sadness. He told me that the effort which he had made in learning the violin was much, much greater than mine. When he was learning the violin, he used to get up at five o’clock every morning, and practise for four hours. That was twice as long as I practised. That’s why there was a red mark on the left side of his neck, the one which I had noticed the first time I saw him.

“Do you think you can win prizes within so short a time and with so little effort?” he asked me seriously. “If that is so, then everyone can be the winner, right?” I nodded and suddenly his words made sense to me. Uncle Fong continued, “To be successful, one mostly depends on two elements: wisdom and effort. Among them, effort counts for eighty percent.” He spoke in a strong voice, as if I was being given a lecture. He tapped on my head and said,
“Uncle thinks you’ve already got wisdom. What you have to do is not to give up, keep going, and make more of an effort.”

So I kept going and worked harder because I really wanted to find out whether his saying was correct. After several years I had improved a lot. I won the Shanghai Youth Violin Competition. That was a big encouragement for me. The moment I went up to the stage to get the prize, I was so grateful and thankful to Uncle Fong. I remember thinking to myself that the prize should be awarded to him also, not only to me.

I left Uncle Fong at the age of eleven, since I had to move to Hong Kong with my family. Uncle Fong gave me his cherished violin, which had accompanied him for twenty years.

“You will face a lot of challenges in Hong Kong. Remember what I said: Keep going, don’t give up, and make an effort. You will conquer the challenges finally, okay?” and he smiled at me. I replied, “OK! I will. Give me five!” I had grown much taller in the past years, so I could reach to slap his hand easily.

That was our last conversation and, of course, it is always on my mind. When the plane was slowly taking off I looked through the window beside me to see my relatives still standing there. Uncle Fong was waving his hands with my other relatives and sending his best wishes for me. He was still the most obvious, the tallest, and the broadest of them all. No matter how much I grew, he would always be a giant to me.

I faced a lot of challenges when I first went to Hong Kong. New languages and a new living environment were what I had to adapt to. However, I was very confident in facing all the new situations. Recalling my uncle’s advice helped me conquer all of the challenges I have faced.

I will forever be thankful to my Uncle Fong. He is my strength—a giant who lifts me above all of the challenges. He is certainly “The Wind Beneath My Wings.”
About the contributors...

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**Andrew Uchida** is a graduate of Moanalua High School attending KCC as a liberal arts major. He enjoys body boarding, guitar, and basketball.

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Sitting in the house I can hear the exchange of harsh words outside. Within seconds, my older sister and her boyfriend are yelling. As I look through the glass door, hesitatingly, trying to see what is going on, I see the two people whom I love the most, enraged with each other. My sister and her boyfriend were my primary caregivers when I was about nine years old, and it was through them that I first learned about love.

I walked outside, scared, with my face marked by tears, to get some comfort or reassurance that everything would be all right. I didn’t. I witnessed my sister and her boyfriend standing on the middle landing of the stairway next to the house. I don’t remember the words they exchanged, but I do remember seeing my sister being punched, closed fist, by her boyfriend, and her tumbling helplessly down the stairs. She didn’t cry though; she just stood up and ran back up the stairs and hit him back, solidly connecting with his jaw. He hit her again and down the stairs she went. By this time I was in a fit of tears and hysterically ran over to him pleading with him to stop. I’ll never forget the look he gave me when he turned around. It wasn’t even him—it was as if the devil had entered his body. He hit me. Smack. Right across my face. I stood there, open mouthed and speechless as the stinging washed over me.

When I realized what had happened, I ran into the house, crying. Not so much from the pain of the slap, but more from the confusion I was experiencing. I had grown to love my sister’s boyfriend like the older brother I never had. He was always worried about us and vowed to protect us through anything, and now, he was the attacker. How then could he protect me from himself? My sister came in asking if I was OK. I couldn’t answer. I just cried. Her boyfriend followed her in and said to me, “I’m so sorry, sweetie, come here. You know I love you.”

He hugged me and in that moment I forgot what had happened. All the fear, anger and confusion had escaped me and I was filled with warmth and security as his strong arms enveloped me. In that instant, I forgave him.

This was my first lesson in love. Through adolescence and beyond, I found myself trying to find someone like that old boyfriend of my sister’s, a protector. Then, I found him. I was nineteen years old and he was twenty-seven. He didn’t just sweep me off my feet; he threw me into the air and there I stayed, in the clouds of heaven, for a numb er of years. There was something about him that made me feel like I knew him, almost as if I belonged.
there, and within a week I moved in with him.

We were so in love then. We both believed that we were together way back in our past lives and that we had been searching endlessly for each other ever since. He was a pirate back then (also his nickname in this life), and I was a princess. He stole me from my family and took me captive aboard his ship. I was so lonely on that ship; I missed my family immensely. As much as I hated the pirate who stole me from my beautiful castle and loving family, he always tried his best to make me happy. He sang, he danced, he eventually succeeded in making me smile, and slowly, I learned to love him. This explains the attraction in this life. I had already learned to love him many, many, many years ago.

He was so different. He wore a black trench coat, and I thought he was nuts. This is Hawai‘i. It’s not cold here. He also wore fingerless black leather gloves and when my father asked him why, he replied, “It’s a fashion statement.” He was funny. Really funny. So funny that I knew the humor that was portrayed on the outside was masking a man filled with pain. When I was with him, he seemed so happy. I thought that I could fill all his pain and emptiness with my love.

He’d often tell me, “When you go to heaven, be sure and pull me up. OK, baby?” I never knew if he was joking. I tried hard to pull him up. Every day, he would fall farther and farther into the depths of drug addiction. I continued trying to rescue him until I too found myself falling.

He would always sing this song to me about a cat named Roy. “I had a cat named Roy, he was a good old boy . . . .” He said, “When I die, I will come back for you, no matter what. I will ask you what my cat’s name was. That is how you will know it is me. And, if you answer correctly, I will know it is you.”

After a while, I was stolen from my family again. Much like the time he stole me from my castle. The only difference was that this time I allowed myself to become his prisoner. He loved me so much, much more than my family did. At least that’s what he said. I was told not to see them, not to talk to them, and I listened. I was taught to walk behind him and not to look into people’s eyes, even when talking to them. I should look on the ground. He didn’t want me to swear and being that I have a horrible mouth it was very hard not to. Each time I did swear, I got a slap on the side of my head, right on my ear. Soon I couldn’t hear very well and when I went to the doctor, I was told I would go deaf if I kept getting hit on the ear. He stopped hitting me on the ear, and he gave up trying to stop me from swearing, but he did not stop hitting me.

Each time we fought, he would yell and hit me. Then suddenly, as if his temper was lifted from him, perhaps by an angel, he would ask me, “Are you ready for a hug now?” It was in that hug that I found the same warmth and security that I had experienced before. It became a need for me to be stripped of my dignity so I could once again feel loved.

Some days I was such a “good girl” others I was “bad.” I was always trying to redeem myself in his eyes. That became my whole existence, trying to make him happy. I was stolen not only from my family but also from myself. I didn’t have an identity anymore. I
was solely his girlfriend.

I felt trapped, almost as if I was on a ladder that went from heaven to hell. I was on the top half and he was on the bottom. He was slipping, fast, and I was reaching down for him trying to help him back up. He just barely grasped my hand and held on with a death grip. I tried my hardest to pull him up, but I started to fall too. I had to let go to save myself or fall with him, to the depths of hell.

I’m not trying to say that it was all his fault, because it wasn’t. I became addicted to the abusive attention and then the nurturing period that followed. It’s a cycle that is more addictive than any drug, at least that I have ever tried.

I tried leaving many times and was always won back by the “we were meant to be together” thing. By the time I left, I was 24 years old and 3 months pregnant. I was no longer his princess, for in the time I had spent with him, I grew up. I told him in my eyes he was dead. I told him I had to believe he was dead or else I’d never be able to leave him, and for the sake of the baby I had to leave. He didn’t want me to go but I had to. He had hit me in my stomach one day in the car. We were bickering and he wanted me to shut up. That was when I knew for my baby’s sake, I had to leave him.

Even though I couldn’t stop thinking about him, I started seeing someone else. The relationship didn’t last and I never fell in love with that person. I have never fallen in love since my pirate, and that was three years ago.

Every day, I see him in my son, Michael. Michael walks like he does and Michael’s favorite toy is his pirate ship. Ironically, Michael received a Christmas gift from my mother, who has no knowledge of my relations. “Mama, piyate, look mama, piyate.” Have you ever had a heartache? I’ve had one every day of my life, and I’m starting to feel it may last as long as I live. At least in this life. I believe that I am his queen and he is my pirate. I believe that one day he will come back to claim me again. I believe that we were meant to be together, but just not in this life. I believe that in our next life, we will meet again. And, if not, we will keep searching, lifetime after lifetime, until we find each other again.

I imagine what it would be like if he were still with me: I can see him, looking down at our son, smiling. He is singing a song to Michael, “I had a cat named Roy, he was a good old boy, he used to go hunting, down by the lake ‘n catch himself a fresh garden snake. Yeah, Roy was a good old boy, until the dogs got him.” Michael is dancing as he sings. “Daddy, look Daddy, piyate.” He starts talking to Michael in his pirate voice. When we go to bed, he puts his arm around my head real tight, almost like a headlock, kisses my forehead, and tells me he loves me. I feel so safe lying there in his arms, like there is nothing in the world that could ever hurt me. I listen to him breathe in and out and my breathing falls into rhythm with his. I can smell him, his scent, and I close my eyes.

When I drag myself back into reality, only my little man is next to me, and I realize that I was dreaming, again. Dreaming of the man I loved. The man I gave my soul to. The man who loved and protected me through many battles. He was my hero. Then, I lost him. I lost him to something I couldn’t compete with. Drugs.
The Sewing Room
by
Andrew Uchida

Here I am. I find myself in a place that holds many memories for me, some good, some unpleasant. I have returned to the sewing room, a sizable room nestled between the garage and the living quarters of my grandparent's duplex in Kaimuki. It's a rather lovely room, well lit by day by two screen windows on adjacent walls, whose jalousies are rarely open. Though the dimensions of the rectangular room are quite large, fifteen by twenty feet, you somehow get the feeling that it's a lot smaller than that. It could be the presence of the faithful freezer—the large upright in the corner that never ceases to hum. Or, it could be the wooden and metal shelving that hides the walls with the forgotten treasures they bear. Or, perhaps it's the two sewing machines themselves, each spoiled with its own table and draped with its own weatherproof cloth when not in use. Or maybe it's the boxes. The various types, all uniform, like an infantry, stacked neatly in any space that would allow them. Along the base of the walls and under the table they seem to wait and wait. Now the table stands more or less off to one side, towards the living quarters, though it doesn't come within two feet of any wall. It's a simple table. Yet of all the pieces of furniture in that room, it is the dominant one. Its aged surface boasts scars and stains that give it life and character. It is the table that I remember most, and some of its scars that are all too familiar.

I lived my childhood in the lower level of that duplex. From the day my parents brought me home from the hospital as a baby until I was eleven, and my family moved to Salt Lake, it was home. I don't think I really noticed the table until the second grade when it became my study desk. To my parents it must have seemed like the ideal place to study. The large quiet work place, free from the distractions of my family, yet close enough for my parents to check up on me. To a seven-year-old child, however, it seemed somewhat torturous. I wouldn't say that I was a stubborn child, just a daydreamer... a rascal. Every day I would arrive home from school and eat my daily snack, which I made last as long as possible. Then I would go into the sewing room with my books and sit at the table, never to emerge until dinner. And after dinner I would
return. In the early years, it wasn’t so bad. (It was even a little fun.) Between vocabulary words and cursive writing assignments my eyes would settle upon an object in the room and my mind would take off with it. Sometimes hours would pass between one assignment and the next. And so began the pattern of my elementary school days.

My daydreaming habit was fun and exciting until I entered the third grade and the work load increased. My study habits had formed, however, and didn’t change to accommodate the new amount of work. I spent more time in the sewing room alone with the table. I was able to sit there for hours doing nothing and my grades very honestly reflected my study habits. I learned to dread the sewing room. What once was my haven had suddenly become my prison cell. Night after night I carried on this ritual, by then tired and irritated. Nights formed months, and months formed years—four years to be exact. Four years later, academically speaking, I was one of the worst students in my sixth grade class.

The move to Salt Lake didn’t have much of an effect on my study habits. As I made the somewhat lonely transition from elementary school into intermediate school, my desire to study remained the same. I was still very immature and more concerned with play than with study. My new place of study became my desk in my room or the kitchen table. Throughout my intermediate career, I struggled with studying. Developing my study habits may not have been as hard as it could have been though. The move had left me without a lot of friends, and no one was very eager to make friends with an overweight introverted loner. I can only thank God for that.

It’s very peculiar for a high schooler to be concerned with issues such as tomorrow’s consequences as a result of today’s choices, the importance of a good education, studying hard to gain new insights, a future career, and so on. Perhaps this is even more peculiar in Hawai‘i, with its more or less laid-back atmosphere. Yet, these issues weighed heavily on my mind during my beginning years of high school. I can only thank God for allowing me to be concerned with these mature issues at such a young age. By my sophomore year, my study habits had drastically changed for the better and my parents were overjoyed and somewhat shocked. The change was sudden and very evident. I could come to no conclusion as to why this change came about, other than the hand of God upon my life.

And so I continued my high school career with my academic goals and priorities set. Studying became more natural and, over time, easier. Now I could study wherever I wanted or needed to, and I could discipline myself enough without becoming sidetracked. I had more time to socialize and, as I matured, was able to make more lasting friendships. My life was becoming balanced. Only by the grace of God was I able to excel academically in high school, and I give Him all the glory for the radical change He brought about. I was even able to refine some of my artistic and creative writing skills, so that by my senior year I had produced some surprisingly good art and writing pieces.
I have returned now, returned to Kaimuki, the place of my childhood; returned to my grandparents; returned to the sewing room. This time, though, a little more mature; not a child in elementary school, but a young man in college. Physically, it’s just as I remember it. However, something is very different. I no longer dread the sewing room. The fear is gone and only a sense of accomplishment remains. Just last week I was in the sewing room when my grandma came down to do some work on the sewing machine. With a smile she asked me if I remembered the trying times I had spent studying at the table. “Yes,” I replied with a chuckle. I’m glad I can look back on those years now, and laugh.
You can't have those two, Guero.” Rueben said, pointing at the blackish-brown pups running in circles and singing in the excited way that babies do when they are restless and looking for the source of warm, sweet milk that a mother provides.

“I’ll let you have that one for a six-pack of Olympia,” Rueben smiled and said, pointing at the energetic white runt.

“He’s Guero like you, man,” teased Rueben. My father lifted his head slightly and raised his eyebrows in slow acknowledgment. He watched the runt stumble after his chosen siblings, biting and bumping into their backs and trying to assert some kind of footing already—not even aware that this instinct would provide him with the stamina and audacity to outlive all of his more desirable brothers and sisters in the litter.

“I can take him off your hands,” my father said as he scooped up the runt with one hand. “You can buy the six-pack, man.” He took him home and endured the predictable threats from his mother.

“Guero, you’re gonna clean his mess up!” she yelled. “I’m not gonna feed him—you are! And I don’t want that dog in my house!”

That night he snuck the runt into his room. He made a comfortable bed for the puppy inside a well-worn leather boot. He watched him sleep with tight, closed eyes. He was still and quiet for the first time that day. What did he see in this imp of a dog that nobody else could see? Did he relate to the puny puppy’s “runt-syndrome,” which he had experienced in his own brown-skinned microcosm of birth? Perhaps he could identify with feeling unwanted and neglected, yet still exude some spunk in spite of these social handicaps.

It was obvious his mother liked Sonny better—his calm, agreeable, dark-haired older brother. He knew his father didn’t give a shit about him, except that he handed over his paper route money and stayed out of his borracho (depth of field) on his weaving path to the kitchen table to eat his perpetually hot and ready dinner and degrade the cook (his wife) in the process. His wife, who spent her days in a packing house, still found time to wash his dirty clothes and make, from scratch, the tortillas he wiped his plate with.

As my father lay in his bed watching the spunky runt sleep, did he realize he had rescued a kindred spirit of essence and plight? How could he know that this simple
arrangement would manifest itself into one of the most enduring connections of his life?

He was christened “Punk.” Not a reckless, disrespectful Punk, but a Punk with the odds against him—free-flowing, undaunted in his escapades, yet still adhering to a code of allegiance that always dragged him back from his canine binges.

Imagine a bathtub-white mongrel terrier with caramel above his eyes and, on his chewed up ears, a solitary brown spot in the center of his back for exclamation. My first baby-drool memories are obscure, but Punk always seems to be wagging in the fringes of these images that visit me in dreams and unforced reminiscence. His head stood about as high as the front of my “Big Wheel.” He had a burly chest. It provided his great center of balance, so crucial in a fight. Punk had short, scarred legs that appeared to have had chunks of flesh ripped off them near the sinewy parts of his shoulders and flanks. Although his legs were gnawed in appearance, they were sturdy and useful in squeezing through tight holes to escape impending danger. Punk was small in stature, but mammoth in wuupp-ass attitude. He radiated, “What the hell are you looking at?” when an honest reply would have to be, “That’s what I’m trying to figure out.”

Punk was already a neighborhood fixture of legendary proportions by the time I was able to venture outside the safe, familiar couch-comfort of his master’s den—beyond the screen door and just on the other side of the peeling, white picket fence and around the corner, through the alley—his domain.

Punk was present the day my voracious neighbor Yvonne introduced me to the acquired taste of dirt, a delicacy new to me in my short-lived life. Punk watched in silent disgust, probably thinking to himself, “Wet grass is much better.”

Outside of the screen door, he demonstrated to me that for every action there is a reaction. “Continue to yank my tail, choose to ignore my warning growls, and I will bite your face. You are my master’s pup, but I must teach you this primordial lesson of tooth and fang so that you may grow to eat, drink, sire offspring, and rest in the cool shade.” I didn’t quite appreciate his honorable gesture at the time. I screamed bloody murder, and Punk got his ass whipped by my father.

As a child in the days before I had any experience with near-life threats or death, Punk, only a dog, taught me the real concept of mortality. It was a cool, overcast Autumn afternoon—gray and flat. I found him lying on his side on the back porch—still except for strained rises and falls of breath. He was badly mangled, but he had somehow managed to make his way up to the porch steps—dragging his guts underneath his torn, open belly. I was frantic. I screamed for my father. When he arrived, I couldn’t understand his calm, unexcited manner as he bent down next to his stoic beast of many summers and winters—poking here, turning his head sideways to get a better look there. Punk must have winked at my father with those moist, black eyes saying, “This is worse than that time over on Hazlewood when that Shepherd-mix
mauled my front paw and had me in that throat hold. This Doberman, he just got lucky. I’ll get him back. I know where he lives—between the garbage can with good stuff in it and that Beagle-bitch in heat.” It took more than thread—the veterinarian had to cut strips from a towel to serve as stitches to sew him back together again.

For most of my childhood, my father was busy. He worked hard. His work often took him away from home. I admired him. I learned many of the values that make me whatever kind of man I am today from him. I must also pay tribute to his dog, Punk, for having a significant, indoctrinating impact on me. I wasn’t capable of it then, but now that I’m grown-up, I can see a definite correlation in their personalities—what they really meant to me. They both craved a nomadic life. They tried to shun the fluffy restrictions of domestication as often as they could. I was never offended by this, nor could I quite explain it. I could only sense the internal struggle they both wrestled with—trying to bust loose from it all, only to sober up and submit to the origin of their obligations. For my father, it was his wife and children. For Punk, it was his alpha-male—my father.

The nature of my father and Punk’s affiliation often puzzled me. Their interaction was uneventful and reserved towards one another. Punk would not erupt into a frenzy every time my father came home. What did exist was a subtle recognition, a mutual acceptance that I realize now can only come from days, weeks, and years of shared, everyday existence.

“Dad, it’s cold outside. Can Punk come inside and sleep with me? Dad, can Punk ride in the car with us? Dad, I don’t think it’s safe to give dogs chicken-bones.” My father would always answer, “He’ll be okay . . . he’s only a dog.”

He must have watched him for hours that week. My father was out of work for a month because he had just undergone surgery for a recurring knee injury. He was, in his way, watching Punk—always trying to observe without actually interfering with the natural life-processes he regarded with the utmost respect. Punk had slowed way down that week. It was the beginning of summer, and he kept stumbling blindly into the pool, only to be rescued by my father. I was twelve years old. I remember noticing Punk’s deterioration, but for some reason it didn’t weigh that heavily on me. I figured he would pull out of it. I had seen him get out of plenty of tough situations.

That morning, when I was getting ready to leave—it was my last day of sixth grade—I watched my father. He was posted in front of his bedroom sliding-glass window which looked out into the back yard. His surgery was still new, so he couldn’t be too active. But I knew why he was sitting there. He was watching Punk hobble around with head lowered, eyes nearly closed, slowly zig-zagging in and out of near plunges into the pool. It was the same pool that, when it was being built years before along whose narrow, concrete edges, Punk would tightrope-walk . . . sure-footed and impervious to slipping and falling twelve feet into an empty, concrete basin. The water was catching his fall now.
I left them alone that morning, trying to understand my father’s squinting gaze. It seemed as if he was noticing this ailing friend of so many years for the first time. Maybe he was recalling the night he had laid that little white ball inside of his boot and watched him rest so snugly. He might have recalled feeding him, bathing him, and eventually weaning him.

Subsequently remembering the births of his children, building his first home and watching his kids grow in that home... All the summers, all the Christmases, all the quarrels, all the laughing, all the pictures... Who had been there for all of these momentous occasions... silent... always waiting... never judging... content to be alongside and to be but a part of his joy?

When I got home from school that day I was different. I was no longer an “elementary-grader.” I was now on the cusp of sophistication—immersed in the wonder of being in Junior High next fall. My father was also different than when I had left him that morning. He was no longer staring out his window. He was lying on his bed in something like a fetal position, very quietly. Very still. Something else was different.

I walked out to the back yard. I didn’t see Punk anywhere. I searched the garage. I checked all of his usual nooks and crannies of retreat: under the cars, behind the woodpile, calling his name. Then a horrible thought struck me. The pool. I ran around the corner, passing the garbage cans. I now stood at the edge of the deep-end—reluctant to look into the artificial blue water—for fear of seeing him floating belly-up, scraping the sides to the rhythm of the lapping pool skimmers. He wasn’t in the water. I scanned the triangular shape of the back yard once more from the pinnacle of the diving board—nothing. Suddenly, something caught my eye. Way back in the corner near the cactus tree where Punk would dig deep, cool holes with his back feet firmly planted as his front paws flailed relentlessly, unearthing wisps of loose, soft soil into the air behind him only to re-emerge from his burrow in a backwards scuttle, then spin around exposing his wet nose caked with the residue of his earthly toil, was a freshly packed mound of dirt. My father walked up to me as I stared at this mound.

“I took Punk over to Roger’s ranch today and ‘laid’ him down. That’s how Roger said it. He’s tired, Guero. Laying him down is the best thing you can do.” My father began to silently convulse in tears. It was the first time in my life I had seen my father cry. I cried, too. I felt a deep, piercing ache unlike any pain I had ever suffered before. I had never lost a member of my family. I realized that from that moment on there would always be a crack of emptiness along the expanse of my heart where that being had inhabited—and would continue to do so—forevermore.

Over my sobs, I could hear my father repeating, “He was only a dog.”