DIAMOND JOURNAL

Published by The Board of Student Publications
University of Hawaii - Kapio'laní Community College

Fall 2002
Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to those members of the Kap’iolani Community College family who have helped in the production of this issue of *Diamond Journal*, particularly Wini Au and Michelle Poppler, whose advice, patience, and expertise we constantly relied upon and remember with gratitude.

We also wish to thank the Kapi’olani Community College faculty for their continued support in encouraging their students to submit their writing, especially Kathy Chang, Leigh Dooley, Christine Hacskaylo, Gail Harada, Susan Inouye, Lisa Kanae, Davin Kubota, Mark Lawhorn, Gary Pak, William Reisner, James Robinson, Carolyn Skinner, Lee Tonouchi, and Shr Ward.

Finally, the staff of the *Diamond Journal* would like to thank all the writers who submitted their work for consideration. It is their effort, talent, and courage that make a publication like the *Diamond Journal* possible.

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My Name Is . . .

Anonymous

My name is . . . and I am an alcoholic. With the help of others like me and literature on the subject, I have come to believe that alcoholism is a progressive and deadly disease. I have been sober now for some time but it wasn’t easy. This is my story on how I got to this point.

I had a very nice childhood with everything I needed and most everything I wanted. I played every sport I could in Oklahoma and was fairly good at one or two. I don’t think I had any predisposition or warning signs to tell my parents I would eventually have this condition.

I’m not sure when I took my first drink, but I do remember my first drunk. I was 14 at some friend’s birthday party. The cops came to check on us. As they rolled up the driveway a friend handed me a bottle of Bacardi 151, really hard stuff. After the police left, I took one big pull on the bottle. The liquor burned my mouth, down my throat and into my belly. My reaction to this vile liquid was harsh and sudden. I gagged and almost threw up. But almost immediately, even with the burning still in my mouth, I felt a beautiful warm tingling throughout my body. Besides feeling good, I started feeling a part of the party. I drank more, and I let go more. I felt older, I started talking to girls, singing and having a great time. I extremely enjoyed drinking that night. After that I don’t think I ever turned down a drink. I tried drinking when I could. As I got older it became easier to obtain alcohol. I started surrounding myself with friends that had the same goals as I, to get drunk, party and have a good time. This started my spiraling descent into the realm of alcoholism.

Drinking was fun. It was a great way to meet people. But a few years after I started drinking regularly, it became trouble. I found myself in trouble with the law, my parents and school. I got a DUI and several minor-in-possession tickets before I graduated high school. All of this happened in a relatively short amount of time. I didn’t even think to stop what I was doing. I rationalized everything in my head to make it seem not so bad. I thought I wasn’t doing anything anybody else I knew wasn’t doing. I thought I was being picked on. I figured that the authorities, school, and my parents were out to get me. Of course, not too many of my friends drank like I did, and if they did they were in trouble with me. That’s the baffling part of alcoholism. My alcoholic mind would not let me see what was really happening. I was steamrolling through my life and everyone else’s around me. I didn’t want to see I was hurting the people that cared about me, and wasting every opportunity handed to me. Just when living in my hometown was getting too much, I left for
college. That was a pattern in my life by that point. I would make a situation so bad that I would pack up everything and go. It happened with friends, girlfriends or any relationship. On the way to school I wondered to myself why I wanted to get out so bad. How had things gotten so bad? A thought started to grow in my head, that maybe drinking got me into trouble. I thought if I could cut back on drinking, then maybe school in Missouri wouldn’t turn out like home in Oklahoma.

I arrived at college in Missouri ready to start anew. I was going to try and put some action toward my new plan. I made friends, played soccer, and tried to stay off the booze. I enjoyed life staying somewhat sober. I enjoyed going to parties and remembering what happened. This strategy worked for a few months but by the semester’s end I was drinking just as much as before. I don’t think I need to say that this affected my final grade that semester. I noticed I lost control more often when I drank hard liquor. So I swore off the hard stuff and stuck with just beer. This didn’t work so I changed brands of beers. Again this failed so I started drinking only malt beer. I even tried switching to wine, but I would end up drinking three or four bottles and feeling even worse than when I drank beer. So now everything started crumbling down in Missouri. I felt this cloud of impending doom over my head. Everything I tried had failed. It seemed everything I touched turned to shit. My girlfriends would tell me that I had a problem and I needed to get help, but I was determined to beat this myself. I kept with this life for another two years. I got in trouble from time to time. My life became alcoholic maintenance. Finally drinking got me into a fight at the dorms and that was it for Missouri. I was kicked out of school and given twenty-four hours to move my things off campus. I didn’t tell my parents for a month. I hid out at a friend’s cabin on Lake Tenkiller and stayed drunk. Trying to drown my sorrows. Once again I was in a place I didn’t want to be and my relationship with alcohol had brought me there. Alcohol was a major problem but I knew I couldn’t stay sober. By then I knew the pattern. I would get myself into a big enough hole that I would get sober. I would then come up with a new plan, stay sober for a while, forget about how I got in that hole and get drunk again. I needed something drastic. I needed a place where I would be taken care of and at this point a mental ward was out of the question and I didn’t want to think about treatment. I felt my only option was to join a military service. I looked at them all and decided on the Coast Guard.

Now this was it. I had found my answer. After basic, I felt like a new man. I hadn’t drunk for a month and I was off to Hawaii. I stopped off at home for a few days before heading out to the islands. I wanted to show off my new attitude and focus. When I arrived I saw my family for a while then went out with my friends and stayed drunk for the next five days. I’m not sure how I made it to my new station on time and without getting arrested. The
Coast Guard and I really clicked. I enjoyed being out to sea. I enjoyed the work, and for the most part the people. For an entire year I kept my nose clean. I became respected and trusted. My head became big with the comments I received. That’s when I started to forget how I came to the military in the first place. I started drinking, and I was off just like before. I kept up with my duties and advanced rather quickly. A year after I joined, I was promoted and switched stations. To celebrate, my friends threw me a party that weekend. I got too drunk and fell down the stairs at the barracks. This caused a scene and for that I was awarded Captain’s Mast and my first alcohol infraction in the military. I eventually received another one and was sent to treatment as well as processed for discharge.

I didn’t want treatment, but I went at first to get out of work. That’s where I started to hear a new way of living. I was made to take an honest look at the wreckage of my past and see the patterns I kept making. At treatment I heard a new way to live and be happy. I couldn’t imagine life could be very fun at all, let alone tolerable, without alcohol. But there I saw firsthand it working for people who drank just like I did. I went out into town and heard stories of so many people staying sober. These people got sober and got a life along with it. I came to realize in treatment that I was sick and needed help. After seeing and hearing these people, I started wanting what they had. Alcohol had beaten me down to the point that I was willing to do what it took to get and stay sober. My ideas on how to stay sober always failed me and my best thinking got me kicked out of school and the Coast Guard. I decided to give this new way of living a try. I took the suggestions that were offered and kept an open mind. Before I knew it, I was living a much better life and not having to worry about what I did the night before or what I was going to do. By using the tools that were given to me at treatment and my outside support group, I’ve been able to stay sober a lot longer than I thought I could. I could tell you the things I did to start a life of recovery, but that would be a whole other assignment.

So if you drank like I did, or you’re having problems drinking, maybe you are an alcoholic as well. Don’t worry though: you don’t have to go through the years that some do. There is help, anywhere in the world; all you have to do is look. Most of you have heard of the groups out there that offer help, and if you’re hurting enough, you’ll find them.
Strangers in Life and Death

Scott Bartlett

I had just asked my father about an hour earlier if any planes had ever crashed in the history of our annual small town air show. “No,” he had said. “There have been some close calls but never a crash.” His “no” kept circling around in my mind as I found myself in the back of a pick-up truck, racing to the other end of the runway toward a dissipating column of smoke arising from the freshly twisted metal of what used to be a plane.

My father has been a private pilot for over 15 years; he is a certified flight instructor and has logged over 7,000 hours of airtime. Flying planes was his escape, his high, his passion. He was always at the airport with his friends and fellow pilots. He is one of the local gurus and has earned the respect of his fellow pilots and strangers alike. The air show was always a big event for him and for our small town of Sussex, New Jersey. It is known as the biggest-littlest air show and receives nationwide attention from pilots and spectators.

Most of the crowd flies in before the show so that the fields surrounding the runway look like a wholesale auction. The landing pattern is a constant buzz as a steady stream of plane after plane comes in to touch down. My father and his buddies are part of the airport staff, helping to direct planes on the ground and ensure safety. Running children and running propellers are a combination that does not mix well at all. Security and safety are top priorities as well as the hospitality and courtesies that only a small town can supply.

The air show, like all others before it, went quite well as far as performances go. WWII war planes were simulating dog fights from an era not long ago and acrobatics galore. A “farmer” tried to steal a Cessna plane, which performs stunts and tricks that seem to defy gravity. It was during this last act that I had asked my father if any planes had ever crashed during the history of the air show. I guess I just asked him out of curiosity, or maybe I had already run a “what if” scenario through my head. Rescue workers tend to do that I think. We prepare ourselves mentally for things we hope never happen but that we must be prepared for. Being a volunteer firefighter for eight years and a newly certified Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), I had learned and experienced firsthand that disaster may strike when you least expect it. The more prepared you are to deal with an emergency situation, the better chance you have in positively affecting its outcome.

Thirty minutes after the air show ended, the second “air show” began. The hundred or so planes that had flown in to watch the day’s events lined up, engines running, getting ready...
Strangers in Life and Death

Scott Bartlett

to again fill the skies above New Jersey and begin their homeward bound trips, reliving the
day’s excitement in their thoughts and words. My father’s crew had worked earlier in the
morning, so it was time to relax, have a beer, and look at all the different types of aircraft
drifting up into the setting sun. A fun time, when the “big kids” compared “toys” as the
evening crew directed the ground traffic that resembled rush hour. Laughing and joking
about air speeds and flap adjustments, my father and I relaxed together with his friends,
under the wing of his glider tow plane. Suddenly one of my father’s friends who had been
looking down toward the end of the runway broke the laughter sharply as if slitting all our
thoughts simultaneously.

“He’s in the trees . . . there’s a plane down . . . he crashed, he crashed . . .”

My father vanished from my sight as he raced toward his SUV. Everything from that mo-
ment seemed to be happening in slow motion. For a moment, I stood in disbelief, as every-
one around me seemed to disappear. With a blink of an eye, I found reality, although it
seemed as if I was watching myself from a distance. I could feel everything happening
around me, and I could think and react, but it was as if I was watching a movie and seeing
myself react. I began running after a pick-up truck headed down the runway. I remember
thinking how stupid my effort was as I jumped with hands outstretched, suppressing the
fear that the guys in the truck might not catch me. My legs sprawled wildly behind me as
many hands pulled me into the back of the truck.

The trip down the runway seemed to take forever, even though we reached 60-70 mph.
Leaving the end of the runway, the truck went four wheeling through a small dirt plot that
belonged to a farmer. Dust and dirt was kicked up all around as we approached the high-
way. The plane has crashed in a field across the highway. The truck’s driver slowed down
some as we went up, onto, and over the highway, barely keeping the truck from flipping and
spilling out all of us in the back. Down into the field we went, the truck bouncing and
rocking like a ship in a storm over bump after bump of rough terrain. When the truck
 lurched to a halt, as if stuck in a small ditch, I jumped from the back and began running the
rest of the way to the site of the crash.

The first thing I saw was the tail section of the Cessna 172 standing straight up vertically
out of the ground, tail end pointed toward the sky. Then I saw a wing about 20 feet away
and not much further away the ripped and torn cabin and cockpit half of the plane. As I
quickly moved toward the front half of the twisted metal box, I saw a victim who had been
thrown forty to fifty feet from the crash. When I reached him, another EMT was already
over him checking for a pulse. I told him I was an EMT and asked if I could help. He asked
me to stay with the victim so that he could check for others. As my fellow EMT left, I
looked over the man lying face up in the grassy field. He looked around 35 years old, about 210 pounds. He was bleeding from small superficial cuts, but, amazingly, his body seemed to be intact. He was conscious, but obviously in severe shock. I introduced myself as an EMT and said I was there to help him.

He asked me if he was home yet and told me that he had gone to the air show. I explained to him that he had been involved in a plane crash and that he was still in New Jersey. I checked his vital signs and found that he had a very weak and thready pulse. The other EMT came back quickly and said nothing of any other passengers. I told him I would stabilize the victim’s neck and he could palpate his body and continue our assessment. Just then I saw my father before me, handing me medical gloves, which I put on my already bloody hands. When I asked him if there were other victims, he said that the man on the ground in front of me was the only one who was going to make it.

I explained to the victim that I was going to hold his head and neck still to prevent further injuries as my partner checked over his body. The victim told me his name and many things about himself and his life. Minutes seemed like hours. I could hear sirens in the distance and knew they were coming as fast as they could. I gathered information from the patient, keeping him calm and alert to his surroundings, aware of what was being done to him at all times. The paramedics finally arrived and took over the scene, but I stayed with my patient until we loaded him into the ambulance. I felt that everyone was talking about or around him and I was the only one talking to him. I could see him becoming more agitated and confused as more people crowded around him. After relaying my information on the patient to the paramedic and placing him in the ambulance, I asked the paramedic to talk to him and explain what’s going on. “He’s aware of what’s happening, so talk to him,” I said. Then I watched as the ambulance sped down the highway toward the waiting helicopter that would medi-vac the victim to a level one trauma center.

Later that evening, my father told me that the other two victims, a male and female who were inside the cockpit, had been practically chopped in half and most definitely killed on impact. The pilot of the plane had taken off too low and clipped the tree line, causing the plane to crash into the field below.

Two weeks later, I found out that my patient died of extensive internal injuries. I felt bad for him and his family, and I will always remember being with him that day. I know I did everything to the best of my abilities to help him, and I made him feel more at ease in his situation. I will never forget that day when I shared a lifetime of moments with a person whom I wish I had never had to meet. I wish fate had just allowed us to pass on the street one day, remaining strangers or by chance becoming friends.

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Living in the Moment

Terry Bellamy

Have there ever been events in your life that make you wish that you could disappear or that you wish would end as soon as they began, only to look back on them later and realize that they were some of the greatest times in your life? My life is filled with these events.

I have an incessant need to try to control every event in relation to my life. When things do not go according to plan, I tend to worry and not enjoy the events as they unfold. My wedding day was a prime example of this. The poets have a saying. In Latin, it is "carpe diem" (seize the day). I hope that by retelling the story of my wedding day, others with problems resembling mine will see the importance of not trying to plan their lives, but just enjoying each moment as it comes.

The particulars of the wedding had been planned months in advance. In order to avoid all of the worry and heartache associated with a wedding, Melisa, my fiancée, and I had planned to be wed in a courthouse ceremony. Kenneth, my older brother, was chosen to serve as the witness for the ceremony. As I was exiting the shower of the semi-luxurious Continental Lodge feeling that nothing could happen to spoil this foolproof plan that we had conceived, enter the fool.

As my cell phone began ringing, little did I know our plan for a wedding without drama had just got up and walked out of the door. I could tell by looking at the caller ID that Kenneth had stopped by his favorite watering hole. Kenneth works third shift at Tyson foods, a poultry plant. Every morning after work, Kenneth stops by a bootlegger’s house to get a few drinks of alcohol and talk smack. Kenneth and I had agreed that he would not make his usual stop on this particular morning.

In the phone conversation that ensued, I tried to assess the mental state of my brother and persuade him not to drink any more alcohol. "Hey, what’s up? Are you still goin to do that?" I asked as I answered the phone rather dryly trying to relay my displeasure to my brother.

Undaunted, Kenneth asked when we would be picking him up, to go to the courthouse. I explained that we were in the process of getting dressed and that we would be picking him up soon. When he realized that he would have a few more minutes before our arrival, he began ordering another drink.
Living in the Moment

Terry Bellamy

"You sure you goin' to be all right?" I asked diplomatically hoping that he would get the hint that maybe he should not get that next drink.

"Yea, you know me. I'm straight," he said as if to let me know that he did not get the hint.

I hung up the phone and lay back on the queen sized bed trying to figure how I was going to tell Melisa that we would have to pick Kenneth up at the bootlegger's house.

Once Melisa came out of the shower, I went about the business of explaining to her the phone conversation I just had. As you can guess, she was not pleased with what she heard. "Where is he?" she asked several times with a tremendous amount of agitation in her voice, as she looked up at me with eyes as wide as moon pies. As I sat next to her on the bed, I tried to explain to her that Kenneth had a habit of drinking on special occasions such as his wedding, friends' and relatives' funerals, and everyday the sun shines. Hearing me say this may have helped in calming her down a little, but it did nothing for my already frayed nerves. After we had finished dressing, we exited the hotel room and were greeted by a bright and unseasonably warm first day of November. The seemingly picture perfect day served to allay my fears as we took the short ride to south Phenix City to pick up Kenneth.

Upon arriving at Fannie Mae's house to pick up Kenneth, I was faced with two problems. First, I did not want to enter the house, because not only did it reek of alcohol, the house also contained the stench of cigarette smoke. I rarely ever entered the establishment wearing anything aside from work apparel. Even though I only wore khaki pants and a blue button down Duck Head shirt, I did not want the scent of cigarette smoke to be ingrained into my clothes and skin. Second, if I did not go in and get Kenneth, he had the habit of making people wait for an absorbent amount of time for him to come out. Luckily, today Kenneth felt benevolent and came staggering down the perilous brick stairs at the rear entrance of the house as soon as he heard the blare of my horn.

As we were leaving Kenneth's favorite watering hole, I took the time to make jokes about his attire for the ceremony. We had all agreed to dress casually for the ceremony, but Kenneth took casual to another level. Melisa chose to wear blue jeans and a button down shirt, because she disdains dresses and skirts and prefers tennis shoes and tee shirts. Kenneth stunned Melisa and me when he appeared dressed as if he was getting ready to go to work. Kenneth wore his old gray Auburn Tigers tee shirt, old slacks, and work boots. This was easy to understand because he had just left work, but it still was a source for lighthearted conversation as we drove up Broad Street toward the courthouse.
Living in the Moment

Terry Bellamy

Although I had been to the courthouse many times before, I had never paid as much attention to its features as I did on this day. Once the three of us had arrived at the courthouse, we were instructed to wait in the massive lobby until the judge was ready to perform the ceremony. The Russell County Courthouse can be compared to an ancient castle. The courthouse sits atop a hill at the end of Broad Street in Phenix City, Alabama. The huge brick building has stood there for many years as a towering symbol of justice, even though a pickup truck sits out front bearing signs extolling the injustice that takes place inside. The building is so large that it contains a lot of the county’s civic departments, such as the DMV, the moving vehicle citation office, etc. You can expect to meet many acquaintances if you roam the halls of the courthouse long enough.

Even though I was nervous as a whore in church, everything was going fine until the next fool entered the picture. While we were sitting in the lobby waiting, in came an acquaintance that I was glad to see, but not at this particular moment. Ben Baker, a school disciplinarian turned County Commissioner, came strolling up the corridor toward our party of three. As soon as Mr. Baker caught sight of Kenneth and me, he made a beeline toward us. At this very moment, I wanted to disappear. Meeting Mr. Baker at any other time would have been a blast, but this wasn’t one of those times.

In order to understand the history between Mr. Baker and Kenneth and me, we would have to go back to our high school days. When Kenneth and I were in high school, this “parallel universe” answer to Santa Claus worked for Russell County High School. No one really knew what his job title was at the time, but he didn’t hesitate to throw his above-average weight around on campus. Mr. Baker had the habit of physically abusing every male student that graced the halls of Russell County Courthouse, and Kenneth and I were two of his favorite whipping boys. Kenneth and I had a lot of fun sparring with Mr. Baker in high school, but at this moment he was one of the last people I wanted to see. As Mr. Baker and another gentleman approached the three of us, I could feel my air circulation being cut off and felt faint.

The next few minutes became hot and contentious among our expanded group. “Looky here. The two sorriest excuses for human beings in the world,” Mr. Baker began, trying to get a laugh from his tall and angular compadre. I could tell by the wild look in his eyes that Baker was looking for a physical confrontation. “Which one of you is about to go to jail, or are both of you about to go?” asked the thug.

After I explained to Mr. Baker that I was getting married, he quickly began to tell my fiancée how sorry I was and how he would beat Kenneth and I up in high school. I tried to play it cool, because I knew what he was trying to do. On the other hand, Kenneth in his
impaired state was falling right into Baker's diabolical plot.

After hearing all he could take, Kenneth lunged wildly at Beelzebub, thus setting off a ruckus in the courthouse lobby. They began wrestling and boxing up and down the corridor of the courthouse. Knowing that Kenneth wasn't feeling up to par, I had a decision of either to stand back and look or step in and help Kenneth. For the next ten seconds, I couldn't move. All I could think about was that I didn't want to get involved in this fiasco, but I remembered the countless times Kenneth had come to my rescue in high school when Baker would have me cornered. I also remembered all of the fun we had in school sparring with Mr. Baker.

Against all of my better judgment, I dived into the battle to help Kenneth. The passersby walking through the corridor were treated to a free Worldwide Wrestling Federation main event. People stopped and rooted for the three of us to turn up the intensity. After several minutes of being locked in this life and death struggle, an angel of mercy appeared in the form of the judge’s secretary. She informed Kenneth and me that it was time to stop playing and that we should follow her to the judge's chambers. She didn’t get an argument from either one of us. We quickly shook hands with Mr. Baker and followed the secretary before round two could begin.

After Kenneth involved us in a courthouse brawl, he still wasn't finished with his mischief. Once we entered the chambers of Judge Albert Howard, we were instructed to wait for the judge’s arrival. While waiting in the cluttered and cramped office of the judge, Kenneth decided to take a seat on a corner of the judge’s desk, being that there was no place else to sit. The office was filled with old and rather large books stacked on the floor, on chairs, and on the desk. Melisa and I kept urging him to stand and await the arrival of the judge, but the combination of the alcohol and the tussle in the hall had worn him out. Upon the entrance of Mrs. Albert Howard, the shock of her being a woman confused Kenneth. Kenneth leapt to his feet in awe and saluted the judge. At this point, I was ready to jump out of the lone window in the small office. Judge Howard was more concerned with Kenneth and my appearance than the salutation she received from Kenneth.

Mrs. Howard attempted to make small talk as she prepared herself to conduct the ceremony. She began by discussing Kenneth and my haggled appearance. In responding to the judge’s questions, Kenneth let loose several ill-timed profanities. By this time Melisa and I were mortified. Judge Howard only laughed at the comments.

The actual wedding ceremony lasted about four to five minutes and went off without any hitches. There were the usual particulars of the recitation of the vows, the presentation of
the rings, and the kiss. As the judge recited the vows, my nervousness had rendered me completely numb and my clothes soaking wet. As she ended with you may kiss the bride, I stood looking at my bride for several seconds. I didn’t make a move until Kenneth blurted out, “If you ain’t goin’ to kiss her, I will.” We all laughed, and thus ended all of the angst that had been pent up inside of me for the past several weeks. As I kissed my bride, it was like a weight being lifted from my shoulders.

As I look back on the events of that day now, they seem pretty funny. At the time, though, I could barely breathe from fear that things would go wrong. From the playful sparring with Mr. Baker to Kenneth’s crazy high jinks, I was having a good time and didn’t realize it. I can never get that day back, but at least I do have the memories. In order to avoid a repeat of what happened that day and make sure that I enjoy the good times as they come, I have to keep reminding myself that you can plan a pretty picnic, but you can never predict the weather. So now when I feel that things aren’t going according to my plans, I do as the poets and seize the day.
I must have given Adel a “you’ve got to be kidding look” when she told me she wanted to see an acupuncturist. Adel, my best friend for a number of years, has been suffering from dizzy spells for about six months now. There are days that the dizziness affects her so severely that she cannot drive, go to work, or even do simple household chores. She has been under the doctor’s care since her sickness started. A series of tests were made by specialists in the hope of explaining the cause of her problem, but all attempts failed.

“I am willing to try anything just to get rid of my illness,” my friend explained in a desperate voice. I was skeptical of the idea, but if seeing an acupuncturist would help Adel, I was willing to put my doubts aside.

With my left hand clutching the steering wheel and my right hand holding the road map, I carefully scanned the unfamiliar street names. Adel is sitting quietly on the passenger seat barely uttering a word. She kept to herself during the long drive from Waipahu to Kaneohe. I sometimes catch her staring out of the tinted car window with a blank expression. I have a feeling she is debating whether to continue or to back out from her decision. I do not want to bother her deep thoughts, so I concentrate on my driving. Over and over, I silently repeated the address written on the small piece of white paper that is partly tucked in my dashboard cover. Adel obtained the address of the acupuncturist named Ahn Ming from a lady co-worker. Ahn Ming was highly recommended and my friend wanted to give him a try.

I finally saw Poomau, the name of the street we were looking for. I made a right turn to the narrow dirt road and count seven houses on my left as our directions said. I was expecting a small clinic, but I parked in front of a mid-sized wooden residential house. As we knocked at the door, a Chinese man, barely five feet tall and in his late seventies, greeted us.

“Hi, I’m Adel and this is my friend, Haidee,” Adel introduced us.

“My name Ahn Ming. Come on in.” With his broken English, he introduced himself and motioned for us to come in.

When we entered the house, we were welcomed by the smell of incense. In one corner of the living room I noticed a statue of the fat belly man, sitting cross-legged and eyes shut like
he is concentrating.

"Ah, this Buddha. You know Buddha?" Ahn Ming asked. I nodded in reply. I studied the life of Buddha in my religion class.

"Sit, sit." Ahn Ming motioned us to sit on a sofa. "I come back," he said and then disappeared in one of the house’s three rooms.

"I am nervous," my friend said.

"Don’t worry. You will be fine," I said, tapping her hands for reassurance, although I have no idea what is going to happen. I tried to make casual conversation to ease her nervousness until Ahn Ming reappeared.

"Who like to go first?" Ahn Ming asked.

"Oh, I’m not here for treatment," I uttered. "I am just here to keep her company."

"Oh, I see," said Ahn Ming. "What is your problem?" he asked as he turned his attention to Adel.

Adel explained about her condition and Ahn Ming nodded his head and listened very carefully, like a doctor diagnosing his patient.

"Come, come. Follow me." He invited my friend to go to the room he disappeared into a while ago.

Adel gave me a ‘don’t let me go in there by myself’ look, so I asked if I could go inside and watch the procedure. Ahn Ming, understanding my friend’s hesitation, agreed.

The middle of the room has an elevated black bed, like the one seen at the doctor’s office, but with a big hole at one end.

"This table I use when treating patient’s back. Put face on hole to relax and smell aroma of mixed herbs I made to stop patient from being nervous." Ahn Ming, as if reading my mind, started explaining the bed’s use.

As I continued browsing around the room, I noticed that the corner table had different types of leaves in different size bottles. The table next to it had different sizes of needles indi-
individually wrapped according to size, a jar full of cotton, rubbing alcohol, and another con-
tainer with an unknown liquid inside.

"Sit, sit." Ahn Ming motioned Adel to sit on the four-legged wooden chair located in the
middle of the room. He also pulled out a white plastic chair for me.

From one of the table’s drawers, Ahn Ming took out a circular chart that resembled the
constellation of stars. He started explaining that our body is divided into three distinct
areas, and those areas must be taken into consideration when diagnosing and treating patient’s
illnesses. After explaining this, he asked for Adel’s hand and took her pulse by placing his
two fingers on my friend’s wrist. Just by taking a person’s pulse, explained Ahn ming, an
acupuncturist can find the imbalances portion of the patient’s body.

After he was done taking my friend’s pulse, he proceeded to open a set of needles. The
needles varied in sizes, from one to three inches long, very slender – almost as narrow as
human hair, very flexible, and with a very sharp tip. He opened the jar of cotton and the
bottle of alcohol, and dabbed each needle with cotton soaked in alcohol.

“Just relax, okay. Promise not going to be sore.” He tried to assure Adel that she would feel
no pain.

Ahn Ming began by taking a needle and again dabbing it with alcohol. Then he started
sticking the needle into Adel’s forehead in a slanted manner. He repeated this procedure
until the upper portion of my friend’s hairline and all the way to the back of her head was
covered with needles. I was amazed to see how he stuck the needles in with such precision.
I was expecting to see blood to come out from the pricked skin, but to my amazement, there
was none. When he was done, he tapped my friend’s shoulder and he left the room.

“Does it hurt?” I asked Adel.

“No. I didn’t feel anything when he was sticking in the needles, and I don’t feel any pain
right now either,” she replied.

After half an hour, Ahn Ming came back with a reassuring smile. “How are you?” he asked
my friend in his thick Chinese accent.

“I am fine,” she replied.

“No pain?” again he asked.
“No, there is none,” she again replied.

“Good, good,” Ahn Ming said as he tapped my friend’s shoulder.

He then started removing the needles one by one with one hand. With the other hand he dabbed each point where the needle as with the cotton soaked with the unknown liquid. When he was done removing the last needle, he placed the needles into a small yellow bag.

“Throw away after,” he said.

Before we left, Ahn Ming asked my friend to come return. “Come back for two more sessions. After that you will be 100% again,” he said with a smile.

Adel and I did what he asked. After the third session, I notice my friend did not complain of dizziness anymore. In fact, she seemed to be back to her normal active life again. I was glad she was feeling well.

“Can there be any truth to alternative treatment?” I often asked myself. I was a skeptic before Adel started her treatment, but my view changed after I saw the big improvement with my friend. Acupuncture is Asian’s traditional way of treating people. He practice has survived hundreds of years. If it could cure people then, and it can cure people now, maybe there is no reason why I shouldn’t believe.
A Near Drowning Memory

Marissa Dasalla

Once upon a time, I could swim. I mean . . . I can swim, but I can’t swim in the deep. It all stems from a childhood experience I had at the age of ten. I went on a field trip with my school to an amusement park that does not exist now. The park’s name was “Castle Park.” It was not a big amusement park, but it had a lot of fun things to do there. You had to go through the castle to enter the amusement park. When you went through the castle, you would hit the arcade room first. In fact, the whole castle was the arcade section. The arcade room had two levels of arcade games, food vendors, and other machines where you could buy novelty balloons and souvenirs. Then you would have to make your way toward the exit at the rear of the castle, which led you to fresh open air. On the left side, there would be a path that would lead you to the miniature golf course. To the right, there would be a path that would lead you to the bumper boats, the bumper cars, and the pool area, which was called “Water Country.”

Before the excursion, my friends and I had plans to hit the pool area as soon as we got there. When our school bus arrived in the parking lot of the amusement park, we waited patiently for our teacher to lead us to the sandy area of “Water County.” As soon as we hit the entrance, the other girls and I ran quickly to find a spot to throw our things on, then we ran into the water. I swam in the swallow, and I swam in the semi-deep. I could swim for hours, and I was perfectly okay.

Later in the day, my friends wanted to try to ride the big slide. I was kind of hesitant because I felt the slide was only for big people. I was small and so were my friends. “Ah, come on, Marissa! Let’s go on!” a girl yelled across the water. I turned to see who was yelling at me. It was my friend Joan in a black and gold one-piece-bathing suit.

Joan was a Filipino girl in my class, who was as short as me and who wore glasses. We have been friends since the second grade. If there was anyone who had the skills to convince me to do something, it was Joan.

Joan ran through the water with excitement heading to my direction. I knew she was not going to stop persuading me until I said yes. “I’ll be your partner,” she tried to assure me.

“I don’t know,” I responded. I turned toward the slide to see screaming kids hit the bottom of the slide, go underwater, and then resurface laughing. I didn’t care how much they
laughed. I was terrified.

“I’m scared,” I confessed with a shaken voice.

“Don’t be. I am here,” Joan attempted to assure me again. “We will be in our own tube, so we can’t drown,” she pointed out. “I will hold your hand so we can be side by side. Okay?” Joan tried to sound convincing.

I looked at the slide once again. After a few minutes of silence, I said, “Okay, let’s do it.”

I was feeling proud of myself. I was going on to the big people slide. I was going to do a big person thing. Joan and I had to climb this tall ladder. At the top of the slide, slide attendants had the inflatable tubes waiting for us. In the beginning of the ride, the water was shallow; I could tip toe and touch the floor. It got a little deeper as the ride proceeded. The slide was fun! There were twists and turns to the slide. I felt no immediate threat because the water was shallow and I was secured in the tube.

“See, isn’t this fun?” Joan asked.

“Yeah,” I replied giggling.

“Oh, here comes the ending … the big slide!” Joan exclaimed. “Here, hold my hand,” she continued, holding her hand out to me.

“Okay!” I said as I grabbed her hand.

At the top of the slide, I was holding Joan’s hand. Somewhere during our ride down, I lost grip of Joan’s hand. I hit the bottom of the slide and ended up back at the pool area again. I slipped through my tube, but I didn’t panic. When I went underwater, I looked below to see how far I was from shore. I saw no ground and knew that I was in the deep end of the pool. That’s when I panicked! I fought for my dear life! Each time I surfaced I would yell for help. From a distance, I saw my other friend, Jewel, laughing at me. Jewel thought that I was playing around. I surfaced a few more times trying to yell for help. Then finally, I gave up.

I remember seeing water around me and I was beginning to see the bottom of the pool. It was then that I realized I was sinking to the bottom. I could slowly feel myself going. Everything around me was becoming a blur. It was a strange feeling. The memory of my
near drowning is not scary because I remember it being a peaceful experience.

Just as I was going into unconsciousness, I got yanked out. I remember having the sun touch my face and being pulled along the surface of the water by someone. I heard the swooshing sound of people running through the water and people yelling a question, “Is she okay?” I was still trying to regain my composure and at the same time trying to figure out what was going on. Who was okay?

Then it finally hit me... Oh my, God! I almost died! I jumped up and tried to stand in the water. I stumbled a few times, but eventually I got myself walking through the water. I didn’t know that the person who had pulled me out was still holding on to me. “Hey, hey! Relax!” a boy’s voice said in anger. I didn’t care at that moment if the person who pulled me out was the President of the United States. I just wanted to get out!

I ran to shore and headed to the area where my things were. I sat there for a couple of minutes trying to catch my breath. A boy ran towards me, but I did not look at him. I was embarrassed.

“Hey, Marissa. You okay?” the voice asked with concern. I recognized the voice. There were older classmen on the excursion, including my brother’s class. A guy in my brother’s class had saved me. “Marissa, are you okay?” Alan asked again. My brother’s classmate stayed there until he knew I was okay.

“Marissa, are you okay?” Alan asked a second time.

I looked at Alan with shyness. I saw a wet Alan wearing colorful Bermuda swim shorts towering over me. Alan was about three inches taller than me. He was a little on the heavy side, but he was not huge. Alan was Filipino with black hair, brown eyes and he had a golden tan, which suggested that he went to the beach a lot. Go figure! How else would he have known I was drowning?

“I am okay,” I finally responded. “How did you know that I was drowning?”

“I saw from a distance that you were struggling to the surface,” he started to explain as he turned to point out the exact location where he saw me. “I saw Jewel laughing, so I thought that you were just messing around. Then I saw you go down and you never came back up.”

Alan paused for a moment from his storytelling to see if I was following him on the story. My silence signified that I was listening and absorbing the details of the incident. “You
A Near Drowning Memory

were down there for quite sometime. That’s how I knew you were drowning,” Alan con­tinued to explain.

“I don’t know what happened. I can swim,” I said. “I guess I panicked.”

“Maybe you should stay in the shallow area for awhile. Don’t go into the deep. Okay?”

I didn’t say anything, but just nodded yes.

So I stayed in the shallow, and I have always, till this day, stayed in the shallow. This near drowning experience has caused a mental block for me. I can swim up to the point where my toes are touching the ground and my head is just barely above the water. As soon as I go underwater, and I know that my toes can’t touch the bottom, I start trending water to the shallow area.

People say that when you have a bad experience, you should go and face that experience right away so that you do not get a mental block. If you get into a car accident, you should get back on the road and drive as soon as possible. If you fall on your skates and twist your ankle, you should get back on your skates as soon as your ankle heals. If you get slammed by a wave while surfing, you should paddle right back out and catch the next wave. If you have a near drowning experience, you should shake it off, get back into the water and just swim.

Someday, I would like to try to get over my childhood block. Perhaps if my life depended on it, I just might be able to jump over that hurdle . . . maybe someday.
Potpourri Ball in the Wrong Place

June Ann Duldulao

We, the whole Duldulao family, were cleaning up after the lunch-get-together at my house. We piled up the chairs and the tables, took in all the left over food, empty pans and utensils. Then, it was time for my uncles, cousins, and brothers to take the chairs and tables back to my uncle Eddie’s house in Kailua. I was about to drag my lethargic body into the house to help wash pans when I heard my brother, Junathan, call my sister and I.

“June Ann! Belle!”

“Yes, brother,” I responded.

“Can you and Belle watch Alijah while we go to Uncle Eddie’s house?”

“OK,” I said happily while taking my two-year-old-curly-haired-mixed-plate niece from my brother.

“Alijah, you be good okay,” Junathan told his daughter as he kissed her bye.

“Say bye to daddy,” I said as I grabbed Alijah’s hand and did the waving motion.

Earlier that day, we had to do so many things in preparation for my grandpa’s luncheon and I was tired. It was a Sunday afternoon. The birds were chirping, the plants were full of color, and the sun was shining bright as if it was a perfect summer day, but not for the Duldulao family. The men were wearing white tops with black bottoms while the females were wearing all black. That morning, we had to say farewell and may God bless you to our grandpa, who we placed six feet under ground at Valley of the Temple in Kahaluu. Taking care of my niece rather than cleaning up was good for me at that moment. My sister, who was suppose to be helping me watch my niece, went upstairs and fell asleep. My cousins, Jen and John, Alijah, who was my excuse for not helping with the cleaning, and I went into John’s room to relax. John, who was of average height, was the type of guy that had to get things done before he did anything else and complains when he isn’t satisfied with his service.

John’s room was a garage, until we tiled the floor and put up two more walls to make it into a room. In his room were two twin-size unmade beds, a small sofa covered with damp
Potporri Ball in the Wrong Place

June Ann Duldulao

towels, a TV, a desk with a computer on top, a computer chair with clothes hanging from the back, and a movable carpet, many clothes, and all kinds of little things scattered on the floor. John’s room is usually clean but on this day, his room was a mess (just like everyone else’s room in the house) because no one had the time to clean. Although it was a pigsty, we stayed in there anyway.

“So what do you people want to do?” John said.

“Can I check my mail, John?” Jen, a second year college student whose face looks like a high school student, asked.

“Go ahead,” John responded.

“I wanted to do that,” I whined.

“You can right after me. I’m only going to be fast,” Jen retorted.

“Here, June Ann,” John said as he threw the remote to me and started to do his homework.

Alijah and I sat next to each other while watching TV. I felt as if my eyelids were carrying little weights and I was struggling to lift them back up, but my conscience told me to stay awake and watch my niece. Alijah on the other hand was still up and running like the energizer bunny. She climbed off the sofa and started to explore John’s rooms. She grabbed objects, played with them for a while and put them back. I could never fall asleep because she made a lot of noise, banging things, looking through drawers and shelves, and doing all sorts of things. Then, she started shaking this little plastic container, but I wasn’t really paying any attention to her. I was trying so hard to isolate the sound as I was trying to sleep. While Alijah was enjoying the sound of the plastic container and it’s contents, Jen startled me.

“I’m almost finished, okay,” Jen said out of the blue.

“Okay,” I responded as I slightly jumped up and walked to the back of her chair.

As I was watching Jen close all of the windows on the computer screen and finish what she was doing, I noticed that Alijah stopped making noise and I smelt the scent of green apples, but didn’t say anything. What I didn’t notice was that she had opened the container that she was playing with. I slowly turned my head, looked at her in a glance, saw little green
potpourri balls on the floor, and wondered how it got there. I looked at Alijah and she had a potpourri ball in between her two little fingers and smelt it. Then all of a sudden that little ball was shoved up her little nostril by her little fingers and vanished like a magic trick. What made matters worse, was that she took her little chubby Hawaiian pointer finger and shoved the ball more up her nose.

“Alijah, what did you do?” I said in a very stern but worried voice.

“What! What happened?” John and Jen said anxiously as they looked our way.

“Alijah stuck the potpourri ball up her nose,” I told them.

Their response to my dilemma was laughter. I tried to push the outside of her nostril to possibly push the ball out, but nothing happened. When I looked up her nose, you could only see a portion of the ball and it looked as if it was nestled in her nostril. I didn’t know what to do. All I could think about was my brother’s reactions and his loud angry voice rang in my ears. I was wondering if Alijah had a hard time breathing because the ball was blocking her air passage in her nose, but when I looked at her, she looked perfectly normal. Her big brown eyes looked at me in such a way that she was wondering why I was panicking.

“What am I going to do? Junathan is going to kill me!” I said.

“Here let me see,” Jen said as she tried to get it out but nothing, nada.

I picked up Alijah and walked bare-foot over the hard rocky trail to the front house to see if my brother had came home already, but he hadn’t. I didn’t want to tell my aunties, grandma, or mom what happened to Alijah, so I let myself out of the house and went back into the back house through the sliding door. As I was walking back to John’s room, I remembered the blue sucking thing that people use for babies when they have mucus. I was on the third step going upstairs when I saw Alijah making this weird face. Her nose kept on flaring and her eyes were blinking more than usual.

“You okay, Alijah,” I asked her even though she couldn’t really talk well.

Her nose was running and the mucus from her nose was about to touch her lip. Then all of a sudden she looked up a little and let out this big AAACHOOO! The green potpourri ball covered with mucus came sliding out of her nose. I started to laugh hysterically.
“Bless you! It came out you guys!!!” I yelled with laughter.

Jen and John laughed again. I grabbed the little green apple scented ball and showed it to Jen and John. Then my sister was at the top of the stairs and asked what happened. I told her nothing and walked back to John’s room.

“See, you were panicking for nothing. Your arms looks like a butterfly fluttering its wings” Jen said.

“Don’t tell Junathan. Okay, you guys?” I told them nervously.

About an hour after the whole incident, my brother came home, and Alijah and I were sleeping in my room. I could hear him outside talking to my cousins. All of a sudden, he says WHAT! in such a shocked and angry voice that I my eyes widen and my bones shiver. Then, I hear him walk into my room, but I pretend to sleep. I guess that seeing us sleeping made him not want to bother us, so he walked out.

To this day, my cousins laugh about this little episode of mine. I was so relieved that the ball came out of Alijah’s nose. I realize that it was funny the way that I reacted to the situation, but it could have been much more dangerous if she didn’t sneeze. I guess I learned that I should pay more attention to Alijah, even if I’m tired.
Unforgettable

Corina Elmore

It was an extra slow day at the bank. Betty and I were the only people in the office. I had been working at the Temple Valley branch two weeks and already felt comfortable with the clients there. They were laid back and easy going compared to the clients I worked with at other branches. Even the atmosphere felt relaxed compared to the fast-paced environment of the larger branches.

It was on this normal Tuesday afternoon, while balancing the vault, that my thoughts wandered back to my boyfriend Kuenn (pronounced Keen). I hadn’t heard from him since Thursday night. I knew his parents and younger sister, Kylynn, had left Friday morning for Hilo. Kuenn’s older sisters, Kellyn and Kwynn, had moved to Hilo three months earlier. His parents and younger sister flew over to see whether they were settled in. Kuenn had just started a new job at the Marriott and had an interview at the Hyatt Regency that Friday afternoon, so he was unable to go with them. We had also made plans to take our three-year-old daughter, Brandy, to the movies that evening.

When I received no call from him Friday afternoon, I suspected he had forgotten about our plans to go to the movies. I called the Marriott and was told that he had finished work at 2 o’clock that afternoon. I called his home several times that evening, but no one answered. By 9 o’clock that evening, I knew something was wrong. Kuenn and I never went a day without talking to each other. At times when we got into an argument, he would still call me, even when I didn’t want to talk to him.

Early Saturday morning I drove to his home, but he wasn’t there. When evening came, I had convinced myself that he had decided, at the last minute, to join his family in Hilo. It angered me that he could have been so inconsiderate in not telling me his change in plans! It also angered me that I had spent two days worrying for no reason when he was probably having a ball in Hilo!

On Sunday, Brandy and I went to church as usual and later had a picnic at the beach. Once in a while the thought “Why hasn’t he called?” crossed my mind. Even if he had gone to Hilo, he still could have called me from there! I knew his family would be catching the last flight back on Monday night. So I had to wait until then to get my questions answered.

Here it was Tuesday, the bank would be closing in two hours, and I still hadn’t heard from...
him! I had tried calling his home earlier, but no one answered. I finished balancing the vault and went into the office. Betty was in the lobby fixing the magnetic interest rate chart. The telephone rang and Betty called out to me that I had a personal call on hold. My heart jumped. Could this finally be him calling? I picked up the phone eagerly. It turned out to be Kuenn’s mother on the phone. I could tell by her voice that something was wrong.

“When was the last time you heard from Kuenn?” she questioned me.

“Not since Thursday night,” I replied. “I thought he joined you folks in Hilo.”

“No, he didn’t. We just came back last night. Kuenn is in Queen’s Medical Center. He’s been in the hospital since Friday evening. I’ve been here since this morning. Dad went to the airport to pick up the girls. They’re coming in on the next flight. How soon can you get to the hospital?” she asked.

“What happened?” I asked. “How badly is he hurt?”

“He’s not doing too well; he might go at any time now,” she answered.

“What!” My mind went blank for a few moments.

“I’ll explain everything to you when you get to the hospital,” she said and hung up.

The room suddenly went cold. My hands were shaking, and tears were running down my face. Somehow I had walked back to the vault and sat crumpled on the floor.

“What happened?” Betty asked as she rushed to my side. I related to her what Kuenn’s mother had told me. Betty called our manager and was told someone would be sent over to cover for me so I could go to the hospital. My whole body was shaking. Betty told me to call someone to drive me to the hospital because I was in no shape to drive. I couldn’t even stand! I called my aunt and she agreed to drive me to the hospital.

On the way to the hospital, I prayed that everything would be all right. The words, “He might go at any time,” kept repeating in my head. “Please don’t die before I get there,” I kept thinking over and over. Somehow, I felt my presence would make him get better.

When we finally reached the hospital, I had calmed down. My aunt asked the girl at the information booth what room Kuenn was in. She informed us that he was in the critical care
When we got to the critical care unit, my aunt was not allowed inside. She had to wait in the waiting room.

As I neared the entrance to his room, I saw his mother, father, and sisters huddled around his bed. There were all types of machines, I.V. stands, and monitors in the room. When I entered the room, they all turned towards the door. His mother moved to the left and I got my first glimpse of him. He was covered with a white sheet. I noticed his feet were sticking out; they weren’t covered. As my eyes traveled further up the sheet, they stopped at his chest. I could hear the rhythmic sound of a pump going up and down and noticed that his chest moved with the same rhythm. There were tubes in his arms and nose and wires attached to his chest. I noticed his eyes were taped shut and wondered why. I looked at parts of him that weren’t covered and observed no cuts, scratches, or bruises.

“He’s in a coma,” his mother told me.

“What happened?” I asked.

She told me they received a call from the police that morning requesting that they go to the Queen’s Medical Center to identify a body they thought was their son. According to the police reports, after Kuenn had finished work at the Marriott Friday afternoon, he caught the bus to Waikiki for his interview at the Hyatt. His bus probably got there late because they had stopped doing interviews when he got there. As he waited at the bus stop to go home, three men, whom the police described as “street people,” approached him and asked for his wallet. I found out later “street people” is the term they use for people who make their living on the streets such as drug dealers and prostitutes. Knowing his ego and how stubborn he could be, I knew he didn’t give his wallet willingly. The three thugs jumped him. No matter how good a fighter he was, he was no match for them. They pushed him to the ground and kept hitting the back of his head against the cement pavement until he no longer moved. Although there were a lot of eyewitnesses, no one made an attempt to help him.

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough damage!” an old lady yelled, as they tried to take his wallet from his still body. Someone in a nearby store called the ambulance and he was taken to Queen’s Medical Center.

In the emergency room, the examining doctor found his application for the Hyatt wrapped around his left leg under his sock. It was from that application that the police got his parent’s phone number. They had been trying to reach them since Friday evening but they
were in Hilo. Until the police could get someone to identify his body, the hospital had registered him as “John Doe.” The police had a sketch artist draw his face and it was placed in the newspaper and shown on the evening news. No one came forward to identify him. As Kuenn’s family filled me in, the doctor entered the room and asked that the family follow him to the conference room.

After they left, I was alone with Kuenn. I sat on a chair next to his bed and held his hands. They were warm. I could feel the calluses he had gotten from cutting down the trees in my backyard the previous week. I looked at his tan face and remembered how his forehead would wrinkle when he was thinking. I moved closer to him and could smell a sickly medicinal odor on him. I then realized it also filled the room. I put my head on his chest and remembered hearing somewhere that even if a person is in a coma, they might be able to hear you. I started talking to him. I told him how much I loved him and to forgive me for being angry with him when I thought he had gone to Hilo. I told him how much Brandy would miss her daddy and that she loved him very much. I talked about our dreams and goals we had yet to achieve. I prayed God would bring him out of his coma and make him well. I thanked God that he was still alive! I stroked his face and admired his handsome features. Even with his eyes closed I could still see his deep green eyes in my mind. It was his eyes that caught my attention when I first met him. I again wondered why they had taped his eyes shut.

Just then, a nurse came in to check on his tubes. I had her explain why they taped his eyes shut. She informed me it was done so we couldn’t see his eyes, which had rolled back in his head. If his eyelids were not taped, they would open and we would only see the whites of his eyes. I then wished I hadn’t asked.

As the nurse walked out, Kuenn’s family entered the room. I could tell his mother and sisters had been crying. His father told me the doctor met with them because he wanted to know how long the family wanted to keep him on the life-preserving machine.

I was stunned! I had no idea he was being kept alive by a machine! I thought the machines were there to check on his vital signs and to detect if something went wrong within his body. Or better yet, to detect if he was coming out of his coma!

I learned that the repeated pounding of his head against the concrete pavement resulted in a hemorrhage. The hemorrhage created a great pressure within his head that caused his brain to die. By the time the ambulance got him to the hospital, he was already brain dead. With modern technology, the doctors were able to keep the rest of his body functioning until his
family could be located.

I felt myself crumbling inside. All hope I had had vanished. I had heard of people coming out of comas, but brain death was something totally different! Kuenn’s family had decided to pull the plug on him within the hour. They felt that even if he came out of the coma, he would be a vegetable for life. The hospital chaplain came in and spoke. I don’t remember anything he said. I was in total shock! Just a few minutes earlier I had hoped that Kuenn would come out of his coma, if not today, maybe tomorrow or the next week. To find out he was brain dead and within an hour they were going to pull the plug on him was a nightmare! I held his hands tighter. This couldn’t be true! Time was running out fast! I felt helpless; there was nothing I could do but pray.

I prayed, I begged, I pleaded with God to do a miracle with Kuenn. I had heard missionaries relate stories of miracles they had seen God do on cripples, blind people, and people possessed by demons. I now wanted God to do a miracle for me. He was my only hope. Forty-five minutes passed; nothing changed. As time passed, my hope for a miracle diminished.

The doctor returned to the room. He told us it was time for us to go. I clung tighter to Kuenn’s hands. I knew once I let go it would be the last time I would feel the warmth of his hand in mine.

“I will always love you,” I whispered in his ear and kissed his cheek. With one last squeeze to his hand, I left the room.

As I walked into the lobby, I saw my mom waiting for me. She had come to the hospital so my aunt could go home. I walked into my mother’s arms and cried.

It was over.
A Family Affair

Tony Forman

It was a warm July morning back in 1986, and I had not been able to sleep a wink the night before. My kid brother Steve and I had been lying there dreaming of all the possible adventures we would have on our summer road trip with Dad, who was a drilling foreman in the oil fields. His job required extensive traveling throughout the world and extended stays in exotic places, making sure the "juice" was still coming out of the ground. But when he was home, he really made sure to spend all the time he could with his sons. This particular year he had been away from home a lot. But he promised us that the summer was reserved for his boys, and we were going to do something special!

The last month and a half of the school year seemed to last forever. I could almost hear the second hands of the clocks at school ticking away. Every time I saw a map of the United States, images of my family, flying down the highway eating fast food and looking for hotel swimming pools with slides and diving boards filled my thoughts. I’d come home and look forward to my dad calling and letting us know how many days until his return. For once in my life I wasn’t bothered by my little brother's incessant annoying questions. “Will we get to stay at Disneyland all day?” “Can we fish in Florida?” “Are their big snakes in Arizona?” The questions kept coming, and even I wanted the answers! Then, finally, the day before school ended, Dad was back! My brother and I loved my dad’s homecomings because that meant that we’d be getting something cool from a far off place—ivory from Africa, knives from Mexico, petrified wood from Alaska. The presents were always educational, and the stories that came with the gift were as good a treat as the trinket. This time, however, the gift my dad brought me was fantastic! An Olympus SLR camera with zoom lenses, a beautiful black shiny piece of equipment that I was almost afraid to touch. My dad must have sensed my apprehension because he explained to me that he bought it for me because he thought that I was very observant and that I was responsible for documenting the biggest family outing ever. I remember the pride that I felt at being trusted to take care of such a cool and expensive camera.

The bell rang on the last day of school, and I rushed to the parking lot where my father was waiting with a truck full of camping gear and clothing. We didn’t even go home from school that day; we just headed west, California bound, our first major stop Disneyland!

At the time, all my brother and I could think about were the amusement parks we were going to visit. But looking back at the trip, my dad really made an effort to show us the
coolest places and things that the United States had to offer.

The world's biggest Teepee, the meteor crater in Arizona, the Grand Canyon, the Las Vegas strip, Lake Tahoe. The list went on and on, and we hadn't reached California yet!

One of my fondest memories of that trip was our conversation on the road. I remember how my dad talked about the landscape and the history of places we visited along the way. He always had so much information to share with us. Back then my brother and I were just mesmerized by his stories. He was like a traveling teacher or tour guide. Back then he was like a super hero to us, a god, and the one person that we trusted without question. We were so happy back then, my brother and I. Even though my dad was gone a lot, we still felt close to him.

After a couple of days, we finally reached Disneyland and our excitement was uncontainable! For the whole day we literally sprinted from ride to ride. By the end of the day, all three of us were spent. We stayed the night there, watched the fireworks and the next morning, headed south, bound for Texas and the Gulf of Mexico. Dad painted such a fantastic picture of the ALAMO and the brave men who died defending her that I remember getting out of the truck expecting to hear the clash of sabers and small arms fire. It turned out to be just another tourist trap, but no one could have taken us back in time and really told us about the ALAMO like my father. Then on to New Orleans and the best oysters on the half shell I have ever eaten. I still have a scar from opening those delicious oysters. But all of the pain I endured that night was well worth it. I remember dad being proud of me for sticking it out at the restaurant even though I really sliced the shit out of myself! On we drove through Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and finally to Orlando Florida, home of Disney World and Epcot center. Yet another frantic Disney day followed by some unreal fishing in the Keys. After wetting our lines for a couple of days, we headed due north, Great Lakes bound, listening to country music and talking about life and what we wanted to do when we grow up. You know the conversation: “You can be whatever you want to be!” Yeah, that one. I still remember the look on his face when he said those kinds of things to me. His brow would bunch up and his eyes would get so big and bright. A look that I now know reflects his most meaningful advice. I remember being able to dismiss those kinds of comments with ease when I was younger, but when he tells me that he believes and supports me now, it means so much on so many different levels. It took a lot of growing up for me to realize how important hearing that from a parent really is.

On we drove sight seeing and fishing whenever we could on the way. In Chicago we jet skied all day and cruised through the Sears tower in the evening. I still remember how
awesome the skyline looked from the water at sunset, unbelievably beautiful! Like a postcard from another world or something! Then the next day we were on the road again, barreling down the highway, through Minnesota and North Dakota. I remember driving through the badlands and imagining early settlers trying to cross this country by wagon and thinking how miserable it must have been. Yosemite National Park was where we camped for the last time on our trip. We spent several days just enjoying nature and hanging out together around the campfire. We could all sense our time together on this trip quickly running out and fought hard not to think about it. But school was coming, dad had to go back to work, and life was going to quickly return to normal much faster than we would have liked. The last days of the trip were much different than the previous. The mood was somber, the chitchat less frequent, almost as if we knew what the future had in store for us. Change was coming and those changes would affect our lives dramatically.

School began shortly after our return, and dad went to Alaska’s North Slope to oversee a platform for his company. He had a whirlwind affair with a woman he’d met while traveling, and in six months they were married. Our relationship with our new stepmother was strained at best, and, as a result of that, I felt alienated and withdrew from the family somewhat. My brother began stealing and getting into trouble, and our close knit family slowly began to dissolve. I remember that year as being one of the worst times in my life. Dad was away a lot, and my brother and I lived virtually unsupervised. My stepmother was an absentee guardian and was more interested in my dad’s money than anything else. By the time my dad realized how bad things were for us without him, we were all messed up in the head. I remember how bad my dad felt about subjecting us to that experience. He was crushed, and for a time very depressed. He felt that he wasn’t capable of taking care of us and sent us to live with our mom here in Hawaii.

The change of scenery was nice. However, our derelict behavior did not change. School work was easily substituted with drugs, alcohol, and criminal activity, and in just a matter of a couple years, we went from being great students with bright futures to being juvenile delinquents on the fast track to jail.

Ten years passed with almost no communication with my father. I’m not sure if it was because we were ashamed of our current situations or because we were just stupid, stubborn jackasses. But we continued to drift apart.

Time passed, and in August of 1997 my brother and I found ourselves at an all time low. We were full-blown cocaine addicts living in my Toyota corolla, committing crime after crime to support our drug habit, unable to use good judgment any more.
One night, out of money and food, we found ourselves talking about the past and reminiscing about the summer trip that we had taken with dad. That experience seemed like a million years ago, and I realized that that was the last time that we were together as a family, and really genuinely happy. I'm not sure if nostalgia, guilt or the hand of god touched us. But that night we chose to give up the drug life and get help as soon as possible. The very next day, I checked into an in-house rehabilitation center. I got sober and have spent the last 4 years of my life working hard to make up for lost time. It hasn’t been easy. My brother chose to stay on the street for a couple more weeks and in that time got picked up for drug related theft. He has spent the last four years behind bars.

Last September, I went and saw my dad and family in New Mexico for the first time in about a decade. Everyone was really happy to see me doing so well and they loved meeting my wife and son. While I was there, I got a chance to go catch up and mend a lot of fences with my family. Toward the end of the trip, I went fishing with my dad on a river that we used to fish when I was as a kid. We talked a lot and had an awesome time together, talking about the past and the future and just appreciating each other’s company and becoming friends again. I felt like a whole person again for the first time in a long time. I never really realized how important family and my relationship with my brother and father could be, or, for that matter, how family ties could affect the direction that my life would go in. Now I’m starting to understand the importance and often think about where I would be if my dad had never remarried and we had stayed together and on track as a unit. Ultimately I dismiss the thoughts, though. I find that nothing gets accomplished when you ponder the “what ifs,” and, quite frankly, I like the person that I am, shortcomings and all! If I hadn’t gone through the tough stuff and come out OK on the other end, would I be the same person? I don’t think so. I’m making the best of what’s happened in the past, and I look forward to my future. Most of all, I look forward to getting together again after all this time has passed and revisiting the summer vacation we took all those years ago, just my brother, my dad, and myself. Together and happy again.
A Spectacle on Ice

Kelly Garringer

You know how a song can remind you of something from your past, or a particular incident can cause your mind to replay a particular scenario over and over again? How about a voice that you have not heard for awhile that makes you feel good inside? My memories of the late 80’s, mainly 1985-86, conjure up feelings of triumph, fun, and friendship. What makes this time in my life so special were the moments spent with a best friend, learning a game I would grow to love. Alden is one of the few people I hold dear in my life. He has always been an encouragement no matter what I decided to pursue. Whenever I would doubt myself, there he would be saying, “Put your mind into it, stay the course.”

In December of 1985, we were at the Ice Palace playing on the ice after the whole place was closed for the night. We both knew the owner and the people who managed it. We were getting ready to play bandy, a game that is similar to hockey only you play with brooms, a ball and you wear shoes instead of skates. It’s a fun but slippery game. Before we played the game, everyone was skating around and playing with hockey sticks, practicing their stick handling and hitting slap shots against the sideboards. I was not a good skater at the time, and it was hard just staying balanced, but Al said, “Hey, grab a stick and shoot some.” I was hesitant, but he insisted. So, I grabbed a stick and got out on the ice. I was pathetic. Then Al said, “Hey, you’re doing great.” I retorted “Liar.” Al later said to me, “You should join one of the hockey teams.” I said, “You’ve got to be kidding.”

The following week I joined. It’s funny; Al was always able to get me doing things I would not otherwise try. The day came for my first practice. I did not have equipment of my own, and it would be awhile before I could afford to buy some. So Al, Mr. ALOHA, scrounged together everything I needed to play. He went and asked people that he knew played the game if they had an extra set of elbow pads, or a helmet and so on until he had everything. Completely dressed in my hockey gear, I looked like Frankenstein on ice. My socks were of two different colors, the shin guards were secured to my legs with tape, and my stick was left handed. I’m right handed. My jersey was of a community team sponsored by Burger Chef, whoever they are.

My first time on the ice in full gear was a joke. I could not skate very well to begin with. The restrictive bulky pads and the tape holding my shin guards on were cutting off circulation to my feet. We started to practice. First skill sprinting and stopping drills. Great! Did I mention I don’t skate well? You can imagine how this went. The stopping was more
A Spectacle on Ice

Kelly Garringer

hilarious than the sprinting. Everyone else knew how to do a hockey stop while I found it easier to run into other people and then fall to stop. The stick handling, passing, and shooting drills...let's not even go there. After practice, Al came up to me and said, "We need to work on a few things. First, how to stop." As the weeks went on, I got better at the individual skills, and then I needed to work on combining them.

My first game was an experience. One of the things you learn as the new guy out is that you become a target for every "goon" on the ice. They test you by tripping you up, pushing you off balance, and by checking (slamming) you against the walls just to see what they can get away with. My first season consisted of a lot of this extracurricular activity. Just call me the crash test dummy. Anyway, the first game they put me on as a forward, one of the players that skate a lot. I did mention I don't skate that well, right? I spent more time falling, sliding and crashing into walls than anything else, but I had a ball doing it. The team I played for was sponsored by Walker Moody construction and we wore the Edmonton Oilers jerseys. The great one, Wayne Gretzki played for this team before he signed on with the LA Kings. As the season went on, I got better. I was able to stop, pass, and shoot the puck as well as sprint and stop. The team decided to move me from forward to defender. I soon grew to love this position. As a defender, I helped guard the net by making it difficult for the other team to take shots on the goal while on the defense. On offense my job was to keep the puck in play, that is keep it in the attack zone. The line I played on consisted of Alden, as center, Ricky and John as the forwards, Daryl and I as defenders. Daryl, a one-eyed sailor stationed at Pearl Harbor, taught me everything I know about the position.

Daryl later shipped out and a kid named Doug took his place. As time went on, this line became very cohesive, almost as if everyone knew what the other was thinking. Doug and I clicked especially well. I could pass without looking in his direction, know where he was and that he was watching for the pass, and vice versa. We had this strategy; on the offensive, whenever one of us got the puck, we would pass it across to the other to shoot. This enabled us to elude the other teams players and opened one of us up to take a shot on goal. The longer we were able to keep the puck in the zone the greater the chance that our offense would score, and shooting at the goal made it easier to score on a rebound if we did not score ourselves. It worked. One game the two of us had over 50 attempts on goal during one period.

We got a chance to play one game in the annual old timers' tournament, where teams from all over came to play — teams like the L.A. Kings retired, teams from Finland, Australia, West Germany, Alaska and so on. We got to play an early morning game against a team from Kenai Peninsula, Alaska. This team was smoking us. They were good, very good. After the first period, we had our regulation 2-minute break, and I glanced over at the other
team and my jaw dropped. The whole team were women in their late thirties and early forties who had been whipping us young men like it was nobody’s business. A humbling experience, I must say.

Later in the third period, I was chasing down one of the forwards. When she took the shot, I dove out in front to block it. I was successful; however, when I landed, I soon learned in a painful way that one of my testicles was between the brim of my protective cup and my body. Upon impact, I saw stars and groaned as I slid across the ice. Everyone on the bench, unaware of what just happened, was yelling at me to get up and hustle. All I could think was, “Let me hit you in the nuts and see you try to hustle.” What a trying game that was.

There is one game that I remember well. It was the only game seen by a girl I was interested in and who later became one of my best friends. On a drive across the neutral zone, one of our forwards got tied up with a defender from the other team, so I left my position to take up the forward right behind Alden as he entered the offensive zone. Al was tripped, but as he went down, he was able to get the puck to me. Just as I got the puck my legs turned to jelly and I was wobbling and slipping as I skated in. I lost my balance, but I was able to get the shot off. Then I fell, unable to see what happened. As I lay there hearing my team cheering, I realized I had made my first goal, a beautiful shot right between the goalie’s legs, just above his stick. That was the only goal I ever made my whole time playing hockey, and I’m glad that my best friends were able to share in that moment with me.
Located at the North Eastern tip on the island of Oahu, there is a small town called Laie. Laie is a small and friendly place where everybody knows each other. Laie's geography could even be called romantic. Beautiful, white, sandy beaches border Laie from end to end. Frothy, white foamed waves crash relentlessly against miles of protective barrier reef. The salty mist released into the air is carried ashore on the shoulders of the everpresent trade winds.

This charming little town is what once was called an ahupuaa. The ahupuaa was a land divide sectioned by the alii (rulers) that was just large enough to sustain a healthy supply of natural resources that would be used by the Hawaiian people to support individual communities. This section of land was usually about three to six miles wide and would stand from the ocean to the highest point of the mountain range parallel to it.

Laie as a whole is made up of two parts. The ancient Hawaiians named these two parts “Laie Maloo, which was the arid side of Laie,” and “Laie Wai, the wet side of Laie, which was host to many natural water features” (Pukui 128).

My Grandmother, a life-long native of Laie, would tell me stories about the land and the community that she experienced as a child. Her sweet, old grandma voice filled my head with images of a land that was once lived with, instead of just lived on. She described a place to me called the Beauty Hole. It was a pure, clean, fresh, natural, artesian spring. Unusually large, it could be dove into headfirst without ever worrying about hitting one’s head. As a little girl she would go there often with her two brothers and two sisters to swim and play. Like so many other places in this small town, the Beauty Hole no longer exists. A Foodland supermarket rests upon what is now just a memory.

My grandmother told me that almost all of the houses and roads of the present day Laie were built on what used to be acres and acres of wet-land taro patch. As a child growing up, she would help her mother tend to their family’s taro crop. She would walk barefoot with her pants rolled-up above her knees, carefully placing each step in the soft cold mud. Periodically she would lean over and thrust her coarse fingers deep into the refreshing muddy earth. She would gingerly fondle the plant’s bulb shaped root, using her fingers to measure the girth and decide if it was ready to be harvested.
As I listened to her describe the raw, natural beauty of the Laie that she could only remem­ber now, I felt a warm sensation surround me. I started to realize how lucky I was to be receiving such a vivid recollection of Laie’s history. As the details are processed in my mind, I am taken back to a time when life would dance to the rhythm of the ocean tides and the beat of the falling rain. I could taste the salty trade winds blowing gently against my face. I could feel the cool refreshing mud of the taro patch oozing between my toes. I could hear the children’s laughter echoing from the Beauty Hole as they splashed and played in the refreshing purity of this magical spring. I could smell the ocean fragrance of the limu kohu, limu ogo, and manuea. These were varieties of edible seaweed abundant in Laie’s coastal waters.

My ancestors would fish these waters to feed their families. Men and women would net and spear and trap countless varieties of colorful reef fish and pick seaweed to season and garnish their food. Men would sail out to sea in outrigger fishing canoes to catch pelagic species of fish like marlin, tuna and dolphin. They would use hand-braided line made from coconut husk fiber and fishhooks fashioned of whalebone, oyster shell, and some native hardwoods.

Younger, stronger men would travel far and deep into Laie’s lush mountain valleys to hunt wild boar. They would use traps and snares and dogs and spears to face their cunning and unpredictably vicious prey.

Children would often spend their days helping the kupuna (grandparents) with whatever might need to be done. Parents never grumbled because they knew spending time with the kupuna would allow the children’s sponge-like minds to absorb any knowledge that would spill from the saturated mind of the kupuna.

My grandmother is eighty-one years old. She has lived in Laie her entire life. For me, it will be a sad day when I am no longer able to open her box of memories and descriptions of the tiny community where she was born and raised - the little town where she had given birth to and raised fourteen children, including my mother; this beautiful, magical place where I was born and raised, and will always call my home.

Many things have changed in Laie since my grandma was a little girl. Even for such a small country town, Laie has fallen victim to development and the human desire for convenience. The fast paced, rat race of human society did not overlook this tiny place that used to be paradise.

Almost all of the land in Laie that meets the criteria for development has either been deval-
oped or cleared for farmland. Much of the lower mountainous regions of Laie used to be rich with native fruit trees. Now the land is leased to immigrant Americans so they can farm produce as a source of income. Most of these farms are now home to locked gates and raggedy barbed wire fences that use existing trees along a boundary line as fence posts. Now the only way to get to any remaining fruit trees is by running away from an angry Vietnamese farmer.

Present day Laie is over-crowded and over-paved with hideous parking lots filled with loud, ugly automobiles. Traffic lights and telephone poles line the highway. Tourist attractions, fast food restaurants, and supermarkets have all staked their claim in little old Laie town.

Sometimes when I walk down the road to the beach from my house I try to imagine what it would be like to spend a day or a week or a month in ancient Laie. I imagine following a foot trail to the beach in the middle of the day and see that the only footprints I can find belong to lazy, gray monk seals basking in the sun. I can see tracks from green sea turtles that have made land in the cover of darkness to rid their swollen bellies of fertilized eggs. I can see tiny three-fingered footprints belonging to busy little sea birds, racing every wave back and forth against the shoreline, snatching up all the tiny crustaceans they can find.

Places that reflect Laie’s natural beauty and ancient history do still exist, but even where they do not, Laie’s natural essence can still be seen radiating through anything that tries to cover it up. I look around and I know that Laie will never be the quiet and humble paradise that it used to be, but I also know that the rich cultural and geographical history of this small town is far too enchanting to ever be forgotten.

Work Cited

Never Giving Up
Debra Kahanaoi

My granddaughter, Micaela, and I used to do everything together. When she used to come for visits, we used to go for outings. We used to walk around Pearlridge Mall. She liked to eat pretzels, so we’d go to The Pretzelman and each have our own. She didn’t like to share hers with me. She wanted to have her own, so it was always two whenever we went there. She also liked to eat ice cream, so we’d go to Dippity Dots. Her favorite flavor was bubble gum. I wonder why all the kids like bubble gum.

We also went to the lagoons at Ko’olina. She loves the water. We would get there at 8:00 a.m. or 9:00 a.m. and stay all day. I would pack two small coolers, one for sandwiches and chips and the other for fruit juices. She would run down to the water and dive in. If there were other children playing, she would mahaoi herself (poke her nose in there), and out came a whole new bunch of friends. She would run to me and tell me that she had so many friends to play with at the beach. The hardest part of the day was to get her out of the water, get dressed and get her home. These were always very special moments that my granddaughter and I shared.

How can one explain the feeling of loving someone so dear and precious (such as your moopuna, or grandchildren) to you. Then out of the blue, they are taken away from you. All you do is cry and ask, “Lord, why is this happening? What have I done to deserve this?”

My granddaughter, Micaela, and I had just come home from taking her father to work. We were making breakfast. Caela was cracking the eggs into the bowl and mixing them when she said, “Grandma.” I replied, “Yes, Caela.” She said, “Hurry up, I’m hungry. Is the bacon ready?” I answered, “It will be ready in a few minutes. Why don’t you set the table.” “OK, grandma.” She ran to get the dishes and then stopped by me and said, “Grandma, I love you, grandma.” Those words made my day because they were unexpected. We sat down to eat and were almost done when the telephone rang. She ran to answer it and passed it to me and said, “Grandma, a lady wants to talk to you.” “Thank you, little girl.”

The conversation that was about to come was one that would destroy my life for the months ahead.

“Hello.”
“Hello. Is this Debra?”

“Yes, it is.”

“My name is Susan. I’m with the Child Protective Services or CPS unit.”

When I heard CPS unit, my heart dropped.

“I need for you to take Micaela back to her tutu’s house and meet up with my social workers.”

“May I ask what this is all about?”

“Someone has reported Micaela’s aunty for physically abusing one of her brothers. We have the authorization to take the 3 children away. Because they are under the custody of their mother and she resides on Maui, we will be flying them to Maui and they will be placed in a foster home there pending an investigation.”

“Is there any way they could stay with me?”

“I don’t think that can be done.”

“How long will they be there and who can I contact on Maui to find out how they are doing and what I need to do to bring them back home?”

“I’m sure you can call the Maui CPS unit and find out all the details. My people will be there in 5 minutes. Please have Micaela up there by then. Thank you.” The phone went dead.

I cried as I started packing her clothes. She saw me and asked, “Grandma, why are you putting my clothes in my backpack? I don’t want to go to tutu’s house.” Wiping away my tears, I said, “My baby, I love you very much. I need to take you to your tutu’s house and then you and your brothers will be going on an airplane ride to Maui and live there for a while.” “Why grandma? I don’t want to go. I want to stay with you and my daddy. I want to stay here.” I cried and held her and told her how much I loved her. Then I told her I would do everything in my power to get her back home to us. The social workers were waiting only a few blocks away from my home. I put her in the car with her brothers. I gave them all a big hug and told them that I loved them all very much. Then they were gone. As
I watched that car go down the road, the emptiness that filled my body and soul was so tremendous, there are no words that can explain that feeling.

I went home and phoned my son, Steven, at work. I told him what had happened. The phone went silent for a few minutes and then trying to fight back the tears, he asked about his little girl and her reaction to all this. I told him she was very distraught and I would talk to him when he got home.

I was absolutely devastated. I couldn’t do anything at home. I missed her cheerful laugh, her 1000 and 1 questions about anything and everything, her helpfulness in the kitchen, her little hand trying to brush my hair and her cute dimpled smile. But most of all, I missed her presence. I missed kissing her goodnight before I went to work. Calling her in the morning when I was finished at work and just hearing her voice. Things were not the same after her departure. I made a vow to myself NEVER TO GIVE UP.

I made numerous calls to various people within the CPS unit. Although, financially, I was very tight on funds, the Lord provided me with the money to make several trips to Maui to attend court hearings. This was done through a very special man’s generosity. He’s been a huge part of my life and my children’s lives, especially Caela’s. Joe is my boyfriend and Caela called him “Papa”. Caela used to like to hear Papa sing a song on the computer called “Taking Me Home”. He used to hold her and sing to her. She would just nestle in his arms and listen. Being a bright little girl, she would pick up some words and start to sing along with him. He was also devastated when he learned she was gone.

It was a long uphill battle of constant calling up social workers, lawyers, GAL (Guardian Ad Litem) lawyer for the children to find out the progress on the case. I even proposed caring for all 3 children. I could not see my granddaughter growing up without her brothers if I was awarded only her. There were numerous home visits by social workers on Oahu to see if my home, my family and I were qualified under the state system to be specially licensed as a foster care home.

It took a little over nine months to finally get that important phone call. It came on January 17th at about 8:30 a.m. Jennifer, the social worker for the children on Oahu, called and said, “Debra, we are ready to place the children with you. When would you like them to come home?” I was so happy, I started crying. Jennifer asked, “Are you still there?” I answered, “I’m sorry. I’m just so happy. Thank you. Thank you, Lord.” We made arrangements to have them come home the following weekend, January 26th. On Saturday, my son Steven and I flew to Maui at about 6:30 a.m. We met with the social worker at 7:30 a.m. We followed him to a recreation center. From there, he went to the foster home where they
were and brought them to us. As I stood there waiting for my grandchildren to arrive, the emotional feelings that ran through my body was so overwhelming.

As the car turned in, I could hear my granddaughter Caela yelling, “Daddy. Daddy. Grandma. Grandma. I miss you.” She ran to me and said, “Grandma, are we going home now? Is Ikaika and Kama coming with us too?” “Yes, my baby, you and your brothers are finally coming home to live with grandma.”

The tears started to pour out. These were not tears of sadness but tears of love and joy.

This was the happiest day of my life. A day that was always there in my heart just waiting for the right moment. With prayers and with love, those words that I had vowed, it seemed so long ago, NEVER TO GIVE UP, had given me a new perspective on life. A perspective that there will come a day when all involved would be reunited. They will be able to start a new and more enjoyable life knowing that there will always be lots of love, hugging and caring.

As night falls in our home, peaceful words fill the air.

“Goodnight Caela. I love you.”

“Goodnight Kama. I love you.”

“Goodnight Ikaika. I love you. Sweet dreams.”

“Goodnight Grandma. I love you, too.”

“Thank you Lord for a beautiful day.”

“I love you, Lord.”
The Awakening

Kristine Keene

“Kris! Kris, wake up right now!” I was being shaken so fast that I thought my brain would fall out of my head. Rochelle, my roommate, was sitting on top of me with her hands encompassing my face.

“Wake up now!” she screamed. I looked at her through one opened eye. Then I glanced at the clock on my nightstand. It read 3:48 a.m.

“Are you insane?” I said as I shoved her off me.

“Something terrible has happened! Cary’s been stabbed and we need to get her to the hospital. I’ve already called the police and the paramedics are on their way.”

Rochelle tried to proceed with her story, but I just hobbled around her, groggily walking into the living room. Cary was sitting on the coffee table with nothing but a sweatshirt to cover herself. At least I thought it was Cary. She looked like a white marble statue covered in blood. I thought I was going to faint. Instead, I threw up all over the kitchen floor. The room seemed to be spinning.

I could not understand the vision in front of my eyes, so I just sat motionless on the floor. Crimson footprints now marred the pale blue Berber carpet. What was going on? Was I having a horrible nightmare? Did I have one too many margaritas earlier in the evening?

“I heard someone screaming my name,” Rochelle explained. “At first, I thought I was dreaming. I woke up and realized it was Cary screaming outside the front door. I opened the door and she fell into my arms naked — covered in blood. She wanted me to find Skye.”

“Where is Skye?” I asked. Skye was Cary’s little boy, with whom she shared the second floor apartment in our building. Rochelle was still telling her story. At this point, I could hear what Rochelle was saying, but my mind was a complete blur. The whole time I just kept staring at Cary.

“Kris! Are you hearing me?” Rochelle continued. “Anyway, Dusty ran out of the apartment to look for Skye and found him under the stairwell in the garage. Poor little guy. He must
be traumatized.” The word “traumatized” was an understatement for what I was feeling at this particular time.

“I had Dusty take Skye to Leslie’s house so he wouldn’t see any more of this horrible mess,” Rochelle said, her voice cracking. Dusty was Rochelle’s knight in shining armor—the love of her life.

Leslie and Cary had been friends since high school. Following in our footsteps, she had also left Honolulu to move to Hollywood. Leslie lived about five minutes away from us. In the distance, I could hear the cacophony of police cars and the paramedic unit. Two minutes later, the medics had Cary in a wheelchair and were escorting her to the emergency vehicle outside. Two LAPD officers had also come into our apartment and were asking Rochelle some questions.

“No, we did not see what happened,” said Rochelle, beginning to sound annoyed. “It was 3:45 in the goddamn morning! We were sleeping. How could we have known what was happening?”

“Ma’am, calm down,” said one of the officers. “Did your friend tell you who did this to her? Did you see her attacker or can you give us any information? Ma’am, we are here to help. We need you to help us.”

Irritated by the officer’s ill compassion, Rochelle sarcastically responded, “Yes officer, I can give you information. One of my best friends was attacked and nearly stabbed to death tonight. So if you will excuse me, I am going to the hospital now with my roommate to make sure she is not going to die. You can show yourself out.”

With that, she grabbed our jackets and dragged me out of the apartment.

As we drove to the hospital, my eyes focused on the perfect white lines on the road. The same words kept running through my head: It’s only a dream... it’s not real. I glanced over at my roommate, who was driving us to the emergency room. I could tell by the look on her face that she was trying hard to hold back her tears. Rochelle, the most adamant person I had ever known in my life, now resembled a complaisant little girl. Neither she nor I had ever witnessed a horrific scene like that we had seen tonight. What had happened? Was Cary going to survive? What about Skye? A sense of guilt fell upon me, but I was still in a dumbfounded state. An eerie silence filled the air as we followed the flashing lights of the paramedic unit to Cedars Sinai Medical Center.
We watch movies about women who are abused, harassed, assaulted, and raped; but, what can we do when it happens to someone we love? I thought I had stopped breathing... that somehow I would wake up and this would not be real.

Rochelle stopped the car, and someone opened the passenger side door. It was Leslie, standing there in her blue jeans and white T-shirt.

"The police officers are waiting inside to ask you two some more questions," she said. "Skye is asleep at my house. He was so scared. What exactly happened?"

While Leslie attempted to ask about the incident, a sick feeling came over me again. I did not know what to tell her. Instead, I took the first detour to the nearest trash bin and hurled. Maybe this was just a very realistic dream, and I could not wake up.

As we walked through the automatic doors into the emergency room, fluorescent rays beaming from the high-ceiling lights above seemed to pierce holes right through my eyes. I could not believe that we were here. Only a few hours before, we had been laughing and celebrating Dusty’s birthday in our apartment. Rochelle and Cary came close to burning the house down because they forgot to turn the oven off— with the cake still in it! Now there were no smiles, no laughter, not even a hint of the craziness that had occurred earlier in the evening.

Two police officers guided us into a private section of the emergency room and began to ask questions regarding the attack. My head was throbbing, my eyes were aching, and I just wanted to curl up into a ball and die. I could see their lips moving, but could not fathom a single word they were saying. All I could think about is “Why Cary?”

At about 5 a.m., a nurse came into the waiting area and told us the news. The good news was that Cary was going to be fine. She had seven puncture wounds, but only two of them were deep enough to cause serious damage. The two wounds were in her right side and had punctured her right lung, causing it to collapse. It would take a few months, but she was going to be okay. The bad news followed.

“She is going to need to have more tests done to check for pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease,” explained the nurse.

“What are you talking about?” asked Leslie, with a perplexed look on her face. “She was raped? I thought she was stabbed.”
The Awakening

Kristine Keene

Frowning, the nurse replied, "She is a very brave young woman. It is an unfortunate thing that happened to her."

With those words, she left the three of us sitting speechless in a cold waiting room. Once a fearless foursome, we were now just three apprehensive young women waiting for a savior to help us.

About a week later, a private investigator came to our apartment and handed an envelope to me. It was a subpoena to appear in court on Cary’s behalf. Apparently, the man who raped Cary (who we decided to call Mr. Evil) had committed a number of misdemeanors. We had all been subpoenaed.

Since Cary had been home from the hospital, we were all anxious to hear the real story of what happened that night. One morning, we were having breakfast on the patio of Leslie’s two-story townhouse. Cary decided to divulge the hidden story of that awful morning.

“I heard someone knocking on the door at about 3:00 a.m.,” Cary said, her voice quivering.

“It was a man’s voice saying to open the door,” she said. “I thought it was Dusty looking for something, so I didn’t bother looking out the peephole.”

At this point, I felt a huge lump starting to form in my throat. I was not sure if I was ready to hear this story.

“When I opened the door, Mr. Evil was standing stark naked in front of me! He pulled out a knife and placed it to my throat and,” her eyes began to swell with tears.

“Cary, it’s okay, we don’t need to know.” I told her. The lump was now the size of a ping-pong ball. Trying to avoid contact with Cary’s eyes, I gazed past her at the Hollywood sign in the distance.

“No, you do need to know because I need all of your help to put this maniac behind bars for the rest of his life.” she retorted. When she composed herself, she continued with her story.

“He dragged me by my hair into the bedroom. Then he forcefully ripped my nightshirt...I could only think of Skye who was sleeping so soundly in my bed. That !*#hole forced himself on me in the same bed where my baby was sleeping! Something told me that if I did not get Skye out of the apartment he would kill the both of us.” The quiver in her voice now sounded anxious.
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By this point, Rochelle, Leslie, and I resembled three girl scouts sitting around a campfire listening to a ghost story being told by the camp leader.

"I tried not to scream so Skye would not wake up," she hesitated, "but Skye awoke and without thinking, I tried to grab the knife. Mr. Evil freaked! He swung the first stab at me, once here (pointing at the midline of her chest), and then here (pointing at her abdomen)."

I had visualized the whole thing and now I felt my breakfast returning to its place of origin. Cary seemed to be so confident in telling the story yet there was a strange madness about her.

"Ignoring the pain, I managed to grab Skye and run for the front door. That's when I felt the knife penetrate the flesh in my back. I hit the ground. Thank God, Skye was able to run away." Tears glistened down her face.

After a long pause, Rochelle walked out of the room to get us refreshments. I think I needed something stronger than a cool drink to listen to the rest of her story. Rochelle left because she had heard all that she could accept. I wanted Cary to stop.

"I fought him in the hallway and somehow, before he could stick me again, managed to break the knife in two. Realizing that someone might wake up because of all the commotion, he left me there and ran off. That's when I came upstairs to your apartment."

Now we were all in tears. How could a human being be so malicious and inhumane?

"It's not your fault, Cary. You didn't know. How could you have known?" I said as I wiped the tears from her face. I did not know what to say or do to make her feel better. We were all scared, especially because we thought this guy was a normal, civilized human being. The police were now on a citywide manhunt for this man.

A few weeks after the litigation, Steve, an old friend from Chicago, called Leslie to see how Cary was doing. He helped Cary move all of her belongings into a new place and babysat Skye for a couple of days so Cary could be interviewed for a news segment dealing with L.A.'s most wanted criminals. As the days passed, the two started spending more and more time together. Besides the girls, Steve was the strongest support for Cary. That is what she needed—a new beginning to help heal the pain and trauma of the attack. In fact, that is what we all needed.
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After numerous visits to child psychologists and medical specialists, Skye slowly began to talk again and made the effort to socialize with other children in school. I had strong hope that he would be normal again someday. The artwork that Skye drew reflected haunting visions of that night. Images of men and women, painted red, were all he drew for many months. His teacher said it would pass with time and therapy. Somehow, I found it hard to believe her.

Rochelle and I moved into a three-story townhouse in Sherman Oaks. Leslie also moved to the Valley. Cary, Skye and Steve found a new house in West L.A., where they would start a new life together. Hollywood had become a heinous place for all of us. Although we shared many fond memories there, we never wanted to move back. Unconsciously, we grew doubtful of people we met or accepted in our lives. I especially had a hard time trusting people. It would be a long time before any of us were all right.

In January 1992, the salvation arrived. God had answered Cary’s call. She telephoned us to say that Mr. Evil had been arrested in a small town in Illinois.

“Someone that lived in the town saw the report on L.A. s Most Wanted and recognized Mr. Evil at a local eatery. They called the police and within an hour, they arrested the son of a bitch!”

I felt a wave of relief through the receiving end of the phone

“They’re sending him back to L.A. to be tried in court. It finally happened! Aren’t you relieved?” Cary waited through a long pause. “Kris, are you there?”

“Yeah, that is the best news I have heard all year.” I tried to sound enthusiastic to make her feel like everything would be okay. However, all I could think about was how Cary was going to be able to face him again.

Finally, the date arrived when she had to face Mr. Evil in court. Having been arrested in three states for assault, drug possession, and now, attempted murder, Mr. Evil was sentenced to fifty-seven years in prison without parole. I guess we were all relieved as we walked out of the courtroom. He was behind bars and that was all that mattered.

Many years have passed, and we all have separate lives. Cary and Steve were married in Chicago. Just last May, she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy named Austin. Leslie is getting married and moving to New Jersey. Rochelle and I have decided to go our own ways to pursue deeper interests. We vowed never to discuss the morning of June 11, 1991.

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Kristine Keene

Five years ago, I would have kept that promise. Now I understand that it is okay. Being older and a lot wiser, I realize that what happened to Cary could have happened to any of us. I tell my story knowing that there are others who have experienced the same, or worse, situation. I never fully appreciated life until one of my friends almost lost hers. Waking up in the morning has newfound meaning for me.

“New awakenings for new beginnings. Always remember that.” Cary said those last words to me as she boarded the plane to Chicago.

I think about those words every time I watch the sun’s amber rays peek above the morning horizon of a new day.
Playing With Heart

Jay Koseki

“Jay! Are those notes supposed to be slurred?”

“Uh, no.”

“Then why are you slurring them?”

“Because it sounds better.”

“Don’t do it!”

With his mighty stick in hand, the conductor had the power to force me in whatever direction he pleased. The viola and bow that I held so awkwardly seemed to have even less meaning than the black and white dots scattered across the page. Was this music? If so, then what was the point? I felt as if someone had taken away my paintbrush. I had been in the orchestra for five years, and after finishing my freshman year, I had come to the conclusion that my viola days were over.

Leaving the orchestra had left me in a search for contentment, for without an instrument in hand, I felt as if something was missing. At first I couldn’t pinpoint the problem. Everything in my life seemed to be as it should. My family was in good health, I was getting good grades, and I could go to sleep knowing that a beautiful Hawaiian sunrise would greet me in the morning. What I had was order, and I believed that order leads to happiness, while chaos leads to misery. I knew this idea held at least some truth, for I could see it every time I went to volunteer at Kuakini Hospital. The stroke victims seemed to have it the worst. They’d float in and out of reality. Years, days, months, and even minutes seem to have no significance. To them I was Uncle John, Son Brian, or even Daughter Heather. Life for these people was chaotic. My life, on the other hand, had order, and therefore I should have been happy. I was not.

What I was missing was a means of self-expression. Without music I had no release from the harsh realities of the real world. I needed a release. I needed music, but what kind of music? How I came to find my musical niche is kind of a mystery. I had heard of Ki’hoalu, or Hawaiian slack-key guitar, but didn’t really know what it was, or what it meant. I also do not know where I got the idea that this would be my instrument. All I remember is being
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Jay Koseki

absolutely determined to learn this style of music; however, this posed another dilemma. Slack-key is an art form in danger of becoming extinct. The masters are slowly dying, and some guard their gift as precious family heirlooms. Needless to say, it was difficult for me to find a teacher. Then, as miraculous as blessing are, my father heard from a co-worker about a man who welcomed new students and held classes in the lobby of a food distribution warehouse.

With all my insecurities, preconceptions, and my Western ways of learning, I went to the warehouse and cautiously opened the door. Standing in the middle of the room was a smiling Hawaiian man holding a guitar. On his head, he wore a Honolulu Fire Department cap, which indicated the work he did for a living. He introduced himself, and told me his name was Renny. He took the old guitar that was on loan to me out of its case and began to tune it. It looked like it hadn’t been played in a hundred years. Instead of pearl inlays, numerous scratches along the back of the guitar served as instrument art. The fret board was badly worn, and the strings, which were corroded, looked like they might snap at any moment. When he was finished tuning the guitar, he played a simple five second melody that pierced my heart. It was the first time I had heard true slack-key. Never had I heard such sweet and touching sounds. My body seemed to react both physically and emotionally as the music flowed from his hands and into my soul. I finally understood how commanding and influential the musician is, having the power to instill emotions or ideas in a way that the listener is unaware of and cannot guard himself against. He then began to explain to me that he did not teach with any written music. I would learn in the old style by watching and listening. He then added, “Don’t play exactly like me. Play the way that feels right for you.”

Over the following weeks and months, I developed a special bond with “Uncle Renny.” I went to him with the intent of learning slack-key. What he taught me, however, went far beyond the music, for true slack-key is not just a style of guitar playing, but a feeling and philosophy as well. It is to be experienced and not merely studied. One must be immersed in a caldron on love, sharing, and learning to attain the “soul sense” of Ki’hoalu. As the great slack-key legend Gabby “Pops” Pahinui once said, “A lot of people ask me the same question. ‘What is Hawaiian music? What is slack-key?’ I can’t tell them that.” Hawaiian music is one of the greatest forms of poetry. The sound, rhythm, and meaning of the words go far beyond the literal level. It is a reflection of a culture rich in values, tradition, compassion, and warmth. The master and apprentice relationship is unparalleled by any other form of music.

One meeting in particular with Uncle Renny sticks out in my mind because it would be one of the greatest and most useful lessons in my life. I sat with my guitar directly across from
my teacher. This time his mood seemed to be a bit more solemn than usual. We were working on a beautiful love song called "Sanoe," written by Queen Lili‘uokalani, one of Hawaii’s most beloved monarchs. The story behind the song involves the love affair between one of the Queen’s young female servants and a commoner. The speaker of the song addresses a “mist” which flows in and out of the palace. The “mist,” which is an element that hinders one’s sight, is analogous to the young girl and her secret escapades in and out of the palace.

As we finished playing the song, Uncle Renny said to me: “You’re playing the song well, but you’re missing something. You’re not playing with your heart. There are many musicians who play well, but a truly terrific musician will play with his heart. This is a love song. You have to know what it’s like to be in love in order to play with your heart.”

The advice Uncle Renny gave me goes far beyond the suggestion of merely putting “feeling” into music. “Playing with your heart” is a surreal but genuine experience. However, if someone were to ask me what it means to play with your heart, I would have to answer, “I’m sorry, but I can’t tell you that.” It is a feeling to experience, not to study. The interpretation of a musical piece is not always so simple, and, as in life, there is not always one correct answer, one school of knowledge, or one path to enlightenment. The beauty of this musician’s wisdom is that it goes beyond music and into the essence of life itself. I have taken this idea of “playing with my heart” into many of my life’s challenges and experiences. From my education at school I have learned a great deal about Math, Literature, Science, Writing, History, etc. Yet, my experiences with Uncle Renny tell me that it is only a tiny part of the picture. I have concluded that there are many different ways of learning. There is not always one answer. In music, as in life, some notes will need to be slurred.

Through Uncle Renny’s teachings, I have learned to be more open-minded. As a write, I explore different types of genres, while writing from a familiar theme, or what I call the “kernel of truth.” As a scientist, I experiment with many different possibilities, knowing that many great discoveries have been made by opposing the accepted “rules” of science. As a young man on the edge of entering a New World, I see many possibilities and experiences. It is a big world that is new and unfamiliar to me, but I will play it with my heart.
And The Verdict Is . . .

Dawn Kuoha

“We, the jury, find you guilty of murder in the first degree.” These are words no one is likely to forget anytime soon. Imagine being one of twelve people to determine the fate of another individual. I never thought that would happen to me, but it did when I was only twenty one years old.

In 1997, I received my first notice to participate in a jury pool. My initial reaction was one of immense dread because I did not know what to expect. Most of all, though, I did not want to take off from work because I would not get paid. It was safe to say that I was not happy about the whole situation.

The morning progressed smoothly. A group of about one hundred fifty people were gathered in the jury lounge awaiting instructions. The whole process of roll taking, orientating us and going over protocol took about an hour. After we were familiarized with what was expected, a group of about sixty of us were then instructed to report to Judge Aiona’s courtroom.

As we entered the courtroom, all eyes were on us. The court personnel, attorneys, defendant, and various observers just stared as every last person filed in. After sitting and waiting a few minutes, we were instructed to stand as the judge entered the courtroom. Then, we were told to sit so that the jury selection could begin.

We were again instructed on protocol and then briefed on the case at hand. At this time we found out the case was a criminal one and that the defendant was on trial for murdering a transvestite prostitute. Now began the nerve wracking anticipation. Would my name get called or would I escape the judicial system?

The judge’s law clerk spun her little wooden cage and began pulling names. It seemed that she was pulling the names of contest winners, but I knew better. I was praying that my name would not be chosen. Relief set in as all fourteen seats were filled. Then the questioning of the potential jurors began. I sat there intrigued by the whole proceeding until the judge excused someone and another name had to be drawn. Relief overcame me again when my name was not drawn. The jury selection went on for some time until it finally happened. “Dawn Kuoha,” said the law clerk. Up went my blood pressure as the sweat started forming on the palms of my hands. At that moment I just went numb.
I still had hope that I would be excused. As I sat in the jury box, every possible reason to be excused ran through my mind. I was too young and innocent. I would probably give a stupid answer. The lawyers just would not want me. I waited and waited for my name to be called again, but this time it was not. After two days, I had made the final cut and was in a position to determine the fate of a man I did not even know.

That night I tossed and turned for hours. All I could think about was that the defendant and his family would take vengeance on everyone on the jury if we found him guilty. But then I thought that if he was guilty and we found him innocent, we would be letting a murderer run free. I made myself sick with worry before I finally drifted off to sleep.

The trial started on the third day of my service. After finally accepting the reality of the situation, I allowed myself to relax a little. I had to relax. It was imperative that I listened to everything that was being said without any outside thoughts interfering. After all, I had the life of someone else in my hands.

The trial started with the prosecutor presenting her case. At the start of her case, the prosecutor stated that the defendant had gotten into an argument with his wife, drove off and went looking for some stress relief. An eye witness testified to seeing the defendant’s car circling the block numerous times over the span of about half an hour. A police officer later testified to pulling over the defendant in the vicinity of the crime scene for driving too slowly without his headlights on as if he were looking to solicit a prostitute.

Having established that the defendant was present in the area of the crime scene, the prosecutor then moved on to establishing a motive. The motive was simply the fact that the defendant was looking to have sex with a female prostitute and was appalled to find out that the “woman” he picked up was actually a man. The prosecutor proposed that the defendant attacked and eventually killed the victim because he was enraged by the fact that the prostitute he had picked up was a transvestite. By the end of her case, I was almost certain that the defendant was guilty. However, in accordance with the judge’s instructions, I knew I had to keep an open mind until both sides finished presenting their cases.

On day six, the prosecutor closed her case and the defense attorney began his case. The defense attorney tried to counter the prosecution’s accusations of guilt by saying that it was a case of mistaken identity. The eye witness could not have been positive that it was the defendant’s car he saw because it was so dark at that time of the night. Also, despite the fact that the defendant had been pulled over by the police officer, the defense attorney tried to establish through the testimony of the defendant’s wife that the defendant was at home at
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the time of the crime. I was not convinced of the defendant’s innocence though, because of the indecisiveness of the wife’s testimony.

On day eight, after both sides presented their best case and the judge instructed us on reaching a verdict, we started deliberating. First, we chose a foreman and then discussed strategies for reaching a verdict. We decided that we would review all of the evidence presented and then discuss our initial impressions. Sometimes our discussions got rather intense because some jurors could not see why others thought that the defendant was not guilty. In the end, after three days of rehashing the evidence and testimonies, we came to a unanimous decision. Our job was finally over.

On the tenth day, after eating a hearty lunch, we took a final vote to make sure no one had changed their minds and turned in our verdict. The bailiff escorted us back into the courtroom where we found the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree. After polling us individually, the judge determined the verdict to be unanimous. He then thanked us for our service and dismissed us.

At first I was terrified at the thought of serving on the jury of a murder trial, but by the end of the whole trial, I was happy to have done my civic duty. In fact, I was ready to do it all over again. Looking back on the process as a whole, it was very exciting. I will never be a lawyer, so I am glad that I had a chance to be a part of the legal process in this way.
The Fisherman

Paul Lujan

Yesterday while I was out fishing, I noticed an old man that looked like my grandfather teaching a young boy how to fish. Things I most remember about my grandfather were his passions for fishing and nature. He taught me about fishing skills and nature, too. My grandfather was a great fisherman, and he also enjoyed helping out people.

Gramps, as I liked to call him, was a physically strong man. I once saw him push a Cadillac with three silver-haired ladies in it! I never saw him without his large wide brim cowboy hat, which covered his short midnight black hair. He had green pensive eyes, a big gleaming smile, and huge burly hands. Faded blue jeans and tan rawhide boots made up his entire wardrobe; he also had the coolest glittering belt buckle, and I always wondered how he kept it so shiny. He was born a kind and spirited man who loved nature. Above all, however, my grandfather was a great fisherman.

Once while fishing, I observed my grandfather carefully. With great skill, he taught me how to slowly and precisely bait a hook and cast line. It was then that I noticed his weathered sun baked brown skin. To me this reflected the many years that had gone past. I watched him as he slowly heaved the heavy looking pole forward. Gramps always said, “All you have to do is look around; nature will provide!” He said that many times, too numerous to count. We sat there admiring the bright yellow sun beating down and basking all below in a warm tropical embrace. Big heavy looking birds passed overhead on endless gusts of thunderous wind. I always liked to look at our reflections in the cool, clean sparkling gem-like water.

It happened quickly! Splash! The bamboo pole bent forward, and the line pulled tight with great strain. I remember yelling, “I’ll get the net!” My grandfather always had a big wide smile when he was fishing; this was no exception. It took him minutes to do what would have taken me at least an hour to pull in the line. Suddenly, up popped the biggest fish I had ever seen, sparkling with silver and hints of green, red, and blue reflecting off its magnificent smooth scaly skin. I could barely contain the excitement within myself.

As we drove home with our great fish, my grandfather told me a story. He said he had once caught a mermaid at that same spot, all with his lucky old bamboo pole. I sat wondering about the truthfulness of his story. My grandfather looked over and said, “My boy nature always provides; you now call that beautiful mermaid grandma!”
Consequently I have learned about patience, attention to detail, and how to be a better person because of him. Many years have gone by now. Gramps is gone but I still go fishing at that same spot, the way he taught me. Looking back on what he said, I can’t help but wonder how many mermaids are out there. My grandfather was truly a great man.
Partners in Crime

Kelli J. Lum

Okay, I admit it. I did it. I planned the whole thing, but the second time around was not my fault, honest! It was an accident, so let me state for the record that I have paid my dues for that mistake. I had two babies just one year apart on the same day. Those were really hard times for me. As I look back, I am glad my kids were so close in age; however, at the time it was quite a different scenario.

The first couple of months after my son Sean was born, my husband and I were in a state of perplexed exhaustion, walking the floor with a wide-eyed baby at three a.m. We were bewildered as to what we were doing right or wrong, and just as we thought we had things figured out (like how to get him to sleep at night!), the baby would change his routine and we were back to square one again. Then during my three-month check-up, I found out I was pregnant again. I was stunned. In a semi-zombie state, I somehow made it home, sat on the couch, and had a very long cry. My husband Doug was pretty shocked too. Later, his coworkers laughingly reported to me that he barely spoke to anyone for two weeks.

Seven months later on my son Sean’s first birthday, my daughter Taylor was born. I remember waking up in the middle of the night just hours after she was born. “It’s a girl!” I whispered to myself; I was thrilled. Boy, was I lost in babyland now. I was stranded in an endless sea of diapers, bottles, and baby toys. I was easy to feel overwhelmed. My husband worked very long ours as an Executive Chef for a busy restaurant. As a Pastry Chef myself, I understood the required time away, but reason did little to console my situation. I often felt like a single parent out-numbered by little munchkins running on Eveready batteries. Sean especially was extremely active. His periscope was up and scanning for new adventures ninety percent of the time. On tiptoe with nose in the air, he kept a vigilant watch on the counters and tabletops, just waiting for a poorly placed treasure he could pirate away. The stereo, TV, and computer were also favorite targets; “Button Man” we like to call him. And the supposed “childproof” gadgets we bought, well, they just ended up in the trash. Patience was a new lesson to practice every day.

I tried to get the kids out of the house as much as possible; otherwise, I would have gone crazy, chasing them away from endless no-nos. Taking them shopping was an adventure all on its own. I had one of those deluxe stretch Cadillac-style strollers. It was baby blue with two adjustable seats and capable of carrying a full load of bags, snacks, emergency diapers, and whatever else I could possibly need. As long as I kept the stroller centered in the aisle,
Partners in Crime

Kelli J. Lum

I was safe because reaching out on both sides like wiggling octopus tentacles were four little hands coated orange with Cheez-it dust. Anything in reach was worth a grab. Sean once managed to take out the entire “Humorous, Over Forty” birthday section in the greeting card aisle at Long’s. These little victories often sent us home with me near tears in frustration and taking my anger out on the sidewalk as I stomped home. I missed my independence, and I missed being able to go anywhere, alone.

By the time the kids were three and four, I began to feel that I could really have fun with them and they with each other. They were truly partners in crime. It began with whispers in the dark, after I had tucked them in for the night.

“Sean, go turn on the light,” urged Taylor.

“You do it,” countered Sean.

A minute or two later, the light would go on, quickly followed by the patter of little running feet and giggles muffled under the sheets. “Hey, you guys, turn off the light!” I scolded down the hall. Then the light would snap off again followed by more running feet and more giggles as I, mildly amused, shook my head.

Later came other misdemeanors. I remember once after a big rain, they had themselves some unauthorized fun in the driveway puddle while I was cooking dinner. I found them mud coated, soaked to the skin, with leaves tangled in their hair and mud splatter on their laughing faces. At first I was so mad.

“What are you guys doing?” I yelled.

“We wanted to try our new raincoats!” they chorused.

I made them strip down out of their mudies right there on the porch. I tried not to laugh, but I could not help myself. They had so much fun together. I think the title of Dr. Richard Carson’s book Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff . . . and It’s All Small Stuff states best what I was beginning to learn.

Over the years, dealing with my two rascals has taught me a lot. Besides patience, I have also learned to laugh and let minor things go, so what is a little mud now and then? More importantly, I have learned to look beyond myself and enjoy the moment. Quality time is precious, but chores and projects can always wait. Nothing that I might think is “all that” can really compare with the crazy times shared with my kids, Sean and Taylor.
Invincible

Edna F. Parinas

The ringing in my head was unbearable. I knew if I did not react quickly, I would lose this fight. The match was staggering. I had just received a blow that ultimately would have finished me off. But the excellent training regime Lee implemented, proved to be worthwhile. We were not into our third round, and I needed this final point to win. I focused my attention on my opponent, and knew I had to reveal the beast in me to become the victor.

“Combo six, combo six!” I heard Lee yell from the sidelines. I knew this was my chance. In fact, we both knew. I raised my weaker leg to fake a roundhouse. She moved to defend herself, which placed her in the perfect position for my final move.

“Go, Ed, Go!” the crowd cheered, “it’s in the bag, baby!”

Finish her, I heard myself say. Faking her out allowed me to complete the combination flawlessly. I jumped in a 360, lifting the alternate leg and slamming it skillfully into her mid stomach. Once I landed the kick, I placed a precise triple punch combination, completing the set with a powerful whack! Icing on the cake as I would refer to it. It was exactly how I’d imagined it. That was the second competition I won. It was very rewarding and memorable.

I still look back on that year as the epitome of my ‘raging twenties’: lean and mean. I understood how great fighters perceived the world around them. Your confidence was high and you believed you were invincible. It was very exhilarating to know I was the Champion Light-weight Muay Thai Women Kick Boxer in my division. I went back to the gym the following week to prepare for, supposedly, the most challenging competitor in my near future. Flying high from my recent match, I arrived early to soak in all of the praises from my gym mates.

“Boy, were you slick, kicking ass like that!” Brad remarked, punching his fist to his palm.

“Merciless!” thick-neck Tonya exclaimed.

My coach came out of his office to begin our training session. He was a short man with well-defined muscles from his many years of experience in this brutal sport. His face was kindly but ancient. He gave me a brief pat on the back and quickly dismissed my pompous
attitude.

"Your kicks were way too low, and none of your left hooks landed correctly in that fight! I guess I overestimated my new training system," he said with a slight disappointed tone. I can't particularly say I truly enjoyed Lee's mind-set, although he was the best at what he did. His training ethics were inscrutable at times; however, we both shared a common goal, to be the best and stay there.

I recall the many months of training in that dungy gym. Some days were more excruciating than others. That day became one of those dreadful days. I now understand the reasoning behind Lee's madness. The results were apparent. I believe I attained my status due to him, along with my athletic abilities. Lee understood how to hone my talent and advance it to a greater level. Regardless, I worked hard that day and the next few weeks thereafter.

As physically intense as the ensuing weeks entailed, my home life was quite the contrary. I valued my family morals tremendously. I was brought up in a Catholic home, with loving parents and not one degree of violence. Consequently, my hobby created a lot of conflict in my household.

"Why do you do this to your body?" my mother would always ask. "Not only do you harm yourself, but you are raising your hand to another!" She was right. I always knew it. It was just so different being in that ring and feeling so powerful and in control. As often as I could, I always refrained from speaking about Muay Thai around my parents. I wasn't quite sure how to deal with this dilemma. It honestly became a burden. I was torn between doubting my passion for this sport that I was so committed to, and being addicted to the adrenaline of winning and being the best.

Finally, the morning of the fight arrived. In the locker room, Lee was wrapping my hands, as Brad massaged my neck. "This is the one, Edna. You win this, and you will go down in history." This was our ritual pep talk, a scenario I came to rely on. "You must save combo six for last. Replay it in your mind, just like we practiced. You will do awesome."

Once I was dressed and prepared, I knelt next to my bench and whispered my customary silent prayer. I could hear residuals of the dispute I had had the previous night with my parents. It was never pleasant when we spoke of Muay Thai. In truth, I couldn't shake the negativity that resonated from our yelling match. "What?! Come see your fight? Fighting is not in our blood, Edna. Violence will never be honored in my family," my father proclaimed.
Who needs them anyways? I am strong, I am cunning and I am about to win the most important match of my life. Amen. I made the sign of the Holy Cross and leapt to my feet. “Let’s do this, Lee,” I said with determination.

Shortly after I stood in the ring, the first round started. My opponent was two inches taller than I was, the exact height I had been anticipating the past month during training. I performed the first combination of all upper body thrusts. She returned with greater intensity. Her strength behind her blows was challenging my defense moves. She was able to front kick me off the mat within minutes of Round One. Point for her.

I caught my composure and proceeded to begin Round Two. I glanced at the crowd, and to my disbelief, there were my parents. They stood apart from the crowd with worried looks on their faces. My spirits immediately lifted, and I decided this would be my chance to prove how good I was in this sport.

The bell rang for Round Two, and I was flying high again. Left jab, right hook, uppercut, uppercut, block, leg block. Much to my surprise, this girl’s strength was not weakening. I decided it was time to pull out my infallible secret weapon: Combo six. What happened next only lasted a few moments, but the memory of it left an indelible mark on my memory as a Muay Thai Kick Boxer. I launched the initial deception kick, which placed her exactly in the position for my combination six. I then jumped into a 360, lifting the alternate leg to expertly slam into her mid stomach. However, I misjudged our distance and instead slammed her directly in her face. She collapsed to the floor as I stood over her. The crowd immediately began booing and hissing.

“Cheater!” an angry onlooker yelled.

I did not intend to hurt her that way. I had accidentally kicked her mouth so hard that blood was everywhere, and her front teeth were missing! Oh dear, oh dear! What did I do? I looked up to see my parents leaving. Lee was looking at me with an infuriated look, and the referee was leaning over trying to assist my opponent. I stood there in awe. The world around me became a blur. Why is the sky blue? Why does water meet land at the shore? Where do stars come from? Who invented pizza?

All I could hear over the crowd was the referee yelling, “Edna, Edna! You are disqualified! Your actions will be reviewed and pending the Board’s results, you may lose your license to fight in any division! Do you hear me? Do you understand?” I think I nodded. The remainder of that eventful night was a big haze.
From what I heard, the girl was able to replace her teeth after a few months of extensive surgery, and she decided to retire her short-lived career. As for me, I also decided to hang my gloves up, with or without the Board's decision. My view in life has dramatically changed since then. I'm not quite sure if I would attribute my change of heart entirely to that day. However, I do believe it began as a result of that fight. Subsequently, I changed my hobby to a far more gentle sport, running.

After 9/11, it was confirmed I made the right choice. This past December, I was able to run my first Marathon in honor of raising funds for Cancer. The feeling of crossing that finish line was far greater than winning a fight with some stranger's blood on my shoes.

Until this day, I've never heard the end of my parents' feelings of disappointment in that particular choice of sport. I believe they secretly enjoy the pleasure of saying, 'I told you so' to at least one of their kids. The truth is, now I don't blame them.
Lost Innocence

Debra Saiki

It was September 28, 1977 and the day was hot and humid. I was in the back yard of my parents’ home, sitting on the wooden step. The house was a 1950’s wood-framed bungalow with three bedrooms. There was nothing very remarkable about it, but it is where I grew up and being there comforted me.

I was 25 years old, pregnant, and due any day. I had gained 25 pounds, which isn’t much under the circumstances, but my small frame didn’t wear pregnancy well and I felt like a 5’ tall by 5’ wide duck. This extra weight made me so tired and uncomfortable that all I wanted at that moment was to have the baby and be able to sit and walk normally again.

This was week four of my maternity leave due to my manager’s insistence. What I needed was to rest and keep off my feet he said, but I know the real reason was that he was terrified by the thought of me having the baby in the office.

At about 6 p.m., I heard my husband’s car pull into the driveway. Jason would pick me up after work, and we would have dinner at home. I, not very gracefully, struggled into the car and we drove home in silence.

Jason and I had met about 6 years before through a mutual friend. We began dating and I enjoyed his company. We had been seeing each other for less than a year when he told me of his plans to enlist in the army. “Why don’t we get married before I leave,” he suggested. I did want to get married, some day, but I was only 20 years old and didn’t feel ready for that kind of commitment. However, Jason was persistent. “You’ve met my family and like them,” he reminded me. “We’re planning to get married anyway. Why not do it now?” he said. Well, we did get married, and Jason left for basic training a month later.

We wrote regularly, and I also visited him, but it didn’t feel like a true marriage. So, when he returned 3 years later, I was very excited and expected a happily-ever-after life together. Instead, I received a dose of reality.

I don’t remember what we had for dinner or, for that matter, much about that evening, but the 10 p.m. news began, and I decided to go to bed, alone, again. Jason would not be coming home till very late that night, and I had stopped asking a long time ago where he
was going. Sleep escaped me that evening for there was a lot on my mind.

Back in June, when I was about 6 months into my pregnancy, Jason announced that he wanted a separation. That left me speechless, and I didn’t know what to think. What does a separation mean? Will he be moving out? If so, how will I manage the household and finances? Would he help me? What am I going to do? I was bombarded with so many questions and had no answers. Thoughts of being alone and being abandoned consumed me for the next three months.

After his announcement, nothing changed. He still left shortly after dinner and usually returned sometime after 2 a.m. All the time I wondered if he had any plans to move out, and I was afraid that he might.

Our marriage, which had not been doing well for a couple of years, had started to deteriorate shortly after his return from the army. He had had affairs in the past but the situation was getting worse. My self-esteem had been slowly eroding away, and I believed the state our marriage was in was my fault. I thought I wasn’t pretty enough or funny enough and that made him look elsewhere.

Sleep finally came, and when I opened my eyes it was morning. It wasn’t the alarm that woke me, but the discomfort I was feeling.

Jason left for work as usual, and I did not mention the contractions to him. They became stronger and more frequent. I had to get to the hospital but did not want to call him. It was about 6 a.m. when I called my sister instead and woke her. Saying that Jason had already left for work, I asked her if she could drive me to the hospital. I’m sure she wasn’t fooled, but she said nothing and drove me there.

There were no complications and the delivery went relatively smoothly, if you don’t think about the excruciating pain. Although I don’t recall how long my stay in the recovery room was, I do remember being taken to my room, and there is where my decision was made.

My sister must have called Jason because he showed up at the door of my room a short while later, smiling. He said he had gone to the nursery and had seen our baby. He commented on how cute she was. As he spoke, I looked at his face and remember thinking, “This is not the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. My life would be happier without him.”
I interrupted him and told him that a separation would just prolong the inevitable, so I would be filing for divorce. The look on his face was one of disbelief, and I wondered if he was feeling what I had felt three months earlier.

In hindsight, there were many things I would do differently. We were both very young. I was naïve and probably thought that in time he would change, or maybe that I could change him. I was too proud to ask for help, and after awhile was too embarrassed to admit that I couldn’t make the marriage work. Looking back, I realize that it was foolish of me not to have turned to my family for help. On the other hand, to have finally made up my mind was so empowering. The fog that seemed to be all around me had cleared, and I was able to get on with my life and concentrate on and enjoy my daughter.
Abuelita’s Light

Michelle Sanchez

It is early January 1999 and I am working temporarily in Manila in the Philippines. A few days into my trip I get a call from my dad saying that I need to get to Guatemala as quickly as possible. Abuelita, my grandmother is dying of cancer and needs round the clock care. I take the next plane out of Manila and get to Guatemala City two days later. I arrive jetlagged and anxious. I know this will be my last trip home.

My Mom and her sisters Lily, Anna, and María, are all here to take care of their mother and to say their good-byes. They greet me with tears, hugs and haunted faces.

Before I enter Abuelita’s room I take a deep steadying breath, dry my tears, and for her, put on a smile. I hug her gently and with a festive air present her with the gifts I have brought her a beautiful blue silk caftan and a jade rosary.

When I see her, I see the charm of her old-world class and grace. She was always a beauty and even in her eighty-one years I can still see it in her youthful, unlined face. We all take after her with our petite frames and strength of will. I am worried about her and how she is handling her inability to take care of herself. She was always so strong in mind and in spirit.

Two weeks pass. Abuelita gets worse every day; she is not eating or drinking. She talks to Pupi, Meches, Willy and others who have passed on, but doesn’t talk as much to those of still living and taking care of her. I don’t know what day it is, but I do know it is close to midnight.

We have given Abuelita an injection of Morphine and Demerol so she should be sleeping for at least a couple of hours and we decide that we will leave her alone for now. Mom, Lily, Anna, Maria and I are sleeping in the room next door to Abuelita’s. Although we are all exhausted, I still keep one ear trained and listen for her breathing and quiet moans. Somehow this is reassuring to me.

About a half-hour after we have all gone to bed, and just as we are all falling into sleep, we suddenly hear three very loud knocks, almost bangs, against the wall of Abuelita’s room. We all screamed and leapt out of our beds, I fell out onto the cold hard floor. We were scared out of our minds. All of our eyes were bugged out of our heads; I was clutching my chest trying to get my heart beating again and get my breath back. We just knew it couldn’t be
Abuelita’s Light

Michelle Sanchez

Abuelita who knocked on the wall because she doesn’t have the strength. Then we heard her calling out for Bea, my Mom. We all ran into her room to find out what had happened. To our shock Abuelita had indeed pounded on the wall next to her bed, she was still knocking lightly when we rushed in. She was coherent for the first time in days.

She wanted to talk to my mother. The rest of us returned to bed. Mom stayed with Abuelita and came to bed about two hours later. The next morning we asked my Mom to tell us what had happened. Mom told us that Abuelita had asked for her help. With tears streaming down her face she told us what transpired between them.

“Bea,” she said, “I need you to help me. I need you to help me, I can see light but I cannot find my way. Bea help me find the light.”

“Okay, Mom, I will help you. Relax and take my hand. Mom what do you see?”

“I see a light, and I hear the most beautiful music. It is so lovely. Can you hear them singing, Bea?”

“Mom, that is wonderful. What else can you see?”

“I see Pupi, and Meches. They are waiting for me. They want me to walk with them to the light.”

“Good, Mom, okay now walk to the light. Can you see it?”

“Yes, Yes, I see it. It’s getting closer. It is so beautiful!”

“Okay, Mom, let go of my hand and go to the light now.”

“No, Bea. Wait. You have to help me. You have to go with me to the light.”

“Mom, I can’t go with you. You have to let go and go to the light on your own.”

“Bea, I can’t. Not yet. You have to help me.”

“Mom, you have to do this on your own. You have to let my hand go.”

“No! Bea, not yet. I can’t do this yet. I can’t do this without you.”
“Okay, Mom, just relax. You’re not ready yet. We will try again later. Just rest for now.”

“Okay Bea. Thank you.”

Needless to say, the rest of us were speechless. I, for one, had a major case of chicken skin. Mom was pale and shaking. I got her a glass of scotch. We all sat together for a few minutes more, staring into our glasses, lost in our own thoughts. I felt I had to go sit with Abuelita for a few minutes.

As I was walking down the hallway, I could Abuelita talking and moaning a little. I decided to go into her room and sit by her bedside. I sat on her bed, took her hand and shed a few tears of my own. I knew I would never get to talk with her again.

My grandmother passed away just two days later. What was left of our little family prepared to deal with the hundreds of other family and friends who would be gathering at the house for the funeral. Lily and Anna prepared her body, and with the help of some friends, placed her in her coffin. She was buried in the blue silk caftan and the jade rosary I had brought her from Manila.

I found out that death is not always frightening. If I am lucky, when the time comes, I will be at home surrounded by my loving family and friends. I was glad I was there to help Abuelita go quietly into her light.
My Piano Incident

Eri Sato

I did not like to play the piano. It was my mother’s idea for me to take piano lessons and not mine. When I was a little kid, I was a tomboy, and loved to play outside. Whenever possible, I went to the park with my friends. It was obvious to everybody’s eyes that it did not fit my character to sit in front of a piano and play beautiful songs. Nevertheless, my mother’s desire for me to learn the piano was much stronger than my resistance to it. Therefore, I began to take piano lessons when I was five years old.

I have had several teachers since then. My third teacher was the most influential teacher in my piano lessons. She was a rather strict teacher and put a lot of focus on teaching the fundamental skills and techniques. I had four music books throughout her lessons. They were two practice books and two other books that had famous songs.

I did not want to practice everyday and did not care to go to her house for a lesson every week. I often envied my friends who took piano lessons and did not have to practice like I had to. The songs were quite hard and I lost my motivation to even start practicing them. Also, though my teacher was not too strict, she did not allow me to be lazy either. I was convinced that I hated the piano. During that time, I did it because my mother told me to do so. She never let me quit it, and I knew I could not ever change her mind. It was torture to me; I was complaining and did not enjoy it at all.

Perhaps my moodiness was very obvious. Everybody might have been able to tell, especially right before I walked toward the piano to practice. It was around the fourth grade and the day must have been Saturday, since my father was home in the afternoon. My mother was in the kitchen doing some housework as usual, and I went into the living room where the piano was. It was getting dark outside and the room had become chilly. My parents were talking in the kitchen, discussing where to eat out for dinner. I passed them and went to the corner of the room, opening the piano’s black cover reluctantly. My eyes were cold, my mouth was shut tightly, and my hands were moving to search for the piano books. I sat on the round piano chair, put the books on the book rest, and started playing the boring practice scales. My shoulders dropped and the sound of the piano filled the room. Though I was very unhappy with it, I always practiced my music the way my teacher told me to. I played the same songs over and over and the time passed slowly. My parents started to get ready to go out, and my father came to the living room.

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“We’ll go out soon, Eri. Start getting ready to leave,” my father told me as he picked up his wallet on the table. I was still moody though and continued to practice the piano.

“I still have to practice more, Daddy. I haven’t finished the other one yet,” I answered. He was still there looking for something and told me to continue practicing a little more. I was tired of practicing and also tired of being stuck with it all the time. I started to complain out loud.

“Oh, I wish I could just skip my practice. It’s just too hard and I can’t do it anymore. Can I just stop right now?” It was what I was thinking inside my heart, and I did not feel it was bad to think and say it aloud. What I said was true, and I did wish to stop practicing. My father’s next reaction was totally shocking to me. He came right next to me and grabbed my piano books. He threw them on the floor and nearly shouted.

“What is wrong with you? It’s better to quit it than practice with such a bad attitude. I don’t want to see that kind of face anymore. Go ahead, quit it, and never practice again!”

I was very shocked. I did not know what had happened. He had never been involved in my learning the piano before, so I never expected him to take it that way. I was standing there speechless, but at the same time was very angry. I sat down on the chair, and started to play it again. I was very confused. I was angry and also very ashamed. I knew we had to leave soon, but I just kept playing. Seeing what happened, my mother’s face was kind, but a little rigid. She came to me and said I could stop and get ready to go out. I was glad then that I didn’t have to stay there feeling uncomfortable. My father drove to the restaurant and the rest of the night was fine.

That was all that happened. It was quick and shocking. It was not because my father threw the books, though that was surprising to me since he was not violent, but that he noticed my attitude so well. I never thought he cared about it. My mother, however, told me frequently about the little tiny things concerning my attitude. Getting scolded by my father was quite different from getting scolded by my mother. It meant a lot and it worked. The incident remained in my memory after that, and, for the first time, I tried to enjoy and be thankful for being able to learn the piano. I knew what my father said was true. I should quit it if I am not being thankful for it. As I started practicing a difficult song with a changed attitude, I gradually discovered that I could play it. It was impossible to even play one or two lines of such songs before. It was such a joy to know that I could do it. Also, the songs I learned were all famous songs, which I had heard on the radio or on CDs. I was very proud that I was able to play the same masterpiece the professional pianists did.
From that time, I tried to be thankful. I actually started to enjoy and began to see that playing the piano was more than just reading and playing the notes. My teacher also started to require me to show more emotion when playing. The recital I had that year was the best recital I ever had.

Whenever I encounter new and difficult things in my life, I always remember the piano incident. Patience and endurance are important and playing the piano taught me to keep trying. I was glad that my father scolded me that time. If he had reacted differently, or had not cared and allowed me to keep on complaining, I would never have been able to continue playing the piano. That would be the saddest thing that could happen, not to be able to play songs well with joy.
My Grandfather’s Shadow

Alana Weaver

My little heart dropped, as I woke up one morning without my grandfather beside me. The morning air was very chilling, so I snuggled beneath the sheets to keep warm. Then, I began calling for my grandfather.

“Papa, Papa, where are you?”

He wouldn't answer. In wonderment, I slowly got off the bed, and began to walk around our bungalow. I looked in the tiny kitchen of ours, but he wasn’t there. I then turned around and looked in the dining room, but he wasn’t there either. Finally, I began walking towards the bathroom in hopes that I would find him. I honestly wasn’t prepared for what I was about to find!

Tahiti was a wonderful place to grow up. The air was cool, the sun was shining, and the ocean was always blue. I lived in my grandfather’s hotel, which was called “Hotel Tahiti.” The hotel was bigger than anything I had ever seen, and I couldn’t believe that it was a part of my life. To be more specific, I resided with my grandfather in what is called a “bungalow.” A bungalow looks somewhat like a small hut, but a little more upscale. There were bungalows all over the place, and ours was on the ocean side.

My grandfather was, and still is a very special person in my heart. He was always cooking. He loved to cook, and that is what he did best throughout his lifetime. He owned a restaurant in Tahiti called “Coco’s.” I remember having lots of parties there, where many people would come just to eat. Yes, he ate the food that he cooked, but sometimes he overdid it, and never watched his cholesterol, or blood pressure. Well, neither I nor my grandfather would have thought that his not watching what he eats would catch up with him one day. Everyone told him to take care of his health and to not overdo it with the food that he made. He was stubborn and never thought twice about going to get help. My grandmother would get very angry, but that’s all she could do, because he wouldn’t listen. Unfortunately, his health got worse, and made me experience something horrible as a little girl.

Back in my bungalow, I found my grandfather in the bathroom, and he was lying on the ground without any clothes on, as if he was about to shower. I was frightened and began to
My Grandfather’s Shadow

Alana Weaver

talk to him.

“Papa, Papa, wake up.”

He wouldn’t answer me, and it was at that moment that I began to think really hard about what I should do to help him. I immediately grabbed a towel from the rack, and gently covered the lower half of his body. He was very pale and cold. The next thing I thought of was to check if he was breathing. So I placed my index finger right under his nose, and no air was coming out. I began to shake and to fear that my grandfather was gone forever. Without any thought, I ran out my front door and headed for the restaurant where my aunt worked. I ran straight to her and began explaining what had happened to my grandfather.

“Auntie, I woke up this morning and found grandpa on the ground in the bathroom! I didn’t know what to do, so I ran straight to you.”

My aunt stood there in shock and began to tell me what to do.

“Alanna, you need to run to the front desk and have them call an ambulance right away. Also, have someone go to the bungalow and check on your grandfather.”

I nodded, hugged her, and ran for the front desk of the hotel.

As soon as I got to the front desk, I told the secretary what happened.

“Tatie, grandpa is lying on the ground in the bathroom and he isn’t breathing!”

In disbelief, she began to question me.

“Alanna, are you sure that he isn’t breathing? Are you really sure?”

“Yes, I placed my finger under his nose, and no air was coming out! Tatie, I’m scared.”

“Everything is going to be alright, hunnie, don’t worry.”

I couldn’t stand there and not worry, because my grandfather was lying on the ground, and I couldn’t get that horrible picture out of my head. Then, the secretary had someone run to our bungalow right away. I can’t explain the way I felt at the time; it was the worst feeling ever. I honestly felt really empty inside. I wasn’t allowed to go to the bungalow. Instead I was told to stay put and to wait for my aunt to get there. I didn’t want to just stay put; I
My Grandfather’s Shadow  

wanted to go see him and see what was going on. After about 10 minutes, I was allowed to head for the bungalow with my aunt. As soon as I arrived, I saw the paramedics carrying my grandfather’s body outside. In an instant, I began to scream out for him and to cry hysterically.

“Papa, Papa, please don’t go away! Papa, please wake up!”

I couldn’t help myself; I knew that his death would change my life forever.

Now that my grandfather was gone, my family and I had to put his body to rest. A funeral was held for him at a very small Catholic church in Papeete. Everyone was there, even my grandmother, who flew in a day after my grandpa died. I recall sitting on the side with my grandfather’s open casket in the middle of the church. I couldn’t bear looking at his dead body because it was extremely terrifying to me. I don’t know why I was so scared of him, but I was. My grandmother was sitting right next to the casket, wiping my grandfather’s face with a cloth. A few minutes later, she called me over to wipe my grandfather’s face, but I refused, and began to scream at her.

“No, Grandma, I don’t want to, I’m scared! Leave me alone!”

Angrily she grabbed me to my grandfather’s side and made me touch his face. I was so afraid, and I don’t know why. Soon after the church service, we went to the graveyard and put my grandfather’s body to rest. I cried and cried for days after the burial; I couldn’t get that picture of his dead body out of my head.

This was a memorable experience for me, and it has stayed with me for a very long time. Death is very hard for me to understand, and I don’t know if I will ever accept it. I know that not everyone has gone through what I went through, and I pray that no child will. Since that day, I’ve learned to appreciate the ones I love and to never take things for granted. Every day is a new day, and honestly, no one really knows the outcomes of tomorrow. I never thought that death would fall upon my grandfather that quick, but then again, I bet he knew that something like this was bound to happen to him.
My Reason

Keiko White

I used to watch his sleeping face every night, kiss on his bouncy cheek, touch his soft wavy hair, and it might sound strange, but I loved to smell him. He had a sweet candy-like smell with scent of soap that made me feel motherhood. Then, I also wondered what he ate, what he saw, and what he did at the babysitter’s house?

Working as a single parent at a retail store in Waikiki, my schedule was not easy. Night shift ended at 11 p.m., and I had to work one day each weekend. When my schedule allowed us to be together, times were very precious for us.

My son has believed everything I have said, everything about anything. Maybe I was the only adult he grew up with, or maybe he was at the age to absorb everything without any questions. He accepted everything; the gate in his mind was wide open.

About one and a half years ago, we were waiting outside his favorite restaurant “EGGS’n Things” to be seated. He was wearing a T-shirt, shorts and slippers and a typical loco boy cloth on his honey-colored skin and he had a big “Kool-aids” smile on his face. A lady asked him, “What is your name? How old are you?” He proudly answered with his loud voice, “My name is Marcus White, I am 5 years old, and my mom is 37!” It was too late to cover his mouth. Later on that day, I told him that his ages go forward, my ages go backward, and he believed it.

Ever since, he has often said, “I’ll take care of you when you will get smaller,” or “I’ll get you a Barbie doll; girls like the dolls, you know.” When I scolded him, he stuck his lips out like a duck and said, “I’ll give you a time-out too.” So many adorable things he said made me smile although I had a bit of guilty feeling in me.

Recently, as he became older, he started to wonder why everybody got older but not his mommy. One day, I decided to tell him the truth, but he was very shocked. I saw tears coming from his big eyes. He asked me, “So, are you going to die someday? Please don’t die. I don’t want to be alone,” he cried. Now, I was shocked. I didn’t expect him to take it in that way, but then, he made me realize, yes, someday, I will die. How long could I be with him?

He has changed my life. He is the reason why I had to quit my work. Going back to school
after so many years isn’t easy, but my commitment is very strong. He is my motivation
He is my energy. He encourages me to move toward success.

I am watching his sleeping face every night and telling myself, “I can do it.”
The Shake to Remember

Jackson Yeh

One Sunday evening, I was eating a delicious meal cooked by my grandmother at my grandparent’s house in Guam. I went there a lot because it was boring at my house and the 100-acre farm was filled with adventures.

I was a growing boy about nine years of age. I had a shaved head and wore a T-shirt, shorts, and slippers. I was always a conformist at that time and pretty much listened to anyone who gave me orders.

At around 6:30 p.m., the sky was slowly turning dark, but it was dimly lit due to the summer solstice and the short distance to the equator. It was a stormy day, with the wind whistling and the rain drizzling. It was very common to have tropical storms in Guam, and to me it just seemed like any other day.

The kitchen was the first thing that appeared when one walked into the house. The sink was immediately on the right side of the entrance. To the left of the sink was a counter, which had many condiments, a rice cooker, and a dish rack full of dishes, bowls, chopsticks, and other utensils. Parallel to the sink was a table big enough for four people. I was sitting down eating dinner on the left side of the table. The food, of course, was always delicious. Sitting to the left of me was my dad, also eating dinner.

My dad was a thin, middle aged man, with a small body structure. I considered him to be mean for some reason and listened to anything he told me. The thing that made me scared of him was because he rarely laughed or smiled at all. On that one evening he was wearing his usual clothing: T-shirt, shorts, and slippers.

Walking around in back of me was my grandmother. She has a habit of eating when everyone else has finished eating. So while I was eating, she was shuffling around cleaning the kitchen and constantly making sure there was enough food to eat. She was pretty short with a small body structure, and very slim. She always has her curly hair permed and her usual clothing is long pants and a shirt. She was always nice and caring, but she kept quiet and rarely laughed.

While I was eating dinner, my grandpa was taking a shower. After a long hard day of work,
he always takes a shower. He is fairly tall and looks really fit for someone his age. Working hard was always his primary concern and he was always very strict. Sometimes my dad and uncles would say, “He (grandpa) will probably be old and be able to outwork us.” A lot of people feared him because he looks very strict. But I will always respect him for working hard.

As I was eating dinner, the kitchen was quiet. Everything was normal until a sharp rumble shook the house. It was as if a gigantic fist had just punched the house. The plates made a clanging noise for a second that stunned the three of us in the kitchen. Three seconds later, all hell and chaos broke loose. The entire walls were shaking, and all the things on the tables and counters were thrown onto the ground. The dishes shattered into tiny pieces all over the ground.

“Earthquake!” my dad shouted.

We were about to run out of the house, but there was someone missing. My grandpa! He was still inside the shower, so I ran to tell him.

“There is an earthquake!” I tried to yell through the door.

It was really frightening because I feared that the roof would come crashing down on me.

After I told him, I sprinted outside. I ran outside the door and out the garage, where my grandpa’s truck was parked. I slowed down right next to my dad’s van parked behind my grandpa’s truck. Hopping up and down next to me were my dad and grandma. Every second seemed like a whole minute as I ran as fast as I could outside but every step felt like it was in slow motion. The earthquake was so powerful that my dad’s van was bouncing up and down. The black asphalt ground felt like it was made of rubber.

The ground was shaking so hard that I couldn’t feel my legs. It felt like I lost circulation. I thought I would be scared to death while the earthquake was still pounding but when I was next to my dad and grandma, I thought it was kind of fun bouncing up and down. My dad said some swear words and kind of smiled too because he had never felt anything like that before.

I always thought earthquakes were supposed to be really short and wondered to myself, “How long are earthquakes supposed to last?”

“Where is your grandpa?” my dad asked me.
I then realized he was still in the house. All of a sudden something came bursting out the door. It was my grandpa. He ran outside like he was sprinting down the last stretch of a marathon. Not only was he sprinting out screaming like a little girl but he was also completely naked and only covering his crotch with his two bare hands. He ran to the right side of the garage and was still screaming. He ran around in a circle once and tried to stop moving, but he looked like a jogger who is jogging in place.

“Oh my God!” was my first reaction. I did not know whether to laugh or feel sorry for him. I decided to hold in my laugh because I thought he would get mad.

When I turned to look at my dad and grandma, I was surprised. It was like the funniest comedian told them the best joke they have ever heard. They were laughing their asses off like they had never laughed in their lives. I guess it must be really funny to see someone streaking outside naked and screaming, especially for my dad and grandma because they had never seen him embarrassed in his life.

The earth was still shaking hard and relentlessly and felt almost as if it would never end. The whole thing seemed to last for a very long time but was roughly a minute.

After it was over, I must have blanked out for a few seconds because I was completely speechless. My grandpa went back inside, quickly got dressed, and came back out.

“Why didn’t anyone of you guys tell me or grab me a towel?” my grandpa questioned.

Everyone just started laughing and I was surprised that my grandpa thought it was funny and laughed about it.

For me, the earthquake was like a rollercoaster ride because it was scary at first, but after it was over, I wanted to experience it again.