Diamond Journal
1999-2000

Kapi'olani Community College
Diamond Journal

1999 - 2000

Kapi'olani Community College
Acknowledgments

The Diamond Journal started out as a class project in 1987 in Linka Corbin-Mullikin's English IOV 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, Gene Phillips, whose advice and patience we value, and Heikki Akiona, who was always there for us.

Mahalo also to the KCC faculty for their continued support in encouraging students to submit their writing, especially Jane Calfee, Ann Ching, Leigh Dooley, Mavis Hara, Gail Harada, Judi Kirkpatrick, Jill Makagon, Donna Matsumoto, Linka Corbin-Mullikin, Frank Noji, Gary Pak, Jim Robinson, Meena Sachdeva, Carolyn Skinner, Gunnel Lamb-Tamura, and Shr Ward.

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 essays 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.

Diamond Journal is produced and published by students of Kapi'olani Community College, with funding provided by the Board of Student Publications. Submissions and correspondence should be addressed to the following:

Diamond Journal Advisor, Language Arts Department
Kapi'olani Community College
4303 Diamond Head Road
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96816
Diamond Journal

Staff

Advisor
Gertrude Chock

Editors
Joy Lynn Bullman
Debby A. Cahill
Iris A. Cahill

Layout
Debby A. Cahill
Iris A. Cahill

Cover Photo
Joy Lynn Bullman
Table Of Contents

Est 100

Tina Chang  7  Cultural Differences Between Taiwan and Hawaii
Skarma Gurmet  8  The Behavior
Satoko Miyata  10  Cultural Differences in Restaurant Service
Young Trumbo  12  Marriage

Eng 22

Mona Amisone  16  For the Love of the Game
Dolores Barcelona  18  Bittersweet Revenge
Erik Cabal  20  Just Try
Brady Chalaire  22  Going to the Movies
Shawna Cutter  24  Welcome to Hawaii, Shawna
Diana Frank  26  I Had to Learn the Hard Way
Janet S. In  28  The Birth of Two Miracles
Miri Klein  30  Happy I’m Here
Beau K. Sabagala  31  Shoulder to Shoulder
Liping Zhou  33  Who Am I

Eng 100

Tu Du  38  Stupid Ignorant Kid
Randy Duldalao  41  Hard as Rock
Tracy J. Harding  44  One Hundred Yards to Acceptance
Benjamin K. Kahanu  49  Strumming Along
Deldon K. Lee  51  Boo Shish
Shane Morimatsu  54  A Long Lost Friend
Dawn Leaque-Pablo  58  How Not Going On Welfare Changed My Life
Lorrin Rodrigues  61  My Waterfront Property
Travis Williamson  65  A New Experience

Eng 215

Carole Brown  68  Ho, Ho, Ho and a Hit and Run
Lia Kim Bullock  71  My Sanctuary the Ocean
Vivian Flaskets  74  The Influence of My Father’s Past
Christopher Hjerling  78  The Aloha Spirit
Mike Orbito  82  Moon Pools
Cultural Differences Between Taiwan and Hawaii

By Tien Shih

In Taiwan, learning a second language is not so difficult because it is spoken at home and by those with whom we socialize. However, learning to adapt to a new environment and culture is very challenging. The first year, I found the cultural differences in Taiwan culture draining the energies of enjoying life and learning. There is a lot of pressure on me to succeed in a new environment and succeed in learning.

The first influence is in social norms and values. After dinner, people in Taiwan are creatures with social obligations. They will not go home until the end of the meal. The meal in Taiwan is usually a very important event in which the entire family is involved and people are present to greet each other and wave hands to say goodbye.

The second influence is in social norms and values. In Taiwan, when people have a gift to give, it should be a small token of their appreciation. To show the present in front of the giver is inappropriate. Likewise, it is proper to keep the gift in a bag or pocket until the person is ready to open it.

The influence of the present and the socialization at the end of the meal is very interesting for me. I get to experience different cultures.

Esl 100
For adults, learning a second language is a difficult task, but adapting to a new and different culture is also very challenging. I have lived in Hawaii for two years. I have experienced a lot of culture shock during this period. I am from Taiwan, which is a very conservative and collective culture. There are some enormous differences in social manners between Hawaiian and Taiwanese culture.

The first difference is in social manner. People in Hawaii are brimming with enthusiasm. When I first landed at the airport in Hawaii, I saw people who were greeted by friends and family with leis, kisses, and hugs. Saying goodbye for local people is much the same. When people in Taiwan meet friends, unlike in Hawaii, they usually just shake hands to greet each other, and wave hands to say goodbye.

The second difference in social manner between Hawaiian and Taiwanese culture deals with gift giving. In Taiwan, when someone gives a present, it should be politely refused at first, then accepted, and finally appreciated. To open the present in front of the giver is impolite, because it seems as though the recipient is concerned with the value of the present and not its significance. However, in Hawaii, if we refuse someone’s gift, it is seen as very discourteous. The gift should be graciously accepted, opened, and appreciated.

Finally, the greatest difference in social manner between Hawaiians and Taiwanese is in interpersonal relationships. “Let’s go Dutch.” is a new phrase for me. I remember that one of my friends, who is an American man, invited me to a Japanese restaurant for dinner. After dinner, he asked me to split the cost of the meal. I really felt embarrassed calculating the cost at the table. In contrast, Taiwanese people will not split the check in a restaurant. Instead we usually see people who insist on paying for their friends. Sometimes they even argue about paying, because the Taiwanese consider treating friends graciously a very important aspect of interpersonal relationships.

Every country has its own culture. If we do not understand another’s culture, it is easy to misunderstand each other even though the words are fully understood. There are many differences in social manners between Hawaiian and Taiwanese people. It is very interesting for me to learn about other cultures.
The Behavior
By Skarma Gurmet

There are differences in the behavior of Indians from that of people in Hawaii. Behavior is the way people act in a situation. It may be possible that because of cultural differences, misperceptions and misunderstandings may occur during an interaction among people.

One of the differences between Indian and local men in behavior is, for example, if two Indian men were seen walking hand in hand in Waikiki. The behavior of the Hawaiian towards the Indian guys would be different from in India. A local might say, "They are gay.” However, whereas two men walking hand in hand is quite common in India, it does not mean at all that they are gay. If the Indians lack awareness about the local’s reaction to the Indian’s behavior, they will continue behaving the same way. On the other hand, the image of the locals towards the Indians would not be true because the locals wouldn’t know the true meaning of the Indian’s behavior. Here both will have misperceptions.

A similar kind of situation also happened to me. That was when I first met an Indian guy in college. I was a new student in Hawaii, and he had already been here for about five years. Both of us being Indians, we soon became good friends. I behaved as I used to with my friends in India. I rubbed his shoulder during an interesting conversation. Soon he warned me and said, “Be careful. It is not like in India. People in Hawaii might think we are gay.” Since then, I am very careful about my behavior especially with guys. However, I am not talking about what is good or bad or right or wrong with others’ behaviors. Still there is a difference, which is a matter of cultures.

The behavior of local as well as Indian students and teachers is another interesting area of difference. For example, I have seen teachers and students in Hawaii sit together and smoke cigarettes. For an Indian, this is disrespectful. However, if an Indian teacher smokes cigarettes in front of the student, that may not be a big problem. But if only the student or both smoke, then that can be interpreted as disrespectful. However, this may not be considered as bad behavior in Hawaii. Rather, it is interpreted as honesty, maturity and self-responsibility.

Another student and teacher behavioral difference is that, in India, students do not call teachers by their names as they do in Hawaii, but
rather they call them, "Sir" or "Madam", which is considered respectful. Students in India have to ask their teacher even if they want to go out of the classroom to use the bathroom, whereas in Hawaii no one cares. Students in Hawaii are more frank and direct and they seem to have more freedom, whereas in India, the teacher is like the master and the students are like the servants.

In conclusion, differences in behaviors of two different cultures are obvious. Locals or Indians might assume different meanings from people's behavior, whereas the actual meaning of the behavior would be different from the perceptions of either party. The reason that one perceives the other differently is simply because their own cultures are different. There is nothing right or wrong in their behavior.
Cultural Differences in Restaurant Services

By Satoko Miyata

For me, tipping used to be a troublesome custom. Because there is no such custom in Japan, I was not familiar with tipping. I had never personally set a price on services before I came to the United States. When I was in a restaurant in Hawaii, I was always concerned about tipping. How much and how should I tip the waiter? At the end of the dinner, I sometimes observed how other customers tipped. These concerns made me forget my primary purpose of enjoying dishes and the atmosphere at the restaurant. I have also seen many Japanese tourists in the same situation. I sometimes wonder why there is tipping in the U.S. After living in Hawaii for about a year, I have realized that there are some differences between the U.S and Japan about people’s attitudes concerning services.

Knowing about the system in the service industry of each country, I can see the difference in people’s attitudes about services. In the U.S., waiters basically serve the same customers until the customers finish eating. When we sit at a table, usually, a waiter with a big smile on his face comes promptly to our table and he introduces himself. He hands menus to us and explains the day’s special. The waiter takes our order and sets our dishes on the table. During the dinner the waiter stops at our table several times and asks, “Is everything all right?” For employees in the U.S., tips are evaluations of their work, and employees are directly judged by customers. It means that the more a waiter satisfies his customers, the bigger tips he receives. As a result, employees work individually and feel their responsibilities and take pride in their work, therefore, the quality of services depends on the employees.

On the other hand, in Japan, every waiter usually serves every customer. They do not seem to care who takes charge of which customer, so waiters, instead of a host, receive guests at the entrance. It is also common for different waiters to take orders and serve dishes. Moreover, we can ask any waiter when we need to order. For employees in Japan, evaluations from their customers are not so important because the owner of the restaurant judges them and pays all their wages. Employees are trained to keep the same quality of service. As a consequence, all employees offer the same quality of services that is made uniform by a manual of the restaurant. Therefore, they feel less personal responsibility for their service.
There are also differences in the attitudes of customers in the U.S. and Japan. For example, in the U.S. there was a customer who ordered a salad with Swiss cheese instead of Cheddar cheese and asked for the dressing to be served separate. When the person was not satisfied with the dish, she asked for it to be re-done. Another customer asked to be served a special dish that was not on the menu. The customers in the U.S. are particular about services. They become more demanding of the services they receive and can directly express their satisfaction by tips. However, in Japan, the customers are quieter, and choose dishes only from the menu because every service seems to be uniform. If there is something that they do not like about the dish, the customers do not ask a waiter to take it away. Although, some restaurants accept special orders from customers, the customers usually do not make their requests to a waiter. The customers in Japan trust that all owners of the restaurants provide good quality services. The customers may hesitate to complain directly, but if they are not really satisfied with the restaurant, they express their dissatisfaction by not going there again, instead of tipping less.

Culture is based on people's sense of values in the country. The sense of values influences the systems of the society. Tipping is a good example that shows a cultural difference. However, I cannot say which system is better than the other because each system has a proper reason that is based on its culture, and also has good and bad points. Living in Hawaii is a chance for me to accept the good points of another culture and the shortcomings of my culture. I think that my experiences in Hawaii will become a part of my sense of values as a citizen of the world.
Marriage
By Young Trumbo

I have a bad opinion of marriage based on what I have seen my mother go through. For example, when I think about my mother, I feel so bad because marriage has taken away her freedom. I never see her spend time on herself. After she married, she supported my father and five kids all the time. She would get up at 5:00 A.M. every morning, including Sunday morning, and cook breakfast for the family. Five times a week she would make five lunch boxes for my siblings and me. After we left for school, she would clean the house, wash the clothes, feed the dog and work in the garden. She had to go to the market before we came home. She would help us do our homework. She would say that 24 hours a day was not enough time for her. Moreover, everyday of her life was spent serving her master.

Another requirement for my mother’s marriage was to have a son. She had four daughters and one son. Most women in my mother’s generation have two or three kids, but my mother had five children because she wanted a son. Eventually, it was not her decision how many children she had. My grandmother and my father put pressure on her to have a son. If she couldn’t give a son to my father, he could have a second wife. My grandmother and my father blamed my mother for not having a son even though it was not her fault. Before she had a grandson, my grandmother gave my mother a hard time. My grandmother scolded my mother to clean the house even though the house was already clean, and she complained that my mother was a bad cook. She ordered my mother to hand-wash clothes and blankets outside in the winter chill.

My mother also had hard a time having my younger brother. She went to see a doctor, and had to change her diet. Three times a day, she drank herb tonic, which was bitter and smelled bad. She had to arrange a special day when she slept with my father. After my mother had a son, the situation completely changed. My grandmother treated my mother like a princess. My grandmother helped my mother with cleaning the house and grocery shopping, and devoted her time to taking care of her grandson. She fed my younger brother, changed his diapers and gave him a bath all the time. When my mother and father argued with each other, my grandmother took my mother’s side. Though my mother’s situation changed after she
had my brother, sometimes she still regrets her marriage and married life.

That is what I see of my mother's marriage. I do not want to live like her, and my mother supports what I have said. She has no freedom and makes sacrifices. When I say that I do not want to marry, my mother does not disagree. She does not pressure me about being single. My mother tells me to enjoy my life and do whatever I want.
I have a lot of stories to share, based on what I have seen, my parents go through, and I write, which I believe about my mother. I don't think that my marriage has always gone very well. I worry that the past has shaped these experiences. When she worked, she supported my father and her kids all the time. She would get up at 5:00 A.M., make breakfast, including lunch, evening, and not breakfast to the family. The morning was hard when she would make the school meals for my siblings and my father. After school, she would clean the house, with the clothes, from the dog and the garden. She had to go to the market, buy the vegetable, and sometimes dinner. She taught me how to read and write, and then letters, which were later and wanted. She would say that 24 hours a day was not enough and make the house temperature higher. She always saw everything, from every day of her life and thought about her parents.

Another requirement for my mother's marriage was to have a son. She had two daughters and two sons. They were born in our country. Some women in our society were kept from marrying due to religious and cultural reasons. My grandfather had no son, which caused a lot of heartache for our family. Eventually, at 39, my father decided to raise a son, and we were blessed with a daughter. My grandfather was my father's best friend, and my grandmother was my father's best friend. These were significant relationships in his life.
Eng 22
Throughout the years, there were many challenges I faced as I grew up. Dealing with my parents was one of them. Hanging with my friends and going to school was another. However, the biggest challenge for me was playing softball. Playing meant a lot to me and I wanted to go as far as I could with the sport. It gave me an opportunity to show how much I would give to play softball.

My dad started me off in playing coach pitch. It was a wonderful feeling for a little girl to go out and have fun playing baseball. I enjoyed every moment that I played and wanted to keep playing as I grew up. I loved the feeling of making my parents happy, and I knew I'd love the sport for the rest of my life.

As time went by, my dad put me in a sport similar to baseball, although it was a sport for girls only. It was called softball. I wondered why this game was called softball? For a fact, pitching was thrown underhand, and the ball was softer and bigger than a baseball. It took me a while to get used to it, but I already knew the fundamentals and I caught on quite quickly.

I began to get better in the sport than I thought I could. It was a thing that I never thought would happen. I was hitting homers over the fence and past the outfielders. I didn't know how that happened, but I did something for the team. My defense picked up and I wouldn't let any ball get past me. I could steal the bases and not get put out. I was having a great time and began to love the sport even more.

When I started high school, it was a whole different story. I had to start all over again. The game was a little faster and players were a lot bigger. At first, I was intimidated and I didn't know what to do. When my coach hit me a ground ball or even a pop fly, I became shaky and my hands started to tremble. I couldn't even catch or stop a ball. My batting wasn't that good either. I had endless butterflies in my stomach and my head hurt because I was so frustrated. I knew I had to work harder to improve my game. Moreover, I was beginning an era of disliking the sport.

Time went on, and I grew older. I was more advanced and smarter than when I first started off in high school. I knew the game better and kept doing my best. There was a point in my high school year that really made my confidence rise. It
was my senior year. The field was loaded with parents and friends. The score was 3-0 in the bottom of the 7th inning. We were losing. Everyone thought the game was over already.

The pitcher struck out our first two batters. Our hopes for winning vanished and we thought it was over. Our third batter went up to bat and got on base. I guess the pitcher was nervous because she walked the next two players. The crowd went wild and everyone’s hopes rose. I looked to see who was up to bat. It was I. Two outs, the bases were loaded, it was the bottom of the 7th inning and it was my turn to bat. I couldn’t believe it.

I stepped up to the plate. My heart was beating fast and I felt numb. The first pitch came and I watched it pass. “Strike,” yelled the umpire. The second pitch came and I hit a foul. That meant strike two. The pressure was on, but for some reason, I wasn’t intimidated; I was pumped. The third pitch came and I cranked the ball over the fence. The final score was 4-3 and we won. That was the greatest feeling I ever had. I will never forget that day.

Wow! What big challenges softball had given me. Playing went by really quickly. I never thought it would end so soon. With all those ups and downs I had while playing, I still love the game and miss it too. Now that I don’t play anymore, I wish I could be in the same position as I was before. There are many memories left for me and I will cherish them for a long time.
Robyn. What first comes to mind when you hear that name? Most may think of sweet little birds that sing sweet melodies high up in the trees. But when I heard the name Robyn, I felt chills run up my spine. She was a new student that transferred to my school in the sixth grade. I had no idea the effect she would have on my adolescent life. Robyn became my personal bully.

As a student I got along with everyone, which didn’t explain why I became a victim of an insecure girl. At first, it started off with minor teasing that I would just brush off. I felt there wasn’t any need to show her my emotions, because it would only boost her ego. Days and months went by and the teasing became worse. I felt insecure and scared. All I felt towards Robyn was anger and hate. I couldn’t understand why I became one of her targets. Many nights I would cry myself to sleep because I couldn’t escape the horrors that Robyn would have in store for me the next day at school. Robyn was constantly on my mind, and I could only fantasize ways to get even with her.

One day while walking home from school, I could feel the haunting presence of hate following me. It was Robyn armed with a cup of red juice, saying, “Ever wonder what red juice does to a white shirt?” The next thing I knew, the white shirt I was wearing became a red tie-dye shirt. She scornfully laughed in my face and all I wanted to do was give her a punch to the jaw, but I wouldn’t lower myself to her level. I had too much pride.

Then one day the taunting and trickery stopped. Robyn suddenly wasn’t present in school. I decided to “live in the moment” because that would be the only time I would feel as free as a bird. I found out why Robyn wasn’t in school. She had been suspended for academic problems, and I felt this would buy me some time to live a normal life in school.

Just when I thought my problems were over, Robyn was back in school. She began her daily routine with me, which was making scornful remarks about my personality. “God! Did you check yourself lately? Dork!” This just made me more angry inside and spiteful towards Robyn. I had no idea the next incident would become the turning point in my adolescent life.

It was during a science lab when Robyn thought it would be funny to pull my chair away as I sat down. The air was filled with laughter, but
all I felt was sadness and embarrassment. Now I hated Robyn with a vengeance. I wanted so badly to yell and hit her because I couldn’t take it anymore, but once again I didn’t do anything. I would be giving in to Robyn’s unjust ways. From that moment on, I made a promise to myself that I would never let anyone take advantage of me again.

The next day at school I decided that Robyn would no longer be my personal bully, but the target of my revenge. The night before, I had worked up enough motivation to do something about Robyn’s many tauntings and teasings. I wanted to let her feel all the anger, hate, embarrassment and sadness she had caused me during the year.

We were having another lab in science and I thought to myself, “This is the perfect time to get my revenge.” Walking towards Robyn, I started to contemplate if I should go through with my vengeful scheme. I stood behind her and my hands began to sweat and tremble. Scenes and words that Robyn used to hurt me flowed through my mind. I placed my hand on her chair and pulled it. I couldn’t believe it. I did it and Robyn fell to the floor! Tears rolled down her cheeks and the students began laughing. Robyn ran out of the room, crying hysterically. No one was there to comfort her, but the teacher. As I stood there with a grin on my face, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for her. She had no one there for her and maybe that could have been the only reason why she picked on me, because she thought of me as her only friend. I, the individual that was being hurt, should have let someone help me instead of taking matters into my own hands. This incident didn’t satisfy me at all. I let my pride go and lowered myself to doing the same things Robyn had done to me.

After the whole Robyn incident, her parents felt that it would be appropriate that she be placed in a different school. I felt as if my problems were finally over, but I only had the feeling of regret about what I did to her. It made me no better than her. Through this experience, I learned that revenge isn’t sweet, but bitter, bitter in the sense that my revenge had nothing but a sour and awful taste.
It was a Saturday, during the second month of my work. It was around lunchtime, and probably hot outside, although I couldn't really tell because I was in an air-conditioned building. I was starting to get that hungry look on my face, that specific look, the face that screams, "Feed me, I'm running on empty."

Time had passed since my face started asking if I was hungry. It had been at least ten minutes, I was so hungry I could eat just about anything. Hearing footsteps coming around one of the aisles, I wiped the hungry look off my face and smiled at my boss. To my amazement my boss said, "Hungry, huh? I guess I can spare you a lunch break." I smiled, nodded my head, and bolted out the door.

Now came the decision: "What should I eat? I don't have a home lunch so I guess I will just have to buy food. Should I go right or left? Korean BBQ on the left, or sandwiches on the right." After about 2.167 seconds I turned left towards the BBQ stand. Assuming that I would see the same old lady I saw yesterday, I skipped in with a big friendly smile. I blurted, "Hello!" Then a young voice that I didn't recognize said "Hi!"

Not accustomed to this cute voice, I started to scan the room to match this voice with a body. Regular people might have only seen her as just another Korean girl, but I saw more. She wasn't just five foot three, she was someone who could look directly in my eyes. Her hair was baby-fine and seemed like it would fall just below her shoulders, even though it was put in an up position. Her smile imprinted in my brain, showed her sophistication, and the complexity that was probably in her character. Because she was dressed in off-white clothing, I could have easily mistaken her for an angel.

"Yike's." I'd turned into Jell-O. my mind, unbalanced, flipped; I wasn't thinking straight. Come to think of it, I must have made an ass out of myself. I had no clue what I ordered. After the fascination wore off I remembered that I was hungry. So I bought a meat jun, tried to make small talk and realized my break had ended several minutes ago so I bolted back to work.

The following week I went back again and did the same stupid act, ordered the same food. I thought, "Boy, if she thinks my diet consists of this food she must think I'm crazy." Once again l
tried to make small talk, then realizing that my lunch break was over, I ran back to work.

It was now the third weekend. That morning I planned out exactly what I was going to say. I had everything figured out, but when I went over to the restaurant, blamm! She wasn’t working. “DOH!”

Now a month passed by and after talking to her co-workers I realized that she wouldn’t be working there very much longer. The following week I didn’t work but went over just to talk to her, I established some small conversation, then gave her a way to contact me—the usual phone number routine. That very night I remembered freaking out every time I heard the telephone ring. Yes, she did finally call, and what a suspense-filled night that was. So we talked about the “who’s, what’s, when, where, and why that.” The direction we were headed in had a very good outlook.

Eventually we started conversing more and more and finally I asked her to dinner. We went to an Asian-Italian restaurant, then I realized she didn’t like Italian food. Strike one, I thought. Anything after that is a complete blank in my mind. Progression was constant; we actually saw each other four out of seven days a week. After she finished work we went out, also, after she finished school, we went out. All I could think of was “Zow” I’m having the time of my life.

Like they say in the movies, it just goes to show that if you don’t try you will never find out. If the outcome had not been a single call from her, at least I tried. Sometimes the result is good. yet on the other hand you can only sit and wonder, “what if?” Like master Jedi Yoda says, “Try? Do or do not, there is no try.”
Going to the Movies

By Brady Chalais

Do you remember the first time you went to the movies? I do. The smell of hot, buttery popcorn crackling in the big steel pot up front, overflowing into the glass case. Tasting your first red vine and biting off both ends to use it as a straw. Those bright red juicy hotdogs that always looked as if they were going to explode! At home, my hotdogs never turn out that way and believe me, I've tried just about every brand and they still don't taste half as good. Or that glass case with every dentist's nightmare: candy, rows of it, miles back-packed with every single type. I could never make up my mind which one to get. The best part of all this was my parents asking me, "What do you want?" What? Permission to have all this junk? A dream come true? Pinch me, make sure I'm awake!

I especially enjoy taking children to the movie theaters. It's as though I'm looking through their eyes for that first time, seeing myself fifteen to twenty years ago. When they get up to that counter they go wild. I enjoy seeing them balance the popcorn and soda on their chest, having to peep between their refreshments to find a seat. Why do they always go for the seats up front? As we settle down, they have to hold that big bucket of popcorn between their legs pushing their feet out so that their knees don't even pass the edge of the seat. Then they begin stuffing their mouths with everything in sight until their cheeks are all stretched out. When the lights dim, their eyes open wide, focusing on the biggest TV screen they've ever seen. Not a peep, it's like they are in a trance, and even an earthquake would not budge them.

Over the years things have dramatically changed. When I was a child you could get a ticket for seventy-five cents, popcorn and a soda was about a dollar-fifty and candy averaged about twenty-five cents. There was also a man who played the organ up front to pass the time while waiting for the show to start. His selection consisted of all that awful elevator music. When he was done he would proudly take a bow, then the curtains would draw back revealing the screen.

As a teenager, we'd go to the drive-in. It didn't cost much to get in, because my friends and I would squeeze in the trunk like sardines. Can you picture three one hundred-ninety pound football players sneaking out of a 1980 Toyota Tercel compact car's trunk, just so we wouldn't have to pay to get in? Now drive-ins are extinct like...
dinosaurs, with barely a trace that they existed. Classic children's movies are outdated by new computer technology. Snow White, Bambi and Cinderella are pushed to the back of the VCR library. Nowadays, some children would rather watch "Power Rangers," or play with their video games.

Looking back at my life I feel that things change in the blink of an eye. Some of us take these little things for granted. Time changes everything and there's not much we can do about it, therefore, I feel we should make the most of our lives and live each day to the fullest.
Welcome to Hawaii,
Shawna

By Shawna Cutter

Hi! My name is Shawna Cutter. I was born December 14, 1977, in California. I had a happy life in a small town called Westlake Village. Making new friends was easy for me there. I had plenty of friends. I remember smiling and just saying, "Hi" and immediately having a new friend.

When I was about eight years old, my Mom and Dad told me and my sister, Heather, that we were moving to Hawaii. "Hawaii!" I squealed with delight. I was happy until I had to say good-bye to all my friends. When I got on the plane, I was sad. I thought of all the things I was going to miss: the changing of the seasons, a neighborhood full of friends, a wonderful school, and the vacant lot next to my home where my friends and I pretended we were explorers.

As we got closer to our new Hawaii home, I got more excited. I kept asking, "How much longer? When will we be there?" My Mom said, "Soon, Shawna. soon." I got more enthusiastic because soon I was going to be in the land of aloha. I wondered what adventures would await me and what new friends I'd make.

Finally we arrived at our new home in Kahala. Instead of a beautiful two-story Tudor home, it was an old one-story house. I remember opening a drawer to put my clothes away and seeing thousands of red ants marching along. I called to my Mom and Dad, "There's ants all in my drawer!"

My parents came in right away to see what the matter was. "What was that, dear?" my father said in his most calm voice. "Look," I pointed! "Well, just wait on the unpacking," he said with a big smile. The next day the house was fumigated for ants, cockroaches, and anything else that qualified as an insect.

Later we went to the Kahala Mall. It was so different than it is today. There weren't movie theaters or the California Pizza Kitchen, or many of the small, fun eateries we have today. The stores and restaurants were different than those in California. I missed Sunday brunch after church and going to the deli. I missed the greater selection of clothing. I missed my room!

Quickly the summer passed and it was the first day of school. I was entering the third grade at Star of the Sea School. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I was so nervous, there was a knot in my stomach. I felt like my parents were taking me to the lion's den. I was in a pretty pink
dress with my hair down and a smile to hide my nervousness. The first half of the school day passed quickly and then it was time for lunch. I ate my lunch and then went to the playground to meet people. I saw a group of girls from my class. I went over to them with a big smile and said, "Hi." One of them turned around and said, "Go away you stupid four-eyed geek!" I was stunned and hurt. As I was ran away I heard them yelling, "Go home you stupid haole bitch."

The bell rang and I went in to class. The rest of the day seemed like eternity. Finally the last bell rang to signal the end of the school day. My Mom was waiting outside in the parking lot. When she asked me how my day went, I started to cry and said in a whimpering voice, "I hate this school. I tried to make friends and they called me a four-eyed haole bitch. I want to go home to California." My Mom looked at me in a sympathetic manner and said, "There, there, it's only the first day. I'm sure it will get better." But it didn't get better. More kids kept making fun of me and everyday I came home more and more depressed.

Then as if being ridiculed wasn't enough, I started failing behind academically. My parents didn't know what to do. I was miserable all the time. My parents went to speak with my teacher to find out if there was anything they could do to improve my grades. Everyone tried but nothing was really helping. I was so miserable. Then my Mom saw a documentary on learning disabilities. ASSETS School was favorably mentioned. She visited the school and made arrangements for me to be tested for learning disabilities.

The next year I was attending ASSETS School's fourth grade class. I started to get better grades and made a couple of nice girl friends. Life started to change for the better. It still wasn't as wonderful as California, but it was better.
It was about 9:00 A.M., February 1, 1999, when my lesson began. I didn't know at the time that this would be my first day clean and sober.

I was waiting on the street for a friend, we were going to meet and get a party started. During the time that I was waiting, a cushman cop (policeman in a motor cab) passed by me. As he was passing, he slowed down to get a look at me.

At this time, I said to myself, "Oh-oh, I'm busted." I knew that the cop recognized me, because I recognized him, as he had arrested me before. He kept going up to the top of the street, and I could see that he was calling in to the police station to check if there was a warrant out for my arrest. He called in and they must have told him that there was a warrant, because he turned around and headed in my direction. At this time, I pretended as if I was walking to the store, but I was trying to get away. Then the cushman cop caught up to me. I could feel my stomach turning inside out. It's that sick feeling I get when things go wrong.

He stopped me and asked, "Is your name—?" I said, "Yeah." He knew my name, but I guess he had to ask anyway. Then he asked, "Is your Social Security Number—?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "There's a warrant out for your arrest."

I was on the side of the street answering questions, waiting for a patrol car to come to escort me to the police station. At this time, I wasn't happy, in fact, I was getting upset. I started to give the cop wise cracks like, "Don't you have anything else to do but harass me? You must get off on arresting people for small s ... huh?" I really didn't care for this cop, we already had a few run-ins before. No matter what I said, he just ignored me and kept on writing his report.

Finally, the patrol car came and I got handcuffed and put in the back seat of the car. At the police station, I kept on making wise cracks. Then one of the officers said, "She acts like she's on drugs, so check her purse." One of the officers checked my purse and that was when they found the drugs and paraphernalia.

I was then given an additional charge. I was arrested on a Saturday and had to spend the rest of the weekend in a cellblock. Monday, I would go to court.

When court was over, I was taken to
Oahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) to await pre-trial and sentencing. By the time I got sentenced, I had been at OCCC for four months. After that, I was transferred to Women’s Correctional Community Center (WCCC), where I was to spend the remaining year and two months.

I was at WCCC for one week when I learned about a drug treatment program called Hoo’mana, in the facility. It sounded good, so I put in a request to be transferred to the residential program. Within two days, I was in the program.

At Hoo’mana I learned a lot. I learned about myself, my addiction, my family and much more. I stayed at Hoo’mana until the time for my release. Then I was furloughed to the Oxford House, a clean and sober house.

Being arrested was the best thing that happened to me. I would have never stopped doing drugs otherwise. Since being released from prison, I have been able to get my family back, start college and pursue some of my goals.

Today, if I am having a problem in my life I get help. I don’t have to learn the hard way.
It was about five years ago when I sat waiting for my result. I started to feel numb as I walked slowly to the bathroom. I repeated to myself over and over, "Oh please read negative." With no hesitation, I grabbed the stick and with one look, my world came crashing down on me. I wanted to cry. I was fifteen years old, and I had found out that I was pregnant.

I was raised a Christian girl, so the thought of abortion really scared me. I believed I would go straight to hell. There was no other alternative than to give birth to the child. Now, the problem I faced was deeper than that. I had to inform my mother about my pregnancy. I tried to think of an easy way to let her know, but when it came down to it, there was no easy way to let my mother know that I, her fifteen-year-old daughter, was pregnant.

To make matters worse, my mother and I didn't have a good relationship. I guess I blamed her for my parent's divorce. When I was younger, I rebelled against her. I skipped school, stayed out past curfew, ran away from home, did drugs and tried my best to be the worst possible kid I could be. I now realize I was stupid, but at that age, I thought I was doing the right thing. My mother and I hardly spoke to each other, and now I had to break this shocking news to her. I feared that when I did break the news, I would be disowned and kicked out of the house.

After four months of stalling, I sat her down and told her everything. She insisted that I get an abortion. She went ahead and made phone calls, finding one of the few doctors that still performed abortions that late in the pregnancy. I refused that option and explained to her why this was my decision. At that point, she didn't care about our religion, or my decision. She only cared about the embarrassment I would cause her. I moved out and took care of what I needed to at that point—myself and my unborn child.

Fortunately, with a little time, my mother started to come around. She helped me through a lot of hard times and was even there when I gave birth to my beautiful baby girl who I named Kelsea. It's funny how life works. To a lot of people, it may seem like I'm too young to have a child, but I don't like to think of it that way. Because of her, I had to grow up. I learned to be responsible, and now my decisions aren't just based on me. I have to think about how everything will affect my
daughter as well.

My life didn't begin until my daughter was born. From that moment on, I looked to the future. Now my mother and I get along great. She helps me raise my little girl who's now four years old. I just hope that when she's a teenager, she won't put me through the hassles that I've put my mother through. If she does though, I can only wish to be as understanding as her grandma.
Happy I'm Here
By Miri Klein

When I was a senior in high school I got pregnant. I was terrified. Not only was I frightened of my family’s reaction, I was also worried that I wouldn’t be able to graduate with my class. I remember being very nervous. When I finally told my parents, I could hardly speak. Not knowing what to expect or what to do, to my surprise everyone was very understanding. My family supported my decision to have my baby, despite their initial disappointment. I was also able to graduate with my class and all my friends. I was extremely relieved. That relief was soon replaced with an overwhelming feeling of shame, not because I had a baby, but because I felt as if I had let everyone down. I was so young, not married, and very insecure.

I attended KCC immediately after graduation. Once when I was in Math class I dosed off during a test. Another time I sat through a whole hour of Biology, before I realized I was supposed to be in History. Feeling the stress of motherhood, I knew I wouldn’t survive. My grades were slipping and I was worn out. That is when I made the most adult decision of my life. Going against what everyone had told me, I dropped out of school. I decided to work part time and raise my son. It shocked everyone, myself included, but that is what I wanted to do.

Now ten years and two kids later, I’m back. I want to complete the education I started. I want this not only for myself and for my future, but also for my children’s future. Providing the best life I can for all of us has become very important to me.

I actually feel in control of my own life. Although we are not married, I’m still with my children’s father. We’ve been together for almost twelve years. It hasn’t always been easy, but who ever said life was easy?

All the feelings of guilt and shame have been replaced with feelings of determination. When I receive a degree it will have all been worth it. My family is already proud of me. Most of all I am proud of myself. I’ve learned a lot about myself. I’m happy I’m here!
It was a Saturday morning in September. There was dew on the grass and mist in the air. You could feel the tension and the sense of anxiousness in everyone's hearts as the Damien Monarchs got ready to take on the St. Louis Crusaders. Suddenly, with the sound of a whistle, the 1995-96 football season kicked off.

Wearing number 42 for the Damien Monarchs, I was a freshman running-back on the move. I was playing a great game until about midway through the third quarter, and that's when it happened. As I jumped over the pile into the end zone, I was met halfway by a Crusader linebacker. When I hit the ground, the pain hit me. It was a pain which I had never felt before. I had popped my right shoulder. I lay there in shock and pain. Then as I glanced to my left, I saw two hands raised high, it was the referee signaling “touchdown!” The scoreboard showed that I had scored six points, but I was down for the count. That was the end of the game for me.

After that game my shoulder continued to dislocate repeatedly. The physical trainer of my team ran me through all types of rehabilitation that ranged from massage therapy, to muscle toning, to even shock therapy. Through all that rehabilitation, my shoulder never improved. It was recommended that I have surgery. My answer was, “No.” The word “surgery” terrified me. There was no way on earth that I was going to have surgery.

In August '96, I transferred schools, and I was now a Kahuku Red Raider. With a new team and a winning tradition behind me, my hopes were high. However, none of that had changed my bum shoulder. I continued to play with the pain for two years. It was my love for the game that got me through those tough times. I played the game with all my heart, until finally that wasn't enough. It was time to have surgery, there were no other options.

Dr. Jay Muramoto, the head sports doctor for the University of Hawaii athletic program, performed surgery on my right shoulder in November '97. Half a year later, my shoulder had recovered completely, thanks to all the hard work and effort I had put in to getting my shoulder back to normal. I had taken two major risks by having surgery. The first was the risk of my shoulder never getting better. Even with surgery, there wasn't a guarantee that my shoulder would get better. The
second risk was never being able to play football again. Football was a sport that I played from the heart, and just the thought of never being able to play again brought me to a stage of depression. Luckily, I had one of the best sports medicine doctors in the state perform surgery on me.

However, I never returned to the football field as a player again. Though I had the clearance to do so, I chose not to. I found that there was more to life than just playing football. Shoulder surgery ended up being a "reality check" for me. I was never going to make a living playing football. It was time for me to think about my future and what I was going to do with my life.

A year after I had shoulder surgery, I met up with a recruiter from the Air National Guard. I liked what they had to offer, and decided to begin processing. Processing was a very long stage. It consisted of a lot of paper work, and a physical that was mandatory for me to pass. The physical required taking a lot of tests: blood, urine, eyes, ears, and the list goes on. The one that worried me the most was having to be tested by a shoulder specialist. After I was examined, the doctor told me that I had the best shoulder surgery recovery he had ever seen. He also told me that the doctor who had done my surgery had done a great job, that it doesn't get any better than that. About three weeks later, I enlisted in the Hawaii Air National Guard.

Today, I am grateful for the wonderful job that Dr. Jay Muramoto did on my shoulder. I am also proud of myself for working so hard to get where I am. Now, I have my whole future ahead of me, with my hopes and dreams just waiting to come true. Once, my shoulder was used for football. Now, it is used to help support my head upon my shoulders, which will guide me into the future.
"Who Am I?"
By Liping Zhou

"My God! What is this?" I am looking at the vocabulary quiz in front of me and my mind is totally blank! Only a few words look familiar and although it is an open book quiz, I can't seem to find the words I need — even in the book. I'm too embarrassed to ask the teacher for help. Once more, I can only hear the voice, "Who am I? Who am I?" I am disabled. I can't think, can't do anything except sit there, suffering and waiting for the time to pass.

"Who am I?" 28 October 1995, my apartment building in Beijing.

With the help of family and friends, I'm lugging two big suitcases from my apartment to the street. My three-and-a-half year old daughter, Angela, walks close beside me. She knows that someone is leaving on a trip, so she is saying to us, "Anyone can go, except my mommy!" I lower my head not knowing what to say. How do I explain such a tragic parting to my little girl? Ten months ago, my husband left China to study for his master's degree in applied mathematics. He has been living in Canada only on his scholarship money, and when we applied for a Canadian visa for Angela, the request was denied because our income was insufficient. Going abroad is always a happy event in China, but here I am, holding Angela tightly in my arms while she sings a popular Chinese children's song:

In the whole world, mommy is the best.
The child is such a treasure if she has a mommy.
How can a child find happiness.
If she leaves her mommy's arms?

A taxi is stopping in front of us and suddenly Angela understands that it is her mommy who is leaving. As I pass her to her grandma, she is crying and desperately reaching for my neck. I jump into the taxi and as it pulls away. I hear her screaming "Mommy don't go. I want my mommy!" I cannot turn my head for one last look; all I can do is weep.

That was when I first heard that voice inside asking, "Who am I? Am I a wife, or am I a mother? Who am I?" I only knew that I couldn't be both. I couldn't think. My mind went blank.

"Who am I?" One and a half months later, one week before Christmas, in Edmonton, Canada.
It is Sunday morning. the sky is extremely blue and the sun is very bright. Two feet of glistening snow, so pure, so much at peace, ice cold and so soul-stirringly beautiful, cover the world around me!

I am lost because I got off the bus too early on my way to my first job. I will be a babysitter and housekeeper for a Chinese couple in Edmonton. I see no one else on this cold, frozen street, no one I can ask for directions on how to get to where I must go. I’m afraid to knock on a door since I don’t even know how to say, “Can you help me? I’m looking for . . . .” The temperature is about -20 degrees Fahrenheit. I can no longer see the beauty of the world, instead I feel cold and helpless.

“Who am I?” the voice inside of me is asking loudly, demanding to know.

Another voice answers, “I am a mother. Yes, I am a mother who is trying to earn money so I can bring my daughter here from China.” Then a car stops close to me. A lady is offering to take me around to find the house.

It’s the afternoon of the same day. The two children of the house, three year old Mimi and her one year old brother Bobo, are asleep. Their parents are out shopping. I am in their shower stall, squatting to wipe watermarks off the shower wall. As I sing the Chinese lyrics of the song “Death of a Swan,” I think of my work in China, my old computer office, my friends and the laughter, as well as how much I miss my daughter.

The voice inside me cries, “Who am I?”

Another voice inside me answers, “I am the wife of my husband, and I am also trying to be a good mother.” I tell myself, “I must get used to this and I will!” I sing with these feelings, without knowing that my employers have returned home and are in the next room. They hear me and they understand perfectly what my song means.

Finally, it is five o’clock, time to go home. “We really like you,” the mother says to me, “and the kids like you, but I think you are overqualified for this kind of job. It isn’t fair for you.” My heart sinks, as she continues, “And it isn’t fair for us to pay higher wages and have an unhappy employee.” Realizing that my first job is over so soon, I feel overwhelming regret. I should have known “who I am,” hidden my sorrow, not sung sad songs and pretended to be a happy person, very grateful to be working.

That was my first job which showed me in one day, “who I am.”

“Who am I?” I am a dishwasher in an Italian family restaurant. Right after my first job ended so abruptly. I started studying English at an adult school in the morning and working as the lone dishwasher in a very busy restaurant at night. I have to wash dishes during the entire five-hour shift, with only 15 minutes for dinner (which means
eating a plate of pasta while standing in place). I manage to rest a bit by going to the restroom, but in there, I find myself staring at myself in the restroom mirror, looking at this figure that is no longer familiar because it is getting thinner and thinner, and I am wondering, "Who am I?"

The chef tells me that the boss has been asking, "Why does Liping have to use the restroom so many times?" This makes me very angry and I say to the boss, "Go and find a worker who doesn't need to use the restroom!" I can see that she is shocked. Yes, of course I need the money, but I take off my apron and walk out the door because I also need basic respect and a sense of dignity.

It is very cold on the streets of Edmonton this February night as I puzzle over the questions "Who am I?" and "What else can I do?" But I feel released and elated too!

That was my second job, which lasted one month, and left me confused.


"Come here! Pull me up! Put your damn book down! Who do you think you are? The boss?"
The 83-year-old woman is shouting at me from her bed.

"No, no, you are the boss," I answer as I put the book down. "I am only the one who takes care of the boss."

She says, "Shut your big mouth! You only take my money and do nothing! Don't just cross your legs and sit there reading. Scratch me! What do you come here for? Studying? Sleeping? No, working!"

She rails on and on, but I am used to her bad temper. I have gotten used to taking care of her needs while ignoring her anger. I understand and truly sympathize with her irritation. For someone like her—83 years old and lying in bed for more than three years—how else can I expect her to be? Taking care of this woman from eleven at night to five in the morning is my first job since coming with my husband to Hawaii. He is now studying for his doctor's degree at the University of Hawaii, and I am still trying to earn money for Angela's airfare and visa requirements, while taking an English course at the community college. I like my late night job because I can study and prepare for my class at KCC. In the classroom, at least, I am happy. I can think, "I am a student and will be a very good student."

That was the job, which supported me, and allowed me to find joy in studying and realizing, "I am a student, a good student!"

28 October 1997. Vancouver International Airport

"Mrs. Liping Zhou, please go to the immigration office," the announcement is made loudly over the PA system of the Vancouver International Airport. It is October 28, 1997—the day I've been waiting for! The announcement means that Angela is on the plane that has just arrived.
I will see her again! I am happily thinking. "I am my daughter's mommy. After our separation of two long years—at last, our family picture will be complete again. All our days of pain and sorrow are now over!" But I also wonder if she will recognize me, if she will call me "Mommy" when she sees me.

The immigration officer assures me, "You will see her soon. She is a very brave girl, flying all the way from Beijing by herself. She had a little airsickness, but she behaved very well." After having me sign the landing papers, the officer asks me to wait at the exit. I feel so much happiness and pride. She is only five years old!

I see her now, sitting on a cart, coming out with an immigration officer. I clap my hands to attract their attention. "Mommy! That is my mommy!" she calls to me. "Well, if you say so," the officer says to us smiling. "Let me see your ID and please sign this." he hands me a paper to sign.

I am very excited. I feel as if Angela and I were never apart. For this moment of joy, I knew that all the hard work, the doubts, the waiting was worth it.

That was a moment, which made me believe that all of my hard work and suffering were worth the joy. "I am a mother and wife." I thought. Angela has brought sunshine to our family life.

April 1999, at KCC.

"I only can place you at the English 94 level," Mr. Noji tells me.

"Can't you let me take English 160?" I ask.

"No, because you need someone to watch your writing. You made too many errors in writing the sample essay," he insists.

"But I am a straight-A student in all the ITS courses I have taken so far. I'll be all right if you let me take English 160," I argue, even though I know that he is absolutely right. I keep trying to persuade him because I fear taking an English class. I fear writing anything in English, and I've tried not to take English for two years, but I know that I have to face it now.

I am sitting in the English class repeating. "Who am I?" Of course, I am not Canadian, nor am I American. But I feel that I am no longer Chinese either. I received a letter from a friend in China a few weeks ago. As I read the letter, I had the strange feeling that my friends were unfamiliar to me. But they hadn't changed, they were the same people I used to know. It is I who has changed—changed so much that I am no longer the person they once knew. All of a sudden, I feel that my friends and China are so far from me.

Then, "Who am I? Who will I be?" I am confused once more. This time, however, because of my experiences, because of the things I have had to overcome, I know that I will go on. No matter what happens, I will progress until the day when I find out a satisfactory answer to "Who am I?"
Eng 100
Stupid Ignorant Kid

By Cu Du

Stupid ignorant kid. I was thirteen years old, what the hell did I know. I thought I was cool because I never got caught before. I didn't worry about a thing. Got everything I wanted and more without spending a penny. My mother never bought me anything and she never gave me much money. My friends had similar problems, so we went out and got everything that could fit in our pockets, backpacks or shopping bags. After school we would go to the stores and take candy or just little knick-knacks that caught our eyes. Some of my friends were too chicken to try it, so I volunteered to do it for them, because I was confident that nobody would catch me.

Then in the middle of December, 1991 on a Friday, school was cut short because it was the last day of classes before winter break. My friend and her sister went shopping with me that afternoon during the busy holiday season. That day we got a little carried away, but we didn't seem to notice it at the time. We got everything our hearts desired from almost every store in the mall. It was a wonderful feeling to be able to have what we wanted without begging our parents for any money.

While we were walking around the mall, my friend began to get paranoid. She thought a man was following us, possibly an undercover mall security guard. I told her to relax, nothing was going to happen. We were just about to leave the mall, when I stopped and remembered that I needed to get one more thing. At that point I should have stopped while I was still ahead, but I didn't.

I led my friends to the swimsuit section in a large department store, our final destination for the day. I entered the fitting room carrying two black swimsuits with purple polka dots. I came out with one safely tucked in my shopping bag and the other in my hand. After I placed the swimsuit back on the rack, we exited the store and headed to the bus stop, exhausted from a long afternoon at the mall.

Soon after we left, a security man stopped us from behind. Startled by his voice, we turned around and saw a skinny funny-looking guy with a two-way radio in one hand. We glanced at one another nervously. I'm sure there was only one word flashing in our minds at that point, "BUSTED". Stupid kids! My friend's sister was a year younger and an idiot with a big mouth. She
looked at me and whispered under her breath, "Uh-oh, busted". The security man escorted us back to the security room in the department store. When we passed by a flight of stairs that led to the downstairs parking lot I had an urge to make a quick getaway, but I didn't. I was already in enough trouble.

There we were the three of us each with a shopping bag filled with all kinds of goodies. We sat in a tiny room with a table in front of us; all our stolen merchandise was piled on it—all sorts of junk such as books, magazines, clothes, jewelry, facial products, even a Santa Claus hat, and the tackiest sixty-dollar swimsuit that got us busted. Staring at the mountain of our non-purchased junk, I realized that none it was worth going through this kind of embarrassment.

I looked over at my friend, her blood-shot eyes told me she was scared to death. I knew it was entirely my fault; I was the bad influence among my friends. I was the one with the best grades, most innocent face, and the one who told my friends that we could get away with shoplifting. I was worried about what was going to happen to us. None of this seemed to really affect the younger sister too much. She wasn't as sensitive as her older sister was. Security released my friends after they got the information they needed and called the girls' mother. I was left alone to deal with the consequences. I had to be arrested because I was the only one who took something from this particular store where we got caught.

A police officer came into the room with a very stern expression and spoke to me in his tough police-officer voice. I knew he was trying to intimidate me with his authority, but I wasn't shaken by it. I kept my head down and stared at the carpet as he spoke to me in a harsh tone. My head jerked upward when he raised his voice and hollered, "Look at me when I talk to you", and so I did. Then he turned around and started jotting something down in his "Mr. Police Officer" notebook. I sat there staring at him, my eyeballs piercing through the back of his head. If he wanted me to look at him, then fine, I was going to look right at him! I was hoping that a red laser beam would shoot out of my eyes and blow his head off. He turned my way and began lecturing to me once more and I continued to stare straight into his eyes. Then he yelled, "What! Do you have a staring problem"? Through clenched teeth I uttered the word "no" and looked away. Before I was handcuffed, security took a Polaroid picture of me with the stolen junk on the table. I was wondering if I should smile or grin in the picture, but I didn't.

Afterwards, I was taken to the police station and put into a cell with steel bars and all. The air conditioner was on full blast all night long; I couldn't stop shivering from the cold air. I called home to have my mother pick me up, but she wasn't there, as usual. She was out to dinner with the old rich guy again. I had no other relatives to
contact; so, I was forced to wait until my mother got home.

I waited for three hours, freezing my butt off, when I finally got hold of my mother at 9:30 that evening. She arrived fifteen minutes later in her white flowered muumuu, and white heels. Her black, wavy, long hair flowed down her back with a headband to keep her hair out of her face. I looked up as I heard her heels click-clack on the tile floor and her keys jingling in her hand. She glanced in my direction and looked away with no expression on her pale face. I sat there feeling more numb than I had for the last three hours.

The police officer took my mother aside and explained to her the situation, while another officer took me into a room nearby for my mug shots. I sat there staring at the camera and I wondered again if I should smile, but I didn’t. He snapped one picture, then I turned to my left side and he snapped another picture. Next, he took my fingerprints and gave me some really greasy cream to remove the ink. While I was fussing around trying to wash all the ink from my fingers, I could hear the other officer still talking to my mother outside. I was a little upset that my pictures and fingerprints weren’t taken earlier while I was waiting all night for my mother. But I felt relieved to be finally going home.

Nearly eight years have passed since my encounter with the law. As I took back on this experience, I realize the consequences of my wrongdoings. This has helped me grow into a stronger and more responsible individual; now I am able to make decisions that will better my future. When I find myself in a difficult situation, I first stop and consider the after effects on others and myself.
"Shut your mouth Jabroni".... The Rock raises his eyebrow.... Fans go crazy.... Yelling.... Screaming.... Cheering.... Rock Bottom!!..... The Rock lays the smack down on his opponent's candy ass..... "Shut your mouth and know your role.... If you smell... what the Rock is cookin'!!...

I remember camping out in our living room when I was young, to watch my favorite TV show of all time. No, it wasn't the Saturday morning cartoons, but the World Wrestling Federation. To me, it wasn't a sport or a form of entertainment, but a fantasy world I wanted so badly to live in, a world of immortal superheroes who fought for complete supremacy over the less powerful, to rule the universe.

Having the same desire to reign supreme, my friends and I would parade around our neighborhood in nothing but our undies and war paint like our idols, the Ultimate Warrior and Hulk Hogan—bashing each other, pinning each other, trying to determine who would be the ruler of the world that day.

The thrill of ruling over each other and the excitement of proclaiming that "I am the WWF champ!... of Kalihi!" lost its original edge as I grew older. Besides, we can't have high school wannabe wrestlers running around campus in BVD's and makeup, now can we? With much thought, I figured out a way to express my enjoyment for wrestling without having to serve time for indecent exposure. I took the next step in fulfilling my life-long dream and joined the elite group of people known as "The McKinley High School Wrestling Team." How exciting it was to be labeled a "wrestler!" I was on my way to becoming one of the superheroes that I'd always admired on television.

Practices, hard and exhausting, were complete understatements and were held after school from 3:30-6:30 p.m. Being in top physical shape was emphasized before I even thought about setting foot in the ring. Coming close to near-death experiences from exhaustion and having to stick it out even when I was literally running on a flat spare, I found this raw, explosive, inner ferociousness that I never knew I possessed.

Gathering all my strength, all my hate, all my love, my last sense of sanity, brought about this psychotic "kill or be killed" instinct that made me go that extra mile to claim victory over my opponent.

Finding the strength, courage, and natural
instincts in myself after weeks of pure physical conditioning, the techniques I learned helped me harness that energy. Having the patience to learn, the discipline to practice, and the respect for my fellow warriors were the necessities for a mentally focused mind of a true and honorable wrestler.

Having been taught the disciplinary aspects of wrestling, my whole perception of the sport had changed dramatically from being superheroes with unimaginable powers, to being mortal men engaging in raw, man-to-man combat, fighting for power in a raging war.

Battling other wrestlers in matches tested my newly found courage. A mixed feeling of thousands of emotions would flood my mind as the time of combat approached. Setting foot in that circle in front of hundreds of eager eyes, with my teammates cheering for me didn't bring out the heart of a champion. Instead it brought out the insecurity of a coward. All those long, hard, three-hour practices, all those times I wanted to just give up and walk out, all those times I tried, failed, and finally succeeded—all that to feel like a coward?! Where was my courage, my discipline, my faith? NOWHERE ............

A feeling of despair and hopelessness came over me as I approached my opponent. We lock up.... Confusion.... Think, think, think!.... What am I supposed to do?... Help!.. As I looked into his eyes, I saw a reflection of what I used to be. The viciousness, the ferociousness, he had it and I couldn’t find it.

Second round. Exhausted... Ready to drop dead.... Scared.... I feel no purpose anymore.... All at once I remembered the core elements of my training. DISCIPLINE!!! “What, you losing? You tired? You scared? Get up, fight like a man, and kick his ass!!!! No pain, no gain baby!” A wave of ferocity overcame my whole body. Sanity lost its authority as I was driven by raw, animal instincts. Cheer on by my coaches, teammates, and the hundreds in attendance, cowardice quickly subsided as the “Psycho man from Kahi Mohala” was reborn. “Kill’em, Kill’em! Or he’s gonna take your heart!” I knew that one man would lose and the other would emerge victorious and I sure as hell wasn't about to go quietly into the night. Exploding with intensity, I gathered up every single ounce of strength I had left, picked up my opponent, and slammed him face first into the mat.

This nine-minute, three-round match all came down to who wanted it more, who was willing to go that extra mile, who had the drive to survive in this critical time period. Close to fainting from extreme exhaustion, I let out a monstrous yell, and turned my opponent’s ass over, and held on to the pin with my last bit of strength. At that moment nothing else mattered but me, him, and the war we had engaged in.

The whistle blows.... Pin!!..... Randy wins!!..... McKinley takes first.... I jump to my feet and let out a primal scream which is greeted by
shouts from the other wrestlers and cheers from the standing crowds. I did it! I truly felt like one of the superheroes I had always admired as a child. The shouts of praise, the looks of admiration, and the respect from all others was what bonded my experiences in becoming a wrestler to the fantasy of it all as a child.

As an innocent, naïve little boy, the idea of super-humans battling amongst each other was what drew me in. The love of it made me join others in the quest to become legendary, and the experiences helped me capture the true essence of what wrestling really meant. Words couldn’t express how I felt as I succeeded in reaching my goals, and living out my life-long dreams. For a brief moment…. I was immortal…. I had the status of a god…. I felt like The Rock ……… I WAS THE ROCK!!!

"Now shut your mouth and know your role!!…. If you smell….what The Rock is cookin’!!!"
I remember the exact day my father realized I was dating a black man. It was the first time I realized my father was a racist. It was also the first time I realized my mother was a hypocrite. Their reaction bewildered me. It shocked me. It stunned me. But most of all, it shamed me. This confused me the most. Why should I feel shame? But this was their shame, not mine.

One of the first things I learned as a child was shame. Whenever I was naughty or mean, my mother would look at me with a stern expression on her face and say to me, "Shame on you," or "You should be ashamed of yourself!" I would feel badly at the time, not knowing if guilt and shame were interchangeable concepts. I would soon learn that sometimes they are.

I was never formally introduced to the concept of "interracial relationships." I was born into an interracial family. My father is Caucasian and my mother is Japanese, Spanish, and Filipino. I was never taught that races or ethnicities should date only their own "kind." I never knew what "kind" or category of people I fit into. Because I am multi-racial, I feel that I cannot claim an individual race to define myself. White people do not consider me white. Japanese people do not consider me Japanese. Filipino people do not consider me Filipino. Spanish people do not consider me Spanish. Luckily, I blend in perfectly in the "melting pot" called Hawaii.

My father was in the United States Navy, and for most of my childhood, we lived on military bases. Anyone who has not lived on a military base, would find it hard to understand how separated we were from the civilian world. Living on a military base is like living in a completely different culture. A person never has to leave the base if he or she does not choose to. Each base has its own grocery store, department store, bowling alley, fast food restaurants, gymnasium, gas station, and swimming pool.

My neighbors were from all regions of the United States, Guam, Samoa, and Puerto Rico. I had African-American neighbors, Mexican neighbors, and white neighbors. Living in this type of environment taught me to get along with people who did not look like me. In fact, I met very few people who were as multi-racial as I am. I have lived in San Francisco, Philadelphia, Texas, and Hawaii. I saw many interracial relationships when
I lived on the mainland and also in Hawaii. I looked at interracial relationships as completely ordinary. I didn’t see anything wrong with individuals of different races falling in love. I think this experience was different for my parents.

When my father joined the U.S. Navy, just before the Vietnam War, he encountered other ethnicities for the first time. He learned quickly that you had to be able to trust the man working next to you, behind you, and in front of you. The color of the person was not important. You had to be able to trust him with your life, and he had to be able to trust you with his.

Occasionally, my father would have his friends come over after work for a drink or two. His two best friends were a Filipino man and a Black man. In fact, when his Black friend came to visit us in Hawaii, my dad gave him a big welcome hug. I was amazed because I had never seen my dad hug anyone—except maybe my mother.

My mother grew up in Kalihi, Hawaii. She graduated from Farrington High School. I saw her high school year book once, and I don’t remember seeing any Black people. After graduating from high school, she attended Queen’s Hospital Nursing School where she was the president of her class. There were no Black students there either. She wasn’t really exposed to African-Americans until after she married my father, and left Hawaii. I don’t remember seeing my mom associate with too many people outside of her family. When we were in Hawaii, she socialized with her sisters. When we lived abroad, she stayed busy with work and with us, her immediate family. Even though my parents’ lives tended to lack exposure to cultural diversity, they made sure their children were exposed to a multitude of different cultures. I never thought I would one day question my parent’s sincerity in promoting racial harmony.

When I first showed interest in the opposite sex, my parents never asked me what type of men I would date. I never thought it would be an issue, and they never made me feel that they were overly interested in the race of my suitors. I had dated men of different ethnicities—an Englishman, a Puerto Rican, and an Italian. When I first started dating an African-American, I never thought to inform my parents that he was Black. It did not even occur to me to mention it. Once, when I came home from the movies, my father informed me that my friend was not to pick me up from my home anymore. I was so stunned: I didn’t question him about it. I went into my room and stewed over it. I never had to have my other friends pick me up elsewhere, so why now? The only difference was my date was Black. I didn’t want to think that could be the reason. I was uncomfortable bringing up the topic with my father.

I waited a while, then I approached my mother. I asked her if the reason my friend had to pick me up away from our home was because he was Black. There was a long pause, then the answer.
She confirmed it. I asked why. There was no answer. I told her, I thought I had a right to know. Her answer this time was, “Because.”

I asked, “Do you think that is right? Do you think that is fair?”

“That is just the way it is,” was her reply.

“How can that be? That is not what you taught me all these years. You said that I was to treat everyone the same...that we were no better than anyone else.” She said, “It’s different with Blacks.” Then I quietly said, “Shame on you Mother, for saying that.” And she said it with such a straight face. Amazing.

After that fiasco, I had my date pick me up around the corner from my house. My house was four homes away from the corner, so I figured it was a safe distance away. Well, I thought wrong. When I came home, my dad said that I did not have my date pick me up far enough away. So, I asked him, “Exactly how far would be far enough?” His reply was one hundred feet. The next time I had my date pick me up, I had him pick me up approximately one hundred feet away. My father could still see the car. He was not satisfied. When I came home, the new distance requirement was now one hundred yards. “One hundred yards! That is a football field away!” He replied that it was his house, and his rules.

The day that I had planned to inform my parents that I intended to marry my Black boyfriend finally arrived. Knowing that I was going to be disappointing my parents made me a little sad, but I knew that it had to be done. Every girl wants her father to walk her down the aisle on her wedding day, but I knew better than to ask. I told my mother that I was going to get married. Her reply was, “Well you’re going to do what you want. Okay then, what about children?”

Apparently, she felt that having children who were half-black would have detrimental reflections on my parents. I asked how she could say that when I am multiracial? I said “If your parents thought like you, then you would never have been born. If you and my dad really believed that, then you would never have had me. Your whole argument is hypocritical. I thought you always said we should practice what we preach.”

When I told my father that I was going to be married, he said, “Make your bed.” Although his remark left me very heavy-hearted, I had resolved that I was not going to let my parents’ hang-ups stop me from marrying the man I loved. Neither of my parents attended my wedding, although my brother said my mom really wanted to come. In fact, my brother was the only member of my family who came.

Newlywed life kept me too busy to be too depressed over the rift between my parents and me. My husband was sent away on deployment a few months after we were married. My husband’s absence proved to be a catalyst in closing the gap between my parents and me. My father invited me
over for dinner one night, and they asked me many questions about my husband. What kind of family did he come from? What were his ambitions? Did he like the Navy? Did he want children? How did he feel about my continuing my education? Did he ever abuse me? Did he make me happy? Baby steps, sure, but I was encouraged by their interest. Maybe there was room for hope after all.

The time to make peace came a few months later. They knew my husband would be coming home from deployment soon, and if they wanted to continue the rapport we had built, they would have to accept my husband. They realized that although I am part of their family, he was my family now. They did a great job at putting their differences behind them and making my husband feel welcome. I am not foolish enough to think that they were cured of their racial biases, but they never let those shameful sentiments show.

I guess that making sacrifices is part of being a parent. They put their opinions to the side to unite our family.

My parents went far and beyond lip service. For the benefit of our family, they welcomed both of us into their home to live for three months so that we could build our savings. No one incident remotely resembling prejudice could be detected. They have continued to be extraordinarily supportive over the years. If there was ever a time when I needed help financial or otherwise, they never hesitated to lend a helping hand.

I remember the time that I told them I was expecting my son, Anthony. I was a little apprehensive about telling them because I was not sure how they were going to accept the news. I wanted them to be happy for me and share in my excitement. My mother had once told me that my husband and I should not plan on having children. I was afraid that my parents might treat my child the same way they feared society was going to treat him. I am proud to say that this was one fear that I would not have to face.

What was my parent's reward for their sacrifice? One reward was seeing their daughter happy, married to a wonderful man. If he makes me happy and treats me well, what should it matter what color he is? I think their best reward of all is their grandson. Had they let their pride continue to rule their actions, they might have missed out on bonding with their only grandson who is a happy, well adjusted, and most handsome little boy.

I think that it is possible for the world to change. If a person is shielded from different cultures, they cannot fully appreciate the diversity that exists in the world today. If a person judges different ethnicities by hateful or ignorant stereotypes, then he or she is doing a disservice to people of all races, even if not intended. On the other side of the coin, it is only through exposure that racial tolerance is achieved. Perhaps with exposure to different cultures and acceptance of the variations that exist, society might live in
harmony. If my parents could make adjustments, then it is possible for us all to get along in this world. It takes sacrifices, an open mind, and taking that first step. We have to put those ideas that separate us as a nation aside. Expose yourself to people from different cultures. Take time to learn about each other. Learn to accept those things that you cannot change. It makes the journey so much easier. Yes, we are all different, but we should rejoice in those differences instead of letting them divide us.

The road is full of twists and turns. If we, as a nation, are up to the challenge, the journey is only a hundred yards long.
While Don Ho and his "Tiny Bubbles" song was blowing up in Waikiki and throughout the world, a young musician was trying to make a name for himself. Anthony Bee, better known as Tony Bee, was playing music on the streets of Waikiki. His fingers would strum the ukulele like no one had ever seen before. His voice was sharp as a needle and clear as a sky-blue day. Tony was making a name for himself in Waikiki.

Tony's interest in music started at a very early age. As a child, his mother, Esther, encouraged him, as well as the rest of his brothers and sisters, to be involved with music. She helped them to realize that playing an instrument could help them in their lives and maybe lead to a career in music. Tony, being the youngest sibling in the family, was the last child to choose and learn how to play an instrument. He decided to play the piano. His mother sent him to piano lessons daily for the first year. Tony was quick to learn the keys of the piano. After three years of learning and playing the piano, his interest quickly moved on to something similar yet different. Tony's aunt introduced him to a six-string ukulele. Just as he had done in learning how to play the piano, Tony struggled a little. But he soon found himself learning to strum the ukulele like a veteran.

Throughout his schooling years, Tony always carried his ukulele. Tony played and practiced constantly, sometimes forgetting to finish his homework assignments. Teachers in school told him that without an education, he was not going to have a well-paying job. Having this always said to him, Tony was determined to prove his teachers wrong; he was determined to graduate and become a musician.

Commencement time arrived and Tony was excited to walk down the aisle to received his diploma. Two weeks prior to graduation, Tony's counselor asked him if he could accompany his class as they sang the school alma mater. Tony happily accepted the invitation. Daily, for the next two weeks, he practiced very hard learning how to play the school's alma mater. Graduation day arrived and Tony was ready. Before singing the alma mater, the class president announced, "This year's graduating class would like to do something a little different than usual. Will Anthony Bee please stand. Anthony will be accompanying us with his ukulele while we sing the school alma mater". As the class
stood up. Tony walked to the front and started playing the introduction to the song. A few moments later, the students started to sing while Tony played. Happy and excited, his mother started to cry. Not only was she proud of his graduating, but also because he played his school's alma mater.

While Tony's fellow students started leaving Oahu for mainland schooling, he decided to stay home and venture into the music industry. Knowing a couple of musicians who played nightly in Waikiki and having an aunt who was a very famous musician, helped Tony's dreams turn into reality. Famous singers like Sonny Chilingworth, Genoa Keawe, Atta Issacs and Gabby Pahinui helped Tony to get exposure. Every night, Tony would perform in different Waikiki hotels with some of these musicians. Tourists would be amazed at the way his fingers strummed the ukulele. Playing with these musicians helped Tony to learn new chords and songs. By age twenty-five, major Waikiki hotels wanted Tony to play for their dinner shows. Tony accepted an offer to star at the Sheraton Waikiki. His limelight was cut short due to the draft.

Tony was drafted into the United States Army where he served for four years. Being drafted didn't stop Tony from playing his ukulele. He was not allowed to carry it around the barracks, but he was able to play it in his room. Playing the ukulele for his fellow soldiers gave him a "natural high". They stared eagerly at his fingers while he played. Once while doing his daily duties, his sergeant called him into his office to notify him that he was chosen to accompany the king of rock and roll, Elvis Presley, when he came to visit the barracks. How happy Tony was when the offer was made. Elvis came and played a few songs for the guys and then said, "There is a certain individual that can tear up the ukulele like no other. Is there an Anthony Bee out there?" Tony came on stage eager and nervous, and played with the King of rock and roll for an hour. The barracks were shut down for the performance. "What a day it was, playing with the king of rock and roll." Tony commented.

After serving in the army for four years, Tony came back home to Oahu, but found that many new and upcoming entertainers were hitting the streets of Waikiki, showing their stuff. Tony decided to retire at an early age and start a family. He played at parties and sometimes was invited to play at hotels with former friends. He started working for the government and is soon to retire. Tony says, "I am grateful for the many opportunities that I had in my life as an entertainer, and will cherish every moment." I am proud to say that Tony Bee is my grandfather.
"Hello out there? Can anyone understand me? I'm trying to tell you that I hate coloring; you give me a crayon and I scribble a few lines. Wow, whoop-di-doo. I'm still not going to color the picture no matter how many times you tell me to do it, or how long you try to make me sit in front of this dumb picture. There are better things I can be doing. I could be playing with my friends, playing with my favorite train set, or even taking to my friends who act like they know what I'm saying. Forget this, I'm going to get out of coloring this picture and do something I want to do!" As Wes tries to complete the task, I can envision him thinking this as he tries to escape the confines of his desk.

I say to Wes, in a direct, stern, demanding voice, "Sit down! Finish coloring this picture. You can play with your trains later."

Being misunderstood is frustrating. Being understood is often taken for granted. The thought process involved with speaking is extremely complex. Nerve impulses must travel over the synaptic cleft (space between the axon and dendrite ends of a neuron) so the proper nerve impulse can be passed from neuron to neuron, thereby coordinating one's tongue, lips, and vocal cords along with hundreds of other parts to make one simple sound. The velocity at which these parts work and the ability for them to create sounds that produce words can be taken for granted. To actually break down the mechanics of speech to this level is perhaps a little farfetched, but to someone whose brain cannot perform these basic functions can mean the difference between a smooth, correct way down a flight of stairs and a rough, tumbling fall.

On a bright, wonderfully breezy day, Wes and I went to the aquarium. "Shish! Shish!" Wes cries out as the bright, magnificently colored fish effortlessly float through the tank. "Boo shish, yellow shish, red shish!" The colors catch his eye as he points to a parrot fish and a long-nosed butterfly fish.

As I urge him to walk further down the gloomy corridor he comes across something odd. As he stands there mesmerized and excited I can almost hear him thinking, "Look a wall of water. I can jump in and play with the fish. That would be so cool!" Then, slam! Wes runs into the 6-inch thick plexiglass that separates the man-eating tiger shark from a hefty meal. After slamming into the
glass, he comprehends what just happened and realizes that he will not be able to swim with the fish. Then he recognizes the razor sharp teeth of the shark and he reacts, "Shish bite!" Continuing on our journey, we encounter the reef exhibit where the attendant lets us touch the sea cucumber and other shell fish. Having no concept of safety, Wes extends his arms aggressively and fearlessly into the water. Luckily, I catch him in time so his hands do not get punctured by the sharp spines of the spiny sea urchin.

Remembering how much fun and excitement Wes and I experienced at the aquarium, I planned another outing for us, this time to the zoo—huge animals, many different sounds, an aroma therapist’s nightmare. We park on the street where Kapahulu Avenue meets Kalakaua Avenue. The street is really busy on this particular day. I get out of the car to feed the parking meter before I help Wes out, but Wes finds a way to open the door and blitz his way into the street. He has no concept that cars are bigger than him and can hurt him. He doesn’t even understand the idea of danger or death. I apprehend him before he reaches the double solid line in the middle of the street, but not before he has already crossed almost two lanes of traffic. Terrified, paralyzed, confused, excited—these feelings and a million more shot through every inch, every limb, every living part of me. Do I scold him, do I say, “forget the zoo” and just go home? How do I express to Wes that what he just did was very dangerous? How do I tell him so he will understand and not forget. I wasn’t successful, because to this day he still runs into traffic.

From the first two outings with Wes, I learned that: First, he loves the water, and second, he must be dropped off. So, what better place to take him than the district pool. I still have to watch him carefully, but since the pool is enclosed, Wes can’t run away too easily. So I make arrangements to do just that. When we arrive, I put his life vest on him so he can paddle and kick around in the pool. The lifeguard, however, has other plans for the life vest. “You can’t use any flotation devices in the pool.” Basically, he means, “If we let you put on that vest, you’ll leave him in the pool and expect us to watch him.”

I take Wes by the hand as we put his vest into a vacant cubbyhole next to the shower, where we both rinse off quickly. We stroll to the shallow end of the pool and I jump in first, but I am too slow. Wes ends up jumping in at the same time. I end up scrambling frantically to grab him and get him above the surface so he won’t drown. As I pull him up to the life sustaining air, I think to myself, “Wes knows he can’t breath under water, so why would he just jump in? I think he knows that I’m here to protect him—smart kid.

Helping Wes swim around the pool, I realize that he is not any lighter in the water. I’ve carried him many times, but in the water, where objects are close to being weightless, he still feels
like a four foot, eighty-five pound, six-year old. As he gasps for air Wes cries, "Shishi, Shishi." I notice all the parents and children stop what they are doing to observe Wes’ next move. Being the good, caring person everyone there hopes I am, I take him to the bathroom. After he takes care of his business we go through the shower ritual before we go back into the pool. I quickly slide in this time so I can prevent Wes from jumping in, and I am successful this time. We continue his aquatic therapy—kicking and flailing his arms is good motor-skill development for a child like him.

Despite Wes’ actions and his inabilities, he is such a delight to be around. Innocent, humorous, loving, joyful and temperamental are just a few of his many characteristics. Wes has cerebral palsy and a behavioral problem. He also has a slight weight problem because he lives to eat. He requires more love and attention than normal kids, but it’s not his fault. I work directly with Wes and other special needs children and it bothers me to see how some people treat them. People know these children have special needs. But should these children be ignored as if they have a contagious disease when they try to shake or hold someone’s hand? Absolutely not. If a child says “Hi,” do you look at them as though they are speaking a foreign language? If we all appreciate the gifts we have, it might change our feelings toward these children. Domestic violence, drugs, and other factors continue to contribute to disabilities in children. A few years ago, when I thought about having my child, I was concerned with, “I want a boy rather than a girl,” or “I think I only want one child.” Now my thoughts are, “I want my baby to be normal and healthy.” Being normal and healthy is often taken for granted.
As I wait for the person that I am going to interview, I start to think back to the days when we were small. We always had fun and we could always count on each other. Whenever we had problems, we would always talk about them. Things have changed now and we have both grown in different ways. I always wondered about her life, but never asked her. I guess tonight will be the time that we catch up on old times.

The bus stop on Kuhio Ave. is packed with people who are going home after a long day at work. You can see the strain on their faces, as they take periodic looks down the street wondering if they missed their bus. Men and women dressed in their aloha patterned uniforms wait with their bags by their side and a drink in one hand. A few are trying to smoke away all the stress that they have accumulated. Periodically you can hear the striking of matches and the first deep puff. The area is full with smokers all trying to huddle around the ash tray to flick their ashes and dispose of their cigarette butts. The smoke in the area billows from the ash tray and makes a nonsmoker have a difficult time breathing.

The Japanese tourists are all looking at their maps trying to figure out what way they have to go to get back to their hotels. They sound like they are arguing with each other, unsure if they should trust the other person. A Japanese national asks me, "pinku hoteru?" I giggle at the way she says it and I tell her that it is located on the other side of the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center. She gives me a strange look and tilts her head to the side. I then realize that she does not understand a word that I say. The bright red lipstick on her lips is smeared and beads of sweat roll down her wrinkled cheeks. I point to her map that she has in her hand and show her where the pink hotel is located. She smiles, showing her black rotten teeth. She talks to the group for a second and then they all turn around, bow, and in unison say "domo."

I notice the working people disappearing and the night people starting to come out. The bus stop is now empty and the drug dealers and prostitutes are making their way out. They look around to make sure that the police don't see them. The drug dealers seem to have on sun glasses, to hide the glassy blood shot eyes that would show their depressing life style. The tourists gawk at the long, sexy legs of the prostitutes that glisten with
the reflection of the street lights. The older males stare with their mouths wide open, as if their tongues are going to fall out. A few of their wives see them looking at the prostitutes' rear ends and slap them on the back of their heads to wake them from their trance.

I feel a tap on my shoulder and smell the seductive aroma of perfume. I turn around and see the one that I have been waiting for. The soft cute features of her face make her look all of 19 years old. The smell of the perfume makes me want to go over to her and take a deep breath to enjoy all the pleasures of the scent. Her five-foot, ninety-pound frame is stunning and I can not believe that this cute little girl is out here.

She looks at me with a smile and says, "Let's go somewhere out of view." We walk over to the stairwell that is located next to the "Zanzabar" night club and we sit down. People may wonder why a security officer and a "hooker" are sitting in a stairwell. She looks at me and says "It's been a long time since we talked." I agree and we continue to sit there looking at each other with this blank look on our faces. I tell her that her tardiness has never changed and she laughs and hits me on my shoulder.

I tell her I still can not believe that she is doing what she does. She laughs and says, "I've known you long enough to know what your first question will be." I tell her to give it a try and she responds, "Why?" I look at her and can still see that little girl that I used to play with after elementary school. The soft features of her face and the smile are still there, but something is different. It could be the shortest skirt that I ever saw, creeping up her thighs, or it could be that seductive smile that she must have learned with her experience on the street. Whatever it is, it feels like she is not someone that I've known since my childhood.

"I have known you my whole life and I find it hard to see you walking the streets," I plead, with a disgusted look on my face. She replies, "I have to, my man told me that I have to do this." As I try to read her facial expressions, I can see deep in her eyes she is not enjoying her life. She then adds, "Well it's hard, I kind of hate it, but the money's good. I would stop but my man is going to get mad if I don't do this." I look at her and ask her, "What kind of man is he if he makes a young, beautiful girl sell her body". She continues to sit next to me with a blank look on her face.

Breaking the momentary silence, I ask her what kind of money she is making. She replies, "I think, on an average night in the busy season, I can make about a thousand dollars, but on slow nights I'm lucky to make two to three hundred." I now understand why a young girl would waste her whole life for quick cash. I look at her soft cheeks and see that as pretty as she is, she is not wearing any make up. The natural beauty of her face is stunning.
Hearing from other girls about how they have to give all their money to their man, I make a comment that she must be rich by now and she says, “No way, I give all my money to my man. He has all the money.” I ask, “All of it?” and she replies, “My man takes all the money and if I want something he buys it for me. If I buy something I have to show him the receipt.” It is hard for me to take this. I remember how strong-willed she once was and looking at how weak she is now makes me cringe. Her eyes get smaller and I can see the tears building up inside so I decide that it is a good time to get off the subject.

“There are a lot of risks, you have to always watch out for the cops because if you are get caught you will get that geographical thing.” I remember that the geographical thing that she is talking about is the new law that says if you get caught for prostitution in Waikiki you will be banned from Waikiki between 9pm and 6am. I ask her how long the geographical thing lasts and she replies, “Depends on the judge, maybe six months to a year.”

I ask her if there are other risks and she pauses as she sticks her head out of the stairwell and looks around cautiously. She goes on to say, “Well, you don’t want the other pimps to see you slacking, or they will tell your man and you would be in trouble. You also have to be careful what kind of johns you date. They sometimes want to beat you up, steal your money and rape you.” “Has anything ever happened to you?” I ask. She looks at me with a blank look as if she is reliving the scene in her mind and says, “My man beat my ass a few times and once this john raped me.” By the expression on her face, I can tell that she is reliving every horrifying detail in her mind. “When my man beat me I stayed home for a month and when I got raped the guy stole all my money.” She tells me the details, but it is too much for me to bear. I can not understand what kind of power these men have over innocent young girls.

“Why did you get involved with your man in the first place?” I ask in disgust. She tells me the story, “It started when I met my man about six years ago at Pearl Ridge Shopping Center and he was really nice to me. He even bought me a cell phone and clothes.” she pauses for a moment as she collects her thoughts and goes on to say, “About six months after I started dating him, he started beating me up. I was scared. He told me that he needed money and that he wanted me to work in a strip club, so I agreed.” She gives me a fake smile as if trying to make me believe that it does not bother her. “After a few months he forced me to work in the massage parlor, and then on the streets. That is how a lot of the girls get started.” The look on her face said it all. I know that she does not like what she is doing, but she is afraid of her so-called “man”.

Her cell phone rings and she talks for a second then hangs up. She turns to me with tears
in her eyes and tells me that she has to go. As she starts to walk away I grab her arm and tell her that we will be friends forever and that if she needs anything to just ask. A tear rolls down her cheek as she says “thank you” and walks away. As I watch her walk down the hallway I see her turn around every few steps to look back at me. This makes me feel depressed.

Everything goes in slow motion as she turns the corner and goes out of sight. The surroundings are now quiet and there is not much going on except for the night club next door. Friends of mine working at the club look at me and ask what we were talking about, but by the look on my face they know that they should not say more.

I found out what I wanted to know, but still it was not satisfying. With every question that she answered, she gave me a hundred more to think about. I wish that I was there by her side to help her through this, but she also has to want it for herself. A childhood friend that I will always respect is hurting and it makes me hurt even more to know that. If there was only some way to help her.
Sometimes it's the things you don't do that change your life. As a child, I was raised to take responsibility for myself. My parents always told us that it was our burden to provide for our own existence. My father told me that sometimes people are poor simply because they lack the willingness to work hard. In our family it was a shame to turn to the government for assistance, it was not done. If, for some reason, you were unable to care for yourself, it was your family's responsibility to help you. Yet, fear of judgment and shame kept you from wanting to be in this position. This was, perhaps, the reason I found it very difficult to turn to my family for help when I found myself unable to adequately care for myself and my children.

It was a bad time for the people of our country, and in particular, the state of Texas. The unemployment at that time was the highest of any other state. Our area, south Texas, and the city where I lived, Corpus Christi, were hit especially hard. We had previously, in the few years past, enjoyed a growing economy. New businesses sprang up. The building industry was at an all time high. Corpus Christi, being a resort area, opened many new hotels and restaurants to cater to the rapid increase in tourism. Many new jobs were provided. It was a boom time for area residents, and those who traveled from other areas because of the opportunities in Corpus Christi. However, it was not to last. The boom crashed, big time. Hotels and other businesses closed, the old fell with the new. The housing market was flooded with too many homes that no one could afford to buy. You couldn’t sell a house because they were worth less than what you owed on them, and nobody had money to buy anyway. We had no money. We had no jobs. It was a terrible time. It was an event in this scene that was to have the most impact on my life and my future.

I had married at seventeen. By age twenty-two I had three children, and was in an abusive relationship. At age twenty-four, after finding myself in the hospital following one too many beatings, I decided to call it quits on my marriage. I had tried to make it work. I had held on by straws. It wasn't working. My young husband, who was two years older than I when we married, was a drug addict and had grown progressively more violent as the years went by. He could not be responsible for a marriage relationship. I feared for the safety and
future of my children. I was the one who would have to be the responsible person. For them. For me.

I moved in with my sister, refusing to return to my home until my husband left. He refused to leave until the divorce was finalized, and the courts threw him out. It was different then. Spouse abuse did not mean jail for the abuser, and it did not provide much help for those who were abused. I didn’t know where to turn. I didn’t have a job. I didn’t know who would help me. But, I had my sister, and that was a start.

Going back to my parents was out of the question. My marriage relationship had been seemingly long, and without a doubt, rocky. My mother, in particular, had begun to lose her patience with me and my problems. When I married she told me that I had made my bed and now I could lie in it. My father had told me to ignore her, but I could not. When I called my mother to tell her of the last fight, and to inform her that it was finally over, that I could take no more, she responded with a complaint about my inability to get my life together. I would never go back to her. I could take care of myself! I debated over welfare. I could convince myself that I deserved it. I had worked before. I wasn’t a freeloader. I just needed help. My life as a young adult had never been easy, but this time I was really scared.

I went down to the local welfare office. I picked up the forms. I had to stand to fill them out because the office was packed. The lines were horrendous. I didn’t know that there could be this many people in need. I wondered how many were really in need of welfare, and how many were, like my dad said, lazy. After hours, I finally got a chance to talk to someone about my application. The lady handling my paperwork looked exhausted. She matter-of-factly told me that my application would take four to six weeks to process. Before I could express my shock and dismay over what I was going to do in the meantime, she stated that due to the unusual number of applicants, the processing time was taking longer than usual. “Unfortunately,” she went on, “we will not be able to get you any food stamps for about two weeks.” “But this is an emergency,” I protested, “I have to feed my children!” She looked at me. I felt as bad for her as I did for myself. She really looked tired, and almost sad. She said, “Honey, the whole state is an emergency.” She handed me a paper with an address for a nearby church-run soup kitchen and told me to notify the welfare office if I found work.

I walked out numb. I felt almost guilty for being there. I went back to my sister’s house. I never returned to the welfare office, and never went to the soup kitchen. I had my sister. That was perhaps more than some people had. The next day I started looking for work.

It was hard finding work. I would take anything. I would scrub toilets. All I wanted was honest work for at least minimum wage. How do
you find a job when there aren't any? For every single job I went to apply for, there were dozens of applicants. I didn't have any job skills. I had dropped out of college when I found myself pregnant with my second child, because I was already struggling to attend school and care for my firstborn son. The immigrants in the room with me had more job experience than I did.

My big break came after two weeks of spending hours on the streets searching, almost begging, for a job. One application had a space on it that said something like, "Any other information that would relate to this position." I had written there neatly, "Please hire me. I am a single parent with three children who need food!" One day, upon returning from my daily search, my sister gave me a message from a lady at an area department store. She had requested that I come for an interview the next day, and had left an appointed time.

I went for the interview but was disappointed to find that they had no openings. It was their policy to openly take applications. She was interviewing me for possible future openings. I concluded my interview with a plea. I asked them to consider placing me on call, promising to come within thirty minutes any time they called. The next day they called me back. "We never do this..." was how her conversation started. To make a long story short, they hired me. I kept my promise and they put me on full-time. I eventually became a manager and never had to work at minimum wage again.

I don't know what kind of life I would have had if the events of that day at the welfare office had gone differently. Maybe my life would have been easier. Perhaps the ending would have been a good one, perhaps not. Would going on welfare have made me lazy? Would the lives of my children be different now? The only thing I know for sure is, that at least for a while, my life would have been different from the way I was raised. I am proud of myself for caring for my children without the help of the government. But sometimes I wonder at what cost. Would government assistance have bought me more time to be a better mother? Could I have used the time to go to school and possibly get a better job? My life has definitely been inside out and backwards at times, as I struggled to do the best I could. Looking back I have many questions, but the direction I must go is forward, so I cannot spend too much time in reflection. I must instead continue to choose my path, selecting from the possibilities I have to choose from, and only occasionally look back to see where I've been.
During the last ten years of its existence, Honolulu’s War Memorial, also known as the Natatorium, has become a topic of heated debate among state residents, and a nemesis to our city officials. Our local government’s indecision to resolve the issues concerning its fate has helped to polarize the argument on whether the Memorial should be demolished or restored. As of this writing the courts have cleared the way for partial restoration of said facility; renovation is currently underway. Even so, the contrasting opinions of two main factions deserve to be looked at. We also need to look at the decision to restore the structure. Is the City’s decision sound? Are our tax dollars being put to good use by doing this? Let’s examine the issues, both pro and con.

The first group involved in this debate that we’ll look at is, “Friends For the Natatorium”.

“Friends For the Natatorium” is a coalition of mostly older war veterans who, obviously, want the Natatorium to be restored to its former glory. Their argument is basically of a two-fold nature:

1. Since the whole structure (building and pool) was dedicated to WWI vets who died in service to their country, even partial demolition of it would desecrate the Memorial and dishonor those who bravely gave their lives in the name of freedom.

2. Because the building is on the National Historical Sites Registry, it cannot be torn down, and it is the City’s responsibility to preserve it. From an idealistic point of view, these are strong reasons for restoration, to be sure.

In contrast, the opposing faction in this debate, “Kaimana Beach Coalition” brushes upon several issues supporting the razing of the whole structure. They argue that:

1. The structure is so dilapidated that restoration would cost much more than the currently allocated fund provides for.

2. The addition of new beachfront is sorely needed, as attested to by the City’s willingness to widen Waikiki Beach at the expense of narrowing Kalakaua Ave. by one lane.

3. Kaimana Beach is one of the last beaches left in Waikiki used primarily by locals. Restoration of the Natatorium would ultimately “displace” these local beach-goers.

4. Restoration of the saltwater pool raises concerns about its safety. Projected bacterial levels would be so high that people with compromised
immune systems would be at risk and possibly be banned from swimming there.

Having seen both sides of the coin, the city sided with the proponents for restoration. Unfortunately, it’s taken the city some twenty-odd years, since the Natatorium was closed, to act. Ah yes, the wheels of government truly do move slowly, and in the end they “punked out”. They knew it would take a lot of paperwork to demolish a structure on the National Historical Sites Registry, not to mention time. The Mayor’s office also saw renovation as a chance to create a new tourist attraction, complete with water shows in the “pristine” waters of the saltwater pool. This approach equates to the idea of having a giant ferris wheel at Kewalo Basin; it’s just plain stupidity. I’m sure that when the state courts authorized only partial restoration, excluding the saltwater pool, Mayor Harris was upset, to say the least.

We don’t know if the pool will be renovated or not. Its fate is still up to the court. If it is to be renovated, we’ll have a new place to charge tourists for admission (kind of like Hanauma Bay). If it is to be demolished, then we’ll have refurbished bleachers looking out into nothing. What will they be used for? I think they’ll be used so we, the taxpayers, can watch our wasted dollars float out to sea, and into the sunset! It makes me sick!

I do have a consoling thought though; that when these factions were at war, the state government was idle, and the newspapers were writing articles almost daily about the Natatorium. I was the one person in the whole state that actually did something! Everybody else was all talk and no action, but I was all action. Believe it or not, the Natatorium became my home for two years, and nobody knew! Let me explain.

At the end of 1995 I became homeless. I slept in Kapiolani Park with 25-30 other homeless people. After one month of being rousted in the middle of the night by the police, I decided that there had to be a better way. Then I looked over to see the lonely structure we call the War Memorial, just begging for a tenant. It almost seemed to call my name! Ultimately, one night, I pried the plywood off one of the windows. I rehung the plywood on hinges; two slide locks, and my front door was finished. I then inspected the interior to find a large room with windows that could open and close. As soon as I entered that room, I knew I had found a home. After chasing all the feral cats out, I fumigated thoroughly. Next, I cleaned up all the garbage, swept the concrete floor, and took up residence. Within the first two weeks of moving in, I had installed wall to wall carpet, and painted the walls with a two-toned scheme. I had two walk in closets, a coffee table with beach chairs, and a comfortable bed (which consisted of a door on two cinderblocks, and a brand new futon!). I always had a fresh supply of towels and linen, compliments of Waikiki’s many hotels. These hotels also were where I took showers thanks to their
many employee bathrooms!

All in all, I'd have to say that I was "bullet-proof!" I was living on the waterfront of the most famous beach in the world! I lived in a building that was on the National Historical Sites Registry, and I wasn't paying a dime for rent!

What I expected to be a one-two month stay, stretched out into two years of occupancy. During those two years I developed a true understanding of the Natatorium. I'd be reading in the newspaper that the City had proposed how the Natatorium was to be renovated, and I'd laugh out loud! Not just because I was reading the paper in the Natatorium, but because they had no idea as to the integrity of the structure. The state even had architectural plans drafted; structural engineers had deemed the building restorable! This conclusion had to be influenced by the Mayor's office and his spin doctors. No one had actually gone into the structure to inspect it. Had they done so they would have found three things:

1. They would have seen severely cracked concrete and rusted reinforcement bars in all of the main support beams. They would have had to conclude that the structure was beyond repair; the integrity of the structure had been compromised and renovation would be impossible.

2. They would have better observed the results of "crystallization", a process that I'll go into detail about later.

3. They would have found me! (Or at least my living quarters!)

Fortunately for me, the City never discovered that they had a squatter at the Natatorium. Unfortunately, neither did they find out the true condition of the Natatorium. This leads me back to what "crystallization" is. I was told this by a person who actually helped to build the Natatorium, back in 1924. He told me that the sand used to mix with the concrete was never washed; the construction company didn't have the time to wash it. Because of that the sand had large deposits of salt in it. Since the Natatorium's completion in the mid-twenties, that salt slowly recrystallized, and displaced the concrete, creating small fissures throughout the whole structure. Those fissures allowed water to seep in and deteriorate the reinforcement bars.

So in essence, what I'm saying is that the whole structure is falling apart and there's no stopping it. Did you ever read about that in the newspapers? No, you "heard" it here first.

For the last twenty-odd years the Natatorium has been left to die a slow death from decay and neglect. It's a shame the state didn't put it out of its misery by razing the whole structure years ago, yet I still have mixed feelings about it. After having lived in the Natatorium for two years I have developed a sense of nostalgia and a fondness for her. After all, she offered me shelter and warmth, while I, in turn, cared for her and gave her companionship. I am happy for her, and her
promising future.

To the city officials I'd like to say this: "It's about time! After years of the wait-and-see attitude, you have finally acted!"

Even so, this issue remains a controversial one. In the end, only the passage of time will help to ease the tension, and help us to see whether the government's decision to restore the Natatorium is beneficial to the City of Honolulu and the State of Hawaii.
The creature stood isolated in a distant field several miles off the main road. From the main road, it was almost transparent with its nearly see-through body. As I drove closer, the beast began to grow until it loomed over me. By now I could see its many tentacles, which kept it from falling over. Parking close to this titan, I slowly emerged from the truck I was in. Now facing the thing, I could feel my eyes popping out of my head. "OH MY GOD," I screamed silently. There standing before me was truly a monster!

I was twenty-one, with no fears and in the best shape of my life, but I had never been in a situation like the one that I was about to face.

This was my first day at my new job. I had never climbed anything except a few trees when I was a boy. I thought to myself: "What was I thinking when I accepted this job: I must have been crazy to think that I could do this." My new boss told me that this would be a simple guide tower inspection, just a two-man job. I was to go along only to prove that I could handle being up high off the ground.

As I stood staring at this monstrosity, I realized that I was being laughed at. I turned to see my two new co-workers amused by my anxiety.

"Don't worry. Everybody is nervous at first," said Luke, in an encouraging voice.

Then Dan said, "Just remember that no one is forcing you to climb. If you don't think that you can do this, now is the time to say so."

Regaining my composure, I said, "Well I won't know until I try, so let's do this." Luke gave me reassuring smile, but Dan just walked away shaking his head.

After putting on my climbing belt I walked up to the base of the tower. Looking up I saw what seemed like two thousand feet of galvanized steel going straight up into the air. The only thing holding the tower up was a steel wire called a guide cable. The guide wire was attached all the way up the tower. From the tower, the guide wire stretched out and attached to anchor heads. The bodies of these anchor heads were imbedded into the ground. The tower was triangular. Each side was about six feet wide. Inside the tower was the climb ladder. The climb ladder went all the way up to the top of the tower. After I looked around the base of the tower for a minute or two, I entered the beast and began to climb.
For a while the climb didn’t seem like it was going to be too difficult. At first I would stop after every hundred feet and rest, then after every fifty feet, then every twenty-five feet, and finally I wasn’t moving at all. My hands were aching and my legs were trembling uncontrollably. I stayed at that one spot, debating whether to climb down or finish the climb to the top. When I was just about to call it quits and climb down, I heard Dan.

“What are you doing, roosting up here?” Dan said in his smart aleck voice. Then I heard Luke say, “How’s everything going here?”

“I think that he has had enough.” Dan said as he climbed down past me. “Don’t worry,” Luke said with compassion. “After doing this awhile your body will get used to climbing these towers.”

Both Luke and Dan had been to the top of the tower and now they were inspecting the tower on their way down. I knew that I still had enough time to make it to the top of the tower. Once my legs and hands were feeling normal, I started climbing up again. Onwards and upwards I climbed. After awhile my body was wearing out again. Every step felt like my last one, but each time I found the strength to keep climbing. Then I saw it. There it was, the top of the tower. I might have been more excited if I wasn’t so exhausted.

After arriving at the top, and taking a well-deserved break, I started to realize what I had done. I felt like I had conquered the beast. As I sat there in all my glory, I looked around. During the climb I never looked down or away from the tower. This was my chance to experience a view that is only reserved for eagles. The panoramic view engulfed me, and the excitement that I felt was incredible. Everything I felt made the climb worthwhile.

The tower now seemed different, no longer was it a monster. Instead, it was a magnificent creation, a monument to man’s ingenuity.

The adrenaline rush that was going though my body from being on top of the tower made the climb down a lot easier. When I got back on the ground, I knew that this would be the life for me. Although my body felt like I just had run a marathon, my spirit had never been so energized. When I turned around I saw Luke and Dan who were both smiling at me. They knew the emotions that I was feeling for the first time in my life.

As we prepared to leave, I took one last long look at the tower and thought, “how wonderfully remarkable she is.”
How many lives do we have to live? Most people would say, Just one. However, I can assure you that we have several to live. After I experienced a near-death experience, I found myself to be a firm believer in the nine-life rule. Christmas Day started out like many in the past, but little did I know it would not end like so many before it. Living in Pennsylvania, we were almost guaranteed a cold, white Christmas, and that Christmas Day did not disappoint us.

I woke up Christmas morning to a very cool 32 degrees and a blanket of fresh white snow. I looked out the window and saw only about two or three cars on the road. I thought, today will be a good day to go for a run since traffic will be light. However, I knew I would probably have to put that run on hold until later in the day after all of the family festivities were over.

By the time all of the guests had left and we had cleaned up, evening was near. I had been working quickly so I could get a run in before sunset. As I was putting on my new running shoes and jacket, my mother stated every reason why I should not go for this run. By the way, I am also now a firm believer in “mother’s intuition.” However, being a young twenty-something independent woman, I assured her that I would be fine. So, off I went, with my husband for the run that I had been eagerly awaiting all day.

Outside, the first couple of breaths were painful because the air was so cold. I remember feeling so happy to be finally on my long-anticipated run that the cold air suddenly did not matter. We ran north along a quiet country road. When we turned to make our return trip home, I was thinking about how tired I was. I could hardly wait until I was back inside my nice warm house. However, my next feeling was shear agony!

All experienced runners, I’m sure, can relate to what I am about to say. When you run with a partner, it is very likely that sometimes your partner runs so closely behind you that he may step on your heels. Well, the next thing I heard was thud, and my body was suddenly throbbing with unbelievable pain.

I remember opening my eyes to see my husband’s face filled with fear. I felt as if I had been asleep and had awakened from a horrible dream.

The first words out of my husband’s mouth
were, “Can you believe you were just hit by a car?”

My reply was, “Really?” and I started to laugh. Some people may think by that response that I have a really warped sense of humor. However, I laughed because I found it so unbelievable that I could be hit on this quiet country road on Christmas day. My husband asked me if I could move my neck. He feared the worst and wanted to reassure himself that I was not hurt as bad as he expected.

I attempted to stand up, but my body would not cooperate. The pain was so immense that I crumbled. I was lying on the shoulder beside the road. The ground was very cold, and snow had started to fall. It was so quiet I could actually hear the snowflakes hitting the pavement. The sun was setting, and the temperature was falling well below freezing. There was an eerie silence and no traffic on the road. My husband leaned over me and said, “I need to call” for an ambulance. I have to leave you alone, but only for a few minutes.”

I pleaded with him not to leave me. I was shivering and in intense pain. By the time he convinced me that I would be okay, a car came down the road and stopped. I call the men who stopped, my angels, because that is how they appeared to me. I remember them walking towards me, two young men dressed in black slacks, white shirts and long brown trench coats. One man leaned over me and asked, “What happened?”

“I was hit by a car while I was running,” I said, “and the person did not stop.”

The man laughed and said that had happened to him about three years ago. They both took off their long coats and covered me. The coats were warm, but by this time, I was shivering uncontrollably. One man held my hand and told me to squeeze whenever I felt pain.

I remember lying on the road and thinking how peaceful and quiet the night was. So many thoughts were running through my head at this point. I thought, “It's really cold. Will I be okay? Will I be able to walk?” It's funny how I took life for granted, until something life threatening happened.

My left elbow felt as if it were no longer attached to my body, so I reached down to feel it with my right hand. One man stopped me and said, “You don’t want to do that.” I asked, “Why not?” “You have an open fracture, and the bone is protruding from the skin.”

I took a couple of swallows and said, “No wonder I can't feel my elbow.” I tried to remain calm, but I was falling apart. I was in the fetal position, trying to keep my mind occupied on anything but the pain. However, the pain was winning the game. I could feel myself drifting away and I was fighting very hard to keep my eyes open. Those few minutes of agony and insecurity seemed like an eternity to me. Suddenly, I heard sirens blaring in the quiet night and I knew help was on the way.

Next, I heard the doors of an ambulance
thrashing open and saw about five different faces staring at me while I lay on the side of the road. I kept looking for my husband in those faces but could not find him. As the five strangers prepared me for ride to the hospital, I kept asking for my husband, and it seemed that no one could hear me. Finally, my husband appeared in the crowd of faces, and assured me that I would be okay. However, I was not so sure he was right.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was quickly rushed into an exam room. So many thoughts were going through my mind. Doctors and nurses were steadily flowing in and out of the room, but no one was saying what my injuries were. I did a lot of praying that night, and also reevaluated my life. I made some promises to God. If he made sure I would be okay, I would do something in my life to help other people who are in need.

Today, as I look back today on my “hit and run.” I can see how it has changed my way of thinking about life. I don’t take things for granted as I did in the past. I really try to live everyday to its fullest. I’m also keeping my promise to God by becoming a nurse so that I can someday help other people in need.
When I submerge my body into the ocean I feel her energy rush through my soul. I often let the hassles of life control me, but the sea helps me get a realistic perspective on things. She soothes my troubles by embracing me with a much-needed hug, keeping me safe in her company.

The magnetism of Hawaiian beaches hypnotically draws me in with its sensual caress and leaves me longing for more. The temperature of the ocean invites me in like a soothing bath. I feel comfort walking through the warm, sun-touched sand, feeling the hourglass effect through my toes. The reflections of the ocean catch my eye with an entrancing glow only the Hawaiian sunlight can provide. The sunlight captures the sea’s full range of colors that vary, depending on the depth. The water can be dark blue, almost black in deep areas, whereas shallow sections look as clear as fresh failing rain.

I grew up in Alameda, California, which by definition is an island. Unfortunately, the beach and ocean were never like those in Hawaii. The water at the Alameda Beach, which is off the East Bay of San Francisco, was always an odd-looking grayish/greenish color, like a stagnant pond—not a friendly invitation. I remember a bird sanctuary at one end of the beach that probably explains the odd smells that came off the water. In addition to the Bay’s odd smell and color, the chilling breeze that came off the water gave me goose bumps just thinking about what it would feel like to venture into its cold body.

As a child I still felt compelled to go to the beach and attempt to play in the water, despite its unappealing characteristics. I recall that once in the water, I had to walk at least half a mile out in mushy, dirty green seaweed that squished between my toes, before getting to the shore. Making the best of what was available, I would play in the icy water and enjoy the fact that I was in the ocean. After getting out of the water I would have a dirty film on me that made me immediately want to wash off. I never felt cleansed as I do after a dive into the ocean in Hawaii. My friend shared a story with me that I can relate to: she was born in Honolulu and when she moved to Alameda as a young girl, she recalls crying and crying because of the huge difference between the beaches.

Now that I have the privilege of living in Hawaii, my need to be in the ocean is even stronger.
Since I have lived here, my connection to the sea has been vital for my well-being. The ocean as a whole is my therapist that doesn’t require me to talk. Sometimes when I get caught up in the shuffle of life and start to lose myself, I take time out to dive into the open waters. Getting into the ocean centers me and helps bring me back to the moment. She helps me clear my mind and release myself in a way I am not able to on land. I am able to dive deep under her surface and explore the life beneath me or be held afloat and feel as light as a feather. I am able to be playful, doing somersaults or just splashing around, which helps me release my negative energy.

One of the first activities I learned to do in the Hawaiian waters was surfing. Already having been entranced by the beauty of the ocean, I was taken to another level through surfing. The idea of being able to ride a wave that is a product of the sea’s power completely took me in. I learned about the ocean—she can be unpredictable and at times dangerous if you turn your back on her and don’t give her respect. Because the sea’s strength should never be underestimated, I am always aware of the different conditions that can come my way. If I go out to a new area, I make sure I look for coral reef that could be dangerous.

Because the ocean is unpredictable, she allows me to have a new experience every time I go out. She never hands out the same set of conditions, which makes each experience exhilarating. Every wave that I catch when I surf is a good one to me, whether it is small, big, choppy, or smooth. The fact that I have the ability and opportunity to ride a wave satisfies me.

In addition to my love for surfing, paddling outrigger canoes has become a big part of my life. I am a member of a canoe club, Hui Nalu, that has become my family on the island. The teammates and coaches whom I have worked with have become lifelong friends that I hold close to my heart. We share a connection with the sea that cannot be replaced.

I have raced regatta and distance seasons. Regatta races are sprints that range from two to fifteen minutes and distance races can last forty-five minutes to several hours. When training for sprints we are confined to a small area and are required to frequently stop and start up again. I enjoy paddling in every form possible, but in my experience nothing tops long-distance paddling, when we are able to become one with the water. It makes me never want to stop because I fear that if I do, the high I feel will diminish.

When it comes to long-distance season, my heart smiles and jumps for joy; not only is it great exercise, but I am also able to be out in the middle of the sea utilizing all the area she has to offer. I am able to see areas of the island that cannot be seen from land. One of my favorite races is the twenty-six mile Dad Center Race that starts at Lanikai Beach and heads south, and ends at
Kaimana Beach. The way the waves break and the current flows constantly challenge us and keep us alert so we don’t huli (tip over). The six of us in the canoe become one with each other making sure we follow the stroke in front of us while the steerswoman keeps us on a straight path. It becomes an exciting race because the waters from Makapu’u through Hanauma Bay are rough. At times it feels like we are on a real life roller coaster when one end of the canoe is on the top of a wave and the other end is still at the trough of another. The high that I get from these races makes my heart start pumping faster as I relive the experience in my mind.

When I paddle out in the open sea I feel her free-flowing energy that helps me escape any restraints I put on myself. It is like she hypnotizes me when I feel her salty mist spray my face, like a million little kisses thrown my way. Being out in an area where there seem to be no real boundaries is like being a wild animal released from a cage. It makes me feel like life has no limits and that I am capable of anything. When I am out there it is amazing to see life surrounding me—flying fish crossing my path and sea turtles swimming around with curiosity about the foreign object in their waters. I see the different depths and colors associated with the ocean, how it gets colder and a darker shade of blue when we are in a deeper area and how she is a crystal clear turquoise with the coral reef below when we are in shallow areas.

The sea is universal; she has no prejudices and doesn’t discriminate against anyone. The ocean is full of strength but at the same time it can be tranquil, and people of different backgrounds or of all ages can enjoy her. She brings together all different kinds of life. The beach is a gathering place where loved ones can appreciate the beauty of the ocean and connect with nature together.

All too often negative thoughts about my existence take over my mind. These unfriendly thoughts strangle my well-being like an anaconda killing its prey. I get wrapped up in my head and forget to feed and nourish my soul. I put a lot of pressure on myself to be perfect. I know that it is not possible, but the standards I have are often farfetched. When I don’t reach these expectations I instantly feel like a failure and easily get absorbed into a tunnel of darkness that has no light at its end. If I didn’t have the ocean, I wouldn’t be able to escape the dark cloud that frequently hangs over my head. When I am not in the ocean she still soothes my sorrows. Sitting on the beach and watching the waves move along the surface and listening to them roll into and away from the shore comfort my struggling soul.

I feel complete when I am in the sea. She brings sunshine to my overcast days. She passes no judgments and has no expectations of me, which is why she is my sanctuary, allowing me to be me.
I have wondered about the contributing factors that shaped my father’s attitude and values. I had suspected that the largest chunk of these factors is his World War II experience in 1941. My father continually narrates his war experiences. It seems there are certain war experiences that he cannot erase, and he occasionally experiences nightmares. His recollections of the war reinforce my suspicions, especially when the monthly sirens go on the first day of every month in Honolulu. The monthly sirens and the filming of the upcoming movie “Pearl Harbor” strengthen his attitude. One of his reminders of WWII is a diamond ring, a memento of the war. We all grow up with different experiences, and we choose which to hang on to. We make decisions based on past experiences. From my father’s point of view, the war helped shaped who he is, and in fact, who I am today. His attachment to the past makes sense now.

In December 1941, in the Philippines city of Cebu, my father was taking an exam in high school prior to the upcoming Christmas vacation. Everyone happily anticipated that vacation and dreaded very much the exam on Asian history, a hard exam because Chinese and Japanese names sound almost alike.

As the students nervously stared at the menacing test paper, they heard the word...WAR!! My dad immediately searched through the questions to find out which one it was, the Ming Dynasty Wars or the Japanese Shogun Wars. He was busy placing the right answers to the wrong questions on the questionnaire when suddenly their teacher called for everyone’s attention to announce that the examination would be cancelled. Furthermore, classes would be suspended indefinitely because Pearl Harbor had just been bombed by Japanese planes.

Then my father and the whole class naïvely thanked Japan for releasing them from the nasty exam and for giving them an early Christmas vacation. In jubilation, he and his gang left the classroom and went to the movies. His thoughts were filled with Flash Gordon’s “to be continued” fight with Emperor Ming’s shark-men in a water tank. Flash Gordon was left drowning in the last sequence. In those days, one had to wait for the continuation of a sequence a week later. Of course, Flash did not die and would live until the next week’s episode.
After coming home from the movies, however, his jubilation was doused by news from worried parents huddled in the middle of the streets discussing the consequence of the bombing. To innocent youngsters it was no problem. America could just simply bomb Japan back. They were not thinking about the implications of those actions.

Weeks later, his family evacuated and witnessed first-hand the brutality of the war. His transition from an innocent teenager to a responsible adult was a very traumatic one. As they traveled away from the city, Japanese soldiers stopped their car and did a routine search. Grandfather's revolver was found, and all five people were ordered to line up. Each of them was questioned about its ownership, and each time the person denied the ownership of the gun, that person was slapped. The slapping went around about four times. My father stood helplessly as my grandmother staggered to the ground after the fourth round of slapping until a Japanese officer commanded a halt to the questionings.

During those years, my father saw many brutalities of the war, even Filipinos betraying Filipinos. His uncle lost an ear for being a guerilla; the Japanese cut it off in front of the municipal building for everyone to see. When the tide of war turned against Japan, my father's uncle and the guerillas had a field day exacting their revenge on the Filipino collaborators. My father saw two Japanese soldiers executed on the beach by the guerillas. He heard the roar, saw the might, and felt the awesome force of the returning American forces. He saw Cebu City destroyed three times, first by the Philippine Army on their scourge-earth policy, then by the Japanese bombs and finally by the American bombers. He smelled the fragrance of the American cigarettes, chocolates and GI food.

On another occasion, his family went to a small town called Dalaguete and met an American teacher, Mrs. Searle, who looked lost. The town was in imminent danger of being occupied by the Japanese army, and nobody wanted anything to do with her. Army propaganda depicted the Japanese as brutal, and she would rather die than give herself up. She had a cyanide capsule with her just in case. My father's family decided to take her in and hide her. She became almost a part of the family.

A hidden room was specially built for her with a camouflaged door leading to the dining room. The Japanese army had meager supplies during the war. The soldiers during their march to several towns had to procure food along the way. In contrast, the civilians would barter their belongings for food from the mountain farmers. Wealthy landowners would not mind if they asked for food because they had a surplus. The only food that was palatable to Mrs. Searle was beef liver and fruits, and it was my father's duty to scour the town for those foods.

In one food-hunting patrol, a contingent
of Japanese soldiers passed by the hut where my father’s family was staying and immediately searched the premises for eggs and chickens. One Japanese soldier leaned his rifle against the door leading to Mrs. Searle’s room. Seeing this, my father became nervous because the rifle was leaning against the secret door. My father deliberately tripped the rifle, making it fall to the ground. My dad received a loud berating and was almost struck with the rifle as the soldier picked it up and transferred it elsewhere. My father did not understand what the soldier’s angry words were, but was very relieved when the gun was moved. It could have meant instant beheading for all of the family had the weight of the gun opened the door to the room of Mrs. Searle. Hiding an enemy would mean treason to the “Great Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” campaign the Japanese were launching.

They were successful in hiding Mrs. Searle for months, under the noses of the Japanese soldiers, until she was finally picked up by a submarine delivering arms and ammunition to the underground movement. American forces were very gracious as they passed around American cigarettes, chocolates and GI food. Mrs. Searle gave a large diamond ring to my grandparents as a token of her gratitude for saving her life.

Mrs. Searle’s first letter came after D-Day, around 1945, in which she described how snowy and cold Chicago was. She never mentioned how rich she and her father, Mr. John Hamlin Young, were; their wealth was brought about by the discovery of oil in Mr. Young’s farmland. This wealth made Mr. Young a philanthropist and he built the Salem Memorial Hospital in Chicago. It would have been named after him, but he refused to be identified as the person who financed it. Mrs. Searle’s estate lawyer got in touch with us upon her death and that is how we learned the facts about her life.

Many families were fragmented temporarily and some permanently by the war. My father’s family was one of the few who did not lose a single member. But, what irony! Migrating has fragmented my father’s family since some of my brothers are still in the Philippines. My parents find it hard living with some of their children far away. Perhaps my father’s connection with Mrs. Searle could play a part in reuniting my father’s family because Mrs. Searle’s wealth helped established the Salem Township Hospital and other charities. My father is clinging to the possibility that the Salem Township Hospital would be willing to sponsor the rest of his family.

After more than fifty years, my father became nostalgic as he visited the submarine SS Bowfin at the Arizona Memorial Drive. He never knew the name of the submarine that had picked up Mrs. Searle, so whenever he sees an old submarine he wonders if it was that submarine. He also wonders whether the submarine was lucky enough to see the end of the war only to be recycled.
for its metal, a piece of which could be the
gangplank on which he climbed the submarine SS
Bowfin.

The kindness that the Americans have
shown my father evokes an attitude of idolization
and patriotism. There is a sense of everlasting
gratitude because the American forces were like
saviors. My values of money, family and spirituality
were shaped by my father’s war experiences. While
I appreciate the material things of life, I value being
a part of a close family.
My mother raised my brother and me with a little help from our aunt. My mother pulled graveyard shifts to pay her dues as a nurse in the intensive care unit. My brother and I didn't see her that much while she worked nights. She'd come home from work as we left for school with my aunt, then wake at five to get us set for the night and rush off to work. I remember her always being overwhelmed with both work and parenting. However, the night shifts didn't last very long, and by the time I was in first grade I really began to learn who my mother was.

My mother was a very liberal person. She had no prejudices against any group of people, except people with bad personalities. My mother loved to laugh and smile and be loud with anyone, anywhere. I was always attracted to that glow she had when she was happy. That's how I wanted to be when I grew up.

That glow would come out when she told us stories of living with her best friend, my Aunt Donna. They lived in Waikiki with all the guys who worked at the beach, and had the time of their lives. However, they had to move back to the mainland after a few years because they could not handle the high costs of paradise.

Every summer, my mother, my brother, and I would visit my Aunt Donna who moved back to Hawaii sometime before I was born. My brother and I would have a blast surfing on the rental boards at Waikiki. Of course, we got to use them for free.

I loved Hawaii, the sun, the surf, the trouble-free atmosphere, and that glow in everyone's faces, the same glow I saw in my mother when I was growing up. It was the "aloha spirit," laid-back, kind, and caring. That passion which made people take the time to stop and enjoy the world. I thought that everyone in Hawaii had the perfect state of mind. Of course, many didn't.

I realized this when I was nine years old when my mother decided to move to Hawaii. I was sad to leave all of the kids in my neighborhood, but the thought of living in sunny weather and smiling faces drowned out my sorrows. The irony is that I didn't receive those smiling faces filled with aloha. I actually came to find out that many people had a prejudice roaming through their blood, a bias that caused them to have a sense of disgust towards people—towards haole people. Yet, as I went through the years, I realized that the prejudice
these "locals" had was against the stereotypical mainland culture—the fast pace, get out of my way, anything to win attitude on life, not against white skin.

I will never forget my first day of school. I walked passed the kindergarten and first-grade area and up to the second floor of the "big kid" building. I saw about ten kids sitting outside of the classroom talking and laughing as they discussed their summers. I remember feeling quite relaxed as I walked towards the friendly smiles. I also remember those smiles disappearing as the kids noticed me. Their warm, welcoming eyes turned into steady stares, creating in me a horrible paranoia. I couldn’t figure out what was wrong with me. I had on clothes like them, my face was clean, and everything was all right, yet something bothered them.

That night, I asked my mother about the tension I felt, hoping to get some sort of explanation. She explained that it was because I was a new kid on the block, and some children my age feel uncomfortable when a new person comes along. That sounded like a pretty good answer.

As the weeks passed I began to communicate with everyone, but not on a genuine social note. The kids would talk to me about something dealing with school or comment on the lovely taste of lunch, but that was pretty much the extent of the conversation. I felt I was making progress with the new-kid problem, though I couldn’t find my way past the barrier the children placed between me and them.

I was still curious about this barrier until one day somebody said to me, "You don’t belong here, haole!" I knew what the term meant, because I had heard it many times before, but not in that manner. It finally dawned on me what the barrier was. It was race.

Racism had never been explained in depth to me before, but I watched enough movies to know these kids didn’t like me because I was white. Racism was something I had never needed to really think about because it was never a factor in my life. I didn’t quite understand what people went through until then. All of a sudden the confusion turned to pain. All of my life I had judged and been judged for who I was as a person, and now I was being judged based on my appearance.

About mid-October, the boys began to play football after school: Hawaiian style football, barefoot, legal forward laterals, rush-run, and stick football. This was my chance. If I was going to make true friends, playing football by their rules was a golden opportunity. I thought if they saw me as someone they could play with, they would forget that I was haole. I still didn’t truly know the depth and harshness of prejudice.

The first time I went down to the field was a traumatic experience. I stood there watching as the two captains began picking everyone but me. I was the last guy picked—the loser who got thrown to one side as if each team would prefer
having one less guy. The harsh treatment was terribly demeaning and frustrating to me. Not only was I thought of as socially inferior, but athletically inferior, too. And they hadn't even seen me play! I'll never forget the feeling of going from everyone's favorite in Reno to the absolute bottom of the social ladder, because of my skin color.

As the weeks of barefoot football went on, I needed less and less timeouts to pull the "pokies" out of my feet. One day, one of my teammates said, "Hey, looks like Chris is getting Hawaiian feet!" For a moment I felt as though I was one of them. I began to feel as if they opened the gate and let me in. Then I heard someone else say, "Nah, but he's still haole." Another gate shut in front of me.

That moment really got me thinking. I was curious, were my classmates connecting with me more because the bottoms of my feet were becoming giant calluses, or because I could score touchdowns. Hawaiian feet had nothing to do with my being white.

I felt so close yet so very, very far from these people that I had based my entire social life around. These boys were my friends, my neighbors, my classmates, my everything. I had nowhere else to go, nobody else to hang out with. I knew I couldn't rely on my brother alone, that's not how I was. I was a social child and I wasn't about to give up. I knew I could make friends. I just didn't know exactly how.

The most frustrating aspect of this prejudice was dealing with the, "you stole our land" hatred. I received comments of that nature quite often. I knew enough of the basic story behind Captain Cook and the missionaries to understand why they were mad. However, it was disturbing that I was Swedish and in no way related to anyone who was involved in taking over Hawaii. I also remember hearing these comments from Japanese children. Even though this all seemed terribly off to me, I began feeling sorry, sorry about someone I had no relationship with, stealing land from somebody not related to whoever made the comment—sorry just for being white.

My self-esteem experienced a major drop. I could no longer see myself as an athletic, nice, happy, personable kid. I could only see the evil white boy in the mirror every morning. I began seeing what I thought the other children saw. I looked at myself in an entirely new perspective, an entirely new, bad perspective. Sometimes I would catch myself feeling sorry for myself, wishing I could be anything else. Anything but haole.

This prejudice against myself lasted until one day at the beach during the summer before sixth grade. I had come in from surfing to ask my mom for some "Jack in the Box" money. One of my uncles, the guys my mother used to live with long ago, said he had some Hawaiian food for me instead. So I sat down and started munching. It was kalua pig, lomi salmon, and some semi-sweet poi. "He's haole on the outside, but he's Hawaiian
at heart.” my uncle said to my mom who’s smile seemed to glow. I then saw myself as a likeable person again.

For a very long time I wished all of my friends would see what my uncle saw. It was almost as if I needed to wear a “Hawaiian at Heart” pin, like when the Koreans wore “I am Korean” pins in Hisaye Yamamoto’s story, “Wilshire Bus”—something to let people know that I was not the evil haole they thought I was.

As time passed, the barrier got smaller. I believed it was just the racism towards whites leaving my friends’ systems as they grew older and more mature. I did notice, however, that every now and then my friends would treat another haole as they treated me in fourth grade. I was really confused by this. I didn’t mind them being close with me, but I couldn’t figure out what made me different from every new haole who came along. Then one day in seventh grade a classmate made a haole joke. I looked at him with an insulted look to see his reaction. He looked at me and said, “You not haole, you local."

The gates opened and the clouds disappeared; I was enlightened. I finally realized after about three years that I was pushed away because of my culture, not because of my skin color. The barrier lessened because I began to dress like everyone, talk like everyone, and, most of all, I began to glow like everyone. I was changing as a person. Not morals, not personality, but perspective. My outlook was shifting towards people, the land, and life. I was becoming part of Hawaii’s culture and it felt great.

Although it took years of personal changes, I realized that the prejudice in many Hawaii residents is against the stereotypical mainland style of living. A culture which threatens the simple, positive life of the islands. Now I can look at myself in the mirror and see a person whose ethnicity is haole, but whose heart is Hawaiian.

I love Hawaii. The sun, the surf, the trouble free atmosphere, and most of all, that glow in everyone’s faces, the same glow I see in my mother now. It’s called the “aloha spirit”.

Kapiolani Community College
It was another moon pool morning. Silver-kissed clouds had drifted beyond the horizon, leaving the sky open to dreamers and gazers. I lay awake in bed and stared out my window. From the silver-coated leaves, I knew the full moon had crept its way over the valley wall. I watched my dream catcher, its feathers flirting with the breeze. The circular pattern of strings cast a web of light on my bedroom wall. I thought about the other moon-pool mornings I had woken up to when the moon would tickle every nook and cranny of my room, when the sky would be an endless shade of purple, and when it seemed I was lying in a pool of moonlight. My alarm clock buzzed, but I had been up for half an hour. It was 3:30AM. It was a lonely time to be awake—no one to see, no one to talk to, and no one to hear.

My last Sunday morning on the paper routes was the same as always. Before the sun began its journey, I folded the newspapers, filled with the world’s stories and the sales at Daiei. I carefully rolled thin, gray, rubber bands onto the thick newspapers, the ink smudging my fingers. When all the newspapers were folded, I placed them into my bag and onto my moped. The house was quiet; my family was still asleep, dreaming of nothing about the real world. The moped started swiftly and I left my house to begin my last day on the paper routes.

The somber pavement drifted below my feet. Cool, valley air rushed around me and seeped into my windbreaker. On crisper mornings, I wore a thicker jacket, but this Sunday wasn’t especially cold. The neighborhood was dark, but the aroma of coffee and plumeria permeated the air. I arrived at the first house. The newspaper flew from my hand and I sped off to the next house. I snaked through the driveways, making sure to leave a newspaper at all the customers’ doorsteps.

I stopped to rest the moped at an empty lot. A quaint, plantation style house had once stood on the grounds, but had been demolished when the owner passed away. I eyed the perimeter of the lot and discovered a small patch of dandelions rising from the earth. Huddled together in the far corner was a pile of concrete blocks. Vines had begun to crawl over them, a sign that they had been there for a long time. The neighborhood was still dark, illuminated only by the moon and stars. I started my moped and headed off quietly to the next route.
When I arrived at Mr. Hatai's mailbox, he was already waiting for me. Every Sunday morning, he would wait for his newspaper before taking a brisk walk around the neighborhood. He gave me a card along with some money. In return, I thanked him and handed him his newspaper. I continued the route, slipping newspapers into chipped, green tubes, rusted mailboxes, and oil stained garages.

Often times, my manager would drive by to make sure I finished the routes on schedule. I dreaded seeing the white van, speeding up the road, with its doors creaking. My manager would constantly tell me to finish the routes quickly. However, I didn't hear any van. I saw only the white lights of porches and heard the creaking of power lines.

Things appeared differently during the early morning hours. The moon cast sharp, brooding shadows that waltzed under the mango trees. Far off into the distance, a lonely dog howled and a slight wind whispered through the power lines. I shuddered. These sights and sounds along with an empty street were unsettling, but I pressed on.

I trailed into the darkest portion of the route. There were no streetlights in the Ogasawara's seemingly endless private driveway. Their home was the eeriest of all. No streetlights penetrated the countless monkey pod trees that flanked all sides of their home. A large rock wall, which ran parallel to the house, resembled a heiau in the darkness. I often carried a flashlight through their property, but I had forgotten to replace the batteries. There was no use in carrying a dead flashlight, so I groped my way up the uneven stairway. Following my hand along the rail, I counted each stair—almost seventy from the garage to their front door. I dropped the paper on their porch and hurried down the stairs to my waiting moped.

By the time I had delivered the last paper, the moon had climbed halfway across the sky. The stars cast a pale light across the front yards of the houses, clotheslines danced in the breeze, and a single light shimmered from a kitchen window. I stopped to rest at a cul-de-sac surrounded by a thick forest of acacia trees. The large trees were sturdy, stoic, sublime. Through swirling branches and silver-coated leaves, the moon peered down at me. In the distance, the running stream echoed between the tree trunks. I imagined the water, spiraling around the rocks, with crayfish and snails lying on beds of dirt. I balanced the moped against a tree and waited for the sun to peek over the treetops. I thought about past experiences with the routes.

Slowly, the sun rose above the valley, casting a web of light on the valley walls. The once quiet trees now stirred with the tune of chirping birds. Brilliant waves of sunshine rained from the sky, while golden diamonds danced on the creek's surface. I remembered the dream catcher, twirling on my windowsill. I saw the valley as a dream catcher, my dream catcher, and hoped its...
walls would hold my expectations and good intentions that one day would come true.

A large wall of sunlight finally crept its way down to the cul-de-sac where I waited, filling the valley with pure, white light. I watched a dove as it flew down from its tree branch. It began pecking the gray asphalt, possibly hoping for a quick meal. The sky blushed a guava pink, before I finally decided to return home. By then, most of the customers had finished their coffee and read about the sales at Daiei. A gentle wind caressed my cheek before I rolled down the street.

I've learned to appreciate nature because of moon-pool mornings when the clouds carry a Pisces sky, the ocean water foams during a southern swell, and the city swims in platinum light during a harvest moon. These are the moments that I embrace and they shall remain with me forever.