DIAMOND JOURNAL

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Artist's Statement

After the Twin Towers disappeared as bearing markers, I experienced an odd sense of displacement, partly due to my own close association with those buildings. In 1978, artist Tia Ballantine and I had painted a 75' x 800' mural on the surface of the West Side Highway, directly under the World Trade Center. That painting positioned anarchic human creativity and spontaneity in relationship to these carefully crafted iconic representations of Western Civilization. The Trade Centers had dwarfed the massive scale of the painting, but the painting, covering the entire surface of the highway, provided a conceptual garden of shape and color for bike riders, joggers, and lunch-time strollers, thus reducing the overwhelming physical presence of the Towers. The painting was dismantled in 1984 when the highway was dismantled, and now the Towers themselves were gone.

After 911, feeling disoriented by the WTC collapse, I found myself wondering about the physical and metaphysical disorientation we might experience if one of the obvious bearing markers of Honolulu—such as Le'ahi (Diamond Head)—were to disappear. What if a part of our cultural and historical heritage, a solid part of our landscape—such as the WTC had been to those of us who lived in downtown Manhattan—were to disappear? And so, I created “Lost Bearings” as a typical “postcard” of Waikiki—but without Le'ahi looming in the background.

I expected viewers to experience the same sense of loss that I felt when looking at that altered landscape, but instead, to my surprise, many did not notice the absence of Diamond Head. Instead, the land—that which holds ancestry and offers haven and strength—remained invisible to many who examined “Lost Bearings” with confusion, looking past the land for erased buildings on the Waikiki skyline.

Brendt Berger
26 February 2002
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A Fair Chance
Raymond Acosta

A razor sharp scalpel is handed to the surgeon. He presses the blade down on the skin then slowly runs the bevel across the flesh. The skin's edges part, leaving a gap filled with oily yellow fat soaked in bright red blood. It is the first time I have ever seen a body being sliced open. I cringe as the initial cut is made, imagining the pain of a knife piercing my stomach. I feel very uneasy at my first sight of blood, but I am determined to give this profession a fair chance, spending a year of my life preparing for it.

I arrive in Hawai'i from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to complete the clinical portion of my surgical technologist program. I am assigned to do my on-the-job training at Tripler Army Medical Center.

On my first day of training, I get up about three thirty in the morning to get ready for school. I take a hot shower, put on my freshly starched and ironed uniform, and make sure my boots are spit shined. I am very excited to get to Tripler this morning for this is my first time in an actual operating room. At the same time, I am nervous because it will be my first contact with a real live patient.

I get to the hospital at about five fifteen. I am to report to the operating room front desk at six o'clock. Since I am early, I decide to drink some coffee to wake me up a little more. The person in charge of the training is Staff Sergeant Brooks, who soon arrives and instructs me to change into surgical attire.

When I finish changing, I head for the education room to wait for further instructions. Sergeant Brooks sits me down and gives me an overview of the clinical portion of the program. She hands me case study sheets to be completed after every case. I am briefed in what to expect and what is expected of me in the operating room. I am going to observe a bowel resection. This procedure is done to remove a dead section of the bowel on the patient's small intestine. I am not going to be participating in the procedure. I am just going to observe and get familiar with being in surgery.

I walk into the operating room suite, but the surgeon and his assistant, who is a resident doctor, haven't arrived yet. The anesthesiologist is busy putting the patient to sleep. He will then intubate the patient to ensure the patient receives sufficient oxygen during surgery. A breathing tube is inserted in the patient's throat to establish this. The surgical technologist is busy setting up his instruments and preparing his equipment for the procedure.
There are a lot more instruments in his setup than I anticipated. The nurse is tending to the patient, making sure the patient is calm and comfortable before going off to sleep. I pull up a chair on the side so I will not get in the way.

The operating room is very cold and well lit. The room itself has the scent of the disinfectant used to clean everything in it. The room is spacious and extremely clean, and the furniture in it mostly consists of stainless steel material. Every person in the room has a mask on, exposing only his eyes and ears. Hair is covered with a surgical cap. Shoe covers are also worn to prevent contaminants from entering the OR. The nurse begins to prep the patient, using Betadine as she scrubs the abdomen. This is done to clean the surgical site. After drying the soap using a sterile towel, the nurse paints the abdomen with Betadine.

The surgeon walks in the room with his hands dripping water after scrubbing. The surgical tech gives him a towel to dry his hands. He is gowned with a light blue paper gown used in surgery and gloved with rubber latex surgical gloves. The patient is completely draped, exposed only at the abdomen. The electrosurgical pencil, an instrument that uses electricity to cut and burn flesh to minimize bleeding, is set up. The suction tubing is also turned on, causing a high pitched hissing sound.

The surgeon first marks the incision line using a sterile felt tip pen. The cut will be about ten inches long in the middle of the abdomen, running up and down. The surgeon asks for the scalpel. While putting tension on the skin, he lays the blade on the purple line and slices the abdomen open. At the sight of this, I cringe, never having seen anything like it in my life. As soon as the cut is made, blood starts to ooze out of the incision. Seeing the oily fatty tissue mixed with bright red blood makes me nauseated. At this point, I want to excuse myself in order to pray to the porcelain god. Then I think I don’t want to be laughed at, so I take a deep breath and stay. The suction is used to suck the blood, and the pencil burns the cut vessels to stop the bleeding, creating fumes of burnt flesh that fill the suite. This odor is unlike anything I have ever smelt before. It’s as if human hair is burning in a butcher shop. I am getting woozy so I bring my wrists to my mask, allowing my cologne to drown out some of the smell.

Getting over the initial cut takes some time, but soon the sight of blood has no effect on me. My nose gets used to the smell and I feel better. The fascia is now incised to expose the entire abdominal cavity. To get a better look at the different organs, I stand up and go near the surgeons. At this point in the surgery, I start to ask my sergeant questions, which she gladly answers. A piece of bowel that is necrotic is removed. The two ends of the intestine are now reattached using suture, a needle with a string made of silk attached to it. Seeing the surgical team reconstruct the bowel amazes me. They are careful and at the same time very efficient. The whole team works like a well oiled machine, which makes me
A Fair Chance

appreciate surgery and feel determined to be a part of it. As the doctors begin closure of the abdomen, I start to get excited about the next day, knowing that I will do my first case tomorrow as a member of the surgical team.

Most people who see blood for the first time feel the same way I did. Some people would have dropped out of the program. But I do not wimp out. I give surgery a chance, and because I do, I find a profession that I love. Giving something or someone a chance is crucial in life. When you start something worthwhile and face a little adversity, don’t quit; give it a fair and wholehearted chance.
December 31, 1999
Anonymous

Beeeeeeeep beep beeeeeeeep beep, the alarm clock screeched loudly as I groaned at the prospect of getting out of bed. It was 6:30 am. I glanced at my surroundings—afraid at first, then I remembered that I had rented a hotel room (closet-sized, I might add) at the New Yorker. That’s right, I was in New York City, my Mecca. I just had to get out of bed, because not only was I in the greatest city on Earth, but the day had finally come—December 31, 1999.

It would be fair to say that I was in a daze. I had traveled to New York on a whim the previous day from Boston. I had one mission on my mind: to have the greatest New Year’s celebration ever. It was hard to believe that I had actually reached my destination. With conquering the city in mind, I checked out of the hotel to begin my adventure.

Walking through midtown, I passed by business people dressed in expensive clothes headed for posh restaurants, talking on cell phones, and others rushing around eager to commence the day’s festivities. I headed for the Empire State Building. I spotted its immense radio tower scraping the clouds and went in its direction. In the basement of this beautiful building, I stood in line to go up to the observatory. I was in the right place at the right time. Immediately I met Matt and Danny, two guys from Detroit who were on the same mission that I was. After we introduced ourselves, we made our way (slowly) to the summit—well, the 86th floor of the observatory—and gazed in awe at all of Manhattan, including, to the far south, the majestic twin towers of the now-destroyed World Trade Center.

Matt, Danny, and I also visited the Statue of Liberty, rode the subway, and almost went to the top of the World Trade Center. (I remember thinking, “Next time I’ll go to the top.”) At each tourist location we visited, I became more and more smitten with the enormous city.

Dusk was fast approaching, so the three of us decided to celebrate the coming of the millennium right in Times Square. However, we first needed to solve the most important factor for having a terrific New Year’s Eve—the availability of drugs. Danny’s goal was to score some “K,” while Matt and I wanted to “roll” our way into Y2K. We began our quest by going to the East Village—which is notorious for its ample supply of illicit substances. On the way we stopped in Greenwich Village for a quick bite to eat. There we spotted some raver kids. As fate would have it, one of the guys had some “White Buddahs”—enough for everyone to take two. While Matt and Danny trotted off to find “K,” I ventured with my new friends from Ohio—Brian, KC, and Dave—into Times Square, promising
Matt and Danny that I would meet up with them later at a club.

Thousands of people had begun to congregate in Times Square from about 7:00 am onward. As we were walking around, I tippy-toed and craned my neck (I'm short) to see above the people, and all I could see was a sea of heads. I kept looking around to see who looked like they might have a bomb. Earlier that day there were reports of a man with explosives attempting to board a plane to New York. Party-goers were blowing their horns and waving their colorful and glittery New Year’s hats with excitement. I later found out that 3.5 million people were in the Times Square area that night. Although there were thousands of NYPD officers deployed, the four of us still managed to retreat into an office building’s hallway and smoke some weed. The spirit of the new millennium was in the air! We couldn’t believe we were smoking out on the crowded streets of Manhattan. A few minutes later a cop came up to us...and told us that our open cans of Budweiser were illegal. “You kids shouldn’t be drinking on the street like this.” With that, he confiscated a few cans of our beer and stuffed them into his police jacket.

As the evening approached midnight, we walked over to a large fenced-off area in the middle of the street and watched a jumbo screen that displayed Vegas-style images like “Millennium,” “2000,” and “Happy New Year!” People were constantly cheering “woooooooo” and “Haaay New Year!” I was blowing my horn (which I bought off of a street vendor for $2 in front of Grand Central station) as hard as I could.

Finally 11:59 hit. In unison the crowd cried, “Ten...nine...eight...seven...six...five...four...three...two...one! HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!” Wow! This was the coolest moment of my life! And I was still alive! All of a sudden a shower of colored confetti flooded the air and people were jumping around with not a care in the world. I tightly hugged Dave, KC, and Brian.

This was the beginning of the new millennium. And I had celebrated its birth in Times Square! What a fabulous millennium it would be.
I love shoes. Boots, sandals, platforms, strapped, black, brown, red, and in colors galore. Casual wear, exercise, dance, and work shoes, you name it, I've got it. I admit I have a fetish for shoes. Any shoe that is bright and unusual will catch my attention. My favorite pair of shoes is my Tommy Hilfiger running sneakers, mostly white with a red and blue flag logo that adds a patriotic look to them. They are simple yet practical, and I am able to use them for any occasion, for work, play, or casual wear.

One early morning after work, around 2 a.m., I did my daily routine of walking to my car. I took a shortcut through the alleyway of the International Market Place. With my trusty shoes I briskly walked and held my breath as long as I could because I didn't want the nasty stench of urine and garbage reeking like decaying eggs to be trapped on my clothes. As I approached Kuhio Avenue, Waikiki was still active with tourists roaming the streets checking out the nightclubs on the strip. As I took a turn by Denny's, I was near the parking lot and just a minute away from jumping into my car to do my travel all the way up the Pali and back home to Kailua.

As I walked towards Denny's, through the large glass windows I could see people eating while others waited for their food. Bus boys and waitresses hustled to attend to their customers during this early morning rush. In front of Denny's a pair of leopard print platform stilettos with pointy, deadly heels caught my eye. I said out loud to myself, “Ouch! Those would hurt.” Thinking about the shoes my mind went blank, not realizing that the girl that wore them called out my name. I stopped and directed my eyes to focus on the face. She was a young Japanese girl with auburn shoulder length hair that was highlighted golden blonde. Her make-up was striking. She had on red lipstick that stood out on her fair olive skin, glitter eye shadow that sparkled when she turned at an angle, and her eyebrows were tattooed in and arched perfectly. Her shoes, which first caught my attention, were nearly 5 inches tall, giving extra height to her petite stature. A black feather boa was draped loosely around her neck and rested on her shoulders. She wore a tight leopard print tube top exposing her shoulders and rested on her arms. Japanese characters tattooed in bold black ink forever labeled her upper right arm. Leading to the question, “What does that mean?” It seemed as if her tattoo was a walking advertisement for her line of work. She was a “working girl” or simply called prostitute, walking the “track” as one would say in street slang. I had met her months earlier when she announced her retirement from “working” because she was pregnant and undecided about what to do with her unborn child. Young and confused, she felt that it was in her best interest to stop prostituting because of the pregnancy.
"Hey, where are you going?" She asked while chewing her gum and annoyingly snapping it after several chews.

"I just got off work," I replied.

Her tattooed eyebrow raised up and arched even more. I knew exactly what she was thinking. So, to divert her assumptions, I answered her question before she could even ask.

"Naw, I got a square job. I'm a bookkeeper at a restaurant here in Waikiki."

"You know where the money is at." She answered in a somewhat sassy manner.

"That's a'ight, girl. I don't mind the little ends I make. But I need to bounce. My shorty is waiting on me at home," I said abruptly while I thought of my son sound asleep in his bed.

"A'ight... Give your shorty a kiss," she answered back in street lingo.

I walked away in disbelief, but for some odd reason I knew that she would go back into "business." I had a deja vu and was reminded of how I almost walked in "working" shoes. I finally reached my car and started it up to begin my destination home. While driving I was still disturbed and thought of my past and how it affected me greatly.

I graduated from a private school and was young and naive. I was eager to get into the nightclub scene and mingle with the "in" crowd. I would constantly be out partying from late hours of the night to the early morning. Unfortunately, I got caught up with the wrong crowd. I met and dated pimps, players, and hustlers. They were unlike the old school pimps of the 70's with jerry curls or zoot suits. Military soldiers turned civilian wanting to make easy money turned into a whole new breed of pimps. They let their hair grow out to be braided in cornrows, plats, or dreadlocks. They were thugs that didn't have a legitimate job yet were financially secure because of illegal money-making schemes. They drove Cadillac Escalades, Range Rovers, wore nice clothes, and sported their gold and diamond "bling-blings" as if they were going out of fashion.

My friends and I never had to wait in long, crowded lines or pay a cover charge to get into a club. We knew the wrong people to get into the right places. I dated a member of an underground rap group who were notoriously known for their side business of pimping. I was clueless of his extracurricular activities and never asked how he made his money.
I was flattered by being wined and dined. I went to the clubs and drank Alize and Crystal. I ate at fine dining restaurants at no expense to me. On occasion I was “offered” a little spending money. I would reject the offer, but was later coaxed into taking it. I took the small gifts and favors hesitantly, not realizing that there would be a price to pay.

“Dem kicks are tight,” he said in his East Coast drawl, referring to the shoes that I was looking at.

He was tall like a professional basketball player; his build was muscular but slim. He grew his hair out so that he could twist up some dreadlocks in his coarse curls. He was from Detroit and wore his clothes in a hip-hop urban fashion. He wore his clothes loosely except for his “wife beater” tank top that was snug, and his shirts were never tucked in. His pants were always falling from behind exposing his name brand Tommy Hilfiger boxer shorts. His long loose pants covered his pair of tan Timberland boots, which were never laced up.

“They are nice,” I answered and walked away to look around at the other shoes that were on display.

They were a pair of black and gray platforms with faux snakeskin. The platforms were nearly 5 inches high, opened toe with dainty little bows in the middle. They were feminine and sexy. While I did my window-shopping, he had asked the salesperson to get a pair of 6 1/2-sized shoes for me to try on.

“Just try dem kicks on.” He encouraged me even more with a smile. His skin was so dark that I only noticed his white teeth with one gold cap when he grinned.

I put them on and wobbled like a baby learning how to take its first steps. I took a few more steps to look into the mirror. I felt uncomfortable and was cautious so that I would avoid falling. I tried to stand tall since the shoes felt so weird and affected my posture.

“Nah, I can’t use them anywhere,” I said while removing the shoes.

“Boo, I’ll get them for you. We’ll put them to good use,” he said while taking out his leather wallet full of 20’s, 50’s, and 100’s.

After the little shopping spree, the wining and dining no longer felt like dates: they became business meetings. He changed from a cool guy I played horse with on the courts into a money hungry businessman. The sales pitch was a lucrative job opening for me.
The job description was working first at an escort service, later walking the “track” and possible relocation to Las Vegas to work on a “ranch.” My training would mainly be on the job and earn while you learn. There would also be an opportunity for advancement, Madam status. He stated that what I was accepting from him was the same thing, except I would be taking money from other people. The incentives, housing, car, and all expenses paid for. The salary was a generous $30,000 plus a month, minus his percentage that would be discussed at a later time.

The glamour and glitz transformed me like a chameleon and the private school girl that I once was became unrecognizable. I had my hair braided up and wore extensions, my fingernails and toenails were neatly manicured and painted, I pierced my nose and navel, and wore colored contacts. My attire by day was casual because I kept a “square” job at a hospital for a good credit history and by night my clothes were revealing and provocative for the club scene. I finally was able to put the shoes that he bought me to use. I wore them to the clubs along with my appropriate outfits to match. I went out with him and he introduced me to “working” girls so that I could ask about the “business” and see how it was. He wanted me to “walk” just to see how many people would look and stop me. I put all the pieces together. The money, clothes, and gifts were all part of a recruitment scheme.

It was all about money and making it. The main person who would benefit from it would be him. The girls who were making a lot of money went home with nothing because all the earnings were given to him. He controlled all the money and would distribute payments to the girls when needed, as if it were an allowance. The percentage that he took was sixty percent, more than half that was made. All the labor that he did was to drive back and forth to make sure the girls were working and not fraternizing. Oftentimes he would get out of his car to check on the girls and collect the money that was made. It seemed as if there was no protection involved on his behalf because he was the source of the abuse. The girls feared him and were cautious because if they fell out of loyalty and distrust they would be not dismissed but punished.

“Are you on drugs?” My mom asked in a nearly cracking and tearful voice.

“No, Ma! “ I spoke into the receiver of the phone while rolling my eyes back.

The conversation didn’t go further and ended by her saying, “I’ll pray for you. Just let God walk with you.” Then the line went dead.

Those last statements triggered my memory of how I was born and raised in a Christian home. My mother and father were strict in teaching me good Christian morals and values, which I neglected as soon as I moved out of the house when I turned eighteen.
I realized that what I had become and what I was planning on doing would not be acceptable in my mother’s eyes or in God's eyes. I fought my inner demons and chose right over wrong. All the luxuries and wealth would not compensate me if I had lost any of the principles and ethics that I had grown up with.

“I can’t do it,” I told him and closed my eyes, fearing that his hand would be raised and my face would feel the hardness of his fist.

“Why not, Boo?” he asked me in a perturbed manner.

“I just don’t want to do it.” I handed him back the shoes that he bought me along with whatever money I could gather up.

“This is for everything, the braids, nails, clothes, whateva’.”

“Naw, shawty. You keep it. You will always be my Boo,” he replied in a pleasant voice.

“Thank you.” I sighed in relief as I walked away with the shoes in my hands, never to walk back into that life again.

I finally reached home. I impatiently pressed the up button repeatedly until the elevator doors opened. As soon as I got into the house, I ran straight into my room. I plopped myself onto my soft bed where my son lay sound asleep. After a long night of being on my feet, I removed my trusty multifunctional, all-purpose shoes. My shoes are ever so loyal and have done so much for me. They served as armor to protect my feet while on the job, a weapon to kill the cockroach that my son so much dreads, and running aides to chase my son when he tends to stray away from me. Equipped with my shoes, I become “Wonder Mom,” and I know that a pair of stiletto platforms would not be of any assistance with that duty. To some they may just be labeled as a simple pair of running shoes, but to me, they are more than just a pair of kicks. I walked a tumultuous path in my lifetime, and I am glad that I chose the right shoes to walk in.

From time to time I happen to see the pimp from Detroit, driving his pearl white, top of the line, more than $40,000, Cadillac Escalade at Pearlridge. He uses his vehicle as a bait, trying to recruit young and naive girls like I once was.

“Hey, Boo! You and shorty want a ride?” he asked out loud, leaning his head out of his car window.

I look down to my son holding my hand and see that the big white sports utility
vehicle amazes him.

“Naw, that’s a’ight! I got my kicks,” I reply as I smile at him and turn the other direction to walk away.
Life's Consequences
Anela Bartels

In the article “Dying to Be Bigger,” H.D. writes about how he had a problem with steroids. H.D. wanted to be “cool.” Being only “five-foot-nine and weighing 174 pounds,” H.D. decided to take steroids. However, in taking steroids, H.D. noticed the side effects, which were “cystlike blood clots,” his “nipples became the size of grapes,” and his “hormonal level was out of whack.” In the end, he realized that taking steroids didn’t really help his body, but created long-term side effects. Just as H.D. wanted to take steroids to be bigger, my uncle, who I’ll call Stuart, took drugs because he had stress from work, he wanted to be younger, and he wanted to attract younger women.

Stuart had a wonderful life. He didn’t seem like he was having any problems at work, but he was. He couldn’t cope with his new job being the president of a major company in Hawai‘i. Stuart had to deal with 800 people in a week, and he couldn’t handle it. He became stressed out and decided to take drugs. He came in contact with crystal methamphetamine from one of his life long friends and became addicted. Instead of going to play golf, which is where he told his family he was going, he would go to his friend’s house to take crystal meth. His family didn’t even know he was lying and sneaking around. At work, his clients would leave messages and wonder why he wasn’t returning their phone calls. Some of his workers noticed that he was getting skinnier and very pale. Sometimes they would ask, “Is everything alright?” and he would say, “Sure, I’m just tired.” Stuart thought taking drugs would make his problems at work disappear, but they only got worst.

Stuart wanted to be younger. When he turned forty-five, he went through a mid-life crisis. Since he was already on drugs, Stuart didn’t want to take care of his normal responsibilities at home, which was taking care of the family and some of the bills. He began telling my Auntie Linda (his wife) that he was paying the bills. But he was really hiding and using the money for other things. He also began beating up my cousin (his son). No one knew that the cause of all of this was the drugs he was taking. Stuart had fooled everyone he loved just because the crystal meth was much more important. He never thought anything at home would get worse because he never expected anyone to find out.

Stuart not only wanted to be younger; he wanted to attract younger women. Even though he had a job, a wife, a stepdaughter, a son, and one grand-daughter, the drugs took over and were much more important. He started changing his image. Stuart shaved off his mustache, got new glasses, and started listening to his son’s kind of music. He would also
call home to say he “had to work late,” but he was really going to a strip club. Stuart would plan to meet with his brother and his friends; then they would go. One of his friends would bring the drug, and they would take some before they went to the club. Stuart would look for younger women at these clubs and try to talk to them while his family was at home thinking he was working late. Even when he said he was paying the bills, the money was really going to these women at the strip clubs. Drugs can really take over your body.

Just as H.D. took steroids to be bigger, Stuart took drugs to get rid of all the problems that he was having in his life. Even though these are two different stories about two different people, they both didn’t want to be weak. Drugs can take a toll on your life. Stuart thought by taking drugs, he would have power, and he didn’t have to feel self-conscious about himself. In the end, I don’t know if he realized what he had done to his life. But hopefully he will learn from his mistakes. My auntie divorced him and left him with the house. Stuart now lives with his girlfriend and their dog. He has denied the whole story about taking drugs. But no matter what he says, he’s still taking them till this day.
Don't Take Anyone for Granted
Kekai Britland

It was near the ending of school, and summer was near. Kids were excited, the beaches were packed, and all the surfers were hitting the south shore summer swells. I was in my last week of my second grade year and couldn’t wait for the summer break. In one week I would be going to the beach everyday for the next three months. I couldn’t wait to join my best friend Keala, who was beginning with his fun already.

My father is a beach boy, and I was raised on the beach where I learned how to surf, swim, and become a good water person. Most of us like Keala and the rest of the kids who were raised on the beach also learned to become knowledgeable in the same manner as I did. A lot of my uncles are good water men, and most of them work as beach boys or life guards. At the beach you will find the family and wives of the beachboys spending their time at the beach on their days off and if not, you are almost guaranteed to find the kids there.

My mother picked up my sister and me from school that afternoon. When we arrived home, my sister and I went on with business as usual, which meant eating a small snack and watching some cartoons before beginning our homework. Then there was a phone call that my mom took. I heard her say “hello” and then there was a long break as if the person talking to her had something important to tell her. About a minute into her conversation, I saw her eyes tear up. After she hung up the phone, she collapsed and broke down in tears. I didn’t know what to do or what was happening but something wasn’t correct. She looked at me and my sister and told us, “Get ready. We have to go.” We had no idea where we were going and were still clueless about what was happening.

My mom didn’t tell us until we were in the car. She told my sister and me that my best friend Keala had drowned. He had gotten out of school a week earlier than we did because he attended a private school. We were on our way to the Kapiolani Children’s Hospital, where Keala had been taken. I was young and didn’t really know what was going on. My Mom told us that he had drowned surfing, but I didn’t know what drowning meant and what kind of results came with it.

When we arrived at the hospital, we were one of the first to arrived, except for those who had been at the beach and accompanied Keala in the ambulance. I could hear big thumps like thunder coming from the walls as if someone was trying to tear them down. When making our way to the room where Keala was, I saw many of my uncles in tears and
there were a lot of lost faces behind those tears. Keala Kaneapua was pronounced dead at
the age of fourteen. My mother asked my sister and me if we wanted to go into the room
where Keala was to say our final good bye, and we both proceeded to do so.

In the room was a weird and cold feeling. Keala was in the bed and was in the same
condition as when they had found him. My Uncle “Hawaiian,” Keala’s father, was pacing
and punching the walls in disbelief. We call Keala’s father, Uncle “Hawaiian” because he is
a fullblooded Hawaiian from Ni’ihau.

I looked at Keala and saw something that changed my life. He was still in his surf
shorts with sand all over him. His eyes were in a blur that looked at you but right through
you, something that I hope never to see in my life again. He had cuts all over his body from
the reef and his hands were like ice. I’d never witnessed someone in this condition. I stood
by Keala’s bed while holding his freezing hands and said a prayer. A minister in the room
then said my mother, sister and I would have to go in a few minutes so other loved ones
could say their good byes. I finished my prayer and kissed him on the forehead, which froze
my lips. The biggest question I had was, “Why?”

The funeral was a week later and I paid my respects. Being his best friend, I went to
see him in his casket and that’s what broke me down the most. The person in the casket
wasn’t Keala! I couldn’t accept the way he looked, from his hair to his skin tone. His face
looked like it had five layers of make-up on it instead of the nice natural Hawaiian golden
skin I was used to seeing. His hair looked like it had been held down with cement because
it looked rock solid and it was as shiny as a mirror being reflected. I left the church with an
image that disturbed me for many years to come.

Keala was cremated and we spread his ashes off Waikiki, where we were all raised.
We had all surfed there and that was our home. The funeral was huge, hundreds of people
with family, friends and some strangers to me. We paddled out in a canoe, but there were
kayaks, many more canoes, surfers, catamarans and helicopters. There was a ceremony and
then my uncle “Hawaiian” released Keala into the ocean. Everyone cheered as they threw
their lei’s and flowers in the water, and some even jumped in the water. About a minute
later, three big swells came through where we had spread Keala, and it was a sign of him
acknowledging us. We knew this because we were a couple of miles out where the surf
doesn’t ever break; so we knew those swells had to be from him.

In the years that followed, I had a hard time letting go of what had happened. Every
weekend Keala used to stay at my house. He had been my surf partner and we had done
everything together. Even though our age difference was unusual, he had been like a brother
to me. I mourned his death. I went to counseling and talked to all kinds of people, but it
wasn't of any help to me. My entire family went for counseling to learn how to cope with the grief Keala's death brought us.

However, the image I had of Keala in the casket still bothered me. I still had nightmares and experienced things that I can't explain, even if I wanted to. I stopped the counseling because I found it wasn't helping me. I tried to go on with life and I told myself that time would heal things. Everyone told me I had to let go of it and move on, which eventually happened. The biggest thing that no one could answer was “why,” but as time passed on, I came to closure.

Life is okay now. I know Keala is in a happy place and is at peace. I learned a lot from this experience, especially at the young age of eight. I look at life much differently and try to enjoy everyone's presence. I'm a stronger person and have a better understanding of things. I try to say “Hi” to people even though I may not know them very well. I try to show my love to family and friends whenever I can. I always say to myself, “Never take anyone for granted because you never know when it will be your last time seeing that person.”
It started with a wrestling match and ended in the hospital. He was sixteen and I was just fifteen. Not five minutes before his accident Josh and I were having fun and lifting weights. Two brothers bonding, and then our lives changed forever.

The day was May 24, 1996, a Wednesday. We had been working out, preparing for high school football. It was to be my first year and his third. I was looking forward to playing on the same team as him. Actually I would have been on the junior varsity team, whereas he had been playing on the varsity team since his freshman year. He, unlike myself, was extremely talented when it came to sports and football in particular. He was, and is, a big guy. He had fast feet and quick reflexes. Even during his first year he never had a chance to ride the bench. He was always in the game, always making the plays. Despite all this, we would still be coached under the same staff and occasionally we would get to practice together.

We had finished our workout a little before five p.m. After saying goodbye, I headed towards the bus stop on Carpenter Street a couple of blocks away.

When my parents had divorced seven years before, I ended up living with my mother by myself out in Carmel Valley. My two brothers and one sister lived in Carmel with my father, five minutes from the gym, twenty minutes from my mother and me. We, my two brothers, sister and I, had all been together for a few years in the beginning of the separation. My mother, who had become tired of the constant emotional and physical torment from my father, had made the decision to give us all up to free herself. She knew we would be better off together, giving each other support and companionship. So she saved us from the agony of a lengthy custody battle by leaving everything behind, us included. It was because of this that we began to hate my mother. All we knew and understood at the time was that she left. We weren't given an explanation, just a kiss goodbye.

But the custody battle that she tried to avoid did come. Actually it was more a skirmish with very little fight from my father. And it wasn't for all four of us, but just for me. I had become fed up with my father's harsh demeanor and ice-cold attitude towards me. So just as my mother had done years before, I made the decision to leave the unity of the four for the sanity of myself. Thus when I was thirteen, I found myself in one last exchange of words with my father before I left his house, and control, forever. From his door I stepped into the arms of my mother and found love where I had, for so long, thought there was
none. I found compassion where I had thought there would be disgust and found understanding and acceptance where I thought there would be neglect. I have come to both cherish and regret that decision I made seven years ago. Although it has cemented my mother and me together, it has managed to pull me from the rest of my family and sling me into a solitary ditch. A ditch that to this day I have yet to crawl out of.

And it was back to this solitude that I was headed when I arrived at the bus stop at 5:10 p.m. When I finally hopped on the number twenty-four bus to Carmel Valley at 5:15, ten minutes had passed since my brother had broken his neck. When the bus was leaving downtown Carmel, the paramedics were back at the weight room strapping my brother into a spinal board. And as I waited to get home, my brother lay motionless in the back of an ambulance en route to the emergency room.

By the time I had sat down to eat my dinner, the rest of my family, excluding my mother, had filled the waiting room at the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula. Neither my mother nor I had any idea of what had happened. She was off at school, and I was perched in front of the T.V. with my food. We were not aware that our lives were about to come to a crashing halt.

Finally, at 7:30 p.m. the telephone rang. My father was on the other end. What he had to say changed me forever. "Adam, there’s been an accident.” My heart stopped. I had heard that same phrase many times from my mother or brothers, but never from my father. He didn’t call unless it was serious, as it was.

Around 5:05 p.m., Josh and Jason, a good friend, were wrestling on the lawn at the Carmel Youth Center. When Jason put Josh in a headlock, the two of them tripped. Jason stood up, Josh never did. His sixth and seventh cervical vertebrae had been shattered, severing his spinal cord and stripping him of the feeling we all have taken for granted. His body and nervous system shut down as he lapsed into unconsciousness. After a few minutes, his eyes fluttered and his lips softly parted, “I can’t move.” All he could do was stare at the clouds and cry. Around him things started to speed up. Jason ran inside to tell the Center’s director something had happened. The few kids who loitered around took notice of something gone wrong and investigated. The ambulance was summoned and arrived along with its army of saviors. As the world sped, Josh’s own world slowed down, his breathing began to weaken, and once again he slipped away.

I didn’t arrive at the hospital until after nine p.m. My mother, whom I had talked to around eight, was already there, as was my father, Zach and Emmy (my younger brother and sister), and Jason and his family. The only one who had been allowed to see Josh was my father. By looking at his eyes and the puffy circles around them I could tell he had been
Jason Stood Up, Josh Never Did

Adam Campbell

crying. Never in my life had I seen my father cry. He was “strong,” he was “proud”; he was not weak and did not show pain of any kind. But here he was with blood shot eyes and quivering lips. He had been broken down by a train wreck of emotion that I too was soon to bear witness of. I feared what was to come.

I didn’t say a word to anyone; I just walked to a private room to wait by myself. When I opened the door, Jason and his family looked up. We stared at each other for a moment. Then, with a nod of understanding, they all left the room. I felt no hate or anger of any sort towards him. In fact, for a moment, I shared his agony and realized his pain. I knew it was an accident, and I knew that he hurt more than any one of us, family or not. So as he passed by with his head down, I reached out and wrapped my arms around him. I wanted him to know there was no blame on him. He had done nothing wrong.

With the lights off and my head in the palms of my hands, I sat in that room motionless for close to four hours. From time to time someone would look in and ask if I was okay or if I needed anything. They knew the answer and quickly learned to leave me be.

Morning came and I hadn’t seen my brother yet. I had to wait until that afternoon. When I finally entered the intensive care unit at 2 p.m., I realized I hadn’t eaten since dinner the night before. I wasn’t hungry nor would I be for weeks to come.

As I walked through the ICU, I could hear the rhythmic beep of the heart rate monitors, the constant pumping of an artificial heart somewhere, and then the unsteady harsh sound of my brother struggling for air. I opened his curtain, and my stomach dropped. Tubes ran in and out of his arms, his mouth, and his nose. His wrists were strapped to the bed so he couldn’t tear his IV’s out. His head was pulled into traction by a pair of what looked like ice tongs, sunk into either temple and attached by a nylon rope to a stack of weights.

I watched as his chest heaved, gasping for air. Then the restraints became taut, and he struggled with what little strength he had to rid himself of the bundle of tubes jammed down his throat. Slowly he tired and fell limp.

In the beginning, I couldn’t stand more than a couple minutes of this struggle for life. I would become sick and weak and have to leave the room. But gradually I spent more and more time by his bed, forcing myself to experience in at least some way the pain he had now been drowned in. First an hour, then two, until finally I wouldn’t leave. Day and night I sat there, speechless, just staring off into the distance. Friends would come and gawk, and then leave, never knowing I was there. I just sat there holding his hand, waiting for him to speak. I had, in a sense, become a stone figurine, a gargoyle of sorts, adorning his bedside, standing...
Jason Stood Up, Josh Never Did

Adam Campbell

watch, offering him safety and comfort.

It took more than a week for him to be coherent enough to hold a conversation, but still he wouldn’t talk much. He had nothing to say but silence itself. To this I still listened. Over the following three months we spent a lot of our time together absolutely quiet, but together nonetheless.

Before his accident we never really spent any time together. He, being the popular good-looking football star, was always out with his friends playing football or going to parties while I sat at home alone. Even before I had moved in with my mother, when I lived with my father, we didn’t see each other much. Something had pulled us apart long ago.

In our early years, we had no other friend like the kin at our side. Especially in those few years when it was just him and me, before our younger brother and sister were born. We had become two peanuts stuck inside our hard little shell. We would mix with other kids and, of course, have a good time, but there was no solace like that which we had with each other. Whether we were running the riverbanks, toppling old decaying trees or reading a book, it was always we and not he and not I, always we. He explained to me how the dogs drove in Go, Dog, Go and why the eggs were green in Green Eggs and Ham. We figured out how to build one working bike from the skeletons of three long dead, and managed to outwit the evil forces of the forest with handmade crossbows and sharpened pencil arrows. But somehow our relationship had diminished since those days when he was ten and I just nine. It had withered and all but died until the night he himself had almost died.

And on that night and the months to follow, I was not about to let him be alone. When he got transferred up north to the Santa Clara Spinal Cord Unit, I went with him. And for two and a half months, I lived in a trailer donated by a nearby R.V. salesman. The hospital allowed us to park it in the parking lot right outside of the spinal cord unit. Every night around nine (occasionally much later), I would walk over to the trailer and sleep. Then in the morning around eight, I would walk back over to my brother’s room.

During the day, I ran errands for Josh, getting him food and cigarettes. I was underage, but since when did that matter? When night came, I would push him in his wheelchair as we searched the hospital from top to bottom for anything new or exciting. We went through doctor’s offices, and supply closets and whatever else was either open or easily broken into. We made a goal of finding the morgue but never did. We thought we came close one night but instead found ourselves, almost caught, hiding in the office of a gynecologist. We only realized this after opening a drawer filled with oddly shaped tongs and long cotton swabs.
When we became bored with these frivolous adventures, we would sneak off the property. Patients weren’t allowed off grounds without formal consent and never after dark. Going out to a movie or just to get a cup of non-instant coffee soon became harder and harder as the doctors and nurses began to crack down on us with their constant threats. When we would make our exit through whatever door was unguarded, we sometimes heard the nurses call over the PA, “Will Joshua Campbell please report back to nursing station B at once,” but of course we never “really” heard it and so would just speed our pace a bit. Constantly we were greeted in the morning with the stern face of Dr. Donovan followed by the sharp bite of her tongue. And finally when they threatened to drop his insurance, we began to comply and made our journeys with more caution.

My mother made the two-hour journey to visit us almost everyday. And although, at the time, we didn’t show too much appreciation, now years later we realize the help it brought us, him especially, to see that we were all there supporting him as much as possible. Occasionally the rest of our family made the trip. When they did, we would get permission to leave, and would venture out to Mike’s Car, our place to eat when we ditched the doctors, for dinner. This was an amazing thing, our family having dinner together. It was something we never did before, except on holidays. I can’t remember the last time we sat together at the table and talked and laughed as we did while Josh was in the hospital.

When the other two in our group of four siblings made the trip, our mischievous behavior increased. We would search though units, such as the brain trauma unit, for disturbed patients to chat with over a smoke and a cup of instant Sanka. If they weren’t allowed cigarettes, we smuggled them some of our own. When the nurses found us, they would shoo us away. But on our way out we would sneak into the nurses station, while they all scolded the patient for smoking, and steal all the Jell-O pudding they kept in their fridge just to piss them off.

Although my younger brother and sister came up at least once a week, for the most part it was just Josh and I. We grew closer and began to find what we had for so long lost. Our friendship, which was once so tight, and for so long had been totally absent, was now finding its roots yet again.

As the days slipped by, his condition gradually improved. He regained movement in his hands and arms and some feeling in his lower body. His emotional state turned from depressed to cheerful. And our feelings towards each other from uncomfortable to inseparable.

Today my brother is sill confined to a wheelchair; this isn’t likely to change. There have been enormous leaps in finding a “cure” thanks, in large part, to Christopher Reeve.
Although many of his promises about walking in the next decade may be just high hopes, hopes are what we have used, as a society and as individuals, to win the wars we have fought and overcome the struggles we have encountered. And it is hope that will bring us this cure.

What has happened to my brother, my family, is not at all uncommon. We are not a singular triumphant case. We are now a part of what is an ever-expanding family of triumphant cases. Each equally inspiring, as well as tragic. And although at times I wish not to be a part of this “family,” I am grateful for what has come of it. Through this accident I found a friend where I thought there no longer was one. I was united together finally and forever with my brother, and that is why I do not look back at May 24, 1996 with a feeling of despair and regret. Instead I find myself left with a morbid sense of thankfulness. My only regret is that it took such a tragic accident to bring us back together.
I had no idea what made me agree to my cousin's request to go fishing with him. Being a normal teenage girl, I have never gone fishing. I was merely interested in sitting on my butt the whole time waiting for the fish to bite on my hook. And boy, was I wrong about not having a good time. I was not prepared for one of the greatest moments I would ever experience in life.

My cousin and I decided to wake up at seven a.m. so that by late morning we could start fishing. For an hour, my 28-year-old cousin loaded up our boat. As the morning was turning into afternoon, the ocean was finally calming down. My cousin decided that we were going to fish near Likiep Island's shoreline, just five miles away from Majuro, the city where I lived. He chose the spot knowing that I wouldn't be much help reeling in bigger fish, which can be found further away from shore.

As Likiep grew nearer, I was in awe of the never-ending stretch of blinding white sand that seemed to surround the entire island. The beautiful white sand ended only where the crystal clear blue water started. The big blue ocean had grown calm by then and the closer the boat got to land, the clearer the water became. Looking over the railings of the boat, I could see colorful corals at the bottom of the ocean and bright, pinkish, purple jellyfish floating near the boat.

Thirteen minutes later, our motor boat reached the wooden dock built for small visiting fishing boats. I decided to take out my food and start eating while my cousin triple checked that we hadn't forgotten anything. I was not really looking forward to the fishing trip so I was taking my time eating a turkey sandwich I had prepared that morning and slathering on extra coverage of sunscreen all over my body. The smells of a fresh sea breeze and delicious food were very relaxing and relieving, compared to the smell of the oily motor and the faint smoke of the boat's engine. For awhile, I just sat on the beach eating my snack and taking in the gorgeous view of the sparkling water ten feet away from me. I felt like I was in heaven. But my cousin announcing that we were ready to go immediately snapped me out of my daze.

Twenty minutes after reaching our fishing spot, I still hadn't caught anything, but I found myself intrigued by how my cousin was tossing small fish on board. I was finally starting to find the excitement of fishing by watching my rod in anticipation and also by paying attention to my cousin as his bait got bitten again and again. His target seemed to
be quite big by the way he was struggling to pull the creature out of the water. After ten minutes of helping my cousin fighting to get the fish on board, I could finally see it under the surface of the water. The bright glimpse of the yellow fin tuna’s silver skin reflected by the sun gave us a sudden overpowering of strength as we heaved the fish from the ocean onto the boat. After giving each other pats on the back, I whooped for joy as my cousin started the engine.

We were both satisfied with our catch and made no arguments about heading home to show off. We were so proud when my father announced that the weight of the fish tipped the scale at 75 lbs. “Pretty good for a fisherman with a ‘first time fisher’ as a helper,” he said. From then on, I jump at every chance I get to go fishing.
Living a Dream
Tobie A.P. Carter

You wish for the one chance to live out your dreams. Then, the opportunity knocks at your door. You train with all of your blood, sweat, and tears, until you have nothing left. Your family gathers in front of the television or up in the stands to cheer you on. Hoping for the best, they say little prayers and pray that they're heard. Now, the day has finally come to prove yourself, and to show that you can do this. So, when it's all over and there is nothing more you can do, how do you walk away with your head held high, when you feel as though you let everyone down?

My dream was to represent Hawaii in the Miss Teen USA pageant. In the year of 1998, that dream came true and I had the opportunity to compete for the Miss Hawaii Teen U.S.A. title. However, watching these pageants on television when I was little and competing in them were two different things!

Ever since I was a young girl, I loved to watch pageants or any beauty competition. It was the fascination of beauty that grabbed my attention, and how so many people admired these women. I still remember sitting, three feet away from the television, not moving an inch, in complete awe. Every year I watched the teen pageant, and every year I would tell my mother that I was going to be there someday. She would smile and flip through the latest catalog that came in the mail, nodding her head in agreement. I always wondered how those girls got to be there, making it so far to a national competition. Well, after years of nagging my parents, they gave in.

I had been modeling for two to three years at a local agency in Hilo. I was fifteen at the time when my agent handed me a form and told me to read through it and discuss it with my parents. This form she handed me was for the Miss Hawaii Teen USA pageant, the preliminary pageant to Miss Teen USA. I decided with my parents to run the next year, so I would have time to prepare. That year, I worked out everyday in a gym with a trainer, taking as many isometric and aerobic classes as I could. I practiced speaking with a speech therapist and polished up my modeling skills to get every walk and turn right. The pageant was made up of three categories, and judged on a scale from one to ten. Each category was worth one-third of your total points, and consisted of best in swimwear, formal attire and an on-stage interview.

The pageant was on November 6, 1997, at the Diamond Head Theater. The competition was fierce, but my hard work paid off. I was fortunate to walk away with the
Living a Dream

Tobie A.P. Carter

1998 Miss Hawaii Teen USA title, and all three-category awards. I now had seven short months to get ready for the Miss Teen USA pageant in Shreveport, Louisiana. There was nothing that could have prepared me for what was ahead. I learned exactly what those girls I admired so much had to go through.

The pageant was live on CBS, on August 17, 1998. I had already been in Louisiana for a grueling, chaotic, three weeks of training, appearances and practices. I was worn out and tired, homesick, and incredibly nervous. I would be lying if I said that I didn't want to pack my suitcases and catch the first flight home. I had to constantly convince myself to keep going and not to let my state down. It was a few days from the big night, and this was my chance.

I remember the night of the pageant being somewhat of a clear blur. Blurred because it didn't feel real, yet clear because I can still close my eyes and see the stage and hear the crowd. I remember the night in complete detail. How all the girls sat in their chairs in front of their vanity mirrors, nervously fidgeting, touching up their hair and their make-up for the fourth time. Then an announcement from the room speakers came on: “Ladies, we have one hour until we start. Get dressed!” Girls began screaming with excitement and scurried around. The butterflies were so hard to control that I couldn't even button my shorts. I touched up my make-up for the last time and fluffed my hair before I headed off to the stage. Tashina, Miss Indiana, and I gave each other a hug and each wished the other the best of luck. Tashina was one of the girls that I had bonded with over the three weeks. Finally, after standing backstage for what seemed like forever, we heard our cue, “Shreveport, please welcome your fifty-one teen delegates to the stage.”

When the pageant was over and they crowned Miss South Carolina the new Miss Teen USA, I was crushed. Neither Tashina nor I made it to the top ten list. Sitting backstage, I kept thinking that it was over; I had lost. What made it worst was that I felt I had let my family as well as my state down. I didn't want to face my parents in the stands or fly home to talk to reporters. I just wanted to throw my blankets over my head and hide away forever.

I still got on the plane the next day, not by choice, and was greeted by reporters at the Honolulu airport. After doing a quick interview, I boarded another plane to Hilo, and was welcomed home with warm hugs from friends and family. I accepted my loss, and decided to move on and use this experience to my advantage. I got to live a dream, an opportunity of a lifetime that not many get to have. I’ve learned to be a stronger-willed person, with lots of ambition. I know more about myself, and have the confidence that I wouldn’t have had if it weren’t for this pageant. I’ve moved on to bigger and better things, such as working on my Dental Hygiene degree, and I do see another pageant in my near future.

Diamond Journal

Spring 2002
Put in the Doghouse by Emotion
Lynne Chun

Whenever I pass by a 1981 Toyota Corolla lift-back, I start to reminisce about an incident that happened several years ago when I locked my friend’s dog in my car. This is an incident that I will never forget. It taught me an important lesson about keeping my emotions in check.

I remember carpooling to work with a friend by the name of Sue. We both worked at a bank downtown in the Corporate Banking Office. Sue lived in a quiet neighborhood and owned two golden retrievers named Bobo and Zak. Bobo was the older of the two dogs, and Zak was the rambunctious puppy with a flaming red coat. Every morning the two of them would come to greet me as I drove up to park by the sidewalk. Zak would come charging over to my car, jumping on my car door to greet me, while Bobo, the older of the two, would hobble over like an old man with a big smile on his face.

It was the middle of summer. The temperature usually started out in the low seventies, and by mid-afternoon it would rise to the mid-nineties. That morning there was not a cloud in the sky, and since the day was starting out so bright and sunny, I could tell it was going to be a scorcher.

When I drove up that morning, Bobo and Zak got up off the lawn and ran over as usual. I always had to be careful when getting out of the car as Zak would try to sneak into the back seat for a ride. This morning as I got out of the car, I saw a flash of red. Before I knew it, Zak was in the back seat, and my purse strap was wrapped around his legs. I was tangled up in the mess and my hands were full, so I set my keys and purse on the car seat next to Zak. After untangling the two of us, I tried my best to get Zak out of the car, but he refused to budge. I tried to pry him out of the car, pulling on his legs. This didn’t work, as Zak was determined to go for a ride and moved further into the back seat. I finally gave up and closed the door, thinking that I would let Zak out of the passenger side of the car. He seemed to think that he had returned from a car ride when I did this in the past. As I walked to the passenger side of the car, I realized that I had forgotten to unlock my door before closing it. I looked into the car and saw that, as usual, I had locked the car up tight. I didn’t even leave a crack in the car window. I looked into the car and saw that my keys were sitting next to Zak on the back seat. I had not seen them earlier since they blended into the black interior of my car. I was in a panic! What was I going to do? Zak seemed unconcerned and just gave me a silly grin waiting for his ride to start.

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I ran into Sue's house to tell her of my predicament. Sue is normally an easy going, calm person, so I wasn't too worried, but when I broke the news to her she was in a panic. She ran outside and peered into the car window. Zak had started to pant heavily and was drooling all over my back seat, staring at us with his big brown eyes. It was only 7:15 and the weather was changing fast. I could feel the warmth of the sun running across my skin. Sue saw the drool making a puddle next to Zak's head. By this time, he was lying on his side, looking pathetic and breathing heavily.

Sue was determined to get Zak out of the car, and she grabbed a brick from her yard. She was ready to throw it through my car window as she was convinced that Zak was going to suffocate. Luckily, I was able to convince her to give me some time to fix things. I was put on notice that if I didn't get him out soon, she would find a way. Once inside her house, I grabbed the yellow pages and started to call locksmiths. One by one I called each and every locksmith listed. I was out of luck. None of them was available until later in the afternoon. Next, I called the Police Department. When I explained what I had done, they started to laugh and told me that they no longer carried "slim jims" to break into cars and couldn't help me. Sue suggested that I call the Fire Department next. They also laughed at me and regretfully said that they couldn't help me. I was in a panic! It was almost 8:00 a.m. and it was already heating up.

We were going to be late for work. Through the excitement, we had forgotten about the time and had not called in to work. Sue designated me as the one to call our supervisor Grace. She said that there was no way that she would make the call, since it was my fault that we were in this situation. Grace was an unusual lady. She had been an auditor in her past position and was difficult to work with. She was high-strung and easily excitable. Everyone in the office was afraid of her and did their best not to get her upset. I knew what was going to happen when I informed Grace that Sue refused to go to work until her dog was out of my car. I called Grace and got the reaction that I expected. She immediately screamed into the phone, "You did what?!!!" She wouldn't believe my story and told me that one of us needed to get in to work soon!

At this point, my only option was to call my husband at work. My husband James was an electronics avionics instructor in the Navy and a workaholic. He hardly ever got upset and was very mellow, but took his work seriously. He didn't like me to bother him at work unless it was important. When I called his workplace, I was told that he was teaching a class and would be unavailable all day. Sue heard our conversation and started to talk about her brick again. I started to cry not knowing how I was going to solve my problem. I was getting ready to resign myself to my fate and face Sue. I had to tell her to go ahead and break my window. The person that answered the phone at my husband's workplace put me on hold and disappeared for a short period. The next thing I knew, my husband's Unit
Commander was on the phone. I was in shock! This was the last thing I wanted to do. I felt like I had just summoned the president of a corporation. Trying to compose myself, I started to try and talk my way out of the conversation and excuse myself. In the back of my mind, I was thinking to myself that I was in deep trouble with my husband.

The Commander said that he was told that I had locked a dog in my car, and he asked me to repeat my story to him. He started to laugh and told me to calm down, that it would be okay. He assured me that my husband would be pulled out of his class to rescue the dog. Now I knew I was in the doghouse! I went outside to wait on the curb for my husband to arrive. What was I going to tell him? How would he react to being pulled out of work to rescue a dog? In the meantime, Sue grabbed a ruler and started trying to break into my car. I wasn’t paying much attention to her as I was trying to figure out what I was going to tell my husband.

Just as Sue broke into my car with her ruler, my husband drove up next to my car. He was making a face at me, and I could tell that he was mad. He immediately asked me why I had called him, since the car was already opened. I knew I was in trouble, especially since Sue had broken into my car just before he arrived. James gave me another strange look and asked if I needed anything else before he left for work. As he drove off, he said that we would be talking about this later that night!

Sue and I headed into work. It was almost 11:00 when we finally arrived at work. Grace immediately called me over to her desk. She was upset and excited. Her face was red and she looked frazzled. She wanted to know how this could have happened. She told me that the story was too strange to have been made up, but she wanted the details. Everyone in the office had grins on their faces. Sue and I had become the conversation of the day. I knew that I was never going to live this one down!

Looking back on this event, I can laugh and joke about how funny and stupid this incident was, although it wasn’t funny at the time. I had let my emotions get the best of me, and I was in the doghouse for quite a while after this event, both at home and at work. My co-workers still tease me to this day about what happened and call this incident the “Lynne” story.
Those Arabian Nights
Brian C. Cole

In 1996, on a rotation to the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, something happened to a group of American soldiers that was, and still is unexplainable. My name is Brian Cole, and what I'm about to tell you can never be told to another living soul.

While I was serving my second out of a four year enlistment in the United States Army, I was assigned to the 2/27 Inf., Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. We had been sent to Sinai on an ongoing U.N. mission to keep the peace between Israel and Egypt. We were basically observers, reporting to higher up from different observation posts, or O.P.'s.

One platoon was broken up into three squads. Each squad was at a different site. I was located at OP 311, which also served as my radio call sign. We were third squad, a group of guys you don't ever want your daughter mess with. We were riffraff, who would always find a way to do the opposite of what we were told. Despite that flaw, we had a lot of heart and camaraderie. We couldn't be kept down no matter how many pushups we were ordered to do.

Our rotations consisted of twenty-three days on the site and twenty-three days off. While on the site, we watched for military vehicles, aircraft, and naval vessels. My site was located on Teran, an island no bigger than one of the Channel Islands located off the coast of southern California. We flew to and exited the island via helicopter, minus the doors. The only inhabitants on Teran were the nine of us and about the same number of Egyptian soldiers on the other side of the rock. The island resembled the surface of the moon, except the moon doesn't have an active mine field covering it. One false move off the beaten path could end in disaster. Each site had two dogs, local mutts acting as mascots. They really kept our morale up.

The island of Teran had extensive wildlife, although, at first glance none could be seen. Mole vipers were an every other day occurrence. Their venom is quite deadly, and there are no hospitals with anti-venom to be found. Once bitten, you have to be flown to Israel to receive steroid shots. At night, the scorpions came out. These, too, were of a deadly variety. There was also a pack of wild dogs that ran all over the island as if they owned it. I always wondered why the mines never claimed any of the dogs as their own.

When we weren't on the site, we were training, relaxing, or living it up out on the town. I also took this time to visit the Holy Land, and the pyramids. Everywhere I went,
the heat of the day would follow like a hangover that I just couldn’t shake. One day, a thermometer gave a reading of 136 degrees. This was no ordinary hot day. Water jugs that had been frozen solid and delivered two hours before could now be used to make coffee.

Maybe all of this heat started getting to people, because everyone started talking about seeing red dots of light off in the distance at night. Where we were in Egypt, there are no city lights to interfere with the stars. The result is some of the clearest skies in the world at night. When the moon is full, it’s like day. So when the guy who was most knowledgeable about planes radioed in from OP 2D that he had seen something like a Stealth Bomber fly by in different directions, everyone laughed and thought that he was joking. Everyone, that is, except for the guys at OP 3C.

OP 3C was located just over a small mountain range from OP 2D. The guys used to run the route some mornings for exercise. These guys were quieter than most, but everyone knew their shit. They were a close-knit bunch, and we all got along with them. They were ok by me.

Their story was told to me by four different guys on that site. The others didn’t want to talk about it. The ones that did all told the same story with no differences. I could tell in the confidential tones with which they told their stories that something had indeed happened. After urging him for an hour to tell me the story, the sergeant in charge of OP 3C gave the following account:

"I'm not supposed to be telling you this, Cole. What happened on that night was something that I'll never forget. It was the hairiest thing I've ever seen. I was inside, watching the radio. It was an odd night, because Fairchild called in a Stealth over OP 2D. Most nights, there is nothing to report. About ten minutes after Fairchild called in, I get this call on the land line from Johnson in the tower. He's tellin' me I gotta come outside and check something out. He can't tell me what. He just keeps sayin', "You gotta come outside."

"I go outside and make my way to the tower. The night is crystal clear and the stars are bright. Everything is cool, except for a large section of dark sky that is moving towards me at a slow pace. The closer it got, the more I noticed just how huge this thing really was. It blocked out the stars directly over the site. Except for the horizon, the sky went black. A huge, black triangle was hovering over our site for a few minutes, and by now, everyone was standing outside, looking at it. It spun around slowly and moved very quickly off into the desert. The thing didn't even make a sound. It just blocked out the wind. I went back inside to call it up to higher, but I couldn't even explain to myself what I had just seen. I finally got my story straight and everyone back at headquarters laughed."
“A few days later, we were paid a visit by a couple of government agents. They were trying to tell us that we could get in a lot of trouble for falsifying a report. I explained to them that I only reported what I saw. One of them actually started telling me that I was lying. After a few minutes of arguing, he broke out some flash cards and asked me to point out what I saw. I told him that I didn’t see it in the deck. He just kept pointing out the card with a picture of the Stealth Bomber on it.

“After these guys saw that they weren’t going to break me, one of them started telling me stories of other rotations reporting the same thing. A big, black triangle that flew real low, hovered, and left. The G man also told us that if we told anyone about this visit, they would deny it. I was told to keep my mouth shut, or charges would be filed against me. So, you see; you can’t say anything to anyone.”

No one could ever positively identify exactly what it was that hovered over OP 3C that hot Arabian night. As far as I know, the story has remained untold until now. I was able to keep it a secret for five years. That’s nothing. Let’s see how long you can last.
The Welfare Office
Chaelene Cruz

I get off the bus. I look around, making sure no one I know sees me walk into the building. I stagger up the stairs. The waiting area is full. There is standing room only. I put my name on the waiting list and cross my fingers that I will get called.

We have become statistics to the recession. Myron has received a dramatic pay cut and shortage of hours. We have never received public assistance in our lives. It was never this bad in California.

There are looks of worry and panic. My expression is the same. A little boy tugs on a woman’s skirt and asks if it is time to go. The mother scoops up the child into her arms and whispers into his ear. The boy nods and sits patiently. A baby is crying and the clerk motions toward the door. We wait, longing to hear our names called. I pray silently.

Dear God, I pray.
We barely have food.
My rent is past due.
How did this happen?
Should I quit school?
Go back to work and make $8 an hour? Live paycheck to paycheck?
NO! This time I will graduate. I will make something of myself.
For my son.
For My Son.
For ME.

“Cruz? Chaelene Cruz?” Finally. Maybe we will get to buy some groceries today. Maybe my rent will get paid. Maybe I will be able to visit the doctor. Maybe I could pay my childcare bill. MAYBE.
Hold on to Your Hats

Justin Damo

Hold on to your hats, cowboys. Back in 1995, when I was about 13 years old, I had a day of rapture I still clearly remember. This memory will never fade from my mind. Every year Parker Ranch up on the north end of the Big Island held annual rodeos for the fortunate up and coming cowboys and cowgirls of Hawaii.

We woke up before the sun rose. The crisp cold morning air caused the discussion between me and my cousin Jason to produce condensation from the warmth of our breaths. I was sipping at my hot chocolate to keep warm. Just to see all the grass frosty made it seem colder. As we slipped on our boots and tightened up those belts, I heard my Uncle John shout, “Let’s get it going.”

“Coming,” I said.

While Jason was still brushing his teeth, his younger brother Jordan was already in the truck. My Uncle John had the trailer hooked onto his lifted Chevy utility truck. As soon as Jason jumped in, we headed to the pasture and picked up the horses.

A few miles up the road, my uncle’s pasture was the size of about six city blocks. As we entered the pasture, we decided to hop into the trailer for a joy ride. I remember seeing the manure from the horses on the back of the trailer. It didn’t smell so lovely, but we got used to it. The sight of endless fields of grass and many keawe trees was such a peaceful thing to see. And the mooing of the cows was such a pleasurable sound to hear. But my favorite part was getting bounced around in the trailer as we drove through the rocky terrain of the plains. Laughing and getting a kick out of it was the key to having fun.

After loading the horses, we headed for Parker Ranch. Shortly after sunrise, we pulled into the rodeo and found a nice spot to spend the day. We could just smell the cows. “Start saddling the horses, boys,” Uncle John directed.

“Yeah,” we said.

Red was the name of the horse I was riding and Jason was riding Stanley. As I tightened the reigns and the saddle, I could hear horses trotting and see other cowboys warming up their horses to race. Before I knew it, it was my turn to ride in the barrel competition. The object of the race was to ride my horse in a pattern around a set of three
barrels as fast as I could. As I raced into the middle of the arena, Red stood on his hind legs. I was half way off the horse, but all I remember saying to Red was, "WooooW BoooooooY."

Red gracefully came down to all fours. Still on the horse, I was approaching the first barrel making a sharp right. Then I was headed for barrel number two, cutting into the right to set myself up for a hard left turn around the second barrel. On my way to the third barrel, I heard my family and friends on the sidelines cheering for me. I rode left around the final barrel and back to the starting line for the finish. I didn't stop kicking the horse with my spurs until the race was complete. The rush from racing the horse had never felt so vivid and intense.

After the racing and the roping competitions were over, it was time for the real cowboys to do their thing. Bull riding competitions were to follow; they were really fun to watch. I'll never forget helping the ranchers with those gigantic bulls, moving them into gates, where they are released with cowboys holding onto their back for a fast bumpy ride. The most fun for me was using the tazer to shock the bulls into the gates. The buzzing sound from the tazer with the thumping of the bulls as the herd passed me by gave me a thrill!

The ending of my day was near. But before loading up the horses to take them back to the pasture, Jason and I took the horses for a quick ride. I still remember racing the horses around the track as fast as we could just for fun. I couldn't imagine how free I would feel only hearing the wind being cut, and at the same time, feeling my horse digging through the ground. Nothing could compare to this high.

After a long, arduous day feeling sticky, tired and covered in dirt, we headed back for the pasture and dropped off the horses with my cousins. Then we were on our way home to take a nice hot shower. Refreshed and clean, I waited to have dinner. After dinner I was off to having sweet dreams. I will never forget the memories of the fun we'd had at the RODEO.

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The Bomb Disaster
Hushmarien Larissa Dole

It was a sunny Friday in April 1998, the day before my Senior Lawyer's Oath Party. I was about 26 years old then and apprenticing in the District Court of Colombo, Sri Lanka, my native country, an island in the Indian Ocean.

That day I traveled by bus from Galle, my hometown, to the city, where I worked and lived in a hostel. As it was a long journey, I reached Colombo, the main city, a little past 9 a.m. I was very tired and wanted to sleep at the hostel. But my "to do list" was bothering me. I couldn't concentrate on sleeping or resting. I needed to wear an elegant dress for the forthcoming party, so I rushed to my dressmaker's house. As soon as she took my measurements, I took a taxi, since I needed to go to the courthouse as quickly as possible. I knew the court commenced at 10 a.m. I had to meet my friend, who is a lawyer, before 10 a.m. at the chambers. I thank God I met her, and she agreed to take me to the lawyer's party. I was glad. My one to-do list item was fulfilled.

I was so hungry and tired. The law college cafeteria is close to the courthouse. I hurried to there, had a little snack, and then went to the nearest bus stop. I was so upset as I had just missed my regular bus, which was number 144. I was waiting for a long time and the next bus that came along was number 174. I didn't want to board the bus, as it was not passing the hostel. However, the conductor seemed to be a friendly and nice person. I thought maybe I could ask him to drop me off close to my hostel.

The bus was overcrowded. At the next stop, one old man in his late sixties got on. He was holding a bag full of groceries in one hand and an umbrella in the other. Since he was feeble, I offered my seat to him. He placed his hands on his knees, looked at me squarely in the eye and thanked me profusely.

Not even two minutes had lapsed after that when I heard a loud noise, like the sound of gunfire and saw people running. I didn't know what was going on. I looked to the back of my bus, and I could see the back glass was broken. Most of the passengers who were seated were injured. They were bleeding, including the old man to whom I had offered the seat.

"Run! Run! Run!" the bus conductor repeated.

"I'm afraid. Why do you want me to run anyway?" I asked innocently.
"We've got no time to talk or think, just run!" The conductor was yelling at us to escape.

The lady next to me pushed me. I still cannot remember how I jumped, whether through the door or the glass windows. What I can remember is people stepping over me in the scramble. I too stepped over people. I followed the lady next to me, and we ran to the nearest building, which was the police quarters.

Inside the quarters, the atmosphere was just like a prison, very dark and silent. There was a pungent smell and the place was littered with cigarette butts. I was so scared I did not want to leave the building. I met two girls, and when I asked for a glass of water, they stared at me. It was then that I looked at myself.

Oh! My sari (the national dress of Sri Lanka) was torn, my shoe was broken and my handbag strap had fallen. My right leg was injured and bleeding. I soon realized why they were staring and tearfully looking at me. I was perspiring and my body was shaking. Then I started to cry. In fact, I felt like I had no bones in my body at all.

I could hear people shouting and yelling and the sound of ambulances. I then realized it was dangerous to stay in the area. My head was ringing and my shoulders were screaming in pain. I decided I'd better leave the police quarters. I immediately headed toward the main street. I was filled with great fear as I saw thousands of people running on the streets. Children were abandoned and crying for their parents. The smoke from the bomb blast was in the air. Shops were still on fire. Vehicles were on fire and damaged. The ambulances and the taxis were full of injured victims and lots of people were crying. I could see bodies covered in blood lying everywhere.

Ambulance sirens were the most common noise. I realized I was heading towards the police station. I didn’t want to stay there even for one second, as I knew the terrorists often attack police stations. "Well, think fast," I told myself. "Maybe my life is in danger now." I tried to stop a taxi, but none stopped. All were helping the injured to take them to hospitals. I was limping as I walked.

I turned and saw a heavyset man, with a thick and scraggly beard, looking and chewing his lower lip by the jewelry store. He wore a red and black checked shirt with long black pants. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.
The man’s eyes narrowed, and he said, “You are really frightened. Come, please.” He looked up at me sadly. I told him what had happened. He gave me some water and told me to walk to the hostel, so that I would be safe.

I never stopped. I walked as quickly as possible. I was so scared, and I had little strength to walk or look around. My fear was unimaginable and unexplainable.

After about two hours of walking, I reached the hostel; my sub-warden was waiting in the visitor’s parlor and asked me, “Larissa, what happened to you? Are you all right?” My eyes were dull and my voice was flat. I couldn’t talk. Then I fainted. My subwarden called my mom and informed her as to what happened to me.

Like so many victims of the bomb blast, I never got a good night’s sleep that week. I tried to forget the incident, but for a few nights I woke up in the middle of the night screaming. I never stepped out or went to the courthouse or law school during that week. It was a great shock for me! I felt loneliness, and at a loss, and I felt the fear of death.

Finally, the next day was my senior’s oath party. I couldn’t miss that. My friend took the same route of the bomb blast, as it was a short cut, and I noticed that the place had changed considerably. The buildings were burnt and vehicles, too, and it looked like a war zone. When I passed that place, my body was shaking.

Since then, I try to avoid traveling towards that place. Now every time I hear or see the word “bomb,” I can remember the scariest incident that happened to me. I think I was fortunate to escape a terrible death or being severely injured. It is the most unforgettable and fearful day in my life!
The Game Fate Plays

Davis Hoffman

For as far back as I could remember, I hated English -- not the language itself, but the formation of words. Grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling, the essential principles of English, never came easy to a Nintendo-kid such as myself. My world was full of games and mysteries, and as a child, I was always called upon to play and explore, that is, until school started.

My hatred for English began in the fifth grade at Avondale Elementary in San Diego. Writing, by its very nature, was easy to do, but what wasn't easy was coming up with words to fill a page. One fateful morning, my elementary teacher, whose name I have forgotten, handed out a thin book to each student. Each book was personalized with our names. I curiously opened the book only to find its pages blank.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“That’s your journal,” she answered.

“But the pages are blank.”

The teacher’s eyes rolled behind the glare off her glasses.

“That’s because you’re going to fill the pages,” she responded.

“With what?” I said. Surely she didn’t mean I had to become an author?

“With the projects and assignments I’m going to give you. You’ll be writing every day, class.” She announced.

From that day on, I began to loathe writing.

Junior high school wasn’t any better. The same task of keeping a journal and updating it daily for points was a harsh and brutal chore. My other classes, math, history, and keyboarding, were much easier than my creative writing course, which involved using imagination and creativeness. The other subjects were precise with answers and didn’t involve opinions. Still, I had to try. I managed to pass with a D-. The blood in my body pooled to the bottom of my feet as I held the report card in my blue hands. I had passed, and my reward for passing was a week without TV and video games.
As I approached the second year of junior high, we moved from our paradise of a home in Irvine, California to a dense residential area in Milwaukie, Oregon. I began school in a different state with a different mindset. Times were rough, since I had to start anew. The complete change in environment and culture was a change for the better. My seventh grade English curriculum consisted of reading books, many of which required no written part other than a simple worksheet that related to the book. This was indeed the best English class I had ever had, but it couldn't prepare me for high school. I found hope in the oddest of places to find help: the Internet.

A marvelous chat program called a M.U.C.K., short for Multi User Character Kingdom, led my brain cells into a more productive field other than trying to make Mario smash the “Goombas.” This “Muck” was a place to role-play a character from my own mind, and act him or her out through various types of scenes from everyday life. Granted, fighting a dragon is far from normal, but in this program nothing was ever “normal.” This program connected thousands of users across the globe to roleplay in different rooms and habitats. There were no pictures to guide users around the rooms, no pictures to tell the stories. It was completely text-based, which inspired me to use my imagination to the best of my ability. It was a success.

From then on, I welcomed any chance to write a paper. My mind had been changed from trying to make the best score out of a game, to writing the most brilliant prose others had seen before. It was a community of intelligent individuals, Geeks who loved the English language and used it to the best of their abilities. The website’s use of images defeat the old saying: "No words are adequate," but this was a place to solve that problem. I would stay up beyond my normal hours of 1 a.m., waiting for the noisy modem to connect to our Internet Provider so I could use a small share of bandwidth to connect to the gateway of my imagination. Empty soda cans, chip-bags, and pizza boxes littered my desk as I typed away at the keyboard with my mind in the fantasy world I had created. Life was good; life was fair.

Later on in high school, as my writing — I should say typing — skills evolved, I began to focus more on the creative and opinionated side of my writing. I began to lose interest in my math and science classes, and I found myself reading either a book or something online almost every day. When I moved to Hawai‘i and began classes at KCC, I took my first English course in the spring of 2001. I needed help with grammar, and English 22 was the cure. After passing the class with an A, I decided to major for college in the one subject I had hated most and vowed I would never need in life . . . English.
I love fishing—not the actual killing of the fish or the squishy bait harpooned on the hook but more the peacefulness of the wait. The calmness of the ocean while the sounds engulf your senses. I haven’t always taken pleasure in the simplicity of this pastime, and I can still remember my first time fondly. It was one of my last outings with my dad and brother and was surely the most memorable.

I was only eight at the time, still enjoying the simple pleasures of childhood. I don’t remember the name of the beach or the exact date, things trivial to an eight-year-old. But I could tell you of the rocks we scaled to reach the edge overlooking the ocean, their color and roughness beneath my bare feet; or about the salty sweetness of ocean air and the way the wind carried cool, salty drops onto my face. Even the color of the sky seemed magical to a child’s fresh eyes.

As my dad and brother put together their fishing poles and reels, I sat there and stared pitifully at my thin bamboo with fishing line tied to the end. I was so jealous; but it was a last minute trip, and we didn’t have time or the money to get a pole like theirs for me. I had to make do with what I had. My dad handed me my thawing shrimp to rip up as bait while they used some little fish they had scooped up somewhere. He had brought the shrimp for me so I wouldn’t have to touch anything that had been alive within the last 24 hours. He knew my tendency to shy away from killing things for no good reason.

I must have sat there for nearly an hour enviously listening to the zipping noises coming from their reels. By this time I had gotten over the basic “my pole sucks” feelings, but now I was frustrated that they had anything to reel in at all. Fish after fish came from the depths hanging on their lines while mine blew uselessly in the wind. I couldn’t understand it. Was it the bait? I didn’t want to find out since I would have to stab a fish on my own hook. So I sat there waiting patiently . . . till I decided to ask nicely if I could switch poles for a little while. Although my brother (the jerk) refused, my dad graciously agreed. Now I thought, “Here come the fish!” But once again, as what felt like a couple of days had passed in kid’s time, I didn’t catch anything. “Must be the location,” I thought, standing up to move. But the gigantic pole was quite heavy, and I couldn’t move very far. My dad, who saw my dilemma, said we should switch back so that I could move where I wanted to. What was even worse was that he had managed to catch a few fish with my crappy pole!
Determined, I sat myself down in a new location closer to the reef. “More fish there,” I reasoned and again waited patiently. The sun had started its descent towards the ocean, and I hadn’t gotten one nibble. You can imagine my frustration! I was just about to give up when my dad came over and told me we weren’t leaving until I caught something. By then all I wanted to do was toss the stupid thing into the ocean. Suddenly the unthinkable happened. I had long ago stopped paying attention to my line, and so I didn’t notice the slight nibble I got. When the actual tugging started, the pole almost got yanked out of my hand. I quickly scrambled to get a hold of it before it slipped into the abyss. I was so excited when I felt the pulling that I started screaming and jumping for joy while my dad and brother ran over to see what was going on. My dad encouraged me to lift the pole as high as I could, bringing my line completely out in the open while my brother muttered, “About damn time.” (I told you he was a jerk.) Dangling at the end was the ugliest fish (if you could even call it that) that I had ever seen. It looked like a black rock with little bumps on it. I probably would have mistaken it for rubbish had it not been moving. And it was huge! Bigger than anything else caught that day. I was thrilled as I smugly compared it to my brother’s fish still in the bucket and enjoyed the scowl my glee produced. My dad unhooked the slimy catch as I jumped and danced around him. The he dropped it into the bucket to swim with the others.

We sat there, awed by the sun setting in front of us, not uttering a word. I could have sworn I saw that green flash as the sun lost its flame to the watery depths. Before we gathered our belongings, I said goodbye to my rock fish as he slid back to his home unharmed. Thinking back on that day, I figured out why I didn’t catch anything for so long. The fish that I caught was a bottom dweller fish, which meant that my hook must have been lying on the ocean floor. How was I supposed to know fish were nearer the surface since no one had told me it mattered?

It was freezing that night as we rode home in the topless jeep. I huddled near the gearshift where hot air from the engine poured out of a hole in the floor. The cold didn’t bother me; nothing did at that moment. All of the hardships of the day faded, for I considered it the best day I had had so far and happily sang to Bob Marley blaring from the speaker over my head.

That was my last memory of family togetherness I had as a child. After that fishing trip, we really didn’t do things together. My parents got a divorce, and we grew into adolescents and the dreaded teen years when I basically wanted nothing to do with parents. I will always think back on that day with a smile.
The Younger Years
Shannon Hugentugler

The year was 1980, and I was 12 years old. I didn't know it at the time, but I was
at an age when I thought I knew everything there was to know about life. I couldn't have
been more wrong. I didn't know a thing about life, but what I did know is that at the time
it seemed that nobody understood me. I felt nobody could relate to what I was going
through. When I say nobody, what I really mean is my mom, stepdad, and anyone that
had authority over me. I couldn't stand the fact that someone could tell me what to do.

Anyway, let me tell you a little bit about “the younger years.” I attended an
elementary school in Kaneohe on the windward side, a really nice school with lots of
friendly students. I wasn't exposed to any violence there; it was quite peaceful and the kids
were so nice. Then the unexpected happened; my mom said that we're moving to Wahiawa,
a place I’d never been before. I had no friends there, and I had no choice but to move.

When I got to my new school, I realized that the students weren’t very friendly. In
fact, they were mean, and I wasn’t used to that. I really didn't know how to handle hostile
situations. So when some bullies approached me to see what I was about and to test my
fighting skills, to their surprise, I fought back. I didn't know how to back down or to walk
away. I just knew to defend myself. I guess my martial arts and boxing training paid off.

After that, the whole school heard about “the new guy that could fight” and wanted
a piece of the action. Throughout the day, bigger challenges came to me: bigger bullies,
longer fights. Well, after six fights the fact that I didn’t back down earned me a position in
rank. What I mean is, I became someone. I wasn't just some kid that just existed; I was an
icon among my peers. I had a reputation now as a tough guy, and I intended to keep that
status. It was a whole new kind of attention that I never had before, and I liked it. Soon
after that I started doing drugs. I started smoking cigarettes, I started cutting classes and I
did everything that the popular kids did, but to an extreme. I became the leader of my
gang and the supplier of the dope. I initiated the cut outs and provoked other students and
became everything that a young teen could ever hope for. I was among the most popular
kids in the school and I finally had identity. I thought I had it all together, but I couldn't
have been more wrong.

A year went by, and one might assume that I would have changed by now, but I
only got worse. I started to do other things with my time; I started stealing and got into
heavier drugs like cocaine and other amphetamines. I'd sneak out of my house at night
and go to my girlfriend’s house till 6:00 in the morning. I'd stay out late and come home.
drunk and would lie to my parents as if they didn't know where I was.

Every action that I took had nothing to do with my parents and I wanted it that way! It always seemed like parents had no idea what it was like to be a kid. My mother did the best she could and I feel bad sometimes, because I wasn't the only one giving her a hard time. I had a twin brother who was just as delinquent. My mother had double trouble. There were two of us in the same state of mind, and we reassured each other that we doing the right thing. Finally, when my mom had to put her foot down and say, “Enough is enough, this has got to stop,” we disagreed and decided to run away from home. We grabbed what we thought was valuable, some clothes, our bikes and a bite to eat and we were gone!

It seemed like weeks, but was probably only days, and we were running out of places to stay. My sisters found my brother and me in some game room and told us that our father that we hadn't seen for years had come to take us to his place. Lots of mixed emotions were going through our heads. We were happy that we were going to see him, yet we were afraid because of the situation. When we got there, he missed us so much that he didn't mention anything about us running away. We just hopped in his car and left, and never looked back.

His house was a place back on the windward side, a whole new world away from the city, away from all the violence and drugs, a place where we could reunite the father and son bond. At first, there was a lot of fishing and some catching up with our dad. Not too long after came the work! He had 12 acres of land and lots of animals to take care of! He had cows, horses, pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, geese, dogs, and cats. Trust me when I say we had our hands full.

After we got used to feeding all the animals, my dad landed this big construction job and had this great idea to put us to work, like we weren't already working at his house. But like everything else, we were having a blast! We started out as laborers, and my dad said he would pay us $100 a week each. That's about $2.50 an hour if you do the math. Still, that was pretty good considering that we weren't getting paid to feed the animals. Within weeks we were going through the stages of carpentry and advancing up the construction ladder. We worked that whole summer and learned skills that we never thought we had. We built a massive house from start to finish. An accomplishment for us that was huge! It changed our lives forever; we now had a new identity. We knew now that we had a purpose in life, and we weren't just troublemakers. We were smart and had skills that most other kids knew nothing about; we now had goals and future insight. The summer soon came to a bittersweet end. We needed to go back to school, which would end the visit with our father and take us back to Wahiawa, to our mother whom we truly missed. My dad promised that we could spend summers and weekends at his house whenever we wanted. We promised
our mom that we would love and respect her the way we should and that we were sorry.

When we returned to school, we had a whole new attitude, and as leaders of our peers, we now had goals to succeed in life. We also visited our dad on the weekends and summers till adulthood and continued to learn from him until we had mastered the field of construction. We now share a special bond that keeps us together.
Out!
Cheyne D. Inman

Growing up as a young, gay, white male in the small town of Kailua-Kona on the island of Hawaii was one of the most challenging tests that I have ever had to endure. Attending public school made coming to terms with myself harder than it should have been. I severed communications with my family in the eighth grade so that they would not discover who I really was, which made my high school friends more than friends. They were family, family who helped me through life’s pain and problems. One friend in particular was Diana, who has become my best friend and a sister to me. She was the first person I “Came Out” to and who loved me for who I really am.

At a very young age I knew there was something different about me. My mother, a child of the sixties, allowed my hair to grow to an unbelievable length. My clothes were hand-me-downs from my older brothers who had grown up in the 70’s: tight bell-bottom jeans, old striped polo T’s, and shirts with sayings such as “love all” scrawled across the front. My skin is as white as the snow that falls atop Mauna Kea, which can be difficult growing up in a place where there are racist attitudes towards Caucasians. Inside I knew I was different. I didn’t play games that “normal” boys played. I preferred to do things that most considered “girly.” I was gay and took enjoyment in playing with Barbie and her friends. I also took pride in my troll collection, which was a fabulous fad in the early 90’s.

I was frequently called names and teased in high school. While walking to class, I would look down at the ground so I wouldn’t make eye contact. I was called names like “stupid haole,” and the worst, “faggot,” or the two combined. I was always labeled, and never given a chance to show my classmates who I really was. So all through my freshmen year of high school, I hung out by myself. I never went to the cafeteria. I feared the large number of insults that would be lashed out at me if I were to enter. Once my freshman year came to an agonizing end, I was left depressed. Therefore, I searched for a way to better my life at home and at school.

The answer to my dilemma came in the form of a little known public charter high school called the West Hawaii Explorations Academy. The academy is located at Keahole Point on the sunny Kona coast of the Big Island. There, I was greeted by people who befriended me, took me in as friend for who I was: Diana, who was a tall, green-eyed girl and her friend Becky, who was a shorter, very pale girl. The school was very group oriented and immediately, the three of us were signing up to work together.

Diana and I became best friends. We did everything together, knew everything about

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each other or almost everything. I never hid who I was and the way I lived my life. Diana accepted me for what I was on the inside, a funny down-to-earth caring guy who liked shopping. I battled with the idea of living my life the way I wanted to live it. I wanted to “come out.” My desire to share my secret got stronger everyday, but the thought of rejection was always there. My fear would scare me back into the closet each time, but each time, not as far back. I had always thought of telling Diana and my other close friends, but the thought of telling any family members was unspeakable for me. I could never imagine what their reactions would be, so I never had the desire to tell and continued to live my home life closeted. Then one day after school, I got a letter from Tom, a best friend who had moved to South California’s Rancho Cucamondo area while I was in my sophomore year of high school. The letter was addressed to Diana and I, so we opened it together. The letter went something like this. “There is something I need to tell you both. I’m coming to terms with who I am and have a need to let you know. I’m gay. I have known all my life and had just chosen not to tell anyone, but now I feel more confident with who I am.” The letter was so moving that I went home and cried. I cried into the night and felt a connection with him. His letter had pushed me out of the closet. That night I started to write a return letter. The letter was written very sloppily because I had a hard time keeping a steady hand. I had a bad case of the shakes. My words came out mixed up and hard to read. Nevertheless, I sent the letter the next day.

The day I sent the letter was going to be the day that it all came “out.” I was going to tell Diana what was on my mind on the way home from school. My stomach was knotted up and the flapping of butterflies with barbed wire wings where churning at the inside of my stomach. I had never felt as nervous as I did that day I sat in her black Toyota Corolla. I placed my hand on her arm and said, “Diana there’s something I need to tell you. This is very hard for me, but it’s something that I need to do. You remember Tom’s letter? Well it has given me great courage to tell you this. I’m gay.” Right then I felt a huge weight of pressure relieved from my shoulders, and for the first time in my life, I had nothing to hide. The car went silent for a moment, and she replied, “No way, are you sure?” I replied, “Yes, I have been wanting to tell you for so long and now I’ve worked up the courage to.” She reached over, gave me a hug, and said, “I’m so glad that you were able to come to terms with this and accept yourself for who you are.”

From that day on Diana has been a sister to me. She gives me advice on any topic that comes up in conversation. She gave me the support I needed when it was time to come out to my mother. Diana was there to hold me when life got a little twisted. Diana made me comfortable with who I was, and that’s why I’m as outgoing as I am. Without Diana, the once depressed life I had lived might have come to a premature end. To me, Diana is an angelic and wonderful person who has made life a wonderful experience. Diana, I love you.
It was early in the morning one overcast summer day that my brother Wade shook me awake and asked, "Are you ready to go?" I rolled up out of bed and put on my essentials, which were shades, a bikini and slippers. I remember being so excited. I thought, "My first time diving. Wow." I could feel the butterflies just flapping around in my tummy. When we arrived at Aloha Dive Shop, I tried on the important tools used in diving. They include the Buoyancy Control Device, usually called the B.C.D. That is the device used to control your weight under water. Then I was given a regulator, the part that you stick in your mouth and bite down on to breathe. I also put on a wetsuit, mask, snorkel and a pair of fins.

I walked to the boat, a white boat, flat bottomed, with a roof that only covered us halfway. The next thing I knew we were off. The boat moved at a very slow pace through Koko Marina. Once we got close to Mauna Lua Bay the boat started moving a little faster. I saw the beautiful view of the rocks that form Diamond Head on my right and small waves rolling up on the lovely creamy sand beaches of Portlock on my left. The dive masters told me and the other passengers the underwater sign language for: "I'm okay," "I have a problem," "turtle," and "shark."

We finally got to Turtle Canyons. I remember being scared to jump in the water because the sky looked overcast, just like in a "Jaws" movie. I watched as more and more tourists got into the water, some from the Mainland, some from Japan. I put on my mask, leaned over the side, and stuck my head in. "Wow," I exclaimed. I was filled with amazement. Below us were at least thirty green sea turtles just gliding around under the boat. I lifted my head out of the water and told my dive master and friend Byron, "Let's go!"

I sat down on the platform, then rolled off into the water. Slowly I went down under the surface of the water, moving hand over hand down a rope. You have to move slowly down to the bottom so you can equalize your ears. Equalizing is done by pinching your nose and slowly exhaling, pushing air in to your sinuses. The air I was breathing from the tank didn't taste like fresh air, but it didn't taste bad either. The first sounds that I heard were my breathing. Breathing through a regulator made my nerves shake, but I recalled hearing Byron say, "Breath normal. You don't want to get the bends." (The bends is decompression sickness.)

Once I got to the bottom of the rope at about thirty-five feet, I saw turtles and fish on every side of me, even above me. The ocean was filled with beautiful blues and greens,
Six Fathoms Under

and there was coral all around. Inside the coral I saw two moray eels and one octopus which Byron caught and stuck on my mask. It was really neat when the octopus squirted ink, surrounding me with a black cloud. The octopus was very soft and I thought that he was so cute. I also got to hold a Pebble Collector, a little coral-like creature Byron put on my hand. Then he flipped my hand upside down. The creature didn't let go. Then he put tiny pieces of rock on the creature, and it held them too. I could hear a weird noise, like sand in a grinder. It was these little yellow fish eating the coral. There must have been thousands of animals just hanging out in this underwater playground called Turtle Canyons. It was truly the most special place that I have ever been.

It was too soon when we swam back to the ropes at the bottom of the boat and waited to climb up. I went up the line really slowly and equalized on the way. Finally I reached the surface of the water and got pulled up onto the boat. The only response I had when Wade asked me, “How did you like my office?” was to smile and say, “I wish that it was mine.”

Being under water for about forty minutes really changed my outlook on life. At that time I was a teenager going through the death of my father. I thought that nothing in life was great. Going diving made me realize how special my life is and not to take it for granted. I think every one needs to take a break every once in a while and do some diving. I’m glad I did.
Art
Allan Lum

It was a quiet Sunday. Clyde, my neighbor, stopped by my home looking for something to pass the time of day. We are not couch potatoes so we decided to spend the morning at the Art Museum. The feature for the week was the art of unknown artists. One painting that caught my eye was of gold buttercups, painted by Charles Ho. The colors were vivid and seemed to protrude from the canvas. The layout was simple, yet the simplicity seemed to make the painting animated. Another painting was by Michi. The painting was of a lake or bay town scene. The buildings are old two level wood and rock structures. The scene was a little like San Francisco Bay with a few sailboats crossing to a port below a mountain. The scene was at dusk, and the lights in the buildings are turning on. The painting was darkish in color, which makes the mind's eye see the lights in the buildings start turning on as it gets darker. The town had a mystical, real and familiar aura. Uniquely, the portrait did not have the appearance of an oil painting. The scene captivates the viewer's attention so much that all the mind wants to peek in each window to see what the people are doing.

The sculptures included one by Diane, a clay model of a woman with a child. The artist molded a block of clay into the figure of the woman in a hooded robe cradling a child in her arms. The focus was on the child, a cuddly baby happily cradled in his or her mother's arms with no care of the surroundings.

We stopped in the courtyard to rest. Clyde turned to me and said, “Look at that!” His attention was directed at a young woman who strolled into the courtyard. “Look at how her hair flows over her shoulders and how she seems to glide through the garden.”

I tried not to stare. “Look at her figure,” I whispered to Clyde. “She's really something to look at.” I instantly became hypnotized at the sight of the young woman. She had a shapely figure that took my breath away. She wore a simple white halter that was decently made and without being vulgar revealed her shapely breasts. Her matching shorts accentuated her long straight legs. Her outfit highlighted her sculpted figure in an attractive presentation. “I could spend the rest of the day just admiring her beauty,” I told Clyde, breaking out into a definite stare.

“She must be a model,” Clyde replied.

“I don't think so,” I said. “She seems just naturally beautiful. Look at the texture of
her skin, as smooth as milk."

"Her eyes are light blue," Clyde mumbled. "They seem to be glowing.

We watched her for a long while, with our hearts fluttering. How pleasant it was watching her admiring other works of art.

With our unforgettable cultural experience completed, we left the museum. The paintings and sculptures were nice. They attempt to replicate what nature has created. The truth, we decided, is that there is only one great artist. The most creative and original artist is God.
An Unforgettable Experience
Jefferson Mallanao

An unforgettable experience for me was coming to a new country, a new land, a new neighborhood, a new school, and being with my family. All this happened to me in a short time and I can assure you that if I had an accident in which I lost my memory, this experience would not vanish from my mind.

I was born in 1982 in Ilocos Norte, Philippines. I was raised by a very traditional family that attached to my heart and soul all the values they could keep and follow from generation to generation. My childhood was awesome.

However, when I was around five years old, my dad left me and my mom to go abroad to live in Hawai'i. It was a heartbreaking time of my life to see my dad leave, but exciting that one day my mom and I would reunite with him. People told me, "Hawaii is not all that great." Some visitors from the United States visit our land telling lies about this nation. They say that in the United States you can be anything you want to be, everything is easy there, the streets are painted with gold and many other lies that I am sure are why people go there. I thought of my dad often and how I missed him so dearly.

After years had gone by, finally we had our call. My dad petitioned my mom and I to be with him there in Hawai'i. I was so thrilled by the news that I broke down in tears. Not tears of sadness, though, but tears of joy.

January of 1992 was the year that I came to Hawaii. As the plane landed in the airport, I noticed that everything was different, such as the people -- there were the different nationalities and their colors. There were so many stores around and huge highways, streets, and parks. The city seemed to have a life of its own. I really felt like I was in another world versus another country. I had been told lies about Hawaii but never could have imagined the beauty. Even the best pictures of this land could not begin to depict its true beauty. All together it impressed me. But the one thing I was looking forward to the most was reuniting with my dad.

Finally after going through security and checking all our luggage, we stepped outside. There he stood, 5 feet 5 inches, a handsome fellow, dressed in Hawaiian attire, my dad. For a moment there, I said to myself, "Can this be real? Is that my dad? Am I dreaming?" Fortunately, it was not a dream, it was reality. I ran quickly towards him like I was in a race seeking to be first; I hugged him so tightly and kissed him. Of course, I told my dad how I
An Unforgettable Experience

had missed him so much. My mom, on the other hand, was in tears when she saw my dad. What a moment that was for the three of us, and I knew it was only the beginning.

We had a huge party. There my mom and I met the rest of our family members. They all had come to Hawaii before us, so I did not know some of them. They cooked incredible amounts of food. We listened to music and danced. Later that evening after the party was over, I stepped outside and watched the stars until two in the morning. As I stood there alone, I tried to soak up all the feelings I was experiencing so I could cherish them in my heart. The next day, we visited a lot of places such as the Honolulu Zoo, Sea Life Park, Waikiki, Ala Moana, and beaches. We even went around the island and saw many more sights.

After two weeks had passed, I entered Kalihi Kai Elementary School. Later, I attended Kalakaua Intermediate; Wallace Rider Farrington High School, and now college at Kapiolani Community, where I am seeking an associate degree in Culinary Arts. I have come so far and yet still have to face the future.

My mom and I are really happy to be living here; people told us lies in the Philippines, but they also told us the truth. Now I know this country is not painted with gold, but I know the gold is here. This unforgettable experience taught me a lesson that I could only learn one way and that is by actually being here. I miss the Philippines, my friends, and family members, but look forward to seeing them soon in the future.
I’m All Right
Rhea Mateo

“I’m all right.” That was my routine answer to questions like, “Is everything okay?” or “Are you all right?” Being timid, reserved, and quiet is not easy when experiencing trying times. I’d always kept my feelings to myself. I would not let them out. One November day in 1995, however, things changed for me when I discovered that I was adopted.

After Thanksgiving in 1995, I visited my grandmother’s house. My grandmother and grandfather had decided to move to the mainland so their things were all over the house. Boxes and luggage with labels “Throw Away” and “Keep It” occupied the living room and the garage. Used and unwanted clothes, shoes, vases, curtains, and pillow cases were everywhere, yet my grandmother sat down, relaxed, in front of the television, watching a Frank Sinatra movie. Because watching an aged movie with black and white pictures annoyed me, I got off the sofa and walked into my grandmother’s bedroom.

As I entered her bedroom, I saw nothing inside except an old oak dresser and their king-size bed. The curtains had already been taken off, allowing the light from the sun to shine directly through the room. The brightness and the hot temperature of the room geared me up to leave. As I turned to go, however, I saw a heavily shadowed box visible with the light of the sun coming from the doorway where I stood. Curious, I returned inside to see what was stored in the box.

For many years I had wandered through my grandparent’s bedroom, but I had never before see that black wooden antique box, printed with gold pictures of mountains and Indian hats. As I looked closer, I saw that the initials of my grandmother (AGM) and grandfather (PFM) were engraved on top of it. Because I wanted to see more than the exterior, I opened the box.

When I opened it, I first noticed their marriage certificate. Then inside, a black velvet jewelry box held a white gold ring with a petite diamond in the middle. I looked through each folded paper. Most of the papers were my grandparents’ love letters written in Spanish and letters from their family and friends. However, as I got to the bottom of the folded papers, I was surprised to see a file of papers labeled “ADOPTION PAPERS.”

When I unfolded the papers, I spotted the title “Adoption Papers.” At that moment, I questioned what I was reading. So to confirm that I was reading the papers correctly, I looked at the birth date, parents, and place of birth to see if they matched mine. They did
and then I realized I am indeed adopted.

After reading the whole adoption papers, I slowly edged out of the room and looked up and down the hallway. As I got to the living room, I stood frozen in front of my grandmother. I showed her the papers that I had found in her room. She was speechless but stared at me and hugged me firmly. Then all of a sudden she broke down in tears. I did not cry any at that time because I did not know what to think. Mama did not say any word, but her actions answered my question. My mama called my mom and in five minutes my mom arrived at the house to pick me up.

While my mom and I were driving home, there was an eerie of silence. As a result, I turned on the radio. As I listened to the smooth rhythms of Bangles “Eternal Flame,” my mom prepared to talk to me. She turned the volume down. “Rhea,” she said, “I think you’re old enough to handle what I have to say next.” She took a deep breath. “I know that we don’t have the right to hide anything from you. I am so sorry you found this information this way. Your dad and I are not hiding it from you but we thought you’re too young yet. We were planning to tell you when you turned 18. By then you’ll understand more and can make your own decision.” I was no longer listening, and my mom’s voice faded as I sat there, staring out the window. I was stunned. How could I be adopted? I felt like there was a golf ball stuck in my throat and that it was not going to come out. For the rest of the ride, we silently listened to the radio.

When we got to the house, my dad and my sisters were waiting for us. My dad asked everybody to sit at the dining table. My parents just talked more about my adoption. I listened quietly as they explained why I was adopted, why they did not tell me earlier, and who my biological parents are. They suggested that I could meet them but it would be my decision. They tried breaking the news to me gently, but nothing they could have said would have made me feel better. They ended the conversation by asking, “How are you feeling, Rhea?” I replied softly, “I am all right.”

For couple of months, I dealt with my adoption by not talking about it and avoiding the subject. I totally ignored it and often told my family everything was fine. I acted like this incident was not affecting me. I thought that if I did not talk about it then I would not feel any pain. Big mistake. All of my emotions just built up inside of me like a gigantic balloon that was just waiting to explode. One day in school, I broke down and cried to my friends. They tried their best to console me. Although I knew that changes in my life would soon happen, I felt some of the pressure rise off of my chest and I felt better. Also I began talking to my sisters. They made me feel better by encouraging me to vent all of my grief. They were there to comfort me and listen to my lamentations about my adoption.
How Soccer and Children with Special Needs Helped to Shape My Life

Lindsey Mizota

The sport of soccer gives children with special needs a sense of belonging to a community by encouraging teamwork, fostering fair play, and teaching good sportsmanship. Soccer helps to build self esteem, confidence, develop friendships, and improve physical, mental, and social skills. Soccer provides an opportunity for disabled children to feel pride and a sense of accomplishment in an area where they do not usually receive recognition through team sports.

Soccer has been a part of my life since I was five years old. My first memories are of my coach, who was tall, kind, patient, and funny. I remember the comforting voices of my mom and dad cheering me on from the sidelines, something they continued to do for twelve years. I remember sitting down in a circle with my teammates smelling the freshly cut oranges that were passed around at half time. I looked forward to all the different types of food at the potlucks after the games. It looked like an international buffet. Of course, there were local favorites like spam musubi, chili with rice, shoyu chicken, and macaroni salad. I also remember putting my hand in with everyone's hands for a team yell. That feeling of unity was an important part of the reason why I played soccer for so long. Playing soccer enabled me to meet so many different people from Hawaii, the mainland, and other countries. I played year round on American Youth Soccer Organization teams, club teams, as well as high school junior varsity and varsity teams.

For the past six years I have been a volunteer coach for children with special needs. My team, called the VIP's (Very Important Persons), has several volunteer coaches because the children need more one-on-one assistance and support. Soccer in Hawaii depends on people volunteering for the sport to be as successful as it is. Both of my parents helped, as did many others. At first, I was unsure about helping to coach because I was young and I didn't know what to expect. I knew that the children would have to face even more challenges than I did. The children had coordination problems and would have difficulty running, kicking the ball, and getting it into the goal. Others would have problems following directions and staying focused. Some would struggle with balance and direction. A few would get frustrated and want to quit. I began coaching worrying about how I was going to teach the players. I had a lot to learn. I had no idea how much I would learn from them.

I learned hands-on through observation and working with my head coach/
How Soccer and Children with Special Needs Shaped My Life

Lindsey Mizota

coordinator as she interacted with the players. She is a special education teacher as well as a certified coach. I observed her using sign language and other adaptive physical education methods. I noticed how she communicated with the children. My coach would assign colors to the players. We would ask the children to repeat their colors to us several times before we started the scrimmage. The coach would hold up a color and the two players that had that color would try to get the ball and score. She would get their full attention, look them in their eyes, and speak slowly. I tried to model her behavior. Eventually, I learned about the different types of disabilities and the best ways to work with the children. I started when I was eleven years old and I feel that playing soccer and working with children with special needs during my intermediate and high school years kept me grounded. Some of the players I coached were only two years younger than I was.

The children that I coach have a wide range of disabilities. These include visually impaired, mentally impaired, autistic, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and seizure disorders. Some others are attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder, learning disabled, pervasive development disorder, hard of hearing, stress disorder, speech and language disorder, and Prader Wili syndrome. My coach stressed that even with all the disabilities, each child gains something through soccer. She told me that two of the other benefits of soccer are self esteem and an “I can” attitude. She told me that socialization, taking turns, cheering for others, and taking responsibility as a team member helps the children because many of them did not have opportunities to mix socially. Physical exertion helps their cardiovascular endurance. Soccer also helps to challenge them mentally.

I learned that children need appropriate behaviors modeled for them. It helped me to think and act responsibly and to be reliable. I learned patience and to give short, simple, and repetitive commands. I learned how to build their social skills by helping them develop friendships through good sportsmanship, fair play, and teamwork. I found that coaches and players learn from each other. I learned that it is much more important to develop players than it is to rack up points in scoring. I observed that not all coaches had that mentality. Most coaches did a terrific job. A few threw down their clipboards, yelled at their players and referees, and set a poor example. I also learned the importance of providing positive reinforcement and praise. A player with confidence plays better. If a coach tears the player down, his or her play will go down.

The most important lesson that I learned from my players was the value of perseverance and determination. One of my players wore leg braces because of cerebral palsy. He has been a player on my team for the last six years. When he started playing, he would take a step or two and fall. With a big smile he would pull himself up and start the whole process over again. There was such joy in his heart when he played soccer that nothing was going to stand in his way, even the braces. Soccer helped to strengthen his legs. Today
Coaching soccer and working with children with special needs has taught me that it is important to be adaptable, flexible, and patient. I found that some autistic children wanted to participate one day and not at all the next. Some would have outbursts. Sometimes I would have to pull a child aside and talk to him about proper behavior. There were tears and hurt feelings, but we taught them to forgive each other. There were also many high fives and cheers. Down Syndrome children may tire easily, plop down in the middle of the game, and stay there. Depending on the disability, I might be holding the child’s hand through the whole game. The volunteer coaches pretty much run up and down the field, cheering them on.

Except for adaptations, soccer for children with special needs and their families is the same as soccer for other families. I have seen the parents get just as excited, if not more, because their children have not had as many opportunities to participate in team sports. I know it is important for each child to be recognized on the field, so I try to help them stand out. The most important thing is for the players to have fun and enjoy what they are doing. They develop a sense of pride and belonging. I have seen my players look over at their moms and dads cheering them on from the sidelines, just like my parents did. The feeling of unity that I got putting my hand in for the team yell as a player when I was five years old is just as meaningful for me today as a coach.
A Daughter’s Journey
Tomomi Morooka

This letter is dedicated to one girl I will always love.

Do you like your mother now? I hope you will say yes. I know you have locked away your painful childhood memories. You don’t know exactly what happened, and if something bad really happened, you don’t want to remember. I know you didn’t have a good relationship with your mother. You hated her because she didn’t love you. Although you didn’t have a sweet home life, your friends always cheered you up to make a happy life with you. You seem to have improved emotionally, especially over the last five years. I hope this letter encourages you to accept your past and to move on with your life.

You have told me about some of your painful childhood memories regarding your mother. One day, you asked your mother why she wouldn’t love you. “Don’t worry. Your father will take care of you well,” she answered. You vowed then you would never like your mother. She was probably jealous. Your father loved you dearly, more than your mother. You also told me your mother never held your hand. She never tried to touch you except to hit you. She was pleasant and friendly to everyone, except to you. Your mother treated you badly. Perhaps you never wanted to admit the fact that your mother’s behavior was “child abuse.” This is the fact, although you may not want to express it that way.

Have you ever sought revenge for what your mother did to you? You decided not to tell your mother about anything that could possibly make her proud of you. For example, you became a member of the swimming team in Furumae Junior High School. Also when you were written about in the newspaper Asahi regarding how you volunteered to translate books into Braille, as well as becoming a class representative while you were in Hokuchiku High School, you never told her about all those things. You didn’t hurt your mother’s feelings, because you kept those accomplishments from her. It was some small revenge towards your mother. I think that you couldn’t hurt her, but tried to oppose her, even if you knew nothing would change.

After you entered university, you spent a lot of money on alcohol to relieve your depression and became addicted to alcohol. You smoked two packs of cigarettes and drank a bottle of whiskey, your favorite “Maker’s Mark,” almost every day. I know you got acute alcoholic poisoning sometimes. Do you remember when you hit your head on the corner of the concrete stairs and bled? You were in the hospital for a couple of days. I know you don’t remember it, because you were dead drunk. Your friends cried and cried that night.
You could have died. I understand how much you now feel you owe your friends. You love them dearly.

Your soul searching about your mother worked. You thought a lot about your mother, and how difficult it must be to raise children. I'm quite impressed with your self-examination. You tried to see your mother as a wife, a person, and a woman, instead of an enemy. You skipped university classes and spent many days reading lots of books and magazines about the relationship issues between mothers and daughters. Special-counseling programs on TV, related to child-rearing and relationships between parents and children, gave you further information. By watching a documentary on TV, you learned that if a mother had a baby girl first and a baby boy second, the relationship between mother and daughter could later be difficult. You found your mother to be a naive person who looked for attention. Your mother had to please everyone, but she was mean to you. She was possibly spoiled when she was growing up in a well-off family, and apparently had no idea on how to bring up her own children. Your father was always away from home on business, and therefore, your mother had difficulty in raising her children alone.

One day, your mother left home without saying anything to anyone. You had already left home and were living by yourself, but you were concerned about your brother, who was still living at home. A week after your mother left, your father called you. He told you he had found your mother and had started divorce proceedings. You were happy because you would never need to struggle with your enemy again. You realized, however, how your brother, who had just entered high school, might feel about your parents' divorce.

I am relieved to know you broke the vow not to be nice to your mother. You acted as if you wanted your parents to get back together again for your brother's sake, even if you didn't want to see them get together again. In the past, I have supported you in your opposition towards your mother, but decided this time to step aside because, as much as I care for you, it really is none of my business. I only want the best for you in life. I only want to be a good friend to you.

Have you decided to get along with your mother? I don't expect an immediate answer, and I believe you are working towards getting closer to your mother. She had begun to change her behavior towards you, little by little, after having had a quarrel with your father regarding their possible divorce. Also, as you tell your story and have admitted your trauma, you have faced your painful childhood memories little by little. I am sure you will, and can, think of your life in a more positive manner, and perhaps, include your mother in those thoughts one day as well.
More Than Meets the Eye
Ryan Nakagawa

When most people hear the word “toy,” they instantly think of some kid playing with a piece of plastic, merely something that will entertain them until they find something new to do. To me the word “toy” means a whole lot more. It’s a piece of my past, a tangible reminder of “simpler days,” but most of all it’s one of my favorite hobbies. You see, I collect and sell toys, all kinds. Action figures, models, you name it, I probably sold it at some point. But it wasn’t always this way with me.

August, 1990. The “simpler days.” I had just turned seven in March, Mariah Carey had a #1 hit with “Vision of Love,” the Transformers craze was beginning to die out, but most importantly my parents decided to get a divorce. What that meant was we had to find a new house to live in. My father moved back to Aiea; my mother decided to stay in Mililani. I figured that since I’d probably be spending a lot of time alone I should find myself a new hobby to pass the time. Comics and stamps weren’t really working, so I decided to try something new. The only problem was that I had no ideas at all. Then one day I met a 17 year old boy named Marcus. His family had moved to Hawaii the year before from Virginia. He told me that he and his 12-year-old brother Reggie used to sell toys to collectors at conventions. They told me that people would actually pay money for their old toys, especially if you still had the box for them. I told them they were both crazy and that I’d never sell my “Transformers.” As soon as those words came out of my mouth, they begged me to let them see what I had in my house.

As I took them upstairs I kept thinking to myself, “Why am I doing this? I’m not going to actually let them sell my toys.” I told myself that all the way to my room, but as soon as they went in my whole perspective changed. Marcus flipped out as he saw all my toys displayed on the shelves of my wall. I had just about all the transformers I owned up on display, from Bumblebee to Starscream. When Reggie told me that he wanted to sell my toys and split the profits, Marcus told him to stop being greedy and to help me pick out the most valuable ones and see if I wanted to sell them. So after an exhausting search, we picked out three transformers to sell: #1 Jetfire, a good guy plane that had pieces of armor that could be removed; #2 Defender, a team of robots that were rescue vehicles that combined into one huge robot; and #3 God Ginrai, the leader of the transformers from the Japanese T.V. show.

I told them that I didn’t really want to sell them, but Marcus insisted that I should and said that I’d get more than what I paid for them. I agreed to let them sell these for me but the others were too important to me. I couldn’t let them go. They both understood and
said that I didn't have to sell it just because it's worth money. "Sometimes you have to measure an item's worth sentimentally, not monetarily." I knew exactly what he meant. To me some of these toys were reminders of happy memories, like waking up Christmas morning and finding that you got exactly what you wished for. I couldn't let those ones go; they were too valuable to me. No amount of money could make me sell those.

Later that month, they invited me to help them with their booth at a convention in Waikiki. Marcus told me that it was time to see how much people in Hawai'i were willing to pay for rare toys. Sure enough, not more than ten minutes passed by when a man asked me to sell the Jetfire toy to him for 45 dollars. Now you need to understand that to a seven year old kid that's a lot of money, but Marcus told me that he was ripping me off. I couldn't believe what he was saying! 45 dollars for a toy was a rip off? Marcus told the man that "just because we were kids didn't mean we were stupid." Shortly thereafter the man retracted his offer, and I was furious at Marcus! Why didn't he let me sell it? My answer was quick and painless. Another man came up to me and offered me 75 dollars, a "fair price" according to Reggie. I was in shock. I couldn't believe this twenty-something year old man wanted my toy! Marcus gave me a reassuring look as I shook the mans' hand, placed Jetfire back in his box, and exchanged it for the money. I was so happy, my first sale! When a lady came over and gave me 200 dollars for my God Ginrai toy, I practically cried from joy. Marcus said not to get too excited because the best was yet to come. He intended to teach me how to buy transformers for future sales.

As we walked around the room, I looked at all the toys in front of me. There were Mego dolls, Classic G.I.Joe figures, Star Trek toys, pretty much a little from every toy line, even Star Wars toys were there. The first thing Marcus asked me as we walked down the aisle was "What is the one thing most of these toys have in common?" I was puzzled. I replied, "They are all made of plastic?" "No," said Marcus. "Almost every toy is in the original package, and almost all of those are in great shape." I examined the table with the He-man figures to the left. Sure enough just about every one of them was in their package, all nice and clean. He told me that their value would be higher if they were in perfect condition, package and all. I asked him what would I have gotten had my Jetfire and God Ginrai still been in perfect condition. "You don't want to know," he said. I believed him.

Over the years I honed my skills as a collector and trader. I started to look at toys differently. Not just pieces of plastic to pass the time with, but as a way to expand my imagination. Not only that, I saw toys as a doorway to more toys. The more I sold the more money I made. The more money I made the more toys I could buy. A very rewarding circle. Don't get me wrong though; I still played with toys. I would buy two of the really cool ones and play with one, keeping the other in the box so that one day I could sell it. After a while I stopped buying anything that didn't transform. If it wasn't a robot and it couldn't change
into something else, I wasn’t interested.

Marcus told me that buying toys is a lot like buying wine. “You buy it cheap, let it appreciate in value while others are having fun. Then when it’s of age and no one has it anymore, you can taste the fruit of your hard work.” I found this to be very true. I would sometimes buy a toy and not sell it for a few years. Eventually the company would stop making it and the majority of people who did have it squandered their good fortune and more than likely trashed it. Then I would start letting people see what I had in stock and watch the willing bidders pile up. It was always the same. Someone would start the bidding by offering me face value and then another person would double that price. In about 10 minutes you would have anywhere from 3 to 20 people all bidding on one toy. Once I had a winner he/she would come over and I would cut their bid by 5% to seem generous. That way they would want to do business with me. I learned that the nicer you are to people the more likely they are to return. I would often use this to my advantage. I would sell someone something at a good price and in return they would either give me a deal on something I wanted or they would find someone that would. Like I said, a very rewarding circle.

By the time I was 16, I had sold over 200 different items to hundreds of people. I had made tons of new friends within the collectors’ community. Most important of all though, I made over 7,000 dollars in profit (after calculating the original price out of each sale). Mind you, this is small compared to big time collectors like Marcus and Reggie who probably make $7,000 a year, but I feel that I got more out of my hobby than I put in. I still buy toys today, not just for selling though. I still find time to play with them, corny as that may seem. To me, they help keep my mind sharp, my imagination always on. The fact my girlfriend loves it doesn’t hurt either. Over ten years have passed since I started selling toys, and I must say that I don’t plan to stop any time soon. There are too many like me out there, just wanting a piece of their past, trying to find something that can take them back to the “simpler days.” I relate to them. I can’t let them down.

Funny to think that a hobby I started just so I wouldn’t get bored and lonely turned out to be not only full of friends and fun, but money as well. I can’t think of a better thing to do. So the next time you clean out your room or find an old toy at a garage sale that you used to have, make sure you keep it or buy it. You never know how much it will mean to you, whether in sentimental or monetary value. I know I would take good care of it. Some day you might need an extra buck or so.
It was Friday night, and like every other Friday, it was bowling night for my dad and my boyfriend, Ernie. They were in a bowling league together. My mother and I usually tagged along, but we were having second thoughts about going that night.

My dad and Ernie kept saying, "Come on, let's go! You guys aren't going to do anything at home anyway." I was eight months pregnant with our first child, and I had a very, very, healthy appetite. I told my mom, "Why don't we just go with them, because I'm getting hungry, and we can get something to eat there." I was already thinking about what I was going to order: a hamburger steak plate with a large glass of milk. I couldn't wait to get there.

We got to the bowling alley a little early, so we all sat down and ate dinner together. While we were eating, my dad said, "Abby, don't eat too much or you'll pop!" and we all started laughing. He was always making jokes and making everyone laugh. As we were finishing our meal, he said he was feeling lucky and that he would bowl a perfect game. I had to get him back for that remark he made, so I said, "A perfect game, yeah, right Dad; you'll be lucky if you can hit any pins." We all laughed again.

My dad and Ernie started getting their things ready. They were goofing off and messing around as usual. Then the league started, and it was time to bowl. My dad was the first bowler up. I watched him as he stood in his bowling stance, held his ball up, and down the alley he went. He released his ball and, what do you know, he got a strike. He turned around and pointed to me and said, "I told you I felt lucky."

They were in their fifth frame of the game, and my dad made another strike. He now had five strikes in a row. Everyone was cheering him on. He was half way to that perfect game. Even I was getting really excited, because I knew if he won the jackpot that night, he would give it to me, Daddy's little girl.

As the game went on, I said, "Dad, are you sure you didn't step on anything and don't have any of it stuck on the bottom of your shoe?" We all laughed again. By this time, they were on their ninth frame, and again he got another strike. Everyone was amazed. There were bowlers from the other ends of the lane coming to see him bowl.

The pressure was on, and he knew it. It was now the last frame. In the last
frame, a bowler gets three attempts if the first two were strikes. He had a strike on his first throw of the tenth frame. By this time the other bowlers stopped bowling in their lanes for a while and were watching my dad. Everyone was in awe and was cheering him on.

It was time for his second throw of the tenth frame. It was quiet, and all eyes were on him. Down the alley he went again. As soon as the ball hit the first pin, everyone started shouting: "STRIKE! STRIKE! STRIKE!" and sure enough he got another strike. High fives were being given left and right. I was amazed. I thought to myself, "He really was lucky," and I started to laugh.

It was the last throw of the first game. Again all eyes were on him. I watched as he stood in his stance, held his ball up, and stared down the lane. He started down the lane and released his ball. It curved right, rolling on the very edge of the lane, then made another sharp curve towards the middle of the lane. The whole bowling alley was quiet. It seemed like the ball was moving in slow motion and would never get to the end of the lane. I thought for sure he would get another strike. The ball finally hit the pins, and he missed all but one. You could hear everyone's sigh, "AHHH!"

He walked towards where Ernie was sitting and fell back on him. We thought he was upset that he missed his last strike and was goofing off again. Then I heard Ernie say, "Someone call 911!" I saw him starting to do CPR. Then I heard my mom crying as she was running towards them. I was so shocked that I couldn't move. I could feel the tears rolling down my face. As I was making my way towards him, I started shouting, "Daddy, Daddy, no Daddy!"

Ernie and my mom continued doing CPR on him. I stood off to the side, holding his hand, and whispered in his ear, "Daddy, hang on. I love you. You need to see the baby. I need you, Daddy." Then the ambulance arrived. The paramedics took over and transported him to Queen's Hospital.

On the way to the hospital I was still in a lot of disbelief. As Ernie was driving, I could see the tears coming down his face. My father became the father that Ernie never had. At the same time, Ernie was trying to keep me calm for the baby's sake.

As we arrived at the hospital, I saw my mom for the very first time sobbing like a little child. I was so scared. There were so many things running through my mind. While the doctors were working on my dad, our family started to arrive at the hospital. We had a tremendous amount of family support. It seemed like forever before we would hear anything about my father's progress.
The memory is still clear as day. I can see those two doctors walking out of those large silver swinging doors with their blue scrubs, white face masks, and blue hair caps. I could tell by the looks on their faces that the news wasn’t going to be good. We could see them walking towards us down the long corridor. “Mrs. & Ms. Paulino,” they said, “I’m sorry, but we have some bad news. He didn’t make it. We tried everything in our power to try and save him.” I didn’t hear anything else that they were saying after that.

Our Friday nights will never be the same again: no more cracking jokes with each other, no more eating dinners together, no more Daddy. I often think to myself what would’ve happened if my mother and I hadn’t gone that night. It was fate that had led us there.
The Melancholy Dawg
Cortland Sciotto

A firing squad! The Bastille! No punishment was too great for our act of wanton depravity. From where I sat it was easy to hear the teacher recommending punishments to the principal. Where I sat was in the waiting room to the principal’s office. How I got here with my running mates is what this story is all about. It’s a story of an event that reflects the humor and simplicity of a less complex time in my life. A time when I was young and had time to waste. When each insignificant event became a significant memory.

The anteroom to Edwin Jensen’s office was a small area with four dark wooden chairs against one wall. The room was a dull off-white, with beige linoleum that did little to aid the aesthetics of the cell. At either end was a door with a large frosted glass pane in the top half. The sort you might see in an old Sam Spade movie!

I sat in one of the chairs in the company of four friends, our fate being determined by the principal of Elko High School, Mr. Edwin Jensen or just EJ. By the sounds of our teacher’s pleadings, we would be lucky to get off with a mild flogging.

EJ had been the principal for as long as anyone could remember. He was a tall, slightly balding man; his light brown hair was mixed with streaks of gray. He was fond of brown suits, was bow legged and walked with a limp. He was more familiar with me than I with him. After all, he had dealt with my two older brothers who preceded me through school.

Sitting there with little to do but ponder my imminent demise, I began staring intently at a framed poster on the wall across from where I sat. It was really an advertisement for a local rodeo of several years back. I began to smile as I read the headline in bold print, “Cow Town Now Town Presents.”

Cow Town Now Town, yep, that’s what they called Elko, Nevada where I grew up. Cow Town Now Town, most people didn’t give much thought to this moniker, except perhaps the Town Fathers. They seemed to think it brought a certain distinctiveness to the little spot in the high alkali dessert of Northern Nevada.

The town itself was not a bad place to grow up; it was a small community, about 5500 residents, with short windy summers that didn’t get too hot, but with long bitterly cold winters. The spring and fall had a few days that were just so. Days when the air has that
cool crispness that makes you think that everyone else in the world must be feeling the same way.

It was a Friday on just such a spring morning that this story begins. The late morning found my friends and I racing down the grassy slope away from the main building of Elko High School towards Howard Brown's car. There were five of us that morning, our urgency driven by the fear of being caught skipping class.

Skipping was just what we were doing. Running off to drink a few illegal beers and plan our activities for that night and the upcoming weekend. We didn't feel like it was too much of a crime, considering we were only skipping a study hall and our lunch period.

The five of us were close friends and did most things together. Howard Brown was my best friend then and still is today. Howard was 16 years old, sort of medium height and build with thin brown hair, and a gap between his front teeth. He wore square rim glasses, the sort that were popular in the sixties. Howie was the youngest of our group, but when your ages vary in months, it really doesn’t matter much. Howie, like me, liked to laugh. We got along so well because we thought so much alike. We became like brothers and were accepted by one another’s families as such. Marc was next.

Marc Bartorelli looked just like John Travolta. He was a big strong lad, and although he was a jock, he hung out with us. He had thick brown hair, and blue eyes that all the girls loved. He never said “this” or “that,” it was always “dis” and “dat.” He was not the sharpest knife in the drawer, which made his outlook on things that much funnier.

Then there was Mike Bordan, Elsie as we called him. Mike was a tall blond haired, very well built guy. We called him Elsie because his last name was Borden, like the glue! Mike was sort of goofy, or just appeared that way because of the silly grin that he always seemed to have, or perhaps it was the glasses he wore that looked too small for his face. He was quiet for the most part. Mike was truly a good soul and, like the rest of us, loved to laugh.

The fifth in our group and the real criminal of this story was Steve Phifer, a truly demented individual. I think his entire family was that way. Steve and Howard could have been brothers in appearance. He had light brown hair, a sharp pointed nose and a gap between his front teeth. He was what the teachers termed as smart-alecky. His distorted personality gave way to an eccentric perception on life for a 16 year old. He always had jokes to tell and could make you laugh just by the things he pointed out about everyday life in school.
The Melancholy Dog

As we all piled in Howard's SS396, we laughed and made comments about how cool we were and how easy it had been to escape. Our destination was Lamoille Summit, a small plateau on top one of the foothills that surrounded the town. You drove northeast about 5 miles and took a dirt road for another quarter mile and you were there.

The summit was a flat area about the size of a football field, cleared of sagebrush. The location provided a marvelous view of both the town and the Lamoille Valley. It was the spot where teenagers came to party or to park with their girlfriends and look at the city lights!

When we arrived at the summit, we parked and got out to enjoy the day and the sunshine. We opened our first beer and began to talk about things like girls, cars, hunting and our plans for that evening. Without paying too much attention to time or to how many beers we were drinking, we spent our time enjoying the day and our friendship. Before long, we had had drunk three or four beers each. Howard said it was 12:30 and we should get back to school.

That started some discussion about whether we should just skip the rest of the day or go back. It was decided we would go back. This decision would prove to be a costly mistake. Our impending downfall may have been avoided except for one important contributing factor; we all had the same fifth period class, English. Not just any English class, but Mrs. Amastoy's English class.

Mrs. Pauline Amastoy taught fifth period English. She was a tall older woman, perhaps in her mid-fifties. She had brown hair shot with gray. She wore the sort of glasses that sit low on your nose. Her habit of talking out of the side of her mouth gave her the appearance of always having a sneer. Her name had not always been Amastoy though.

Her previous name was Miss Pauline Grissay. Miss Grissay had a particular fondness for a local "after hours" establishment, The Blue Jay Bar. The amount of after hours spent supporting this establishment earned her the alias "Blue Jay Grissay." Further proof of this predilection was validated when she married the bartender/owner and became Mrs. Pauline Amastoy. The truth was, under any name, she was a nasty foul tempered old lady. Of course, her disposition was in no way the result of teaching people like my friends and me for years.

Arriving back at school, we five, a bit tipsy, strolled into the main building to seek our lockers and collect our requisites for our afternoon classes. The main building of Elko High School, where we had our English class, was a long red brick two-story building.
with large windows on both floors. A long shadowy corridor traversed down the center of the building. The light brown linoleum on the floor did little to brighten the dark cavern but was highly polished and shone when illuminated momentarily by the morning sun.

It was the sort of hall when in the late afternoon, if the sun is just right, you can see motes of dust floating in the rays of sunshine. On both sides of the hall were classrooms that alternated with sections of old wooden lockers. Mrs. Amastoy’s classroom was in the middle of this long hallway.

The classroom was a large room with hardwood floors, with four large sash windows that looked out over the lawns sloping away to the street below. The desks formed a U shape around the room, leaving a large space in the center. The five of us sat near one another on the right in front of Mrs. Amastoy’s desk, where she sat as class began.

Class began in its usual uneventful fashion, with roll call, the rustling of homework being submitted and the apprehensive whisperings of students whose work was not completed. Lately we had been reading various poems and prose from a literature book that was not our every day text. The unholy text that held the words to our undoing!

Mrs. Amastoy asked Ann Evens to read aloud from the alien tome. Ann stood up and began to read. Ann was a beautiful girl with long red hair, blue eyes and freckles. She smiled a great deal, which only added to her attractiveness. She did very well in school, and although quiet for the most part, she was always quick to help another student or share in a discussion.

The five of us, being a bit giddy, were not paying particularly keen attention to the reading. As Ann read the passage, “My Heart Turns Melancholy,” Steve began to laugh. In our “condition” his laughter was contagious. Not really knowing why, we all began to laugh. Immediately, Mrs. Amastoy singled me out and wanted to know what was going on?

This happened to me frequently in EHS. It was my destiny or perhaps a curse. You see, I had two older brothers who had gone through school ahead of me. Of course they had been virtual pillars of teen society. On my first day of each school year when I met my new teachers, their first question to me was, “Are you the last of the Sciotto’s?” When I would answer “Yes,” a certain peace would come over them and they would breath out a sigh of relief. So you can see, I was simply a victim of circumstances!

As the laughter subsided, Mrs. Amastoy instructed Ann to continue. At this prompt, Ann repeated the deadly utterance, “My Heart Turns Melancholy,” and once again Steve erupted into another bout of laughter. Mrs. Amastoy, her voice higher now, said, “All right,
The Melancholy Dog

knock it off, Sciotto; that's enough!” In my defense I responded, “I didn't do anything.” Mrs. Amastoy stood up and asked Ann to continue, and one more time those fatal words echoed in the room. This time Steve snorted and tried to hold back the laughter, but it was a futile attempt. Again we all started laughing, but this time her focus was directed at Howard. “Knock it off! Brown, what is so funny?” In his defense Howard retorted, “I don't know. Steve started it.”

With a quizzical expression developing on her face and narrowing eyes, she asked, “What are you guys up to? Phifer what's so funny?” Through teeth clenched in an effort to hold back laughter, Phifer responded with only one word, “melancholy.” Again in our weakened condition, we broke into laughter.

Clearly irritated, and in an angry voice Mrs. Amastoy shouted, “That's enough. Mr. Phifer, do you want to explain? Do you even know what melancholy is?” With catastrophe rapidly approaching, Phifer answered, “Yes ma’am, I do.”

Not that I was any quicker than the others, but perhaps being closer to the door I could sense doom’s shadow. I said out loud, “Phifer, don't do it.” Howard was next to see the reaper in the doorway, and being closer to Steve spoke under his breath, “Steve, sit down. You're going to get us in trouble.” Phifer, made both brave and excited at being the center of attention, looked back and forth from me to Howard and said, “No, no, I really know what it is.”

Seeing Mrs. Amastoy's interest pique at Steve's last comment, I directly told Phifer, “Steve, you don't want to do this, really!” Marc, normally quiet, finally realized the danger and added “Yeah Stipher, don't do dis.”

Again my brother's legacy brought me into harm's way, and Mrs. Amastoy snapped, “Sciotto, you and the rest of your mafia keep your mouths shut. Well Phifer, what is it? Do you know?“

Phifer hesitated and wiped his hand on his pants. Irritated, Mrs. Amastoy repeated her question, “Well, Phifer, do you know? You can define it for the class and me, or perhaps you and your cohorts would care to explain to Mr. Jensen what you find so comical about melancholy!”

It's said when bad things happen, like accidents and such, everything seems to be in slow motion. As we all sat there staring at Steve, the world just seemed to slow down and the classroom took on an almost surrealist appearance. The rest of us in an attempt to distance ourselves from disaster and unwittingly confirm our guilt, asked
excitedly, “What'd we do?” With a glare that could turn sand to glass, she looked at me, and replied, “If anything has been done, you five did it!”

Again she queried Phifer, “Well, Phifer?” Steve, with the revelation of the damned in his expression, tried to bail out by telling her, “Just forget it.” Marc even attempted to derail the train by volunteering, “Great idea. Can I read?” She would have none of it. Sensing the kill, she calmly denied his request. “No, Bartorelli, I'm sure the rest of the class would like to hear what you guys think is so comical about melancholy.”

As if she were directing a firing squad, she ordered Phifer to stand up and tell the class what melancholy meant. Steve attempted to evade the incoming barrage but only managed to squeak out a weak, “But Mrs. Amastoy.” Seeing our weekend and possibly our lives slipping away, I risked her wrath again. But before I could open my mouth, she spat venomously “Shut up, Sciotto! You are most likely at the bottom of what is going on here!”

At this point I knew our fate was sealed.

Seeing that it no longer mattered what we did, Phifer stood up straight and in an exaggerated fashion dusted himself off. Standing there as if on a stage, he said with a clear and loud voice in spelling bee fashion, “Melancholy, a big orange F(&#%&G dog!”

As the words left his lips, the inhaled gasp of the other students brought a rush of wind through the doorway. The inrush of air was quickly checked by the outward thrust of air from my friends and I as we burst into hysterics. A hysteria whose volume and intensity was directly proportionate to Mrs. Amastoy's exaggerated actions.

Stammering and waving her arms as if covered with ants she ran out of the room to continue her Phifer-induced seizure in the hall. In a voice that resembled an air raid siren she screamed, “That's it, that's it! You're all out! Phifer, Sciotto, Brown, get out, get to the office! You too, Borden.”

Elsie, who had been quiet, was trying to figure out what he had done and cried out, “What did I do? I was just laughing.” “Bartorelli you're part of this! You go too! None of you get back into class without letters from your parents. Ann, you're in charge. Continue reading until I get back. I'll be in the office.” As we filed out of the classroom into the hall heading toward EF's waiting room, the long dark hall of the main building seemed to get longer and darker.

Cow Town Now Town. Yep, that's what they call it, Elko, Nevada, the town where I grew up. Did I say the walls were an off-white? Flogging, hanging, the electric chair . . .
Needless to say, we did manage to get off with our lives, though it was a while before we skipped any classes again. It was also a while before any of us saw Phifer. He got suspended, and I think his father grounded him for life! As for my other associates, they received light sentences from the home front. We all returned to English none the worse for wear. And me, well, I managed to elude the gallows entirely. My parents never found out, and I just followed in my brothers’ footsteps.
The Morning My Soul Was Touched
Kira Smith

Oh my goodness. Is this the real thing? I wondered. Am I going to have Chloe today? I looked at the clock on my bedside table, it read 5 a.m. Twenty-three agonizing hours from this moment, I would be a mother. Most important, I was blessed with an amazing, miraculous experience that forever touched my soul!

I was in a daze. The throbbing in my uterus with each contraction was unbelievable! My back felt like it would break in two. The sensation in my lower back was a continual piercing discomfort that never let up. I remember telling my sister, “RUB HARDER!” Later I realized that she had rubbed my skin raw. I tried elevating myself in the bed, hoping that a change in my position would help ease my pain. I sluggishly rolled over on to my side. “Ugh this is not any better!” I feebly cried out. I decided I would attempt to walk away my suffering. I struggled to get out of my bed. With each agonizing contraction I froze, trying to focus on my breathing. This is insane I thought. My contractions are coming every minute! Don’t I get a break? The whole exercising experience did not work! I doubled over in distress with each contraction. I was not making much progress.

Back in my bed huffing, puffing and very frustrated, I was trying to focus on the fact that this would not go on forever. Whoever said that labor is like a bad menstrual cycle is beyond any realm of reason and should be shot for saying so! Screw natural childbirth! “Give me an epidural. I’ve had enough!” I cried out to one of the nurses. I will never forget her response! It went something like this, “I’m sorry, Kira, but when you checked in to Kaiser this morning, you marked the box opting for natural childbirth; therefore we are unable to process a change of request/decision.” I remember feeling dumbfounded! What is wrong with these people and this hospital? (Kaiser has since then changed this insane policy.) I wanted to cry. I felt so hopeless. The nurses had been telling me for hours that I should begin Phase 2, the actual birthing process, anytime now. My contractions were doubling. (Before one was completed, another one would start.) “This doesn’t go on for very long,” they said. “You are really close now.” The intensity of my contractions were peaking on the monitor “Give me some damn drugs!” I screamed. “Calm down Kira, we’ll put something in your IV that will allow you to relax between contractions.” I would just have to wait for a while until it could be administered. I truly believed these people were understaffed.

Just then, I caught a glimmer out of the corner of my eye. I slowly turned my head. Out the window I saw the most beautiful, vibrant display of colors I had ever seen! Each
The Morning My Soul Was Touched

Kira Smith

color was so bright and rich. My rainbow filled my room and heart with hope! I was not alone. It was as if time stood still for a moment. The rich hue of colors touched my soul; I knew I would be OK and my little girl would too.

The excruciating pain returned and brought me back to reality. The nurse finally dumped some form of pain alleviating “drug” into my IV. All I remember is that it certainly did not help my intense contractions! The pain continued pulsating through my lower abdominal cavity and extending to my lower back. “This is truly torturous,” I thought. The pain seemed to multiply and amplify every minute. I glanced at the clock across the room. It read 7 p.m. This can’t go on much longer! Oh, how completely wrong I was! The hours passed at an amazingly slow pace. It was like each grain of sand in the hourglass was dropping one by one, in slow motion! I recall feeling so tired. Is this ever going to end? How long can a human being withstand this agonizing pain?

Finally a doctor and nurse came in with their happy faces. “You are ready to push,” they said. Really, I thought, it’s 12:15 a.m. I’ve been going through hell now for 15 hours. You’d think it had been 15 minutes by their expressions. “You can do this; you are so close,” the nurse whispered in my ear. “PUSH!” everyone yelled. I bore down hard. “PUSH!” Again I did as everyone encouraged me. “Oh my gosh, I see her head and her brown hair.” I could see her head crowning in the mirror across the room. “I can’t wait to see her!” I excitedly proclaimed. And wait I would as that was the last time I saw Chloe’s head for another three hours. Our progress went from bad to worse. Her head had receded back into the birth canal. I pushed for three hours. Kaiser should have been sued! I was given an oxygen mask halfway through this lovely ordeal. My child soon reached the fetal distress mark and I was pissed! I remember a nurse urging me to bear down harder. “Have you ever given birth?” I sarcastically cried out. “No,” she replied. “Then zip it!” I shouted. At this point, I was completely and utterly wiped out. I implored the doctor to let me go home. “I just want to go home; I’ll come back tomorrow. I can’t do this anymore,” I wept.

It was now 3 a.m. Two doctors and three nurses came rushing into my room. The mirror was pushed aside. One of the doctors spoke to me, “You have one last chance to push. If you are unable to get her out, we have no choice but to take you into surgery.” There was no way I was going to go through another procedure. “This baby is coming out now!” I cried. And out Chloe came, ripping me completely apart in the process.

The ninth of March at 3:19 a.m. Chloe Sherise Smith was born. The sheer and utter joy I felt was indescribable! The realization that I had gone through 20 hours of extreme pain to bring forth this miracle wrapped up in a little bundle was breathtaking! Being consciously aware of the physical suffering I had experienced, yet knowing this was the most incredible, beautiful, precious moment of my life! Feeling her warm little body against...
my breast, looking down at her exquisite precious face filled my heart with an overwhelming sensation of love and peace. This moment would forever be in my heart. My soul was softly caressed on that early morning in March, forever transforming my life!
My Talent in Art
Uoleni Tupuola

Talent is something that every person is gifted with. A talent may be inherited from ancient ancestors and passed on through the generations. My family is talented in art. Each member is talented in singing, dancing, designing, playing musical instruments, or making handicrafts. My talent in art is making Polynesian handicrafts.

When I was young boy growing up in American Samoa, I remember how my uncle's house was filled with exotic Polynesian handicrafts. I was terrified of them because they looked vicious. I used to be a bit ashamed of being Polynesian. I was a person who was interested in the popular American culture. Polynesian culture did not rock the world as American culture did. Thinking about anything Polynesian was the last thing in mind.

During my early teen years, I went to Hawai'i for vacation. I saw a Polynesian revue and it blew me away. The dancers looked proud to present the dances of Polynesia. The dancers looked afatasi (Polynesian-Caucasian). I felt embarrassed because I have strong Polynesian blood and dark skin color, but I had less pride than the dancers. I met some of them and they were excited to meet a person from American Samoa, an island where the culture is supposedly strong. Since that night, my attitude towards Polynesian culture changed forever.

As soon as I went back to Samoa, I took weaving classes. The materials they used were fresh coconut leaves or dried pandanus leaves. The instructors taught students how to weave simple handicrafts such as rings and bracelets. I was one of the best students in the class. Most of the students had difficulty, but I was one of the few who caught on quickly.

Later on, my grandmother taught me once how to weave a Tokelauan bird, and I made it perfectly on my first try. I used to make them in school, and classmates would ask me for one to use as a bookmark or as decoration.

On my own time, I studied braiding designs that were used as ropes in old Polynesia. It took me a few tries to make them perfect. I was becoming a Polynesian freak. At that time, I spent less time listening to popular American music, and spent more money on Polynesian CD's.

As time moved on, I moved on to bigger projects such as weaving coconut hats and small woven bowls. The hats were very popular when I wore them in public and I could
My Talent in Art

Uoleni Tupuola

never return home without someone asking me if they could keep it.

During my mid-teens, I wanted to make things that could be kept as a souvenir. I recalled seeing the colorful shell necklaces that hung on the walls of my grandfather’s house. I became curious about how to make them. I gathered some seashells and within a few tries, I made them perfectly. I decided to make necklaces using my weaving and braiding skills. I used natural materials, such as coconut husk fibers, dried boiled coconut leaves with seashells, and black pearls to make them more authentic. When I wore them in public, strangers, friends, or even people just passing by thought I was rich because my necklaces looked costly, especially the necklaces with black pearls. In Samoa, people who wore black pearls are usually the ones who have jobs. I was a teenager with no job, but it was my mother who bought me a loose black pearl. A black pearl necklace could cost up to a hundred dollars, especially with the weaving material. People could hardly believe it when I told them that I made my own necklaces.

It was very rare to find young teenagers interested in making handicrafts. In high school, I was the only student who did handicrafts. Students knew who to look for when they needed help in projects. There were students who helped other students in areas such as sketching and designing. I filled in the position for a craft advisor.

Usually during social events with friends, they would always plan to go to parties. They would ask, “So are you coming tonight?” I would reply, “Nah, I gotta go pull some leaves tonight and let the sun dry them out tomorrow.” They would laugh and say, “Typical Leni. Go do your Polynesian crap.” I was never embarrassed when friends teased me. Those students in Samoa reminded me of my old self when I was ashamed to be Polynesian.

To this day, I am very proud of being Polynesian. Polynesian culture is slowly dying and it takes people like me to help preserve it. I regret the times when I was ashamed. I continue to weave, braid, and make handicrafts. I use different shells and materials from Tokelau and Samoa to represent my heritage. I believe the hardest challenge about making handicrafts is thinking of what to make. I think my talent is truly something I inherited from my ancestors, who were talented in making handicrafts. And making crafts helps me reconnect with my Polynesian roots.
A Haunting
Shermaen Ulit

A few years ago, while I was in high school, I decided to hang around with my sister and my cousins on Halloween night. I wanted to go trick-or-treating that night, but I felt I was too old for that. Dressing up for Halloween is okay, but dressing up and trick-or-treating is something else. High school students discouraged trick-or-treating because it was an immature activity. Also, none of my friends were trick-or-treating either. Well, that was what my friends said, but maybe they were too embarrassed to admit it.

Since my cousin wanted to go trick-or-treating, I decided to accompany her. She did not want to go by herself, and plus I was going to get free candy. I was more interested in getting free candy than in keeping an eye on my cousin. Even though I didn’t want to dress up, I did anyway. I dressed as Wednesday from the Addam’s Family. I felt no one would recognize me because my disguise would keep my identity secret.

After a while, most of the candy givers ran out of candy, so we drove around different neighborhoods trying to solicit more goodies. Some people felt bad, so they ended up giving us fruit or some money. I liked getting money, but it’s not like we got much. Between the two of us, we only got a couple of dollars total. Better to receive something than nothing, right?

As the night grew longer, my cousin and I grew restless. My sisters and my other cousins wanted us to get more candy because they were scavenging through our garbage bags full of candies. It wasn’t enough for them. We couldn’t beg for candy all night long knowing that the supply was dwindling. I was tired of saying, “Trick-or-treat or give me something good to eat. If you don’t, I don’t care. I’ll pull down your underwear,” or something like that. I was exhausted and thirsty. During all those years I went trick-or-treating, not once had I received any drinks. On top of that, eating too much candy gave me cavities or made me hyperactive and annoying. I was bouncing everywhere. I just couldn’t keep still. We needed to do something else besides soliciting for junk food. I needed to do something interesting and something different. “It is Halloween and what can go wrong?” I thought.

Once we all arrived at the gate of Pali Lookout, I knew I was wrong. There were road flares blocking the entrance to the road leading towards the main gate. The gate was closed, but there was a small gap big enough for one person at a time to get through. I had my flashlight beaming towards the pathway when I noticed a folding table with Hawaiian food set up on it. I thought there had been a gathering of some kind earlier and that the
gatherers were up ahead. As we ventured closer to the lookout, we noticed it was getting colder. The wind was beginning to blow harder against us. Somehow, the table full of food was able to withstand the harsh punishments of the wind. We were getting a little jittery because we had heard scary stories about the area. Morgan's Corner was nearby, and the legends of the Menehunes were making me a bit hesitant to go up to the lookout.

My cousin wanted to go up there because on windy days like that day, people would try to be held up in midair by the winds. I knew it was possible for someone as tiny as me, but my two hundred and twenty pounds cousin? No way! Knowing that he was a football player full of massive bones and enormous muscles, I couldn't imagine the wind being strong enough to hold him up. Even just for a second. He was just too big and heavy.

When we had walked halfway up the path, everyone suddenly kept silent. All I could hear was the wind blowing and the trees banging against each other. I was scared, so I walked in the middle of the group. I didn't want to be the first or the last person because I didn't want something to happen to me. I was definitely not going to be alone. All of a sudden, my cousin the football player started running down the hill. He went past us and never turned back. I didn't know what was going on, so I just stood there. Then I saw little Hawaiian children running down towards us. I noticed that they were wearing traditional Hawaiian clothing. I was wondering why they were wearing such skimpy clothes, since it was so cold. I could hear their laughter grow louder as they closed the distance between us. As they came closer, I realized that the children were transparent. They were ghosts!

I couldn't believe my eyes. Running didn't even occur to me, but luckily my sister grabbed me and ran. Everyone but me was screaming. I was just in shock. I had to look back to make sure that the children were really ghosts. Indeed they were. They looked like normal people with faces and body parts, but I could see through them. Everything seemed so surreal. It seemed as though I was in a movie. I'm definitely not an expert on ghosts or apparitions, but it didn't seem as though the ghosts were there to harm anyone. On the other hand, I was still scared of them. I had never encountered a ghost before. Even though I didn't know much about ghosts or apparitions, I felt they were harmless. It was as if the children just wanted to play with us. I couldn't touch them or see their solid bodies, but they seemed like normal children.

When we finally arrived in the safety of my house, we then started to talk about what we had experienced. Without a doubt, we all knew it was not a prank. None of us had the brains to set up a realistic looking prop like that of the ghosts or the strong winds. It wasn't as if we weren't smart. It's just that none of us has the equipment to make an illusion like that. Moreover, no one knew why there was food set up on the table. Later that night, the truth to the curious food was revealed.
I tuned the radio to the KTUH station. It just so happened that the radio station was airing a show about encountering apparitions and other mysterious events. Was it a coincidence? I think not! One of the callers mentioned that she and a friend leave food offerings at the Pali Lookout every Halloween for the dead. Then I knew what the food was for, but how could the food and table be intact when I had to battle the wind to keep from falling down? Why were road flares blocking the entranceway when there were no accidents nearby? Why was the gate closed? Normally, the gate would be left open. My questions still remain unanswered, and I never know when they will be answered.

From that day on, I promised myself never to listen to my so called “brave cousin” again. Who knows what kind of trouble he’d get me into? That was also the last time I went trick-or-treating.
The Stupid Move
Matthew Wellhouse

The first thing I heard was a thud. It was followed shortly by a snap. I knew I had broken my arm as soon as I looked at it. I was clued in to the fact because it was bent upwards. It didn’t hurt until my arm drooped down. I then made the mistake of grabbing the break. This (very) stupid action caused my arm to flip back up and pinch a nerve in the process. One thing for sure is it didn’t feel good.

Maybe I should go back and start at the beginning. We (Mom, Dad, my bro, and me) had finished painting. I had finished washing off the paintbrushes when one of my parents’ friends showed up. While my parents were talking, I decided it would be a good idea to throw a ring in the air and catch it. It didn’t end up being such a good idea. When I threw the ring up the second time, it went behind me. As I was walking backwards, my legs stopped when they hit the lawn chair; the rest of me didn’t.

While I was falling, I had come up with two options. The first was to fall on my shoulder and hope my head didn’t hit. The second choice was to put my elbow down and push the rest of my body over the chair. I went with the second one. It started out as the better plan. Then I made one very stupid move. I forced my arm down. I did not realize how close I was to the chair. My wrist caught on the side of the chair and pushed half of my arm up while the half went down. It was not a good feeling.

“I just broke my arm!” were the first words out of my mouth.

“No crap!” Mom replied. “Get in the car!” That’s not exactly what she said, but you get the idea.

The ride to Kaiser was too long for me. I felt every bump along the way. I never knew how many bumps there are on H-1. Every bump felt like someone hitting my arm. I was so glad when the car finally stopped at the emergency entrance. Every one from the guard at the door to the people in the waiting room to the nurses in the emergency room had only one thing to say and that was, “You broke your arm!”

When they got me to a bed, I was very clammy. It took a while to get me to the x-rays. I still want to know why the x-ray people tried to get me to bend my arm in ways it won’t bend. After they finally got my arm x-rayed, I was wheeled back to ER. I didn’t look at the x-rays that night because I knew how bad my arm was busted. That night they put
me in a plaster splint and sent me home. I had no idea why they didn't fix my arm right then.

My Mom took me back the next day so they could put my arm back together. When I saw the x-rays that morning, I realized why I had to go back the next day for surgery. One of the bones had shattered while the other snapped in half and was overlapping. The doctor said that I had to get to plates screwed into my bones so that they would heal correctly. He thought it would only take two hours to fix my arm. The surgery ended up taking about three and a half hours. All that I know is that I don't remember anything from noon to seven P.M. other than when I switched beds. The nurse said something like, “Now move over.” I think I responded with an “OK.”

When I finally began to wake up (didn't happen very fast), I tried to figure out where I was and what was on my arm. Figuring that I was in the hospital, I decided that I had another plaster splint on my arm. I really don't remember much of my night in the hospital, other than this: hospital strength painkillers are a good thing; catheters are a bad thing.

I was very happy when I finally left the hospital. However, there were two little problems when I left. First, I couldn't get the shirt over my splint and sling. I didn't think very much of that. The other problem was a bit harder to ignore. For some odd reason, I was put in pediatrics (only because I wasn't eighteen yet), so the wheel chair they brought me was too small for me. I had to sit sideways so I could fit in the chair. It was not very comfortable. I think the guy pushing the chair took the long way to the front door because it took a long time to get out to the front. After he got me to the front, my Dad brought his car around, and I somehow got into the back without hurting myself.

The ride home hurt almost as much as the ride to the hospital. Every little bump hurt like somebody hitting my arm, not a lot of fun.

Two years after the plates got put in, I had them taken out because they were annoying. The bone had started to grow over the plates. It wasn't as bad as when I first broke my arm because then I only had pain after the surgery. Another plus is that I gained motion and strength back faster than the last time (probably because I was in a brace instead of a fiberglass cast).

One bit of advice I have is that breaking things is not a good idea. When I was in the cast, simple tasks, like opening jars or trying to carry things, became difficult. No matter how careful you think you are, one stupid little thing can cause a lot of pain.
I remember the tingling on my scalp as the wind gusted through my dangling hair. One step changed my life. One step forward and I’m safely, so to say, standing on the face of the cliff. One step backwards and I was freefalling 30’ to the floor of the cave. This would earn me respect from my brother and the rest of the troop. I could also break my leg, my neck, my arm, or a million other body parts, not to mention that I was deathly afraid of heights. What the hell am I doing here?

I couldn’t sleep the night before. Looking at the clock every 30 to 40 minutes, I was afraid to fall asleep in fear that I wouldn’t wake up. Why had my brother brought up repelling in the scout troop meeting? He knows how scared I am of heights. Why would he do that to me? To this day I have never figured my brother out. When the alarm rang, I was exhausted. Barely able to hold my head out of my Captain Crunch, I wasn’t even hungry. My favorite cereal and I couldn’t touch it. It was unbelievable.

The drive out to the cliff was even worse than the night before. I couldn’t stay awake. My head kept falling forward and then tilting to one side or the other. Then I would snap it back up, my eyes wide open, pretending I wasn’t just snoring. For a bunch of young, outstanding Christian boys, our scout troop could be very cruel. Teasing doesn’t seem to be brought up in the Ten Commandments. Unless it’s that sticks and stones thing.

One night my brother instigated a normal evening ritual. Attacking a defenseless person. Tonight he chose Greg Hinton. Everyone else was just glad it wasn’t their name called out. So we held Greg down and took his pants off him on the basketball court at the recreation center. Then we ran inside with his pants and locked the door. Greg cried and pounded on the doors until our scout master showed up. The humiliation in Greg’s eyes made most of us ashamed, but not Bret. He just laughed harder at the sight of him. I think our scout master hated my brother and me. We both seemed to get credit for every bad idea that was ever thought up. But today, today was definitely Bret’s fault.

The safety rope was secure in my brother’s hand. He would bite a branch with his teeth and dig his hands into stone to hold me from dropping. He could only see me hurt so much and he had to be directly inflicting the punishment for it to be rewarding to him. I had checked my carabiner three times and had paid special attention during the lecture on braking. To brake during a free fall, you take your brake hand, which has the loose rope in it, and lock it behind your back with the rope against your ribcage. This immediately halts.
your descent. Or at least that’s how it works on paper. I was starting to feel like everything was going to be okay. Then my brother did it again. “Let’s make Bart go first; if he can do it, anybody can,” Bret said smugly. “That’s a great idea,” said Curt, who was volunteering from the church. “Get it over with first. Then you don’t have to sit there and worry Bart.” Again, something that sounded good on paper.

That’s how I came to be one step away from, well, anything. One back and I’m a hero, Spiderman slinging webs, flying through the air with the greatest of ease. Capturing villains, flipping backwards, landing a conqueror. One step forward and I’m the sniveling coward that the rest of the troop taunted me as. “He’s afraid of heights, what a pussy. What’s a heights anyways?” Asked Hyram Laney. He was my brothers’ age and he was a big brother too. They both knew how to hurt with muscle and tongue. “Shut up” was all I could think of as a come back. I hate being the youngest in the group. The fact that I’m the smartest doesn’t help either. When you’re a kid, being smart isn’t necessarily a good thing.

Now it’s me, the breeze, and Jesus. The power of the Trinity. My personal favorite number, three. My right foot slid slowly backwards until it fit solidly into a crevice, wedging itself deep into the stone, gripping with every tiny toe muscle. Then I picked up my left foot and let the rope glide through my fingers. My whole body flew backwards to a 45° angle. Then, like I had done this a thousand times before, my arm locked behind me and I froze in mid air. I was now standing upside down on the roof of the cave. My eyes scanned the horizon in disbelief. It was as if the sky was transformed into an enormous lake. The mountains looked like giant reflections; there was no way they could be hanging upside down. That’s right, it’s me that’s upside down, standing triumphantly on the roof of the cave, dangling 80' down the face of Melrose’s infamous Devil’s Den. This was the moment of spiritual truth. Overcoming fear, free-falling, my Zen awakening. It was about 30’ to the floor and I started my fall headfirst. Slowly releasing the rope and kicking away from my crevice. For the first 10’ I stared straight at the floor of the cave. Then I bent my torso upwards and quickly flipped over. The sudden pressure strained at my brake arm. But to my own great surprise, I did not fail. I held fast on my grip, then slowly lowered myself to the floor. The view was so reassuring when I flipped upright. The sky was the sky, the mountains as solid as eternity. I was at peace gliding the last 15’. The blues were bluer and I could feel the touch of heat as the sun hit my face exiting the cave. The sky was my pathway and I felt as though I could leap from the cliff and fly, like my Indian ancestors. Treetops were swaying like a field in the distance as far as my eyes could see. A change of view is always inspirational. I locked my brake arm and leaned out from the ledge of the cave. “It’s beautiful,” I said, yelling up to the troops. “Only 40’ farther, then you can celebrate,” hollered back Curt.

Those last 40’ were totally relaxing. I took deep, easy breaths. I stopped and looked at
the scenery, smelled the roses kind of thing. The fact that no one witnessed my greatest act of childhood heroics mattered none to me. I knew. When life is overwhelming me, I think of this accomplishment and know I can conquer anything. So far I’ve recalled a million times that 13 second free-fall.
A Little Bite from the Big Apple
Sharon Yehoshua

Up until last summer, robbery was a crime I had seen in movies or read in the newspaper. I never dreamt I would ever be involved in an actual robbery. Two weeks after I moved to New York, I was robbed, and that traumatic experience left some scars for the rest of my life. However, in a sense I benefited from that event and since then my attitude towards life has been changed. I have learned to value life much more than I had before.

It was a beautiful Friday afternoon in the Forest Hills neighborhood when my boyfriend came back from work after a long night shift. I was very excited about furnishing our new apartment. I tried to convince him to come with me to the electronic shop located two blocks away from our apartment building. My boyfriend’s decision to come down with me apparently saved my life. After a few minutes in the store, looking around and checking what we should purchase, I approached the front desk and waited for the clerk to finish his conversation. The clerk was talking with an African American guy who wore a heavy leather jacket and boots on a summery day.

Something about their conversation didn’t seem right to me; I wasn’t sure if it was the guy’s poor English or the clerk’s facial expression. However, I kept waiting for my turn to come. Suddenly, I felt a strong poking in my back, and I wasn’t sure what it was. It took me a few seconds to realize that the guy who had stood next to me for the last couple of minutes was holding a gun, a real one.

“Back! Back!” he repeated while he was leading me towards a room located in the back of the store. On our way to the room, he gathered some other people, including my boyfriend and the clerk, who were walking with their hands up to the ceiling the way they had seen in movies.

It was so quiet in the room I could hear even my boyfriend’s heart beating. We were scared to death.

“We are going to die,” I whispered to him. “I’m here with you, Baby. I love you,” he replied, trying to calm me down. The robber locked the door, pointed the gun towards us and declared in a heavy New Yorker accent, “Take off your clothes! Everything!” Everyone obeyed him and took off their clothes immediately, except for me. I decided to leave my panties and my bra on, probably because I was the only woman in the group. The guy was unhappy with my decision; his gun was pointed in my direction, and he had a very strong
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expression on his face.

“Sweetie, I told you something!” he shouted. I was shaking. I couldn’t move as my boyfriend tried to calm me down and helped me to take off my underwear. At that point all of us were standing embarrassed, naked, and scared in front of the robber.

“Give me all the money and jewelry you have,” I heard. Everyone started taking money out of their wallets, taking off their jewelry and handed it to the robber as fast as if they were in a Guinness competition. He was very suspicious that I hadn’t handed over any jewelry, so he used his old technique, pointing the gun towards me and commanding, “Sweetie, show me your hands.” At that moment my heart stopped beating. I realized that I had forgotten to remove the only silver ring I was wearing.

“I’m going to die, I’m going to die,” I whispered to my boyfriend, who stood next to me, shaking like washing machine. I extended my shaking hands towards the robber and waited for the end. However, as soon as he noticed the silver ring, he waved his hand, making it clear that he had no interest in my silver ring. I was still alive.

“All of you, count to 500,” he commanded while he gathered his spoils and prepared himself to leave. We motivated each other to count to 500 even after the robber took off. We didn’t want to make any mistake at that point, when we were almost safe. Thank God we did as he said because he showed up after a few minutes to make sure we were still counting.

The last thing I remember was my boyfriend carrying me home without waiting for the police. We spent the next few hours wondering about how lucky we were. We were still alive. How do I live with a trauma like that? I guess I try to look at the positive side of it. My brush with death helped me learn to appreciate life and all the other beautiful things around me. Is there anything more important than that?