DIAMOND JOURNAL

Spring 2004
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The Editor’s Choice Award is presented to Trisha J.C. Chaves for her memoir *Not the Brightest Color In the Crayon Box, But I Love Her Anyway*. Ms. Chaves will receive a $50.00 award in recognition of her literary achievement.

To all the writers who submitted their work for consideration, we admire and appreciate your talent and courage. This publication’s purpose is to promote your work and showcase your creativity, and it would not be possible without your contribution.

Editors
Cheri Scott
Jessica Novak

Advisor
Mark Lawhorn
The Scope of the *Diamond Journal*

*Diamond Journal* specializes in publishing works of non-fiction that take the form of personal narrative. The two types of writing that most commonly appear in these pages are the personal narrative and the personal narrative essay. A personal narrative is an autobiographical story about a specific incident or series of related incidents in a writer's life which reveal conflict and often growth in the writer's character. Personal narrative may be defined as a true account of personal experience. Rather than "autobiography," which implies a rather comprehensive account of one's life, the term "memoir" might more suitably describe this type of narration. The writer of this genre, who must inevitably be highly selective in choosing details to share with the reader, strives to draw the reader as fully as possible into an experience that is largely communicated through creative use of the following:

- Effective pacing and blending of summary and scene,
- Sharp, believable dialogue,
- Distinctive characterization that "brings characters to life,"
- A palpable setting (time, place, even atmosphere, and the details to give them meaning) that places the reader in the world of the story,
- Action verbs and concrete nouns that show instead of tell,
- An organizational structure and focus that help the reader stay with the story all the way to the end (usually, but not always, chronological).

In the personal narrative essay, experiences taken from one's life are connected to an idea. Because a personal essay may be more idea-driven than story-driven, however, storytelling techniques used in personal narrative may be somewhat less prevalent than in the personal narrative. Occasionally, a good bit of research from secondary sources may be incorporated into a personal narrative essay in order to explore the subject more fully. Such essays, with their scholarly elements of textual citation and bibliography, are often identified as personal critical essays.

The common thread in all the types of narrative writing mentioned here is, of course, the word "personal." Sharing personal stories is one of the oldest, most valued rituals of our species. Taken as a whole, these stories celebrate the diversity of our students at Kapi'olani Community College. They also reaffirm our common connection with any brave, thoughtful person anywhere, anytime who has taken the time to tell a story worth sharing.
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*Diamond Journal*, a publication of the Board of Student Publications (BOSP) at the University of Hawaii at Kapi‘olani Community College, is produced once each semester. Funding for BOSP is provided by student fees. The written works included in *Diamond Journal* reflect the experiences, opinions, and views of their authors, not those of the BOSP, journal editors, advisors, or staff. Authors are solely responsible for the content of each submission. While *Diamond Journal* invites all submissions, selection for publication is entirely at the discretion of the editors, who also reserve the right to edit for grammar, punctuation, and length.
"Now let’s see, do I have everything I need? Outfits, check. Make-up kit, check. Garlands, check. Bobby pins, check. Hairspray, check. Wallet, check. Money, check. Okay, I guess I’m ready to go.” I walked out the door with all my stuff.

That morning was unlike any other morning. After being in school for thirteen years, it should have been no different. Normally on a weekday, I would get up at seven thirty in the morning and get ready for school. That day I had to get up at four thirty in the morning, not to go to school, but to go to the news station to perform on T.V. The Channel Two News Station invited our hula halau to perform for their Christmas morning news. Out of our class, only ten girls were chosen to perform, including me. Finally all the hours of practice, sweat, and not to mention all of the money needed, were going to pay off.

I walked to the car with all my stuff dragging on the ground. My body and mind were still sleeping, but my eyes were open just enough to walk to the car. As I lifted my garment bag into the car, I wondered what this morning would be like. Although I had danced hula since I was two years old, I had never been on T.V. before. So today was going to be my first chance at fame.

The drive to the news station was physically a short ride, but emotionally it was the longest car ride of my life. Sitting in the passenger seat of the car, I thought about all the things that would be inside the news station, the camera, the cameramen, and the personal dressing rooms. I thought about what Joe Moore really looks like since the camera does add ten pounds you know. I wondered how long I would be dancing on the stage. Is there even a stage? “Someone give me some answers to my questions,” I thought. I looked at my grandma driving. She was so busy concentrating, she couldn’t possibly answer any of my questions.

I had never been inside the news studio before. I barely even watched the news. So the first opportunity I got to be on T.V. I took it. Getting my garment bag out of the trunk of the car, I thought to myself, “This can’t be that bad. It’s only T.V. And who watches the morning news at five o’clock in the morning anyway?” Little did I know. After I took my things out of the car, I waited for my hula sisters to meet me in front of the building so we could all go in together. It was the first time to be on T.V. for all of us so we decided it’s better to be nervous together then nervous alone.

“Hey girl, you’re here early. Did you bring all your stuff or did you forget something as usual?” I asked Ashley while walking towards her.
Ashley is the kind of person who forgets things, misplaces things, and half of the time doesn’t know what’s going on. Ashley stood by the coconut tree with a red t-shirt woven between her hands, leaning on one leg, staring into space.

“No. For your information, I brought everything I need. My mom made me this checklist thing so I wouldn’t forget anything this time,” Ashley said to me as she brought out her checklist. “See I have everything I need.”

“You’re so funny.”

Standing outside the Channel 2 News Station I wondered if I had forgotten anything. It was a very important day for me, and it would be ruined if I had forgotten something. I looked through my garment bag and my plastic containers of accessories to see if I had everything. “Good. I thought I forgot something. But of course, I didn’t.”

Ashley looked at me with one hand on her hip, “God forbid what would happen if you ever forgot something.”

Finally, all the girls arrived. We picked up our things off the ground and headed towards the front door of the news station and walked in.

Tess, a very tita-like person wearing a baggy shirt with short shorts looked at all of us.

“Where the hell do we go?” Tess said as she dropped her things.

“Try this way,” I said as I struggled to hold my things and open the door. Inside the door was a room of screens, joysticks, lights, buttons and more buttons, but no one was to be seen. I walked in a little further to see if I could find someone that would help us, but no one was there. “Um, wrong way.” We continued on down the hallway trying to find our way to the dressing room, or someone who could help us find the dressing room. None of us knew where to go so we opened every door along the hallway.

“Nope. Closet,” Tess said.

“Ugh, janitor room,” Crystal added trying to walk ahead of the rest of us. Crystal is Daddy’s-little-rich-girl, so we don’t mind her sassiness anymore.

“Um, I don’t know but it’s not a dressing room,” I closed the last door down the hallway.

Straight ahead of us was an entrance to a big room with no doors. As we all walked
towards the big room we knew it had to be the place. We had tried everywhere else. We walked in and before us were cameras all facing one stage. There were lots of lights on the ceiling and on the walls. There were also big blue T.V. screens facing the stage. On the stage was a table with two chairs. There were two coffee mugs set on top of the table along with two piles of papers. The background of the stage was a white screen, and there were plants all around.

“Oh my God, this is cool,” Crystal said as she walked onto the stage.

“Ah, excuse me, miss. You’re not supposed to be up there,” a man said as he walked towards us. “You must be our hula dancers this morning. Thank you for coming and being on time.”

“No problem,” I answered.

“Well, let me show you around. This is where the newscasters will sit. This is the camera crew and their set up of cameras, head sets and all the good stuff. And this is the stage here where you guys will dance. It’s not that big, but there aren’t that many of you so you’ll be fine, I guess. And down here is your dressing room.”

We walked towards a big empty room. Inside there were mirrors, counters, chairs and a big T.V. in the corner. There was also a jug of water, some coffee, and little snacks. Too bad we didn’t see Joe or Paula or any of the other news anchors.

“This T.V. shows the live news. It’ll help you know when you’re about to go on. I’ll knock and let you know when you’re about to go on, as well. As for your make-up, you might want to make it darker so it shows in the light and on the T.V. screen. Other than that, you can go ahead and get ready. You’ll be on in about half an hour or so.” The man left, closing the door to our huge dressing room behind him.

“This is so cool!” Tess said excitedly. “You guys, we’re going to be on T.V.”

“I know. So we better start getting ready so we can go over our dances one more time.” Crystal wanted to assure that no mistakes were made.

Putting on my first outfit for the first song, I started thinking, “How long are we going to dance?” I knew the song and I knew we were going to be dancing for the commercials, but did that mean we danced the whole song, or a certain part of the song, or did we dance for a specific amount of time. Who knew? I just continued getting ready, not worrying about much of what we were supposed to be doing. I was sure that guy would tell us what to do when the time came.
“Are you guys almost ready to practice?” Crystal rushed us.

Were we ready to practice? We’d been practicing for weeks! I was ready. Everyone else was ready. The dance wasn’t that hard. Yeah, maybe there were a lot of steps, but it wasn’t hard at all. But if it made Crystal happy, I didn’t mind refreshing my memory.


“Ladies, you’re on in five minutes. Right outside your door to the right is the entrance. I’ll wait there. Just come on by and I’ll get you positioned. Your musicians are there ready. Five minutes, ladies, okay?” The man closed the door.

“Well, I guess we can’t practice then, huh?” Crystal said with a frown on her face.

Walking to the stage my body started feeling more tense as the seconds went by. I was so nervous that I had to go to the bathroom, but it was too late to go. So I held it in and walked onto the stage. We stood there for a few seconds waiting for our cue. I looked back at our four musicians, the bass player, the guitar player, the singer, and another guy that no one knew, then I faced forward again. The lights on our stage turned on and we couldn’t see any further then the light right in front of us. As the musicians started playing the beginning of our song, all I saw were little red lights.

I put on a smile and started dancing to Mele Kalikimaka, trying my hardest not to forget the next move and trying even more not to step on the other girls dresses. After thirty seconds, not even an entire verse of the song, the lights turned off. The camera was no longer facing us and we were done.

“Okay ladies, back to your dressing room. Get dressed for your next song. I’ll come and let you know when it’s time again.”

“That’s it?” I asked.

“Yes. Thirty seconds.”

Walking back to the dressing room, I realized that it was not as scary as it seemed. It was actually fun and easy. All that nervousness was for nothing. I couldn’t believe I was ever afraid to go on T.V. I mean, thirty seconds total and the camera was on me for like five seconds, maybe even less. The next couple of songs were a cinch. I wasn’t worried at all.

Gathering all my accessories and my garment bag, I hoped they would let us come back. Dancing for the morning news was a great experience for me.
Father Knows Best
Michael Archibald

At the ripe old age of twenty-one, when I thought I was indestructible, my best friends, Mark and Eon, and I each bought motorcycles with the wild dream of riding them all the way from Oregon to Costa Rica. It was going to be the greatest adventure ever!

Tied to each of our bikes were a backpack and a guitar. Clothed in our leather jackets and chaps, we took our time and cruised down the California coastline, camping off the main road in out of the way places to conserve money. However, we each encountered mechanical problems during this leg of the journey. Mark’s brakes went out every hundred miles due to a leaky brake line, Eon’s bike had some mysterious electrical short that would randomly kill his engine, and I got a flat tire. We were not to be deterred! Every day brought us a little closer to Mexico, and from there, Costa Rica, baby!

I spent the quiet, solitary hours on my bike dreaming about the beaches and the surf. What was I going to do once I got there, for the long term? To be honest I had never really thought about it. My mind was filled with beer and pretty little señoritas. At twenty-one, and full of youthful vigor, the only thing that mattered to me was to live life for the moment -- instant gratification.

“Don’t go into Latin America, Mike,” my father had ominously warned. “They’ll take ya for everything you’ve got. Once you get past civilization, you’re nothing but an opportunity to make a profit to every thief south of the border. You’re fresh meat to some of those people and nothing else. Travel across the States. It’s safer; trust me." My father’s advice fell on unreceptive ears, and foolishly I rode off with my friends.

We entered Mexico at the border town of Mexicali. The foreign sounds, smells, and sights, let me know immediately that I’d stepped into a different world with different rules of conduct. I was beginning to regret not postponing the trip for another 6 months in order to take some more Spanish classes. Yet patience and planning are not often characteristics of a person driven by impulse.

We traveled south through purple colored hills spotted with sage and mesquite to the town of San Felipe. Blue skies over head, and an open road full of adventure lay before us. Once we were stopped at a military checkpoint in the middle of nowhere. The young pimple-faced soldiers were friendly and only wanted to make sure we didn’t have any guns or drugs. Having neither, we continued on our journey with the wind in our hair and our worries behind us. Little did we know what was to come.

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The town of San Felipe is small compared with Mexicali or Tijuana, but it’s still lively. Situated on the Gulf of California, it was a popular spot for American students looking for a good time on spring break. The three of us thundered down the main street, drawing attention from the local street vendors who were wanted to make a quick peso. Then four very hot ladies drove past us in a convertible. The driver beeped her horn and they all waved enthusiastically, beckoning us onward. I thought, “Mexico is definitely my kind of country!”

We parked our bikes at the beach, and washed down our fish tacos with cold Tecate brew. Aside from the annoying street vendors who tried to sell us every kind of worthless crap imaginable, the day was perfect. Mark and Eon wanted to buy some handmade cerrachies, a kind of leather sandal that has a piece of old tire tread for a sole. So I stayed and guarded the bikes while they went shopping. “What a perfect day,” I thought as I munched my fourth fish taco and waved off a pesky street vendor.

Returned from their shopping spree and sporting new cerrachies, Mark and Eon unstrapped their guitars and started jamming on the beach. Thus relieved of guard duty, I grabbed a new hundred-dollar bill and went in search of a bank, and the four chicks in the convertible. Instead of a bank, I found a small exchange booth about a block from the beach. “That will do,” I thought to myself.

As I approached the window, I announced “Hola amigo, como estas,” while grinning stupidly. The man behind the wire mesh window raised a sweaty eyebrow and gazed at me without emotion. I handed him my new hundred-dollar bill and asked for 50 dollars in pesos. With skepticism the teller snatched the bill and began to hold it up to a light. Then with a special pen, he made a small mark in the upper right hand corner. As he verified the bill’s authenticity, I noticed several counterfeit 20’s, 50’s, and 100 dollar bills surrounding the perimeter of the window.

I spied a fake three-dollar note in the corner, sporting the face of a smug looking Bill Clinton. I chuckled to myself as I looked at ol’ slick Willy on that three-dollar bill. As I did so, the clerk told me my money was no good. “What!” I exclaimed, and tried to explain in broken Spanish that I had gotten that hundred from a bank in America. In spite of my passionate defense, the man insisted that my money was counterfeit.

After retrieving the bill from him, I returned to my bike to get another hundred, this time an old wrinkled one. “Can you believe it? The guy at the exchange booth said my money was no good!” I was incredulous, but Mark and Eon just laughed and continued to play Neil Young’s “Needle and the Damage Done” under a palm-thatched umbrella.

Like an idiot, I returned to the same exchange booth. However, this time there was a
different teller behind the window. This man was thin and rather pious looking. He greeted me with a weak smile, and I impatiently handed him my crumpled hundred, demanding 50 dollars worth of pesos. With a meticulous eye, he scanned the note just as the first teller had, and with a nod of approval he gave me fifty dollars in pesos and another fifty in U.S. currency.

Genuinely grateful, I thanked him, and was about to walk away when out of the corner of my eye I noticed that the teller wore a small gold cross about his neck. Completely out of my normal character, I asked him if he believed in Jesus. Instantly the man’s face lit up and his eyes came alive as he went into a lengthy discourse about his Iglesia (church) that was down the street. Missing the majority of what he said, I thanked him again and walked away, not knowing that in the near future this unobtrusive looking man would deliver me from one of the scariest moments in my life.

Reuniting with Mark and Eon, we jumped back on our bikes in order to acquaint ourselves with San Felipe, and maybe even find those girls in the convertible. Ah, what freedom, what a life, no worries, no bills, no responsibilities! These euphoric thoughts were shattered by the screeching sound of sirens as multiple police trucks surrounded us. From every direction and out of every street they came at us; even police on foot were racing out from behind buildings. We were trapped with nowhere to run.

What did we do? I demanded to know. Had I run a red light or something? The police, offering no explanation, only told us to get off our bikes and lie on the ground. I was instantly separated from my friends and told to empty the contents of my pockets on the hood of a nearby police truck. On my belt I wore a nice hunting knife that my dad had given me for Christmas. Seeing the sheathed blade, the officer searching me quickly took the knife and said “Muy mal, muy mal” (very bad, very bad).

“It was a gift from my Father!” I exclaimed, but my words went unacknowledged.

Next a huge, hairy, paw-like hand reached across me and took the keys to my motorcycle. The swollen extremity belonged to an equally disproportioned police officer; he was easily the largest man I’d ever stood next to. This gargantuan piece of humanity nimbly jumped onto my motorcycle, attuning the shocks in the process, and, without a word, he drove away. I stood there and watched everything I owned drive away, my bike, guitar, clothes, passport, money, everything. They even took the change from my pockets. Thus relieved of my worldly possessions, I was loaded into a cage on the back of a atbed truck. After locking me in, a young officer with a wispy looking mustache grabbed the back of the cage and leveled an AK 47 at my head. As the truck started up, I began to recall all the horror stories I’d ever heard about prisons in Mexico. I broke into a cold
sweat as my dad’s admonition came to mind, “Don’t go into Latin America. Travel across the States; it’s safer.” At the end of my rope, with nowhere to turn, I unashamedly began to pray, “Lord Jesus, help!”

Abruptly the truck stopped, and I was hurriedly unloaded from the cage. To my amazement and relief they hadn’t brought me to the jail at all, but instead I was in front of the exchange booth. Surrounded by police, I was brought before the window adorned with counterfeit bills. Bill Clinton still had that same smug look on his face, and with a chill that raised the hair on the back of my neck, I began to understand what had happened. The first teller who had refused to exchange my new hundred-dollar bill, possibly because of the new larger portrait, had gone to the police. Then having my description, the police went hunting for an American biker trying to use fake money. My fears were confirmed, as my pious looking amigo behind the glass retrieved the bill I’d given him and began an extensive examination of it.

“The money’s good; I got it from a bank in America,” I petitioned with desperation in my voice. The police captain whirled on me, saying, “Is this all the money you have?” I could feel the captain’s eyes pressing for more money. He smelled of sweat and cheap tobacco. Suspecting that if he knew the amount of money I was carrying he’d confiscate it, I said, “Yes, that’s all the money I have.” This was technically true because Andre the Giant had ridden off with everything I owned.

Returning to the teller, the captain began to yell in rapid Spanish. In reaction, the teller began a second and then a third examination of the bill. “Es falso, si? Dinero es falso, dinero es falso!” As the captain pressured the teller to say that my money was fake, I began to see myself locked away in some rancid cell with feces on the floor and having to fight with some guy named Juan for food. I envisioned the captain and Andre the Giant extorting thousands of dollars from my parents in order to release me.

Fearing incarceration, I argued, “No, it’s good; it’s not counterfeit.” The captain brushed me aside like a fly, and the wispy mustached boy with the AK 47 took my arm. Then my pious looking friend, whose name I never learned, looked me in the eye, looked at the money before him, looked at the captain, looked back to the money and said, “No, el hombre’s dinero es bien.”

The captain’s shoulders sagged with defeat as he simply shook his head. Turning to me, he extended his hand and said, “Mucho pardon, senor.” Without animosity, I shook hands with him and watched in amazement as he made a circular hand signal in the air. In response, from some hidden recess came my bike, dwarfed by the huge frame of its occupant. With skill he drove up onto the sidewalk and deftly tossed me back my keys. Everything was there! The captain even went over to his truck and retrieved my knife. Oh
the joy of being vindicated! Within an hour, I found Mark and Eon, who had been searching in vain for an embassy the whole time, and after a quick beer for my parched throat, we shook the dust off our feet, leaving San Felipe behind forever.
The Journey of My Life
Florily Baylon

There was a time in my life when I asked myself, “What will my life be like if I do not return to Hawaii? What would be the differences in my life if I lived in Hawaii versus if I lived in the Philippines?” One day everything suddenly became perfectly clear to me and I knew where I should live my life.

Living my life in the Philippines, my home country, was difficult, but I was happy. My family and I used to live in a house with a lot of holes in the roof. The house had holes in the roof because it was made of coconut leaves and this type of roof is only good for one to two years. I still remember when it rained how the water would go through the holes in the roof and fall on us and onto the place where we slept. Not only did the roof have holes, but the walls of our house had holes. The walls were made of coconut strips, and these only lasted for a couple of years too. The coconut strips dried out after a few years which made the strips loosen. The loosened strips opened and became holes. My sisters and I used to stay under the table to wait for the rain to end. Sometimes my mother covered the table with a plastic cover so that we did not get wet. My father would cut up cardboard boxes into small squares to repair the holes in the roof. We watched him place these squares in the roof where it was leaking. In the Philippines, my family was very poor. In spite of being poor, we were still happy, and I did not know that there could be a better life.

Everything changed when my grandparents decided to take my mom to Hawaii. Years later, my siblings, my dad and I followed my mom to Hawaii. This was more than ten years ago. Back then, I was not aware of the advantages of living in Hawaii. I thought that as long as I was happy living in the Philippines, then everything was fine, even though I lived in an old house with lots of holes. When I left the Philippines and moved to Hawaii, I really missed the Philippines. I found life difficult in Hawaii because everything was strange and unfamiliar to me. I did not do anything for fun and was unhappy. I did not even go to school everyday because I had difficulty understanding English and my mind was always in the Philippines. Almost everyday I begged my parents to go back to my home country. I told my parents that I would die if I had to stay in Hawaii for one more day! At that time I was going to Farrington High School. My mom said, “Just finish this year at school and I will let you go back and continue your studies in the Philippines.” The time, days and then months, passed slowly at Farrington High School. Finally the school year ended. Finally summer vacation came. Finally I was free to go back to the Philippines. I returned by myself.

Back in the Philippines, at first, I was happy and enjoyed being there. With all that
had happened in Hawaii, I had forgotten what it was like to live in an old house with a lot of holes in the roof. I had forgotten that the roof of the house leaked in rainy weather. My mom sent me money to fix the house. One day while my uncle was fixing the house, he suddenly asked me, “Why don’t you go back to Hawaii? Don’t you feel stuck here?” He told me that very little changes in the Philippines, no matter what you do to try to change it.

“You are still young and can change your life. There are lots of opportunities for you to better your life in Hawaii, and there could be a good life waiting for you there.” In that moment I suddenly realized that what my uncle said was true. Everything suddenly made sense to me. There was a world of opportunities for me in Hawaii and hardly any opportunities for me in the Philippines.

Suddenly I felt I had made a mistake by returning to the Philippines. I began thinking about earning a living in Hawaii, making money! If I stayed in the Philippines, I would possibly end up stuck in the Philippines like my uncle. I could possibly end up living in an old house that leaks like the one I grew up in. While I was standing there watching our old house being repaired, I knew the house would be better when it is done. However, I said, “Yes it will look good for a while, but it will still be the same house, the same size.” I realized that if I stayed in the Philippines, it would be very difficult to find opportunities for me and my future family to live a better life! I did not want my future family to be like me, sleeping under the table to avoid the rain. I did not want to stay poor like when I was young. I did not want my roof to leak! I made my mind up not to stay in the Philippines.

Just before my high school graduation in the Philippines, I called my mom and told her that I would like to return to Hawaii. I made a promise that I would be good and work very hard. I told my parents that if they gave me a chance to return to Hawaii, I would help them earn and save money. After my graduation, my grandparents sent a plane ticket for me to return to Hawaii. Two days passed and I was again back in Hawaii.

Now I do not waste any of my time as I live in Hawaii. Right after I got here, I went straight to a job agency. I got some help quickly when one of the agencies gave me an application to get into a training program for a job. I was very thankful that I returned to Hawaii. I found a place where people helped me prepare for a job and then I got a job easily.

I have earned money and sent some of it to the Philippines to make our house bigger. I can imagine myself sitting in the old house and watching the days go by, not knowing that there was a better life here in Hawaii. I am now taking full advantage of the wonderful opportunities in Hawaii. I have a great job with benefits, I live in a nice house (with a good roof) and I am striving to further improve myself by pursuing more education.
The Train Conductor
Abraham Bird

He lived in an adobe house in the pueblo of Paugate. He stood around six feet tall with brown skin and jet black hair. His eyes had seen things most people had only dreamt about. His legs were thin and long, and made for running long distances across the desert floor. His hands were strong and full of veins, which managed to make his hands look marble-like. His teeth gleamed gold and silver from when the dentist had installed caps to fix his unquenchable sweet tooth. When he laughed, it would create a bounty of joyous music and harmony. He wore a black striped hat with a small brim much like that of a train conductor. Some called him “Tony,” I called him “Grandpa,” and he called me “Grandson.”

I remember visiting him in his adobe home made of mud where he lived with his wife, my grandmother. Every time we went to visit, he greeted us at the door, and without hesitation, he would walk with me over to the corral and have me chop wood. Even though it was summer and he did not need the wood for another six months, he liked to save this task for me.

Chopping wood was never tiresome or a burden for me. I seemed to find some Zen or balance in lifting an ax and swinging it towards wood. My grandfather taught me how to chop wood, without saying a word. I watched and listened for the ax to strike and split a log. To this day, I remember what the sound was like when Grandpa chopped wood. It was a sound that carried with it compassion and accomplishment. If I could ever get my log to split like Grandpa could, the log would let out a sigh of relief, bringing with it a gift of aromatic pleasure and a desire to burn.

After chopping wood, I would walk back over to the house and be met with a rewarding slice of watermelon. My family and I would sit listening to stories of the family’s whereabouts and doings. My grandfather would break up the monotony of everybody’s personal lives by going up to the smaller children and pretending to pull watermelon seeds from behind their ears. It was much like the magician trick where a coin somehow appears from behind the ear of an unexpected onlooker.

Grandpa was a humble man. In his time, he was known for his roping and riding skills, as well as his long distance running prowess. My mother told many stories of his athleticism. I would always remember those stories while rummaging through his room and touching the racing ribbons, medallions and trophies that he had won over the years.

Grandpa was full of stories. He liked to tell stories of working for the railroad in
Oakland. It was a different time then; there was no state of emergency for people with HIV. It was a time when people still rode in passenger cars, and the streets were safe to walk at night. These stories filled my mind with images of being a hobo and living on the empty railroad cars, carrying a stick with a red and white plaid bundle of belongings on the end of it, and traveling around the country only associating with other vagabonds in my travels.

When Grandpa passed away, I felt as though I did not know him. I never had the time to ask him where he ran, why he ran, what he ran for, and what he thought about when he ran. When Billy Owens ran in the Olympics, he said when he ran he felt as though not only he was running but his tribe was running alongside him. I never took the time to ask my grandpa if his tribe ran with him. Was he on some spiritual journey where he was guided by an inner calling? Did he run for Grandma or was it the reward of finishing?

I am saddened by my sophomoric idealism that Grandpa would always be around. There are so many questions he could have answered, and very few voids that Grandpa could not fill. I had all that information at my disposal, but did not tap into it. For awhile I experienced such despair as when watching the only library in town burn down.

I look at myself and realize that silently, and unknowingly, I became much like my grandfather. I now split wood with fierce intent and concentration. I run far distances in the desert. My legs are long and skinny just like grandpa’s. Sometimes when I am running, I hear grandpa running behind me pushing me to go farther. I feel the same pain and drip and same sweat as my grandpa did. I sing the same songs as grandpa did when he ran through the horizon and back again.

In retrospect, Grandpa is not gone but is reborn in this generation. My heart is no longer filled with emptiness. It is filled with the joy of knowing that my grandpa, however mysterious, was much like me, and I like him. Even though we did not talk much, we still understood one another. The only thing that separated us was a train conductor’s hat.
Looking back on my life today, I see so much that I can be grateful for. I grew up in Hawaii, and that alone is something very special. Here the sun shines most of the time and your playground is the Pacific Ocean. I loved spending days playing on the beach in Waimanalo, chasing sand crabs and body surfing the fun waves that the ocean gave us to frolic in. We lived on the south side of the island of Oahu, in Hawaii Kai, a mix of middle class working folks and very wealthy white-collar people.

However, my friends and I cared about more important things in life, like the fact that Ted’s house in Port Lock had a big swimming pool with a slide; and that my house on Anapalau street had a yard that was more like a jungle and was great for playing war or hide and seek. We had a really cool tree that was so big it covered half the house and most of the front yard. It was a great tree for kids to play in. We built the coolest swing that would fly us across the yard on a big rope my older brother gave us; it was awesome. We had some great times up in that beautiful old tree. For a while we had a gang that rode the wild Bad Lands. We would ride around on big plastic wheels that were loud enough to wake the dead, dodging in and out of everyone’s driveway, mailmen jumping out of our way, and dogs barking. It was great! The Big Wheel was the greatest toy ever invented. We had a lot of fruit trees at my house, and we would all eat guavas, tangerines, bananas, and mangoes. Life was good for me as a kid.

If there are good times, however, there are bound to be bad times. Well, let’s say, hard times. I come from a big Hawaiian family, seven girls and five boys, and with twelve kids you have your share of hard times.

One year we did not have money to buy clothes for school, so my dad went to this charity that gave us clothes to wear. I can still remember when I tried on my red checkered plaid Scottish print pants. I was really into them, and my dad said, “Hell, those look great!” Looking back on it now, hell, they did look great. A few years later they got real trendy with the punk rockers, but that’s another story.

So came the big day, when summer ended and we went back to school. I was happy to go back, and I was all ready to hit the classroom in my new duds, that is, my used new duds. So off we went. I felt good going back to school. It was almost the same as I felt getting out for summer; even holidays can be too long sometimes.

As we were all getting ready to go to lunch, a girl I knew was showing us some things her mom had gotten her to hold school supplies in, like a Hello Kitty pencil case and
About the Heart

David Bright

stuff like that. Looking at her new things, I said, “Hey I got some new pants!” and best of all she seemed to like them. Then this boy named Jeffery, who was a real bully, came up and said, “No, they’re not. Those are old used pants, and you have to wear poor peoples clothes because you are poor.” I froze up inside, and in those few seconds, I could not remember all the love my mother and father gave me, or that I had eaten a good breakfast that morning, and that I had new slippers to wear. In that instant I had become a no good poor boy, in poor people’s clothes, standing at the great divide of the haves and have-nots.

I could not speak or hear. What I could see were only his eyes meeting mine. Out of a deep darkness I had never known before I exploded into rage. I punched him in the face, causing him to fall down over some chairs, and then he got up and ran. I chased him all the way down to the cafeteria and tried to strangle him under one of the tables. Finally some teachers and the principle dragged me away to the office, where I sat in a cold dark room by myself.

I didn’t realize that what happened on that day would greatly affect all areas of my life and would manifest itself again and again through failed relationships, violent behavior, and a very rebellious life style. I found that just as I was judged for what I didn’t have, I would come to judge others for what they did have, not for who they were inside, but for how much money they had, or by the part of town they were from. As if it was their fault that they were born into a wealthy family. I fell into the trap of looking at life as a glass half empty rather than half full. That’s what my dad told me, and he was right. It would take many more years of rebellion against what I saw as an unfair world, and a failed relationship with a woman I loved very much to bring me to my knees. Yes the straw that broke the camel’s back brought a realization that thinking the way I did turned a blind eye to all the blessings that I received in life. I had a family that loved me very much, I had the beach, and I had food to eat.

Life is good, and God has been good to me, and I find the best thing I can do is try to be good to others. I find out more and more that it’s not what’s on the outside but what is on the inside that counts. Also when I start to judge a person by rich or poor, black or white, female or male, I am turning a blind eye to his or her heart and mind, and that can lead to much sadness, so I think that loving everybody equally is the best way to go. I find that when I get fed up with life and start getting angry with people that it helps to look at a baby. We were all once babies, the same, without prejudice, without pride and ego. They are pure love. Then I remember that people may live differently or have more or less than each other, but we are all human. And that I should not judge a person for what they are wearing or by how much money they have, even if they have on red plaid Scottish print pants. I think it’s all about the heart.
It's Hard Forgetting Busch Gardens
Aaron Brown

It was a sizzling hot Florida morning. Excited and anticipating our day at Busch Gardens, my parents, my sister and I crammed into our little beige Toyota. Before heading out, we said a quick prayer, something like, “Keep us safe today, Amen.” We almost always prayed when heading out for a family day. The atmosphere was fun and filled with laughter. It was one of those rare occasions where my whole family was together and no one was complaining. Everyone was talking and yelling over each other and conversations were mixed, from boasting about what roller coaster they were going to ride, to making fun of our past theme park experiences. Going to theme parks had always been the best of family trips and this trip seemed to be no different.

Our day started with a quick breakfast at Micky D’s before making the trek to Busch Gardens, which was a long two hours away. After breakfast, my dad made sure everyone used the restroom. “We’re not stopping again, so you better go,” he’d always say. Getting on the interstate, we could see it was going to take a little longer than two hours; it seemed that everyone in Florida had decided to go out for a drive. Traffic was thick and my dad was a little tense and impatient, his usual demeanor when driving. But we were eagerly on our way, traveling 65 mph along with a horizon full of other cars.

As passengers, we did our job and kept busy conversing and playing dumb car games. The majority of the conversations were about the past few trips to Busch Gardens and other theme parks and how we were going to ride a new ride or how we weren’t scared to ride something anymore. My older sister was having a blast teasing me about crying on the up-side-down boat ride last time and I, trying to keep some dignity, kept trying to convince her I wasn’t crying from the ride, but because I had a headache (not likely). Bored from 45 minutes of constant rambling, we decided to play some silly road trip games. First we played some license plate game, and, getting bored of that pretty fast, we started up a game of I Spy. Playing these games wasn’t as fun as having my Gameboy, which I had left at home, but was sure better than hearing the humiliating story about me crying last time.

I particularly enjoyed playing I Spy, frustrating my sister by lying and not telling her if she had guessed what I was spying. Gazing down the highway, about forty-five minutes into our drive, and keeping an eye out for any obscure objects to stump my sister in I Spy, it happened . . . “DAD! DAD!” A truck was skidding sideways about three cars up and had started flipping. I could hear the nightmarish sounds of metal crushing and scraping, along with a rhythmic sound of glass exploding with each thud of the heavy truck against the inflexible pavement. My dad stomped on the breaks and shot out a hand across my mom, I guess hoping to restrain her better than her seatbelt could. Wide-eyed and feeling...
the tight grip of the seatbelt across my chest, I watched as the truck ipped over and over. Then, in what was like something out of a movie, a rag-doll like figure was ung out of the truck and went skidding violently across the highway. Finally, after what seemed like forever, we shot back into our seats, the seatbelts finally releasing their iron-grip. As the scene slowly came into focus, screeching breaks could still be heard as a whole interstate came to a sudden halt. A pungent smell of burning rubber filled the air as a cloud of white smoke filled the interstate. I could hear screaming. Someone else was yelling, “Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Get help!” Ahead, the truck was lying upside-down and was almost completely off the side of the road. The truck was crushed on every side and missing all its windows. “Call 9-1-1,” my dad said shakily as he got out and started walking toward the growing congregation on the side of the road.

“Mom, the guy, he’s over here,” I said.

“WHAT, What guy?”

“Over there.”

“Oh, my God. Just stay here.”

The rag-doll we had seen thrown out of the truck was walking toward us. Covered in blood, missing his shirt, his jeans totally ripped up on one side, yelling, “Help! Help!” My mom, who’s a registered nurse, ran up to the bleeding man and tried to get him to sit and calm down. As the guy turned his back toward us, my stomach dropped. The skin on his back was scraped off and there was blood down the back of his body.

A group of about five people came running to assist my mom and they all immediately tried to stop the man from coming any closer to his demolished truck. Finally, the sounds of sirens could be heard and after a minute or so, a whole brigade of police cars, ambulances and fire trucks were on the scene. The congregation on the road was quickly broken up and everyone was herded back to their cars. My parents both returned and before getting in had a short talk. I guessed about what each had seen. Slowly they got in the car. Shoulders slumped and eyes downcast, my parents were rather quiet and seemed shaken up. Scared to say anything myself, I asked my sister to ask them what happened. Overhearing my question, my dad quickly said something like, “I’ll tell you what happened as soon as we head out of here; for now let’s not talk about it. I don’t think we’re going to Busch Gardens today, but me and your mom talked about going out for dinner if you want.” For the first time in my life, my sister and I really didn’t care about Busch Gardens; we didn’t even want to go out for dinner. We all decided just to head home.

We only had to wait about 15 minutes until a little clearing was made for the
It's Hard Forgetting Busch Gardens  

It was a bulging river of cars to pass through. Still keeping an eye on the accident and peering through the back window as we drove past the scene, I noticed a white sheet had been draped over the driver's side of the flipped truck. Before I could ask why they had done that, my dad sharply said, "Put your seatbelt on!" Since I couldn't see anything anymore, I really wanted to ask what had happened and why everyone was surrounding the truck. Seeing the anxiousness on our faces, my dad said, "I don't know what you saw back there, but I hope you never have to see something like that again." Getting straight to the point, I asked about who was in the truck. Looking at my mom and then pausing, my dad started, "The truck apparently got a flat tire and lost control. The guy you saw wasn't wearing a seatbelt and went through the back window."

My mom interrupted and said, "Talking with him, he seemed to be all right but only remembered flipping once and then waking up back there on the side of the road where you saw him walking." My dad continued, "And there was a guy in the truck. He wasn't wearing a seatbelt either and..." he took a deep gulp of air, "it looks like he may have been decapitated." I realized my dad was still upset. We were shocked. It never occurred to us that someone had died. Looking blankly at the back of the seats in front of us, we both realized we had just seen someone die. Trying to be comforting, my mom spoke up and started talking about the friend and that he was going to be fine and that I did a good job of noticing the guy on the side of the road. This didn't really do much to stop the shock that had hit us when we learned we had just witnessed someone die and another lose a friend.

The rest of the drive was quiet and we all kept to ourselves. All the way home, I wanted to cry, but didn't. All I could think about was how someone's friend, brother, and son had died. I wondered what their names were and where they were headed. Dwelling on their families and recapturing the look on the bloody guy's face, I got more and more upset inside. Breaking the hour long silence, my mom asked if we would all pray for the two men's families and them; Mom said the prayer. This lifted all our spirits a little and eased some of the tension in the car for the rest of the ride home.
“Did you know that you can get lead poisoning if you get poked with a pencil?” That pretty much sums up my cousin Jaime in a nutshell. Don’t get me wrong, I love my cousin, but sometimes she just doesn’t get it. Actually, that’s kind of why I like her so much. You can never tell what wacky thing she’s going to do or say next. We get along the best out of all my cousins because we are almost the same age (she’s about 2 months older than I am), but sometimes I feel like I’m the older one. It seems like I have to teach her a lot because things just don’t seem to make sense when she has to learn them on her own. And even though I get a kick out of what she does or says sometimes, there are other times where I really get worried. For instance, there was one day last summer when she thought she could make “gourmet spaghetti” by breaking up raw noodles in an old imsy plastic butter container. She then poured Prego all over it and threw it in the microwave-with the fork! It’s a good thing I was there to stop her before she started the microwave because I shudder to think about what could have happened.

Well, this summer we are a little older and hopefully some of us are a little wiser, if you know what I mean. I’m staying at my grandmother’s house for the summer out in Kaneohe. I don’t want to be out there all alone far away from my cousins and have no one to play with so I invited my cousin, Jaime to stay with me for a little while. I can’t wait to see what she’s going to say or do this summer, but I’m sure it will be as memorable as every other year!

“So what do you want to do today,” asked Jaime who was lying on my bed next to me staring at the ceiling and twiddling her thumbs. She was already showered and dressed, wearing neon green shorts and a neon pink tank top to match with her hair in a ponytail ready for whatever action may lie ahead.

“I don’t know,” I yawned. “What are you doing?”

“Well, I was watching you sleep for a bit, but then I got bored, so I decided to twiddle my thumbs because that’s what people are supposed to do when they’re bored. At least that’s what I think. Anyway, that made me even more bored, so I decided to wake you up.” She stopped the tango her thumbs were performing and turned toward me and asked again, “So what do you want to do?”

“Let me wake up a little first; then we’ll come up with a plan.”
I took a shower and got dressed in my favorite outfit; purple shorts and a matching purple sleeveless shirt with a hood. We ran downstairs in our usual morning race because it’s not fun to go anywhere unless you are traveling really fast.

“Trisha! Jaime! Stop running down the stairs! You’ll trip and fall. I don’t want you to hurt yourselves,” yelled my grandmother from the kitchen. “Ie-ya,” she sighed and shook her head. It’s funny to hear her shout at us with her Chinese accent, but when you are actually there standing in front of her it can be a little scary. Her eyes grow and almost look like they’re bugging out. Her big grey hair and tons of make-up really adds to her wrath too. But a second later she’s back to being Grandma, watching her beloved game shows and preparing breakfast without a hint she ever got angry.

Jaime and I sat at the table to eat our breakfast and I tried to reassure my grandmother that we wouldn’t fall down the stairs and get hurt.

“Grandma, we’re not little kids anymore. We’re both 8. That’s almost ten! We’re practically young ladies and young ladies don’t fall down the stairs.”

“Young ladies also don’t run down the steps like a herd of elephants.”

Feeling defeated, I quietly went back to eating my cereal. Then Jaime broke the silence with her usual quirky thoughts and unknowingly salvaged my fading good mood.

“Do they have a different kind of money in the mainland? You know, China has Chinese money. Japan has Japanese money. Does the Mainland have... Mainland money?”

I busted out laughing! Here we go! Jaime is right on schedule with her little anecdotes. I could hardly contain myself, or the milk that was about to come out of my nose.

“Are you kidding me?! If the Mainland had Mainland money then Hawaii has Hawaiian money. Think about it, Jaime. Have you ever heard of Hawaiian money before? Hawaii is a part of the mainland. We use American money because we’re in America!”

“Oh, yeah... I knew that...”

“Jaime, you crack me up,” I say with a smile.

Jaime succeeded in lifting my mood, but now she now felt a little ashamed and defeated, too so I decided to change the subject.
"So have you thought about what we’re going to do today?” I asked.

“Well, it’s a nice day so I thought we’d play outside, but it gets kind of boring playing in the back yard all the time. Let’s go somewhere else.”

“Jeez, you’re always getting bored,” I whined.

“We always do the same things, that’s why. Anyway, I was thinking we should go search for some peacocks. I always see them when we’re riding in the car, but I’ve never actually seen them up close. Have you?”

Come to think of it-I haven’t. It sounded like such a great idea! I was so amazed that Jaime had thought of it first, but maybe that’s just her wisdom finally kicking in. I was proud of her and couldn’t wait to get our exciting day started. Too bad for us my grandmother was right there to rain on our parade.

“No! You shouldn’t go chasing peacocks! They’ll get angry and chase you. They’ll poke your eye out,” my grandmother warned.

I just had to chuckle at what my grandmother had said. It was almost like that line in the movie, A Christmas Story. “You’ll shoot your eye out!” Is that just some kind of universal grown-up saying? Because I know my grandmother has never seen that movie before. Do all adults think us kids are going to lose an eye?

“They’re not going to poke our eyes out. We’re too fast for them! We can outrun anything,” I boasted.

“Yeah, anything!” Jaime cheered on. We get up from our half-eaten breakfast and start toward the front door.

“You’ll both be in big trouble if you walk out that door,” my grandmother warned again.

“Too bad, you can’t stop us, we’re too fast for you,” I yell back. Why does my grandma always have to be so cautious? The moment we do something fun like have a speed race down the stairs or want to venture around the neighborhood she gets all stuffy and uptight. We’re big girls and we can handle being outside. I mean, what’s the worst that could happen?

I grabbed Jaime by the hand and we ran out the front door.
“I don’t know about this, Trisha. Your grandmother seemed pretty mad. I mean, did you see how far her eyes went out this time? Maybe we should go back. She might be right; we could get our eyes poked out.”

“Oh, don’t be silly. We can’t get our eyes poked out. We have nothing to worry about out here. Come on, you came up with the idea so let’s go!” I couldn’t believe that she seriously thought that we were going to lose an eye, but then again, that’s just Jaime.

We started on our quest for peacocks walking down the street away from my grandmother’s house. We turned into a new part of the neighborhood where we saw new houses being built. We didn’t see any builders around so Jaime and I figured this would be the best place to search since the peacocks didn’t like to hang out where a lot of people were.

We walked through the empty lots and around huge holes where new foundations were going to go.

Jaime peered at the giant holes in the ground and said, “Those are going to be funny looking pools. They’re shaped weird and aren’t that deep. We wouldn’t even be able to swim in them.”

“That’s not for a pool. It’s for... Oh, never mind. Let’s keep looking,” I said impatiently. I was really trying to concentrate on finding our prey.

We looked all over for the peacocks we so desperately wanted to see. We must have been looking for about an hour when we started getting really frustrated that we hadn’t found anything yet.

“See, I was right when I said that we wouldn’t get our eyes poked out. There isn’t anything out here to do the poking!”

“I’m bored. Let’s go back to your grandma’s house.”

Gee, that’s a surprise. I don’t understand how this girl can get bored with everything. Maybe that’s why she always says silly things. She could be doing that on purpose, but then again she thought there was such a thing as Mainland money.

I have to admit that I was getting a little bored too so I caved in and we started our walk back to my grandmother’s house. Just then, we heard a strange noise.

“What is that sound?” I asked. It was the weirdest noise I had ever heard.
“I don’t know. I’ve never heard anything like it. Where is it coming from?”

We looked everywhere around us. There weren’t any people, just empty lots. It couldn’t be a lawn mower or leaf-blower because there simply wasn’t anyone around to operate them.

“Is it a peacock?” Jaime wondered.

“I doubt it, Jaime. Peacocks don’t make buzzing noises. They kind of scream and cry, remember? You’ve heard them.”

“Oh, yeah…”

Then she spotted something. “Hey, look at that funny looking cloud! That’s weird. It’s a nice clear day out and all of a sudden that cloud came out of nowhere. It has a strange color too.”

She was right. It did have a strange color. It was very dark, almost black, but the color was splotchy. It also looked like the dark colors were moving around somehow. It was nothing like the smooth white clouds we were used to seeing around here. It was as big as all the rooftops on the block and only about 5 or 6 feet overhead. As I stared at the huge hovering mass I noticed very small dots breaking off from the bulk of it, but then they seemed to be drawn right back. All of my attention was focused on the funny looking cloud that I almost didn’t realize that the strange sound we heard earlier was extremely loud now… and coming from the cloud!

I finally realized what the mystery mass was. “That’s no cloud, Jaime. It’s a swarm of bees!” I was terrified. I had been stung once before a few years ago and I could clearly remember how it felt. I knew I definitely didn’t want to feel anything like that again.

“RUN!!!” we shouted in unison.

“I can’t believe you talked me into coming out here to look for stupid peacocks,” I shrieked at my cousin. We ran as fast as we could, but no matter how fast we ran, they were right there behind us.

“I didn’t talk you into it! You pulled me outside and I wanted to go back!”

“But it was your stupid idea! Oh, never mind that now. I think they’re following us!” Indeed, they were following us. Every turn we took, every short cut we chose, they were still hot on our tail. I couldn’t believe how far away we had gotten from my

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grandmother’s house, but I suppose any destination seems far when your running for your life. My legs began to hurt and I got so out of breath I now hated running fast, but I knew I still had to keep going.

“They’re going to eat us alive!” Even in this frightening time, I actually giggled to myself when my cousin thought the bees were going to eat us. My grandmother’s house was in sight so we picked up the pace.

“Now are you bored?” I huffed.

We ran into the front door, slamming it shut behind us. I was amazed that we made it without getting “eaten alive” as Jaime stated. My cousin and I danced and sang, celebrating our victory. We couldn’t dance much more because we were incredibly exhausted so went in the living room and collapsed on the couch. Just when we thought we were safe I started to hear that strange sound again almost as loud as when we were outside. We got up to see where it was coming from. We headed toward the kitchen and the sound got louder and louder. We peered out the kitchen window and discovered that the bees had accumulated on a bush in my grandmother’s back yard! They wanted to build a new home and of all places they chose this back yard. Jaime and I had just outrun these monstrous things and we weren’t about to have them take over our very own sanctuary. My grandmother was taking a nap upstairs so it was up to us to get rid of these pests. We thought about what we could do as we watched the bush grow with more bees.

“I know! We’ll go back there and throw rocks at the bush to get them off. Then they’ll have to go find another home somewhere else,” Jaime said.

This was a desperate time for desperate measures and I was so excited I wasn’t thinking straight. I went along with Jaime’s plan and we went out to the back yard to gather some rocks to prepare for the ambush.

Jaime threw the first rock and I followed with mine. The bees flew off in chunks so we threw more and more. We succeeded in getting them all off the bush, but they failed to find another yard to invade and instead continued to stay in ours. They became furious since we interrupted the construction of their new home and started swarming all around us.

“Ahhhh!! Oh my gosh! They’re everywhere!” We flailed our arms and screamed to prevent the bees from landing on our bodies.

“One is on your head,” Jaime pointed out to me.
"What?! Where?! Get it off," I pleaded.

"Ok, I’ve got an idea! Bend your head toward me."

I know from all of my previous experiences when Jaime comes up with a plan, I should disregard it and just come up with an idea myself. But once again, I was too worked up to think. I stared at the ground waiting for Jaime to brush off the bee with her hand, but instead she kicked me right on the top of my head. I fell to the ground and woke up a few seconds later remembering what had just happened.

"What the heck did you do that for? That was your great idea? What were you thinking," I asked her as I felt the huge lump on my head along with the bee guts that were splattered throughout my hair. “Do you have any idea how much that hurt?!"

"The bee was dirty and squirmy and gross. I didn’t want to touch it. How else was I supposed to get it off?"

"A stick, a leaf, I don’t know, anything but your foot! Of all the dumb things you’ve done, Jaime this takes the cake! You knocked me unconscious!"

Suddenly, as if the bees could sense my pain brought on by Jaime’s ingenious solution, they finally let up and headed for another yard.

From that day on, every time Jaime thought of a self-proclaimed “great idea” I really made an effort to stop and think about what she was saying. It’s unfortunate that I had to get the daylights knocked out of me to really realize that maybe she’s not exactly the best person to get advice from. But now when I look back on that memorable day, I’m able to laugh about what happened. If she didn’t have these crazy ideas or say strange things then who would she be? She definitely wouldn’t be the same fun person I’d rather hang out with over anyone else. She is who she is and also very aware that she’s not exactly the brightest color in the crayon box, but you know what? I love her anyway.
I was in shock. My mind was racing, trying to figure out what happened and what I could do to help. I had never been in this type of situation before and would have never thought I’d be the first person to arrive at the scene of an accident. Rescuing a person has never crossed my mind, let alone putting that same person in jail.

It all started one late summer afternoon in Arkansas. My mom, my sister, and I were traveling back home from the shopping mall. We were in a hurry because Grandma was angry with us since we were late for dinner. It seemed as though we were never going to reach our destination. My mother was driving slowly since the roads in Arkansas are narrow with neverending turns. It is hard to see ahead of you and are always on the lookout for deer that might try to cross the road right in front of your car. Well, we took this one particularly large turn and on the other side was something that I will never forget.

A white Chevy Blazer was on the side of the road; smoke was pouring from its engine. The vehicle was so smashed that it resembled a piece of tin foil that someone had crumpled between their hands. I yelled, “Mom, you have to stop, somebody needs to help this person.” She pulled over onto the side of the road and I jumped out and raced to the Blazer. There was a man in the driver’s seat. He was motionless. He reminded me of a crash test dummy slumped over the steering wheel with an expressionless face. He had scratches on his face and arms. Even though the cuts were small, blood gushed from them. He looked as if he had not taken a bath for days; his hair was so greasy it was standing on end, and the dirt on his skin had created brown blotches.

I knew the man needed to get out of the smoking vehicle, so I pried the car door open. The commotion must have caused him to regain consciousness. He looked at me with a blank stare for awhile. In a Southern accent, he slurred, “What the hell have you done to me?” At that point, I knew why the man had ipped his vehicle in the one car accident. The whiskey on his breath was so potent that I almost gagged. He was trying to get out of the car, and was having a difficult time because he didn’t realize his seat belt was still on. Once he got out, he immediately pulled out a cigarette and started smoking. You could tell he was an avid smoker by the yellowish brown stains on his teeth. He was trying to stand still, but was constantly swaying back and forth with an occasional stumble. I tried to keep him occupied by talking to him. I asked him several times if he was alright, but he really didn’t have much to say back since he was still in shock and drunk.

I walked over to my mom and sister; they were waiting in the car for me, and asked them to call the police. I hadn’t been away from the man for more than a minute and in
the meantime, he decided to try and leave the scene of the accident. He managed to climb back into the Blazer and start the engine, but his drunken state didn’t help. He put the car in reverse, floored the gas pedal, and drove straight back into a highway sign. I ran over to him screaming, “What the hell are you doing; you are going to kill yourself if you go any further.” He stopped, put his head on the steering wheel for a moment, then stumbled out of the vehicle and sat down beside it. He sat there with his hands slumped over his knees and his eyes fixated on the asphalt baking in the sun. I asked him if he wanted to call anyone to let them know what was going on and I told him help was on its way. At that moment, he jumped up and went straight to the back of his Blazer.

The man started rummaging through his things; he seemed determined to do something, but I was unsure of his motive. I was trying to keep myself occupied and not fixated on what he was doing. Fishing poles, an empty water bottle, and a pair of socks were just a few of the items that he had tossed onto the ground. He looked up at me and caught me looking at him so I turned away. I wanted to see what he was so interested in, so I kept looking up at him every so often. At one point, I looked up at him just in time to see him throw a bottle of alcohol into the bushes. I think the astounded reaction on my face immediately told him that I saw what he did, so he gave me a look that I think meant, “You better not tell the police or else.” As a result, I decided not to say anything unless they asked me.

It seemed like it took days for the police to arrive. When they finally got to the scene, they went directly over to the man and made sure he was not hurt, then they started asking questions. They took me aside and thanked me for what I had done and asked if I was a witness to the accident. I explained I got there after the accident occurred, but was the first person to help the man. While the officer was talking to me, I could hear the other officers behind me talking to the man and saying, “Please follow my pen with your eyes only. You have to keep your body in one place, just move your eyes.” I knew the police could smell the alcohol on him. It seemed like he was failing the tests they were giving him.

I had a feeling that it wasn’t going to be much longer before the police asked me a question pertaining to any evidence of alcohol. I was right. “Miss, did you see this man throw anything from his vehicle,” the officer asked me. I could feel the officer’s eyes looking down on me. I looked over at the man and he was standing between two policemen waiting for me to answer the question. He had that blank stare on his face, but this time his body was stiff, his hands clinched in a fist, he was grinding his teeth, and his eyes were screaming as if to tell me not to say a word. I took a deep breath, cleared my throat, and started explaining what I had seen. I told them the man was rummaging through his vehicle and threw a bottle of some type into the bushes. The police then asked me to point out where it landed. I showed them and in a matter of seconds, they pulled out an almost
empty whiskey bottle. They held it up in front of the man; he looked at me with anger and
disappointment, then put his head down.

One officer started to read him his rights while another officer handcuffed him. I
felt awful; tears started to fill my eyes. It was almost as if I had gotten him into trouble. I
was so kind in the beginning, I helped him, maybe even saved his life. Now I was putting
him into jail. I kept telling myself over and over that he could have killed someone and
he was wrong to be drinking and driving. As they put him in the back of the police car, he
stared at me with that expressionless face that I had seen countless times throughout the
incident. However, this time a tear rolled down his cheek. I couldn’t bear the guilty feeling
I had, so I turned away and walked over to my mother and sister. To this day, I am proud
to know I helped the man, but I will never forget the fact that I was the one to put him into
jail.
What the Shark Said To Me
Bronson Ho

It was a crisp, clear, early morning. I thought I heard a voice, but there was no wind. I was strapping up my diving gear getting ready to swim out into the deep blue. My partner, Kimo, was right next to me rinsing out his mask. I stopped look if there were any boats out there, but there were none in our spot. The water was flat like a lake and as clear as a pool. Kimo and I quickly swam to our spot, a little less than a mile off the Lanikai shore.

Strangely, the fish were just cruising like we weren’t even there. I busted out my Riffe and started hammering some Uhu’s, Kole’s, Kumu’s, and Menpachi’s. An hour went by and I had quite a few fish on my stringer. I kind of thought there were too many, but I didn’t care because I was more concerned about Kimo. Usually he stayed pretty close to me, within eye sight at least, but for some reason he was nowhere to be found. I started to get scared because I couldn’t see his flag.

I decided to swim out behind the islands to see if I could find his floater. Coming up near one of the islands the water started to get darker and a whole lot deeper. I spotted two big Ulua’s cruising on the deep bottom. I thought I heard a voice, but I wouldn’t be able to hear Kimo under water. That’s when I spotted a huge shark. He was about a hundred yards away and headed right towards Kimo. Kimo had no idea that the shark was headed for his fish and he wouldn’t be able to hear my whistle. The water was very clear and I could see Kimo’s long string of fish. I swam towards him as fast as I could without splashing so the shark wouldn’t turn around and attack me. Kimo was at the bottom entering a cavern when the shark attacked his floater filled with fish. Without warning he got yanked right out of the hole.

The shark’s teeth were big, his skin rough, and his power was immeasurable. I loaded my spear gun and I cut the tag line with my knife. I watched as Kimo did the same thing. I swam toward the shark pointing my gun at it while holding my knife in my left hand. I waited patiently and watched for the perfect shot. He stopped and turned, my heart started pounding as the shark watched me. I took the first shot and I stoned him right behind his gills. Kimo hit the shark in his belly while he was coming up to the surface. It started to bleed heavily and it was rolling, kicking, turning, and trying to get those spears out of him. The spears were bent and I thought that it wasn’t going to be enough to stop him as he stared me down. That shark didn’t want any more and he took off with two spear gun shafts stuck in his belly and wing.

Kimo and I quickly headed for shore where we reflected on the day and our shark
What the Shark Said To Me

Bronson Ho

I couldn’t figure out why my Aumakua would attack my partner. Later that afternoon, my dad told me that we caught a lot of fish. He said on the days that you catch a lot of fish that you should try and give some of it back.

Now, as a precaution, we never ever take too much fish. When we have a hefty catch, we always leave something down on the bottom of the ocean or near some small reefs. Since seeing my father leave fish on the ocean, I really took his advice to heart. Even if we don’t have a hefty catch, I still try to give something back. That encounter really taught me to be humble and never overfish the ocean.
Death Discovered
Keri Iwahiro

“What happened, Grandma? What happened?” I recall almost chasing my grandmother around the house and up and down the hallway as she and my grandfather frantically ran about. It was like watching cars on a freeway, every one passing so quickly like blurred images. As my grandpa passed me again, he said hastily,

“Jeffery killed himself!”

Just seconds prior to this it was just as it had always been on a Saturday afternoon at Grandma’s--Grandpa watched TV leisurely, puffing a cigar; Grandma cleaned the already cleaned house; and I dressed my Barbie dolls in the clothes my mother had just made for them. This is when the telephone rang and the chaos began.

Death. I never thought about death. You don’t when you’re seven. It never occurs to you that someday your loved ones will leave this Earth. You think you’re the only one that gets older on your birthday and that your parents and grandparents stay the same. I used to go to Uncle Jeffery and Aunty Sachan’s house every week after church with Grandma. I helped Aunty cook lunch; I’d rub a crayon over a piece of paper on the floor so the tile designs showed through; I made Uncle Jeffrey play patron and waitress so many times he must have been sick of it. He would call from his room, “Where is my food? It’s taking so long.” I would walk in the room, with “food” lined up on both arms, which were really Aunty Sachan’s tiny baskets of flowers and other knickknacks from her miniature cabinet.

“Here you are sir. Can I get you anything else?” I would always say.

“No thank you,” he’d reply and pretend he was eating. I’d leave the room for about a minute then return to check on him,

“Would you like to order anything else?”

“Oh, I’m so full I can’t eat anymore,” he’d say while rubbing his belly.

“Okay, thank you. Come again.” With that I’d clear the dishes off his bed and return them to their place so we could start all over again.

This was life. It was good. Why would anything change...ever?
Life did change on that day forever. It now included death. The canvas of my mind had been beautifully painted with warm yellow rays of sunshine, rolling green hills, cool fresh water streams, sweet smelling flowers in different shades of bright colors, and the images and sounds of love, laughter and safety. But on this day, at this instant, it was as if some faceless being had walked up to that perfect painting carrying an open bucket of cold blacker than black paint with drips running down the sides and violently plunged a tight, cupped, bared hand into the color and flung it at the canvas, covering it with large round splats and long sharp streaks. I could no longer hear the sounds of innocence and happiness coming from my masterpiece.

It was a shock that stunned and paralyzed me for a time. Fear of loss and being alone followed. Visions of some catastrophic thing happening, taking the lives of all my family and leaving me alone filled my mind and made my heart race. What would happen to me? Where would I go? Would I live alone where no one would ever find me? Would I end up living on the streets? I would surely die out there. What would my death be like? I was so afraid of pain. Death must be physically painful.

Accepting the fact that someone was gone was impossible.

It wasn’t even so much the grief of missing someone and wanting them to come back, but rather the concept of here one day, gone the next. It was the knowledge that twenty four hours before this we were all going about our business as usual, unaware of what the coming day would bring and how drastically our lives would be impacted. Didn’t we know somewhere deep within us that something huge was upon us? Why didn’t we know? How could we not know? Did Jeffrey know? Why did he do it? Something must have been terribly wrong. I could’ve helped him. He would be here, right now, if I was given the chance to help him. If I called him on the phone, he would be unable to answer. The next time I went to Auntie’s house, he would not be there to play patron and waitress with me.

I couldn’t make the transition.

Since that day twenty-three years ago, I have experienced the deaths of other family members including Grandpa and Aunty Sachan. My perception of death and dying has traveled the curves and turns in the road of life. I have observed and analyzed and compared the ways others perceive death to help me decide what my beliefs will be. Today I see it as neither good nor bad. Death just happens, and it’s supposed to happen. I don’t spend my time worrying about it and trying to control it as if I could ever prevent it from happening to myself or anyone else. Instead, I choose to be thankful for the time I had with my uncle. I believe it’s true that quality of life is much more important than quantity, and physical life is not something to cling to but something to do as fully as possible and
to constantly let go of. Some will breathe for just a few moments while others will watch an entire century go by. I don’t know when it will be time for anyone around me to leave whether it be my four year old son or my eighty-seven year old grandma. This not knowing is priceless, for it teaches me to spend each day on the things that are most important in life.
“Thank you very much, Mr. Kaneshiro,” the pit boss remarked. “Better luck next time.”

“Luck, what luck?” I remember replying as I stood up from my chair and watched my seat cushion morph back to its original shape after being deflated for two straight hours.

“My luck’s on vacation,” I muttered walking away from the table. It must be on a separate one because I haven’t seen it all week!

Exhausted, irritable, and demoralized, the waning moments of my getaway neared an end as I wandered aimlessly in search for answers; answers to the same questions I had asked myself on previous vacations. How could I do this to myself? What was I thinking? What was I going to do, and what will my girlfriend do to me when she finds out? It is five thirty in the morning. I am just about flat broke, and I’m in Las Vegas.

They claim that staying in downtown Las Vegas is not unlike vacationing back in Hawaii. An abundance of locals, plate lunches, and service with aloha are supposedly part of the attraction and appeal of the California Hotel and Casino. So, amongst these inviting claims, why did the pit bosses and dealers appear more like wardens and prison guards? Why was I hiding from family and acquaintances, and why had I not eaten in twenty four hours? They did it to me again! They drained my wallet! I felt as deflated as that seat cushion.

At five thirty in the morning, the California Hotel’s casino floor isn’t exactly bustling with droves of energetic gamblers. Three quarters of the table games are shut down, and the ones that are open are manned with dealers smirking with each other as the remaining disheartened gamblers limp by while heading for the elevator doors. The only noise prominent were the sounds of countless coins clattering into metal buckets as workers hauled away and counted the daily take before depositing it in the casino’s bank accounts. The cocktail waitress can be heard from across the casino floor. “Cocktails…..Cigarettes?” If I had a nickel for every time I heard these two words in unison, I would be even for the trip. “Give me a double of anything you got,” I said to the lone waitress as she passed by. I might as well, I thought, the bus leaves for the airport in two hours. I had not begun to pack, and I just cramped out for what seems like the thousandth time. I drowned my sorrows with a few drinks as I crawled toward the elevator doors. While waiting for my drink, hind site reveals a significant choice was about to be made. I could either cash out the hundred and
five dollars in chips that I somehow managed to not lose, or search for my elusive luck one last time. Needless to say, I chose the latter.

Finally the waitress arrived. What took her so long, I wondered to myself? I couldn’t imagine she had a bunch of orders at this hour. Well, I certainly wasn’t going to tip her a five dollar chip as I had customarily done in the past, so I fumbled through my pockets in search of a dollar bill. Besides, this sobering trip had just transformed me into a miser. “Just my luck,” I remembered “no buck.” I found my room key, some loose change, and a few chips belonging to another casino. I kept the chips; she got a dollar in change. Lastly, while rummaging through my last pocket (the small one within the front pockets of your jeans) I found a little strip of paper I had long forgotten about.

Flash back a few days ago: my golf buddies and I had arrived in Las Vegas two hours before check in. With a few hours to kill, a handful of us had decided to hit the buffet before tackling the crap tables. Upon finishing our meals one of the wives dropped a handful of fortune cookies, which she had grabbed from the Chinese food station, on to our table. Each of us had eaten a cookie, halfheartedly read our fortune, and began to nonchalantly toss it aside.

I, on the other hand, hesitated while pondering for a second. “Why are there six numbers on the bottom of my fortune?” I asked.

The woman who brought the cookies replied, “Oh, those are lucky numbers that are supposed to entice you to drop a load of cash on their Keno game.” Never the less, her explanation didn’t stop me from tossing it in with the others. We all proceeded to get up and appease our real appetites by hitting the casino tables. As we left the dining area, the fortune-cookie women ran up to me holding my crumpled fortune in her hand and asked, “Aren’t you going to play the numbers on your fortune?” “No one else found numbers in their cookies: your six might be lucky?” I thanked her for her ridiculous notion as I politely accepted it, folded it, and shoved it in my pocket, thinking I’ll probably use it later to discard my old gum.

Four days later, the only thing to survive this heinous trip were the hundred some odd dollars that I had in chips, and a now wrinkled, half faded fortune with six virgin Keno numbers. What the hell I thought, let’s hammer that last nail in the coffin and prove once and for all that I am the most unlucky person in Vegas. Without hesitation, I splashed my remaining chips on the counter, and bought a Keno ticket from the cashier.

Before heading back to my room, I had just one thought. “When was the last time anyone hit a big jackpot?” I asked the cashier.
“Three weeks ago some lady hit a four thousand dollar Keno card by picking five out of five numbers,” he replied. “We don’t see winners like that very often.”

He quickly reminded me why I had never played this game before. I told him I had a hundred and five dollars in chips and asked what to do. He suggested playing a six number card, twenty games, at five dollars a crack. Doing so would provide me time to pack while the games took place. Upon the twentieth game he instructed me to bring my card back to the window to reveal if I had won anything.

Most casinos will devote a channel on your room television to a Keno screen. Before I began packing, I chose to turn on this dedicated station in order to keep track of my numbers. An hour passed, my packing was done, and I kept nodding off to sleep while remaining fixated on the Keno screen. It wasn’t long before I fell asleep, after all, I had been up over twenty four hours pulling off a marathon money losing session in the casino.

My unlucky streak would continue as the phone rang, prematurely awakening me from a much needed slumber. It was my father reminding me to meet downstairs before heading off to the airport. “I will be right down,” I mumbled as I peered at the Keno station fighting through my blurred vision. Upon focusing on the screen, something began puzzling me. The Keno cashier insisted that all twenty games would be completed in an hour and a half, giving me more than enough time to turn in my card before leaving for the airport. Looking at the television revealed that I had nine more games to go. Just my luck again! The bus was departing for the airport soon, denying me of enough time for the remaining games. That is when the unimaginable happened. I pulled out my Keno receipt and proceeded to match my numbers with the screen.

My first number was a match, no big deal. The second and third numbers also hit. I discovered the fourth one, now I knew I was in the money, fifteen dollars worth to be exact. How about that, I thought, the fifth was on there as well signifying a few hundred bucks. Then it happened. A surge of adrenaline sped through my veins as I matched the sixth and final number revealing a perfect Keno card. This is not happening I said to myself. I must be dreaming! Any minute now the phone is going to ring waking me from this cruel dream. I had often dreamt of winning a jackpot, this was surely no different. I turned on the lights and reached for my watered down Crown and Coke I brought up almost two hours ago. I took a big swig. It tasted like Crown and Coke, and I can’t recall ever tasting anything in a dream before. I pinched my arm as hard as I could, revealing little doubt. “Holy $$$$$,” I screamed. I was really awake!

It was later revealed that the delay in the keno games was due to my winning ticket. The pause on the Keno screen signified that someone hit a substantial amount of money and they needed to check the videos to confirm who placed the bet before proceeding to
the next game. Imagine me, walking up to the Keno window tugging my suitcase, carry on, and golf bag, redeeming a winning ticket that would pull me out of the red after four straight days of donations. It goes without saying that the feeling was as surreal as picking six correct numbers. What were the odds? What if my fortune had remained on the lunch table? What if I hadn’t worn those jeans? I kept asking myself “what if.”

“How would you like your winnings Mr. Kaneshiro?” the cashier asked. “We could wire it to your bank account, cut you a cashier’s check, or give you cash.”

“I prefer one stack of high society!” I replied. What a feeling, what a wonderful casino full of pleasant and cordial employees.

“I love this place!” I told the pit boss as he congratulated me on my winnings. “I can’t wait to come back. Damn, I’m hungry, and where’s that cocktail waitress?” I owe her four more bucks!

“YOUR TROUBLES WILL CEASE AND FORTUNE WILL SMILE UPON YOU”

08 23 24 34 39 41

:SIX OUT OF SIX- $10,000 = “ONE STACK OF HIGH SOCIETY”
An Unforgettable Night
Stephanie Kung

It was a lazy, quiet Saturday night at my dad’s house once again. Some delicious
smelling chocolate chip cookies were baking in the oven and everyone was lounging
around the kitchen, waiting to sink their teeth into the chewy, sweet delicacies. The
television was on a barley audible volume in the living room and our two cats seemed to be
engaged in watching the animated commercial. Just before the oven timer was set to ring,
this serene scene was disrupted by an indiscreet yelling that seemed to be coming from the
front yard.

“Give me back my…! I know you have it, you…!” a man’s voice angrily yelled.

*What in the world?* I thought, as I asked, “Is that Uncle Greg that’s making that
racket?”

My grandma could only sigh, “Yes,” in response.

“Oh great, here he goes again,” my dad proclaimed.

“Yeah, I know,” said my step-mom. “He’s been yelling to himself almost everyday
this week. I’m getting tired of it, it’s so embarrassing.”

“He must be talking on his pretend hand phone to his imaginary friend again. I’ll
try and get him to stop,” my grandma said as she headed for the front door.

DING! The oven timer cried as it announced that the chocolate chip cookies were
done baking.

“I’ll go and get that,” I said as I jumped off the couch and made my way towards
the wonderful smelling kitchen.

“I’ll go too and inspect them,” my dad chimed in with a smile.

As I was taking the cookies out of the oven, I could hear my grandma’s voice get
louder and louder outside.

“Greg! You better be quiet right now before I call the cops on you!” I heard my
grandma shout to my uncle as he continued to converse loudly with his imaginary friend.
My uncle paused in mid-sentence to exclaim to my grandma, "Why? I’m talking to my friend on the phone. He owes me money. Leave me alone!"

"Greg! C’mon, be quiet! You’re disturbing the neighbors!" my grandma exclaimed back.

This in fact was true; the whole neighborhood was dead silent. The only noises were the dogs barking at the confrontation between my grandma and my uncle. Not a single light was visible in the neighboring houses. Everyone seemed to be listening to and watching the scene outside from their darkened houses.

As my dad and I were returning to the living room with some of the freshly baked cookies, my step-mom, who was watching the scene outside from the living room couch, remarked to my dad, "Ivan, I think you better get out there. Greg sounds really angry. I don’t want your mom getting hurt; you don’t know what he’s capable of doing."

"Yeah, dad, you’re the man of the house. Go tell him who’s the boss!" I told my dad.

"Yeah, I think I better go out there," my dad responded as he took a big bite out of a chocolate chip cookie.

As my dad made his way outside, I thought, Wow, this is getting pretty interesting. Nothing like this has ever happened while I was at my dad’s house before. Curious to see what my dad’s presence would bring upon the situation, my step-mom and I rushed to the window that was facing the scene and anxiously watched as my dad walked down the sidewalk towards my uncle and grandma. My uncle was slightly leaning against the wall that surrounded my dad’s property, smoking a cigarette, and angrily clutching his makeshift hand phone to his face. My grandma was nearby, apparently frustrated because she couldn’t calm her son down. As my dad approached the scene, he yelled at his brother to be quiet in a very strong and authoritative tone.

"Greg! Be quiet!" my dad emphasized, "You’re doing this almost every night! That is enough already!"

Hearing my dad’s authoritative tone, my uncle swung around, glared at my dad, and screamed a profanity in response.

My dad, apparently offended about being sworn at, said, “OK, fine!” and started walking back towards the house.
Everyone was wondering where my dad was going, as we watched him pass the window where my step-mom and I were at and make his way towards the side of the house. He didn’t respond to our questions, as he walked past the window with a slightly agitated and determined look on his face.

“Dad?” I asked, with no response.

Okay, I thought, He must be up to something. I wonder what’s going on in his mind.

As soon as I thought that, I heard the squeaking of the water spigot being turned on. Uh oh! Is my dad going to spray my uncle with the water hose? This night is getting more interesting by the moment, I thought.

My dad soon reappeared with, yes, the water hose in hand. He walked straight up towards my uncle, who was once again leaning with his back against the wall, and stopped a short distance away from him.

“Ivan! Don’t!” my step-mom screamed with fear in her voice.

My grandma, aware of what my dad was intending to do, slowly started to distance herself away from her two sons and headed towards the safety of the garage side door.

I could only watch with minute satisfaction as my dad raised and extended his arms in the water hose shooting fashion.

“Greg!” my dad yelled, as my uncle turned to look.

SPWOOSH!

The sound of the water hose spraying my uncle in the face was the only sound to be heard in the quiet Mililani neighborhood.

“Hahahaha” my dad gleefully laughed as he dropped the water hose and sprinted towards the garage.

“Arrgghhh!” my uncle responded as he jumped the wall and dashed after my dad.

“Ivan! Ivan!” my step-mom screamed as she watched my uncle almost catch up to my dad.

Wow, I thought, my uncle moves pretty fast for a heavyset man. He almost caught
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up with my dad, and my dad had a couple of seconds' head start! Run, dad, run! I thought as they got close enough that I could hear my uncle's feet pounding the sidewalk.

THUD! THUD! THUD! My uncle's feet resounded as he chased my dad right up to the locked garage side door.

My grandma, who watched my dad spray my uncle in the face from the garage side door, anxiously waited for my dad to zoom past her so she could quickly lock my greatly infuriated uncle outside. As soon as my dad rushed past her, she tried her best to quickly double lock the gated door. She got it locked; just the same time as my uncle reached the door. She sighed in relief as she cautiously looked at her enraged and drenched son, pounding and yelling at her to open the door and let him inside.

"Greg," she said in a calm, yet authoritative voice, "Go change your clothes and go into my car to cool off."

"No!" my uncle shouted, "Open the door! I want to talk to Ivan."

"No! Don't open the door!" my step-mom yelled.

"Greg, I said go to my car and cool off."

My uncle stared at her coldly and slowly backed away from the door. He glanced at my step-mom and I near the window as he searched for another way to get into the house.

Watching all of this unfold from the window, my step-mom and I quickly backed away when the action came too close. We both feared for the safety of my dad and my grandma as they were outside; unprotected from the safety of the house. See, my uncle is a heavyset man in his late 30's, and used to be heavily into the drug scene in his younger days. He suffers from acute schizophrenia and often doesn't remember or recognize the people he knows. Needless to say, he is very unpredictable and uncontrollable when he's enraged.

"What happened?" my step-mom and I asked in shock as both my grandma and dad entered the house through the front door.

"Well, I..."

"Ivan sprayed..."

CRASH!
Before either of them could respond, we all turned in horror as we saw my uncle force himself in through the window screen that my step-mom and I were just at. The poor window screen was too flimsy to withstand the force of my uncle and it bent into unfixable positions as it tried to keep my uncle from coming inside the house.

Having a wild look and a beet red face, my uncle eyed all of us out like a wild dog. He was breathing a little heavy, I guess he hadn’t run that much in a while, and the top half of his clothes were all soaking wet. As soon as he spotted my dad, he started charging towards him like an angry bull.

“Greg! Stop it!” my step-mom and grandma shrieked.

My uncle was oblivious of everyone but my dad. You could only imagine how enraged my uncle was just by looking at the color of his beet red face. My dad, obviously scared, tried to run away from his charging younger brother but there was no where to go. My uncle swung at my dad, but my dad ducked.

“I’m going to get you! You...” my uncle shouted as he chased after my dad.

My dad got trapped in between the kitchen and the dining area and my uncle wrestled him to the ground with his arm around my dad’s neck.

He’s trying to choke my dad! I thought, as all I could do was stare and watch them fight.

“Get off him! Greg, stop it!” my step-mom cried hysterically, trying to get my uncle to loosen his grip on my dad.

“Call 911! Call 911!” was the only thing my dad could spurt out as his arms were flailing wildly and his face, turning red.

Frozen in shock for a minute, I ran to the living room to go call 911. My grandma also ran to her room to go call the police. With my heart racing and my mind still in shock, I desperately tried to relay to the operator what was happening right in front of my eyes.

“My uncle and dad are fighting in the house,” I stammered, knowing that she could hear the commotion from the phone. “My uncle broke in through the window. He’s trying to choke my dad! We need the police!”

“Calm down, calm down,” I heard her say. “What’s your address?”
"I don’t know," I replied, "I don’t live at my dad’s house. I’m barely here."

"OK," she replied. "That’s OK. The police will be there shortly. I’m going to have to hang up with you now, is that alright?"

"Yes," I replied, as I hung up the phone.

During my conversation with the operator, I watched helplessly as my dad struggled to free himself from the choking arm of my uncle. My step-mom was right there beside them, crying hysterically and hitting my uncle; telling him to let go of my dad. Oblivious to my step-mom until now, my uncle took a swing at her; barely missing her petite frame. My uncle, being distracted for just a moment, allowed my dad to wriggle free from his grasp. As my dad struggled to get to his feet, my step-mom tried to talk to my uncle and calm him down.

"Greg! I’ll give you whatever you want, just calm down and you can get your stuff," she was saying.

Apparently while my uncle was choking my dad, he was yelling where his belongings were. I suppose he believed that my dad had his belongings and when my dad cried, "I don’t know," it angered my uncle more.

Seeing that my step-mom was in the way from him getting his "belongings" from my dad, my uncle tried to sucker punch her. Thankfully, she ducked and at the same time my dad sucker punched my uncle in the cheek. My uncle retaliated back by lounging and yelling at my dad. Somewhere during all of this confusion, my dad’s hand ended up near my uncle’s mouth and my uncle bit my dad.

"Ouch! Let go of my hand, Greg!" my dad cried, wincing in pain.

My uncle wouldn’t let go, so my dad started punching my uncle with his free hand. My step-mom also started hitting my uncle simultaneously until he let go of my dad’s hand.

I could only hope and pray that the police would come soon. I secretly wanted to beat the living daylights out of my uncle because I was so angry and scared at the situation; but I knew I couldn’t. I thought about grabbing a frying pan from the kitchen and hitting my uncle on the head with it; but I knew I wouldn’t. I didn’t have enough courage or strength to do that. All I could do was fearfully watch from the living room and hope that the police would come soon.
I don't know what got my uncle to stop beating up my dad. Maybe he finally realized that he was beating up his own brother; maybe he saw the blood dripping from the bite wound on my dad's hand; maybe he got fed up with the situation and decided that it wasn’t worth it; I'm not sure. My uncle is a very complicated and schizophrenic guy.

As my uncle stared dumbly at my dad, I noticed that his complexion had returned to its natural color. That's a good thing, I thought. Before my uncle left my father's gaze, he swore at him once more about his belongings.

"Don’t ever touch my belongings again! You dumb..." my uncle said, menacingly.

As he headed towards the broken window, my uncle got in my face and yelled at me about his belongings. I didn’t know where they were and I didn’t bother trying to respond. I just stared coldly at him until he turned around with a huff and climbed back outside through the open window.

My step-mom, dad, and I stood just where we were, staring at the open window unto the black night and tried to recollect what had just happened. Hearing that the commotion had ceased outside her door, my grandma cautiously reentered the living room from her bedroom. She must’ve been on the phone with the operator, either that, or too afraid to come outside. Everyone was pretty shaken from what had just happened; the look on everyone’s faces said everything. My dad was the worst; he was very bruised and battered. His hand looked disgusting as the imprint of my uncle’s teeth marks showed clearly through his broken skin. His hair was disheveled and his glasses, bent. My step-mom was sobbing uncontrollably and I offered to hug her for support. My grandma appeared scared, but calm. I was emotional; very scared, sympathetic, and angry at the same time. The anger that was directed at my uncle, now found its way towards my dad. I thought he was incredibly stupid for instigating the fight and part of me thought that my dad deserved what he got. My dad was no match for my uncle; he’s very slim and lightweight. What was my dad thinking? He should've known that my uncle was unpredictable.

Just as things were settling down, two police cars slowly cruised up to my dad’s house. This wasn’t the first time that the police were called to the house as a result of my uncle and that could’ve been the reason why they took so long to arrive. It was good, actually, that they took their time because it gave my uncle time to cool down. As the police made their report and collected statements, my uncle was sitting quietly in my grandma’s car. I wondered what he was thinking as I watched everything from inside the house. I didn’t want to be outside if he tried to fight the police; I had too much excitement for one night. As the police handcuffed and led my uncle to their car without a fight, I thought of how sad his life must be. I felt an overwhelming sense of compassion for him and for what
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drugs did to him. It's so sad how such a promising life can be destroyed by an addiction to drugs.

After the police took my uncle away, my step-mom took my dad to the hospital to have a doctor examine his open bite wound on his hand. It looked like it possibly needed stitches, but as I found out later; all the doctors did was clean and bandage the wound.

As my grandma drove me home to my mom’s house at the same time that my step-mom was driving my dad to the hospital, I could sense how sad a disappointed she was from the present situation. It must have been equally hard for her to watch her youngest child waste his life away and live as a bum on the street. I wouldn’t want my mom to have to go through that. My uncle is the prime example of how I do not want my life to end up. Seeing what drugs did to him firsthand has caused me to stay away from drugs altogether.

As of right now, we do not know where my uncle is. After he got arrested, he went through a couple months of rehab and no one has seen him since then. We all want him to change his life around, but until he has the motivation to help himself; he will forever be in the same state.
Eine Sommerbekanntschaft  
(A Summer Introduction)  
Kristen Lee

During the summer of 1997, I was thrilled to discover that our new neighbors from Germany had a daughter my age. Different languages and customs had sparked my interest at an early age. As a little girl, my imagination would take me to foreign countries, but I would have never thought that in a matter of time I would be exposed to a foreign lifestyle that was exciting and new.

Raised in Hawaii, I was exposed to many ethnic backgrounds. My ethnicity includes Chinese, Japanese, and Caucasian. Naturally, I was exposed to these particular cultures. However, the German lifestyle is something I never expected to learn about. My new neighbors were like a breath of fresh air—cultured and modern.

From a distance, I could see them walking down their steep driveway, statuesque with blonde hair. Not much further down the driveway was a girl around my age. She was lanky and looked unsure of herself. I was so happy to finally have a neighbor around my age, so I walked calmly next door and introduced myself. As I approached her, she grew increasingly nervous. She glanced at me for a split-second and looked down at the newly planted lawn just in front of her all the while carefully placing her shoulder-length golden hair behind her ears, which were pierced three times on each earlobe. Her eyes were so fixated on the ground below that it was difficult to get a clear vision of what she looked like. Perhaps she was thinking of something to say. Whatever the reason, I had made up my mind at that very moment to try to make this first meeting as comfortable as possible.

At this point, she was just three feet away from me. Her hands intertwined with each other and she twiddled her thumbs as she looked to her parents for assurance, but they had already gone into the house to unpack their belongings.

Up close, she looked much prettier. Her sparkling blue eyes and wavy blonde hair made me immediately envious of her appearance. I couldn’t help but notice her terrible sunburn, which was due to her 3-hour stay at the beach. She was approximately 5’5” and had slightly shrugged shoulders, which added to her lanky physique. As she glanced toward my direction, the corners of her lips turned upward for just a moment as if she were making an attempt to smile; however, she still seemed unwilling to come out of her shell. Her eyes wandered across her growing lawn as if she were trying to find a lost item. I was eager to relieve the initial tension, so I began my introduction.

“Hello! I’m your next-door neighbor, Kristen. I noticed that we’re around the
same age so I thought that I would just come over and say hi,” I said with my unusually high-pitched chirpy voice.

“Hallo!” She responded with a distinguishing throaty accent.

“So far, so good,” I thought, “At least she hadn’t run away from me yet.” The click-clacks of suitcases opening, which came from inside her home, distracted her momentarily as I continued to try to engage her in conversation.

“What’s your name?” I questioned as the smell of perfume and salt water tickled my nose. The lingering delicate floral fragrance left hints of tuberose and rose water, which was quite pleasant in itself. However, the distinct salty beach water’s aroma in combination with the soft perfume created a unique odor, which I advise no one to experience. The ocean water’s salty essence clashed with the sweet bouquet, creating a product that smelled almost like insecticide with a hint of vinegar. The recipe was disastrous to my sense of smell, leaving it momentarily out of order. I found it strangely amusing how two separate, pleasant odors can combine to become such a weapon against the human body.

“I’m Vicky...Macharzina,” she replied with a timid smile, “It’s pronounced Wicky Makazina; it might be weird to you though.” She seemed to self-medicate her nervousness by chipping off bits of her cherry red nail polish and watching as they fell hopelessly onto the tan colored concrete beneath her feet.

I tried to put her at ease, “W...icky, not V...icky? That is different, but it’s cool. Nice to meet you! It is so awesome that you guys are from Germany. I’ve never met anyone outside of America before.”

“I’ve been to America every year since I was maybe four years old and such. I’ve never had a chance to meet anyone my age though. It’s nice to have someone to talk to...besides my parents that is. I apologize for my bad English,” she replied as her posture straightened. Her chin rose slightly, and eye contact didn’t seem to be as intimidating for her anymore. Her confidence increased steadily as she continued to talk about her background.

After a couple of minutes of required rambling, I was surprised to see her demeanor transform from a self-conscious mouse to an eager young woman trying so hard to draw me into her world. This was no longer the same girl I met just a moment ago. Now her face lit up with excitement as she revealed her heartfelt feelings about her life in Germany and her love for Hawaii. Those eyes once so scared to make eye contact were now inviting and full of life. Her smile seemed to glow. As she talked endlessly about the boyfriend she missed from back home, my eyes played dot-to-dot with the freckles that lightly sprinkled
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Kristen Lee

her petite nose. Now that I was in the picture, she was relieved to be able to confide her girlish truths to me. As I learned more about this remarkable girl and her background, I came to realize that our lives differed tremendously.

The blossoming friendship between Vicky and me was most unlikely. We had very little in common, but our differences created conversation which continued to spark the interest we had in reference to each other's lives. Our dissimilarities were apparent from the first moment we met. Her fair features strongly contrasted with my dark features. I was an awkward girl with small Asian brown eyes and brown hair, which I wore religiously in a spiky twisted bun. She was wearing a black pleated miniskirt and a red tank top, which matched her chipped nail polish almost exactly. I wore an old baggy t-shirt once belonging to my father coupled with navy blue board shorts adorned with hibiscuses. Besides the obvious variations in our appearance, she was very well-traveled.

As Vicky narrated story upon story of her many voyages across the globe, I was enthralled by her experiences and desperately soaked them in. Unlike myself, she traveled to exotic locations such as France, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, and even China. Having been only to the island of Kauai and Arizona thus far, I was envious of her familiarity with such places. However, she had not experienced the various foods that Hawaii had to offer.

It was humorous to watch her face change from delight to disgust as I told her about the assorted raw foods incorporated in both Japanese and Hawaiian cuisine.

"Have you ever tried sashimi before?" I asked as we sat down in the corner of her humid garage. Brown cardboard boxes and black Adidas duffel bags balanced on top of each other like a game of Jenga.

"Soo-shi-mi? What is hell is that?" Her brow furrowed slightly.

My uncle had just gone on a fishing trip so sashimi was conveniently available to me on this particular day. "It's raw fish. Not everyone likes it, but I don't mind it. Do you want to try some?"

Her face scrunched up into an awkward position. She tilted her head a little to the side as the bridge of her freckled nose wrinkled up in a pug-like fashion. She quickly shot back, "RAW FISH!! That is so gross! I'd rather eat bread and dilly."

"What's bread and dilly?" I inquired hesitantly.

She replied, "It's a piece of bread and usually there is a slice of meat and usually
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Kristen Lee

we put a slice of tomato on the top. I don’t know if you’ll like it though. You probably won’t?”

“Well it doesn’t sound strange to me. If I eat your bread and dilly, I dare you to try some sashimi. Think of it as a cultural experience.” She looked at me momentarily and took me up on my offer.

The dare was on. I guided her next door into my family’s kitchen and seated her at the table. She closed her eyes as I brought out a plate of sashimi and placed it in front of her along with a bottle of shoyu, a tube of wasabi, and a silver dinner fork. After a couple of seconds, she opened her eyes and looked down at the plate of raw fish. Over our heads was a white wooden cupboard. I reached up and brought out a small round glass dish adorned with blue lilies and placed it to the right of her. As I mixed a bit of the light green paste with the salty brownish-black liquid, I noticed her blue eyes cautiously staring down the concoction as if though it were poison. When I was sure the mixture was thoroughly combined, I slid it over to her and placed it carefully at a 2:00 position in relation to her plate. Then, I sat down beside her and rested my head in my right hand and waited. She had accepted the dare and now it was her duty to follow through. Courageously, she dipped the bit of fish into the spicy concoction and placed it into her mouth. My eyes were fixated on her expression, waiting for her horrified reaction. To my surprise, she raised her eyebrows and let out an ecstatic, “Mmmm!” At that moment, we looked at each other and laughed in relief.

I came to realize that she was just as interested in learning about my culture. For the rest of the afternoon, we ended up sitting at my kitchen table examining each other’s past experiences as well as our hopes for the future.

Over the summer, we got to know each other’s personalities and shared detailed stories of our seemingly distorted teenage existence. As time went by, their strong throaty accents, leisurely dinners, and excessive cleaning habits all seemed very natural to me. Getting to know my German neighbors has been an enriching experience that has made me realize that despite our cultural differences we all share the same human condition.
Kaimuki is one of the oldest residential neighborhoods on the island of Oahu. All of my life, I have been one of thousands of people who call Kaimuki home. The neighborhood was not something to reflect upon or even cherish—it just was. Kaimuki was just a banal scene where life takes place: children go to school, adults go to work, people simply live. I had never stopped to think that Kaimuki had a history all of its own. Those who look deeper into the soul of Kaimuki will see the core of this old community, which embraces its unique beauty, flourishing with nostalgic value and historic significance.

For sixteen years, I lived up on Maunalani Heights, a place well known for its breathtaking view. I grew up on Mariposa Drive, a quiet, serene street not any more important than other streets on Oahu. For over fifty years, this white two-story sanctuary I called my home stood steadily, holding memories of treasured pastimes within its walls. To this day, the original format of the house remains untouched. My favorite spot in the house has always been the balcony. After I came home from school, I would sit on an off-white colored lounge chair as I did my homework watching the sunset. Tiny chips of brown paint fell off quite often due to fifteen years of weather damage. Despite its ugly appearance, it overlooked a view of Diamond Head worthy of securing a spot on a postcard.

The view is something to be flaunted about like a treasured trophy wife. As the sun sets, the silhouette of Diamond Head located perfectly at the left side of the vista as well as the city’s hotels and condominiums, which glitter like flawless diamonds from Tiffany & Co., frame the ethereal sunset that falls like clockwork. From a distance, the multitude of homes and businesses located in central Kaimuki look like tiny Monopoly hotels lined up in a sporadic fashion. Over the years, I have stared out into Kaimuki looking at it as just a part of the view. It was something to be admired and appreciated, but I had never paused long enough to contemplate its history.

Kaimuki’s name stems from Hawaiian and means “the ti oven,” because of a legend that menehunes built their ovens in the area (Free). The area held many nicknames including “red dirt section” (“Land”) and “red desert” for the plentiful red dirt covering the ground (qtd. in Burtnett 03). However, the proper pronunciation will always be “Kaimu-ki” (“Land”). People who are familiar with the Hawaiian language may understand what Kaimuki translates to in English. However, the meaning behind the word Kaimuki is unknown to a majority of Hawaii’s residents. This is unfortunate, because if more people were aware of how Kaimuki’s name was derived, they would have a better understanding of Hawaii’s past and gain a better knowledge of the culture. The origin of Kaimuki’s name is rooted in Oahu’s past, serving as a reminder of Old Hawaii. As Kaimuki’s name
provides identity, Kaimuki’s various ownership throughout the years has been pivotal in defining the area of land as a valid community.

Over time, Kaimuki’s ownership has been shuffled around numerous times. In fact, Kaimuki holds a historic slot in time as far back as when Kamehameha I was still in power. Kamehameha I had already conquered both Maui and Molokai and was aiming his sights on conquering Oahu as well. When the king and his army landed in Waikiki, Kaimuki was used as a lookout to see approaching enemies coming in from the ocean. In 1848, Kamehameha III decided to implement his “Great Mahele” (qtd. in Free). This meant that the people of Hawaii would be able to inherit pieces of the lands owned by the king. William Lunalilo was the greatest beneficiary of Kaimuki in this deal. In 1884, the piece of land was auctioned off for a mere $2,325. The rocky terrain held little value to its new owner, Dr. Trousseau, who was a “physician to the court of King Kalakaua” (Burtnett “Early”). The fact that the doctor held such a notable profession was humorous because his hobby was tending to his many ostriches. Trousseau ended up giving his land to Senator Paul Isenberg. However, he would not own the land for very long. Theodore Lansing and A. V. Gear bought Kaimuki’s 324 acres from Trousseau for $20,000 in 1898. After they bought the hilly, red dirt-covered terrain, they began to sell the land for 3 cents a square foot, which foreshadowed the start of steadily increasing real estate interest.

Land lots started selling in a business-like fashion once A.B. Lobenstein started helping Gear and Lansing in sectioning off the land. The price of lots, which spanned 600 feet by 500 feet, was $400. During a slow period, the price of land was docked to $100 with $5 down and $5 as a monthly charge (Burtnett “100”). People regularly started coming to the area only when they were bribed with the promise of a private road leading to each purchased property. The public was also offered $50 per baby born in Kaimuki as a promotion (Burtnett “100”). Once the crowds started rolling in, the worth of the land rose tremendously. A new proprietor named C. A. “Boomer” Stanton “was reportedly penniless when he arrived, ...selling $100,000 worth of real estate a month” (“Land”). This sum of money must have made Stanton a wealthy man, proving that investing in developing subdivisions is a profitable business in itself. It is inevitable that Kaimuki would modernize and evolve, but for the most part it has remained the same.

For a multitude of people, Kaimuki is a place that brings them back to a state of nostalgia. The old buildings lined up along Waialae Avenue have remained the same throughout the years. While other communities strive to modernize and look the part of an expanding subdivision, Kaimuki holds on to its meager beginnings. For blocks, aged boxy buildings line up next to each other. After an unknown sum of years, several buildings yearn to be repainted. Many people may wish to knock down these buildings and put up newly dry-walled, cosmetically pleasing structures, and yet, Kaimuki is like my grandmother’s house. It is a familiar place and even though flawed, it is a comforting
place to be. Flaws can be overlooked if a place holds irreplaceable value. I treasure the fact that Kaimuki has remained untouched for the most part because I can walk through this time capsule and relive past experiences that might otherwise be forgotten in modernized Lego towns. Kaimuki is a central location that holds historic value as well as personal significance. Some individuals may choose to attend the various educational facilities, including Kapiolani Community College. Others value the family atmosphere that continues to buzz around Kaimuki. There is also an undeniable respect that goes along with establishments that are able to succeed through the years where technology-driven companies often overtake small family-owned businesses.

There are businesses, which are still running even after fifty years providing residents with a sense of stability. The Crack Seed Store is one of the businesses that still exists, reminding me fondly of my childhood. On the weekends, I would occasionally stop by the snack shop to pick up my favorite goodies. Kaimuki Christian School also holds a generous amount of my history. From the young age of three years old until twelve, I attended Kaimuki Christian School. I remember going to the Kaimuki Library in hopes of finding valuable resources for an important research paper on Hawaiiana. I also remember frequenting Kaimuki Dry Goods during the summer in hopes of finding the perfect fabric to go with a newly purchased pattern that I would eventually end up throwing away in frustration. The tiny, family-owned fabric store opened in 1926 and was originally located where Top of the Hill Inn now resides. Edith Takeya reminisced about her family’s initial inventory, “We were like a general store because there were no stores in Kaimuki” (qtd. in Watanabe 02). Kaimuki Dry Goods has been in business for 77 years so far and is still enduring. Harry’s Music Store also is a place where I can reminisce about my childhood. The dimly lit, dusty, cramped store is probably one of the oldest music stores located in Kaimuki. Harry Yoshioka established his store in 1946. The business sells every musical item needed or wanted by the public. Both musical intellects and those struggling to squeeze out a song can go to the store and find music ranging from classical pieces to Japanese music books, as well as instruments and their accessories. Harry’s Music Store is often frequented by music students searching for the exact piece of sheet music that they intend to master. Kaimuki is not scattered with high-end boutiques associated with pivotal tourist attractions. However, Kaimuki is a place that is strewn with family businesses, bringing back the endearing qualities of old Hawaii, reminiscent of safer times.

Now when I look out into what I think is one of the best views of Hawaii, I don’t only see the waves crashing in the distance, the sunset, or Diamond Head. I see Kaimuki and think about its history, appreciating its existence. I am proud that Kaimuki is my home.
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The Good, the Bad, and the Just Plain Funny
Leo Martinez

"The world is your oyster," my grandmother used to say to me as a kid. "And don’t you let anybody convince you of any different; or when I die, I’ll come back and pull your legs at night for being such a sucker." Mexican grandmothers have a way of scaring the crap out of you as a kid if they want to instill something in you.

"I won’t Grandma, I promise," I used to always say.

I loved my grandmother; but I didn’t want her coming back and pulling my legs at night. So as far as I can remember, I made a made a point of living my life as an adventure.

By the time I was fifteen years old, I was a daring and courageous little guy, quick with a smile and eager to rip the fun out of life in my little hometown of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where beer was cheaper than bottled water, home remedies ware more effective than a trip to the doctors, and a squirt could drive a car as long as he was big enough to reach the pedals and still see over the steering wheel. There was never any shortage of opportunities.

Tim, a tall, lanky and perpetually smiling good friend of the family from California, asked me if I’d be interested on going on a four day long surf trip where he would supply the wheels and pay for both our lodging if I would act as a translator and guide. I don’t think he had finished talking when I was already telling him about all the places we could go and how great it was going to be. Judging from the huge smile on his face, my reply was like music to his ears.

Tim literally lived to surf. At thirty-seven, the man had been married twice and twice divorced because his wives had gotten fed up with him putting surfing before them. Surfing was so engulfing a thing with this guy that he actually had planed to have carved on his tombstone, "Tim Newbern: Surfer."

Taking advantage of my lack of responsibilities in the summer and without too much planning, we scrounged together our surfboards, a couple of t-shirts, and our toothbrushes, along with some other essentials. Next morning we loaded up Tim’s white Volkswagon beetle, and armed with some potato chips and a couple of other snacks, we made for the road.

We drove north for about three hours to a spot called “Platanitos,” which in Spanish
means little bananas, so named because it was in front of this big banana plantation that
guys always snuck into for a quick meal after surfing.

The waves were beautiful when we got there; a little over head-high and glossy
smooth, the way you think of a glass sculpture being glossy smooth.

It’s a funny thing when obsessive surfers like Tim and I get to a spot and it’s breaking
good. We could have been taking our sweet time all the way there, but the moment we saw
the surf going off, it’s a race against time.

Carl Lewis running the hundred-meter dash looked slow as an old lady compared to
us. I mean the way we went about busting out the surfboards, waxing them up, locking up
the car, and running in frantic hysteria to the waves, you’d think a pack of starving wolves
were chasing after us.

But, God! The waves were good, and there was nobody else out in the water. Hell,
there was nobody else for miles! Talk about not having to worry about a crowd; that was
the cool thing about driving three hours to the middle of nowhere on what one would be
overly generous to even call a road. Broken down path seemed more fitting. But for guys
like Tim and me, coming upon a site like that was like a six-year-old trick or treating kid
on Halloween night coming upon Willy Wonka’s house.

We surfed and surfed. The waves kept coming in one after another, set after set,
steady as could be, and beautiful as could be. The hours just flew by like the birds flying in
the off shore breeze.

Before we knew it, we were surfing in the mid afternoon sun, which in such
desolate parts of Mexico has an ethereal quality to it, like time is holding still, like the end
of the Earth is eminent but there is nothing you can do. And it was at this time, under this
sun, that huge freak sets started coming in, big, mean and powerful sets. They would break
way outside and completely close out, leaving you with a foot of foam on top of violently
churning white water and practically impossible duck dives to deal with.

The swell was rising and the waves it was bringing were no joke. Soon the swell
was gonna be too much for this spot to handle.

A somewhat common misconception about waves is that they’ll simply break
bigger depending on the size of the swell, with no other major change to the wave’s shape
other than it’s size. Well, that’s not really the case. You see, there is a sort of balance being
struck between the size of the swell and the shape of the sea floor. If the swell is not big
enough, there won’t be any waves, and if the shape of the sea floor is not marked or defined
enough for the size of the swell, the waves will not be affected by it and will simply break when they reach a shallow enough depth. And when they do, they will do so all at once, creating what is commonly known as a close out.

“There is a spot in a little town no more than an hour and a half from here that has a really strong reef that I am sure can handle this swell,” I told Tim. “If we leave right now, we could surf it for at least one or two hours before sun down.” He stared at me with clumps from the thick foam sticking to his face and smiling, as if to say, “I’m glad you are here.” Then he proclaimed, “We are out of here!”

Flying through the good sections of the road, we made our best imitation of those European races where they scam through muddy dirt back roads on the bad sections. In only a smidge under an hour, we stormed into the peaceful little town of San Juan with our white Beetle painted thick brown with mud.

And sure enough, the waves were peeling in beautifully. The reef was handling the dam huge swell like a champ, and the waves were breaking perfectly. Once again, there was not a single surfer in the water.

We did our whole lock up the car and scam for the water like your life depended on it deal again, and in a blink of an eye we were in the water.

We were like pigs in fresh mud. We couldn’t wipe the smiles off our faces. We were getting barreled on practically every other wave, and not one of them would close out. The surf gods had smiled on us yet again.

After about twenty minutes of all that ecstasy, as I was paddling back to the point, I felt a sting on my wrist. It was like a jellyfish sting but ten times worse. I screamed as I slapped my hand in the water hoping to slap it off if it was a jellyfish. Feeling the acute sting still sharply on my wrist, I went to wipe it off with my hand, but there was nothing there. As I rubbed my wrist in pain, I looked at the water around me to see what the hell kind of jellyfish had stung me, but I couldn’t see anything in the water either. Half freaked out and confused, I kept paddling back out to the point even though my hand was starting to go numb. It was a freaky kind of numb though, because though it was going numb and I was losing feeling in it, I could feel the pounding pain of the sting inside it. Then I noticed that the strange numbness was spreading into my forearm. I was no expert on jellyfish or any other marine life, but something told me I’d best start paddling towards the beach.

As I was paddling there, I crossed Tim paddling to the point and with a bewildered look he asked, “What’s wrong dude? Where are you going?”
“Some weird jellyfish just stung me and my arm is going numb,” I told him. “I’m gonna sit at the beach and see if it passes.”

“Are you ok?” he asked.

“I don’t know, but watch out for the jellyfish,” I said.

By the time I got to the beach, my whole arm was numb and the pounding pain was getting worse. I laid my board on the sand and sat beside it for a couple of seconds. The numbness had started to spread to my chest and neck. I decided to walk to one of the little restaurants in the town and ask for a glass of milk. My mom had told me that milk slowed down or counteracted the effects of venom. We had once made my cat drink milk when it ate a poison. Come to think of now though, he did die. So I guess maybe milk is not really that strong of an antidote. At one of the restaurants however, I asked for a glass of milk. By this time the pain had spread throughout the trunk of my body and had become especially excruciating in my stomach. I remember having to speak very softly to the girl behind the bar because the tension in the muscles needed to speak normal was unbearable. I took two good gulps of the milk, and as I stopped to catch my breath before finishing the glass off, I suddenly felt so nauseated that I was afraid I was going to throw up right then and there. I immediately got up and walked outside, figuring if I walked the nausea would pass, and if it didn’t, at least I would throw up outside and not in the restaurant. It was then that I realized that the numbing and pain were now spreading into my legs, and had passed my neck into my jaw and mouth.

Suddenly throwing up was the least of my worries. I didn’t know what to do; I needed somebody’s help. But I didn’t want to stagger to somebody and start having to explain what was going on. The pain of talking alone would’ve been unbearable. Instead, I decided that lying down in the middle of the square between the restaurants would make it obvious that there was something wrong, and surely somebody would come to my aid. All and all a good plan I figured, until lying there with my face in the dust filled with concrete I heard two women whisper as they walked pass me, “Look at that, so young and already a drunk.” My would be rescuers walked past me in utter disgust! They just thought I was drunk! As I sluggishly and achingly looked around, I saw other people shaking their heads at me as they whispered stuff to one another. I couldn’t believe it. Instead of coming to my aid, people were just walking around and avoiding me. This plan sucked! I needed to come up with something better and fast.

By now the numbing and pounding pain was all over my body and getting worse. Suddenly it occurred to me, “People are walking around me because the street doesn’t belong to anyone, and no one has anything to lose by my lying here, but if I were lying in the middle of one of the restaurants, then somebody would have to address me, even if
only to kick me out.” So mustering all the strength in me, I started crawling to the closest
restaurant. Everything was out of focus and the pain was so intense it even hurt to breathe.
Everything started seeming strangely distant, like in a dream. Completely drained by the
time I had made it to the middle of the half empty mom and pop restaurant, I just let go. I
dropped on my back and waited for somebody to come.

Before too long, people were gathering around. I had a hard time understanding
what they were saying, but it was clear that they understood there was something wrong.
I took in a deep breath and loudly as I could said, “hurts.” Oddly enough, the word came
out as barely more than a whisper. Nevertheless they heard it because the next thing I know
they were all asking, “Where does it hurt, kid?” and “What happened, son?” I again took
in a deep breath and loudly as I could whisper, “Jellyfish,” to which they all started asking,
“Where son?” “Where did it sting you?” “My wrist,” I whispered as I lifted my left wrist
for an instant to signal which wrist. An older woman held my wrist, examining it I suppose,
and asked, “Is this where it hurts?” to which I again with a deep breath answered, “Hurts
everywhere.”

I heard the voice of an older man say, “Spray coke on him where it hurts.”
Apparently spraying Coca-Cola where a jellyfish stings you was a home remedy of his.
So next thing I know, I’m getting sprayed with coke from head to toe. I don’t know if the
spraying of coke really works in some cases, but other than make me sticky, it did nothing
for me. When they realized it wasn’t working, or when they ran out of Coke, I’m not really
sure which, they started debating whether to pour our on me or to rub me with lemon
juice. And since the lemons were already cut in halves and served on the dinner tables, the
lemon juice won out. So next thing I knew, I was getting rubbed by dozens of hands with
lemon halves. Perhaps the rubbing of lemon juice on a jellyfish sting cure works in some
cases, but in mine, other than getting me stickier and smelling nice, I noticed not a bit of
difference. A part of me wanted to laugh at the absurdity of the scene and another part of
me wanted to beg them to take me to a hospital, but I didn’t have the energy to do either.
As I stared helplessly into space and thought to myself, “I hope when these good people
run out of remedies they take me to a hospital.” I suddenly started seeing little black dots.
And as I lay there, they slowly grew bigger and bigger until everything was black; and then
just like that, I was out.

I was lost in oblivion, suspended in absolute silence, in absolute darkness. Then
faintly, as from a great distance, I noticed the sound of a man screaming, an agonizing
kind of screaming, the way you would think a man being tortured in Medieval times would
scream kind of screaming. As I focused on it, it got louder and louder until it was right next
to me. Slowly waking up, I felt the freshly washed texture of the pillowcase on my face,
and the soft breeze of a fan nearby. But where was I? And why was there a man screaming
next to me like he was being drawn and quartered? Then the thick smell of iodine in the air
brought it home to me; I was in the hospital. The nice people in the restaurant had given up and taken me to the hospital. I felt groggy and half gone, but at least nothing hurt any more. Compared to the poor guy next to me, I was peaches and cream. Apparently he had been stung by a particularly nasty type of scorpion and the hospital had run out of the anti-venom, so all they could do for him was to hook him up to an IV and hope for the best. As I lay there trying to regain my senses, I realized I had an IV hooked to my arm too. It occurred to me that if they didn’t have a scorpion anti-venom, there was no way they had anti-venom for whatever weird jellyfish had stung me. And we were probably both being given the same treatment, attach us to an IV and hope for the best. So I figured since I was going to depend on my immune system to do most of the work, I might as well help it by spending as little energy as possible and passing out. At least I would avoid hearing the tortured screams of the poor guy next to me; I clocked out and didn’t wake up till well into the morning.

I awoke to see Tim at the side of my bed saying, “Man, that was some kind of nasty jellyfish that stung you dude.” “I had no idea it was gonna mess you up this bad bro.”

“Neither did I. I didn’t even know something like this could happen from a jellyfish sting.”

“You should have seen the towns people when I came out looking for you.” He continued, “I think they wanted to lynch me! Even old women were cursing at me. At least I think they were cursing at me. It was all in Spanish so I couldn’t understand it, but it sure sounded nasty whatever it was. They were pissed off as hell about me staying surfing when you got stung. I tried to tell them that I didn’t know it was this bad but they didn’t care, they just kept on cursing at me.”

“Man that’s hilarious, I would’ve loved to have seen it,” I said.

“Yea I bet you would’ve been laughing your ass off,” he said. “Anyway, you feeling better now? The surf is still pumping you know?”

I just smiled and said, “Yeah, I’m all right now. Let’s get out of here. By the way, what the hell happened at the restaurant?”

Tim replied, “When I came looking for you there was all kinds of crap on the floor, and some woman kept shaking a sliced up lemon at me.”

“Oh you are not going to believe it! I’ll tell you all about it on the way to the beach,” I said. And just like that, I paid my bill and we went right back to the beach. After all, as my grandmother told me, “the world was my oyster,” and I wasn’t going to let some
freak jellyfish keep me out of the water when the waves were good. We did go to a different beach though, just in case, you know? The rest of the surf trip was blessed with good waves, and no more jellyfish. To this day I haven’t got a clue what kind of jellyfish stung me, but I haven’t gotten stung by another like it since; and I hope I never do!
I awoke at 5:00 a.m., the same way I have been doing for some time now. So often my body clock pulled my eye lids open before the alarm clock even went off. I lay there in bed, fighting the urge to close my eyes again. Then I kicked the covers off and jerked my body up to a sitting position in an effort to throw off the last grip of sleep.

After a quick shower, I opened the closet and fanned through the rack of unironed, wrinkled shirts. For a second, I pondered why I hang wrinkled shirts.

I got to my uniforms, all three hanging next to each other, neatly pressed still in the clear plastic bags from the cleaner. I had always realized the responsibility and the symbolism I placed on myself by wearing my uniform and badge. I felt it was like putting on a suit of armor. It re-enforced my duty to serve help and protect those who needed it. Each piece of equipment on your belt takes months of training to acquire the discipline demanded of you by training instructors. At graduation the final piece is bestowed upon you, the badge, commonly referred to as your shield. Webster defines a shield as “A broad plate of defensive armor; Anything that protects.” I learned that by Webster’s standards my shield and armor would prove useless for the attack on my heart that I would soon endure.

It was a day like any other, some laughs with my beat partners and with the rookie I had been assigned to train. Yes, I would say a pretty good day up till then. As the rookie and I sat in the blue and white outside the station, I began explaining to him the process of doing a field line up and what his specific responsibilities in this procedure would be.

The rookie was listening intently as I pulled the blue and white away from the curb into traffic. I did not really notice the white van as it passed our vehicle on the left side. I observed the van driving along normally about thirty yards in front of us a few moments later.

Then suddenly, without warning the van radically jerked to the right, almost tipping itself over from the violent motion of the maneuver. As I watched in disbelief the van rammed up onto the sidewalk. Like a juggernaut the van barreled along forcing its way between several parked cars and a concrete wall. The van continued on until the concrete wall ended. It temporarily vanished in a cloud of dust as it careened through a hedge and a chain link fence. The van came to rest upright, from my position I could see no major
The Heart Beat

Anthony Matchen

external damage.

Having seen many car accidents before, my instinct told me that the passengers although shaken were most likely not seriously injured. I was setting myself up big time for what happened next. My first thought was, “What the *%! is this guy thinking?” Then training took over and I reached for the radio mike to report the situation.

AM: “2 Bravo 559” (My call sign)

Dispatch: “Standing by 2 Bravo 559”

AM: “I have a on beat code-1,(Car accident) on Kam IV Road, a white van has crashed into someone’s front yard. I’ll let you know”.

Dispatch : “10-4” (Understood)

I got out of the car and started for the van. The rookie was hot on my heels. With the dust still settling, I began to approach the crash site. I tried to mentally prepared for anything. I had no idea what had caused this crash or if the driver and occupants of the van would be combative. My hand moved up to the butt of my weapon, still in the holster, as I prepared to fight or help.

That is when something caught my eye. In the driveway of the yard on the sidewalk I saw something. It took my attention away from the van. It was a little girl! What was she doing on the sidewalk? I moved towards her. Her body lay in an awkward position.

My heart began to pound as the adrenaline began to pump into me. My eyes darted back to the van. OH MY GOD! She flew out of the van! That was the only logical explanation my brain could come up with.

AM: “2 Bravo 559, send me a 10-10 (Ambulance). I have a child ejected from the vehicle!”

Dispatch: “10-4, 559”

I stood over her for a second. Her long black hair was strewn across the white concrete sidewalk. She could not be more than ten, so young, I thought. I bent down to take her vital signs. I would need all my training and discipline now. I had to stay calm. I was the only help on scene. The rookie was speechless. I put my ear just above her mouth in an effort to hear or feel for her breath, there was none. I pulled back to look in her eyes.
She had the beautiful eyes of a child, deep and dark. I could also see them looking past me in haunting way straight into the noon day sky, unblinking. I wanted so much to help her but my heart sank as I realized she could not see me. I knelt down by her side. Maybe I missed something. A sound. A heart beat. A movement. Maybe I could start C.P.R. I tilted my head to get closer to her face. My mind was racing trying to fight off the grip of fear and panic as it placed its fingers around my heart.

My blank gaze was broken by what I saw in front of me next. Off the sidewalk in the yard where the van had come to rest, I saw something. There, partially obscured by hedges, was another pair of legs! As I stumbled towards what I thought I saw, a knot was building in my stomach. There, just a few feet away, was the body of another little girl. Her body lay limp, her legs were sticking out of the bushes. I could not see the rest of her until I got closer.

The torso of her body hung down over the side of a small rock wall contained within the yard that the van had crashed into. Although in my mind I made a conscious effort to sound composed on the radio, I failed.

AM: “559” I need a second 10-10, I have a second ejection. It’s another child!”

Dispatch: “Oh no! Ok! Ok!”

Now adrenaline was all I had. I was oblivious to anything around me as I leaned over the wall to get near her face. Her body was lying at a strange angle. I feared moving her so I bent over the wall next to her. As both of us lay next to the van, I looked at her face, another young face. I saw fluid in her mouth, a pinkish red color, and a faint gurgling sound caused the fluid to bubble.

What should I do? The child’s body looked contorted in an unnatural position. If I moved her, she could die! If I didn’t, she could die! But she was breathing. Was this her last gasp for life? Should I move her to help her breath? I languished in the agony of trying to make a decision that I was not prepared to make. I shut my eyes for a second and opened them, looking past the child.

At that moment I passed into what can only be explained as going from the real world of five senses to the surreal world where reality is an uncertainty and disbelief and denial are lord and master. There in front of me lying under the van was the motionless body of a third little girl. I would never even have seen her had the second girl’s body not been draped over the wall forcing me to place my head down there.
I swear I became two entities at that moment. The one in the uniform got up and moved around to the side of the van, got down and crawled under the van to the little girls side. The other, stricken with panic and gripped by fear, simply followed along.

AM: “559 I need three 10-10’s! That’s three! I have a third child ejected! Expedite, please!”

Dispatch: “Ok. Three, yeah. I got it, three!”

As the words left my mouth, I wondered, “How did she get ejected and end up under the van?” In this moment of utter chaos, my brain needed to explain to my heart that there was a logical explanation for it all. The front of the van had come to rest on the rock wall lifting it about a foot. There was just enough room for me to slide under without my back touching the heated exhaust pipe.

The child lay on her back towards the front of the van. Her eyes were closed as if asleep. As I slid up to her I saw her chest rise and fall in a rapid manner. There was only enough room for me to lie next to her. I placed my hand on her chest and felt her heart beat. I never knew a heart could beat so fast. It felt like it would pound right out of her body.

I knew her heart was doing its job, diligently fighting to keep her alive. The beat of her heart also did something else. The second I felt its force against the palm of my hand, it gave me the first ray of hope. The intangible force of her heart beat went through my hand into me and lifted my own heart out of the hopeless black pit it lay in.

I began to whisper in her ear. “Hey, hang on. I’m here. Help is coming. You’re going to be okay.” I whispered words of comfort in her ear as we lay there for what seemed an eternity. I had to communicate to her someway, anyway to hold onto to life. I looked down at her right leg. It had been broken at the shin and was bent almost into a “V” shape. The bone had forced its way through the flesh and was exposed. I was relieved to see that the blood flow was coming very slowly from the wound.

A colony of red ants whose home had been in the wall were all over her shin biting her. I could not reach them to brush them off. I was enraged that they would bite this injured child. I wanted to pull my nine millimeter pistol from it’s holster and blast those little !@#!’s.

I surveyed the van’s front under carriage to see what was holding it up. If it came down now, I was in no position to do anything about it. It seemed to be resting on top of what was left of the rock wall it had struck. It looked secure; the smell of burning oil, and
hot evaporating water was all around. The pungent smell of burning rubber was just above me but I could not see where it was coming from. I dismissed the thought of fire to stifle my fear.

The next sound I heard were footsteps and police radios. Finally, back up had arrived. The only thing I could count on, the only thing I was absolutely certain of was that my brothers and sisters would come. I realized I never called for them. But they had heard the alarm in my voice from the second I let dispatch know what had happened. I grew stronger as did my hope for the last little girl. I could hear them talking about supporting the van so it wouldn’t come down on her and me.

Then, two firemen slid under the van. I saw the look of disappear on their faces. I passed on the hope that the little girl had given me. “Her heart beat is strong,” I said. Their faces changed from despair to determination.

For the first and only time since I had placed it there, my hand slid away from her chest. The sensation of her heart beat was still there on my hand. I crawled out from under the van as I backed away from the scene and let the emergency rescue people move in the mystery that had perplexed from the beginning began to materialize.

I kept telling the dispatcher that the children had been ejected from the vehicle. But even as I said that I remembered that both doors on the van had been closed. The windshield was intact there was no way for anyone to have been thrown from the vehicle.

But as I looked at the whole scene, now disengaged from it, the answer was painfully clear. A lone shoe on the sidewalk, schoolbooks scattered in the yard, a backpack under the van. These children had not come from the van. They had been on the sidewalk! The irony stank so bad I wanted to throw up! These three little girls had been on the sidewalk just where we adults tell them to walk to be safe. They had not been running across the street irresponsibly or crossing against the light. They had been following the rules like good kid’s walking on the goddamn sidewalk! That explained why I had not figured out at first where they had come from. My view of them had been blocked by the van as it barreled up onto the sidewalk and then down on them.

All my emotions had been pushed to the limits, anger, fear, denial, sadness. Taken individually they could each be dealt with. The one that lingers is always the most difficult, “acceptance.” There was no way to accept this obscene situation, no justice for this event. The driver later explained he had simply reached down for a bottle of water and lost control of the van. Stupid, yes, but even he was a victim. I did not sleep for weeks after that event. I was burdened with guilt about not being to help or protect
those children. My shield and armor failed to protect them or myself.

Still, the one little girl under the van did survive, and from time to time, when I think back to that day, I recall the feel of her heart beat on my hand.
In life I have learned that even when you think you know someone really well, you may just discover that they’re not who you thought they were and maybe you’ll find out that you don’t know them at all. I learned this in an incident that I had with an ex-boyfriend. It all began when I was looking for my birthday gift, the expensive Gucci watch that my father had bought me for my birthday. It was the only thing I was really looking forward to. It was mid-June and my birthday is in July. I had gotten the gift a month earlier and had picked it out at the jewelry store with my father. Even though I already knew what it was, I decided I was going to save it for my birthday so that I had a great gift to be excited about.

I had been looking for it for several minutes and was beginning to panic. I began rustling through everything and had to force myself to breathe and calm down a few times. How could it have disappeared? I had it in a little hiding place in my closet and had taken it out to admire it only a week earlier. The thoughts and possibilities began to race through my mind. I came across the idea that the only person other than me who knew where it was hidden was lying on my bed. It was my boyfriend and although he was the only one who could of taken it, I pushed that idea out of my head quickly. I couldn’t bear to think that he would do something like that to me when I cared about him so much. So I convinced myself that I had lost it and that eventually it would pop up and I would then feel guilty for thinking those terrible thoughts about him.

Two weeks later, our house was broken into and my mother’s valuables were stolen. The thief had broken in the same way that I always snuck in whenever I was locked out of the house. The thought that Kyle was the only person who knew of my secret entrance popped into my head, but again I wouldn’t let myself believe that he would do something so heartless and low. Kyle came to my house that night unusually jumpy and acting strange.

“Babe? Let’s go. The cops are looking for me,” he said. “My grandma just told me that they went to her house asking if I was there. She said they put out a warrant for my arrest for a probation violation because I never met with my PO.”

I was becoming suspicious. “I guess but I should wait until she makes the police report before I leave,” I replied.

I looked real hard at him and into his eyes; I was looking for a change in expression or a flicker of guilt so that I could determine whether he had been the one who broke in. He gave me a look of shock and confusion.
“What? Why is she making a police report?” Kyle asked with concern.

“Cause someone broke in the house and stole some stuff and so she called the cops and they said they’d be here in an hour or so,” I told him.

“Oh, that’s messed up,” he responded. Well, I’ll come back for you later then but I’d better go before they come cause I don’t want to get arrested for violation of probation and be sent back to jail. I’ll come back then.”

I watched him drive away and was left wondering if he was just a good liar or if I was just out of my mind for thinking it might have been him.

Later that night he did come back and he told me to go with him and cruise. It was then that I noticed him being very flagrant with money. I also noticed the fat wad of twenty-dollar bills that he kept pulling out of his pocket. I started thinking about my moms missing credit card and started to feel an urgency to find out the truth. We were hanging out at his friends house, a fellow drug dealer. My eyes were beginning to water from the heavy cloud of cigarette smoke irritating my contact lenses. I was casually watching the game of darts that was between the owner of the house and one of his chronic customers that liked to hang around to get turned on to free dope.

Kyle was talking to a friend of his who wanted to buy some ice. Kyle was digging through his pockets to find the plastic bags so he could give him a $50 bag. He was having a hard time finding them so he began emptying his pockets and dumping the contents onto the table. A familiar item caught my eye; It looked like it was a black leather carrying case that held my mothers credit cards. I shot out of my seat and walked over to the table and snatched the case. I opened it up and sure enough the cards read “Kristina I. Mullen.” My heart sank and my blood boiled. Kyle shot out of his chair and snatched it away from me.

“What the hell is wrong with you Kyle? Are crazy? I can’t believe this!” I screamed.

Kyle frowned and said softly, “I’m sorry, babe. I’m gonna just use the money to buy dope and then I’ll pay it all back plus interest. Please don’t tell your mom.”

“She’s gonna find out,” I told him, “or the cops will anyway. Give me back the cards, now.”

He looked at me but gave no sign that he was going to give the credit cards back. I ran out of the house and down the street to the payphones by the bus stop next to Salt Lake Shopping Center. My heart was beating so fast and hard that I could feel my head.
throbbing. I dialed my home number and noticed how badly my hands were shaking. I kept looking back towards the house I had just run out of and was fearfully looking to see Kyle running towards me. I was sure he knew exactly why I was running, to call my mother so I could go home and I’d surely tell her what he did. I turned my back to the house as I heard my mother pick up the phone.

“Hello.” Her voice sounded worried and sad. “Mom, I know who it was,” I said with urgency.

“Steffani, what are you talking about? Where are you? Are you okay?”

“Mom, just listen to me. Call all your credit cards and report them stolen. Look, I will call you later…”

A hand reached out and turned me around. I hung up the phone and stood there in fear. I knew it was Kyle, I just didn’t know what he was going to do.

“Who the hell were you talking to?” Kyle thundered. “You called your mom didn’t you? Didn’t I tell you not to tell anyone where you or I am?”

“I didn’t,” I wailed. “I called her but I didn’t even get to say anything to her before you came and I hung up.”

“From now on just don’t call your mom or anyone else. I don’t want any one to know where I am. I’ll make the money back and give it to her okay, just don’t make me have to hurt you. Steff, sometimes you make me so mad that I just want to wring your neck!”

Kyle came towards me, I stepped back and slammed into the payphone. He grabbed my neck with his two hands and he began to squeeze it tightly. I stayed calm because I wanted him to continue. I was hoping that someone nearby would notice and call the police. Nobody did notice, and he eventually let go and began apologizing and hugging me. At this point I felt numb. I was so confused, hurt, angry, and afraid all at the same time that I was just empty. I didn’t know how to react. I stood there while he hugged me and gazed at the pavement. I studied the little rocks and their jagged little edges. A car whizzed past us and sent several rocks skipping along the road. I felt as though Kyle was the car, speeding through my life without a thought about who or what was in his path just concerned with traveling to his next destination. I was the little rock, disturbed and tossed from my place with no thought at all.

“Let’s go,” Kyle said as he grabbed me and pulled me along. I was in such a daze
that I didn’t know what to say or have the coherence to argue.

We went back to his friend’s house and he made arrangements to use a car and to have someone rent him a hotel room for three days. Everything was like a dull dream. I just heard mumbling and was so mixed up that I couldn’t even focus on comprehending the words being spoken. I remember Kyle telling me that we were leaving and to get up. We walked to an aquamarine colored Acura Integra, which I knew was stolen, and he opened the passenger door and told me get in. I could tell by the look on his face that he had been smoking a lot of ice at the house before we left. His eyes were large and round as though he was high and they kept darting around to be aware of everything going on.

We drove in silence to the Ala Moana Hotel; a friend had rented him a room there for three days. We got into the hotel lobby and went to the elevator. We got off at the fifth floor and he directed me to the room. He opened the door and put my bags of clothing down on the carpet. I looked around; it was a typical hotel room. It was a room with a single bed and a bathroom to the left of me. I was relieved to see the big bed because I felt extremely drained and exhausted at the events that had taken place in that crazy day. Kyle sat down on the chair in front of the bed and was unwrapping his glass pipe from an eyeglass pouch that he used to carry it in. I changed into a pair of shorts and a T-shirt while he dumped a bag of ice into the pipe and pulled out a torch lighter. I sat down on the bed, across from him, and watched him in disgust. He held the pipe and rocked it side to side and inhaled for a several seconds while lighting it with the lighter. As he let go of the lighter he cooled the pipe on a wet rag that had been set on the table. There was a scorching sound similar to when a hot frying pan is placed under cold water. I looked at his face as he released a massive cloud of smoke. The smoke hid his face from mine and slowly cleared. As it cleared I looked into his eyes and saw absolutely nothing. It was though he wasn’t even a person anymore. They say eyes are the windows to the soul and I looked into the window and saw nothing but a massive hole of darkness. He held the pipe in my direction and offered me a hit.

“Nah, I’m gonna sleep,” I told him. “Aren’t you gonna sleep at all? How long you been up for anyway?”

“No need sleep. I gave that up a long time ago. I quit sleeping is a bad habit,” he said as he laughed sarcastically. “Hmm... I think I’m going on six days already.” He told me as he picked up the pipe. I watched him smoke like an obsessed zombie. He took hit after hit until I drifted off into sleep to the sounds of the pipe cooling.

I woke up nine or ten hours later alone in the hotel room. I sat there for a while and my eyes rested on the room phone. I picked up the phone and attempted to call my mother.
A lady answered with a warm and friendly voice, “Front desk, how can I help you?” “Can I make local calls?” I asked weakly. “Well, you’d need to come down to the lobby and pay a fifty dollar deposit so you can use the phone.” “Oh, okay. Thanks.”

I sat there digging through my purse, I had about thirty dollars so I decided to try and use the pay phone. I put the money into my pocket and found that I had no room key. So if I left I wouldn’t be able to come back in. I sat down to think about what I should do and I suddenly heard the door open. It was Kyle and he looked even more worn out than when I had gone to sleep.

“Did you sleep till now?” He asked.

“Yeah.” I replied.

“Well, I gotta go back out for a little while. Okay?” He said hurriedly.

“Actually, I need a room key,” I said, hoping he wouldn’t question why.

“For what?” Kyle asked.

“I’m hungry and I can’t leave to get food because I’ll be locked out of the room,” I quickly lied.

“Here.” He tossed me the card that you insert into the door lock to open the room. “I’ll get a second key from the front desk. Hey, you better be here when I get back.”

I didn’t answer. He left and I waited until I thought he was gone before I decided to go downstairs to make my phone call. I grabbed the key and headed towards the lobby. I asked the lady at the front desk who was wearing a bright pink muumuu if she knew where the payphones were.

“Sure, right around the other side of this desk.” I peered over at where she was directing me. It was right in front of the glass sliding doors that lead to the street.

“Are there any others in the building?”

“Well, if you go through that door back there and follow the hall down to housekeeping you’ll see a payphone back there,” she responded with a smile.

“Thanks,” I said as I walked towards the door. I rushed down until I saw the payphone. I called my house and I listened to the phone ring about three times. At that
moment I saw Kyle coming towards me and I heard my mother answer the phone. He stood there in front of me just leaning over the payphone and listening.

“Hello?” My mother said again.

Trying to think quickly I said, “Hello? Nicole, what's up?”

“Steffani? It's me your mommy, not Nicole.” I was so nervous that Kyle would figure out what I was trying to do before my mom did.

“Nicole, it's me Steff,” I said. At this point my mom caught on.

“Steffani, he's there right now isn't he?”

I could only say, “Yeah.”

“Steffani, where are you?” I stayed silent, knowing that Kyle was listening and waiting for me to make a mistake.

“Steffani, do you want to come home but he won't let you?” She asked with concern and fear.

“You could do this to me?!” I screamed.

“Do what?” Kyle replied, as if he truly had no idea what I was talking about.

“Look, you can stop bullshitting me cause I know you stole the ring from my mom and took my watch too,” I exploded.

A look of rage came over him and he was clenching his jaw and gritting his teeth. He came towards me and I backpedaled as he threw me hard against the sliding door of the closet, which knocked the door off of its track. I looked at him with defiance but then quickly looked down to avoid another outburst. He walked into the bathroom and I stared at him.

“Whoa,” I said, “You better take a good look at yourself in the mirror, cause you're
losin’ it big time. You’re so not well.” I turned around and he slammed the door shut, a second later I heard the shower running.

I quickly got up and put all my belongings that were laying around into my bags. I gathered all my things and rushed out of the hotel room. I looked over my shoulder repeatedly, afraid he’d come charging down the hall at any moment. I pressed the elevator button and it seemed to take forever to come. Each second felt like minutes but the elevator finally came. I got inside and frantically pushed the button to close the door. I got down to the lobby and headed to Ala Moana Shopping Center so that he’d have a hard time finding me.

As I was leaving the hotel, I noticed several police cars and uniformed officers as well as what looked to be plain clothes officers as well. I was wearing a hat so I just kept my head down and walked to the mall. As I reached the mall though I began to feel sorry for Kyle. For what reason I still don’t know. Anyway, I decided to call him and warn him about the police but the phone just rang over and over. I hung up and at that point I decided I was going home. I walked to Mcully Shopping Center and called a taxi from there. The cab operator said a taxi would be there right away. I called the hotel room again and it rang a few times, suddenly someone picked up the phone. I was about to blurt out, “The cops are downstairs you’d better get out of there,” when I heard a man say, “Detective Harris, HPD.” I panicked and hung up the phone. Whoa, he had already been arrested.

A few seconds later I saw my taxi pulling up and I picked my bags up and began walking towards the street so I could just hop into the taxi. Just as I was reaching the taxi a car came speeding behind and cut the taxi driver off. To my horror, it was Kyle in the stolen Acura!

“Get in!” Kyle said. I hesitated and the taxi driver gave me a puzzled look. “Don’t make me get out and drag you in, get inside the car!” He roared. I got in and he took off speeding down the road. Kyle was wound up and huffing and puffing as though he had just sprinted a mile. He began talking in this excited and amazed voice. I was just afraid that he knew I was planning on going home just as he had pulled up.

“Holy crap, you would not believe what the hell just happened. I had just gotten out of the shower and got dressed when I heard a knock at the door. I looked out of the peep hole and saw cops along with hotel security right out side. I put on my shoes and they were banging on the door. So I jumped off the balcony and ran to the car and dug out. Whoa, that was nuts! But shit, I forgot the damn dope!”

“Well at least you got away,” I said.
The Stranger

Stephanie Mullen

"Ha! Screw that, we're going to Salt Lake for a little while and then I'm going back. I gotta get my dope."

"What? Kyle, are you stupid? I called the room and a fucking detective answered the phone. You know it's a trap and they're just waiting for you to actually be dumb enough to go back there. I can't believe the dope is that important to you." He didn't respond and we rode in silence the rest of the way to Salt Lake. I waited in the stolen car while he went into his friend's house for about 15-20 minutes. He came back into the car and started to head back to Waikiki.

I couldn't help but say, "I can't believe you are going back. It seems like you want to get arrested. I mean, isn't your freedom worth way more than whatever you left there?"

"You like irritate me?" Kyle asked. "How's about I stop the car right now and you can get out, I no like hear your mouth right now!"

I decided to stay quiet since we were driving on the freeway and didn't want to be forced to get out in the middle of the freeway. Kyle was transformed into this evil maniac and I felt he was a total stranger to me now. Who knew what he was capable of? I certainly didn't feel brave enough to test his limits at that point. Prior to this crazy incident, Kyle had never put his hands on me and suddenly in the disastrous course of two days he had strangled me and threw me around and didn't seem to feel very guilty or sorry about it at all. I kept thinking to myself, is this the real Kyle that was hiding underneath the act that I had seen for several months? It was kind of hard to believe this monster was the same person that I had been involved with for all that time.

We got near the Ala Moana Hotel and he pulled into a back road that had a hidden alley that led directly to the hotel. I still couldn't believe he really wanted to go back in there, I mean that sounded crazy! He got out of the car and slammed the door. He walked away from without looking at me or saying a word, I guess because we were both angry at each other. Although I was angry and a large part of me hated him, there was still a part of me that cared for him. I was relieved to think that he would be arrested but I did wish that he had at least said goodbye.

I was very nervous and uncomfortable waiting in that stolen car. I was worried about the cops seeing me in the stolen car so I reclined my seat all the way back. I looked at the time, I told myself that if Kyle didn't return in fifteen minutes that he had been arrested for sure. I waited and stared up at the roof of the car. It was a dirty blue fabric that was stained and had several holes from cigarette burns. The fabric had once been tightly fastened to the roof of the car but over the years had begun to sag and droop from the roof the same way it does off of an elderly person. I studied it as the minutes ticked by; fifteen,
twenty, then thirty minutes passed. I knew he had most definitely been arrested but I just sat there feeling dumb and not knowing what to do next.

Eventually there was a knock at the window and I instinctively opened the car door. Standing in front of me was a tall African-American man wearing denim shorts and a T-shirt. He pulled something that was hanging from his neck out of his shirt and revealed a police badge.

"Are you Steffani Mullen?" he asked calmly.

"Mm-hmm" I answered.

"Would you mind stepping out of the car and coming with me to answer some questions?" I got out of the car and followed him into a police vehicle.

He drove to the back of the hotel where about five other police cars and officers were waiting. I peered around trying to spot Kyle. My eyes landed on him, he was handcuffed. He was just staring at the ground and an officer was beside him while a detective was questioning him. When he finally looked up and met eyes with me I tried desperately to spot an emotion. I saw a look of guilt, pain, but mostly a sense of shame. I couldn’t stop the tears from coming. I was relieved yet it was a very painful and tragic time.

Now, it has been about three years since Kyle was arrested. He is still in jail as I write this and he has been there for three years. I correspond with him every once in a while but I am no longer that naïve girl that I once was. I have learned that trust needs to be earned and that people have the ability to turn on you and transform and you need to be aware of it when it happens. I have been able to finally forgive him and I know that he has paid for what he has done with three years of his life but no matter how much time passes, I will never be able to forget the pain that he has put me through. This hardest part of all of this is trying not to let this experience get in the way of new relationships and trying to develop a deep sense of trust with someone again. I have mainly learned though that it is important to follow your head and not your heart.
Forget About Sticking Tongue
Christina Norris

Never stick your tongue out at your mom and think you can get away with it. A long time ago, before I started school, before I knew what a “real” playmate was, and before I knew that I DIDN’T know everything; I played on the swing set that we had in the front yard for hours and hours. The swing set was about fifty feet away from our house and you could easily see the porch from it. The blue and white swing set consisted of a slide, a monkey bar, and two swings. The swing has always been my favorite. Sitting on the cracked plastic seat and wrapping my fingers tightly around the rusted chains I would propel myself higher and higher off the ground. As I got higher I could see the porch, then it would disappear behind the bushes . . . porch, no porch, porch, no porch. I loved being up so high, like no one could touch me. I could get lost in the world of imagination for hours. Flying (or so it seemed) next to the birds with butterflies in my tummy was the most wonderful feeling.

One late afternoon, just before it was time for dinner, my mom came out on the porch. She called me inside to wash up and set the table. I thought my mom was the tallest lady in the world and I remember hoping that I would get to be as tall as her. Little did I know she was only 5’4”, if that at all. After having four children, she had a nice little pillow pooch for a stomach. It was always the best place to lay my head. Naturally tan, she didn’t need to be in the sun long to get dark brown. The skin on her face was so smooth except for the crinkles at the corner of her eyes and mouth from laughing and smiling too much. I know she had been in the yard under the hot sun all day because she had on her scrubby “work” clothes. He wild black hair was stuffed under an old beat up hat. If you didn’t know any better you might mistake her for a young yard boy. Even though she wore her flower print garden gloves, her hands were always rough with calluses; however, they exerted caring, hard work, and discipline. While swinging, I had seen her wave me inside more than once, but I continued to ignore her.

I had been enjoying myself on the swing and not wanting to break my happy little bubble I did the unthinkable because I thought I was untouchable. With my heart beating fast, I stuck my tongue out at my mom. Let me tell you, I have never seen anyone move so fast. You know Superman, right? He has the faster than a speeding train jingle. Well, my mom blew him away! As she jumped off the porch, her hat fell off her head. She came towards me with electrocuted hair. She had already taken off her gloves and I knew what that meant. I was about to get spanked. She came at me like a crazy woman. Her eyes gleamed with madness. My mind was racing but everything seemed to go in slow motion. Should I slow down the swing, jump off and make a run for it? Should I swing higher so she couldn’t reach me? How long could I stay away from my mom? It didn’t
matter because my decision was made for me. I was down off that swing faster than I could blink an eye. I started pleading for my life. I promised never to do it again. I don’t think my mom heard me though. Her left hand gripped my shoulder and her right rained down whacks on my okole. I could smell hours of sweat mixed with dirt each time her hand came down. My knees wanted to fold to mess up her target range. How much longer was this going to last? My play clothes were no barrier for the whacks followed by a stinging sensation that happened every few seconds. Tears streamed down my face and tasted of salt and guilt. I knew I shouldn’t have stuck out my tongue. My mom didn’t deserve my disobedience.

From that day forward I never stuck out my tongue. I didn’t stick it out in jest, or for any reason. It’s taken me a while to realize that I can and not have my mom next to me in a heartbeat. For the longest time I had a phobia of licking ice cream cones and sticking out my tongue in goofy pictures. Now I get ice cream in cones only and I take numerous goofy pictures. My mom will never know how much of an impact those ten minutes had on my entire life. I learned a very important lesson that day. It was a lesson about obeying your elders and respecting what they say – and if you decide not to, DON’T stick tongue.
Daddy’s Little Girl
Jessica Novak

I’ll never forget the night I saw my dad as a real person. Someone just like me in many ways. Someone who had struggled as I had to find his place in the world. So much hope, so much expectation and so much uncertainty. So much to look forward to.

The night that my father became more to me than just “my dad” was an extremely cold November night. The wind felt like it was burning tiny holes into my skin. I could no longer feel my hands or feet and I imagined they were blue anyway. We had just finished with a particularly grueling church service and despite the cold, I was glad to be outside rather than in the church building. I’d had enough “holy-rollin’” for one night. My dad and I hustled across the parking lot as quickly as possible, fighting against the wind that was blowing us back. I looked up at the stars. It was such a clear night and the stars shone like millions of little spotlights in the sky. I could hear my feet crunching on the gravel beneath me when a huge gust of wind quickly brought me back to reality. Twenty-three. Deer, Arkansas. Church. Nowhere to go.

When I finally reached the van, I flung open the door and threw myself inside. Dad already had the heat cranked up and the warmth was almost instantaneous. I was already chilled to the bone and wondered if I’d ever be warm again.

“We’ll see how long it takes your mother to quit yackin’ tonight.” My dad grumbled. He gave me a small laugh. We both knew that my mom could talk to anyone about anything for any length of time. My mother has a true talent for communication. Even though she can drive me crazy, I love the woman to death. We’ve always been close.

My father and I were a different story. We were polite and pleasant to each other for the most part. We’d settled into some kind of arrangement. I didn’t really bother him and he didn’t really bother me. We rarely discussed anything more than general superficialities like, “How was your day?” “Good. Yours?” “Good.” I don’t mean to make him sound unconcerned or uncaring. He was always there if I needed any money or needed any help with changing a tire. He’d go out of his way to help me move or fix something I’d broken. For matters of emotions or feelings though, I always went to Mom. Dad and I just couldn’t relate to each other that way. For the most part we really did get along. Of course, during my teen years we hit a few bumps. I pushed any and all buttons that I could; tried to see how much I could get away with.

As I hit my late teens and early twenties, we seemed to grow even farther apart.
I had gotten involved with a guy that every one had warned me against. Not just Mom and Dad but even my friends. But since I knew everything at the time, I thought I could handle it. When the inevitable struck and the relationship crashed around me, Mom and Dad rescued me. What had been a ravine between me and my father had become a canyon. I could give you all the typical stuff, “he just didn’t understand me” or “we were from two different generations and we just saw things differently.” The cold hard truth is that I never made any effort to get to know my father as a person or to try to build a strong relationship with him. I had gotten so wrapped up in the soap opera of my own life that I’d allowed us to become completely distant. The worst part about it was that it had become comfortable. I had always secretly longed to be “a daddy’s girl.” For him to protect me and be the one I ran to. Sure, he’d always been able to change a flat tire for me, but I would have driven around on the rim in exchange for a close relationship with him.

“That woman could gab till the cows come home. Literally.” I was snapped quickly out of my reverie and became aware that my dad was still in the vehicle with me. The warmth radiating from the heaters and the sound of the wind outside lulled me into my thoughts. I turned to look at my father. Smooth, shiny black hair. He was so proud that at almost fifty, he had not a single grey hair. His wide glasses hid dark eyes, and his sharp jaw line and pointed nose gave him the appearance of hard man. I stared at him for several long seconds until I was no longer seeing the hardness of his features, but of the five o’clock shadow and the little lines around his eyes and on his forehead. His face became one I didn’t know, like I was staring at a complete stranger. I saw a man that had struggled with life and had experienced way more than I had; someone who was not the unapproachable man I had known all my life. A man who had been through many things, but had always found a way to keep going. I wanted to know him. I wanted his advice on how to pick the pieces of my life up and start again.

“Where were you when you were my age?” The words were out of my mouth before I knew it. Too late to take them back even if I’d wanted to. And I didn’t. I needed to know. He gave me an odd look as if trying to figure out why I would even be interested. His face softened and he let out a long sigh.

“Well, let’s see. I guess about your age or somewhere close I would have been in Vietnam.” I knew my father had served in Vietnam but that was all I knew. He never talked about it to us kids, and what little I did know was from overheard conversations. I listened in one day when some of Dad’s war buddies had come over and I could tell by their hushed tones that they were discussing what had happened to them. I could tell from the intensity in their voices that this was a conversation that I should not interrupt, so I sat quiet and unseen. At the time, I didn’t understand much of what I was hearing, but I knew enough to know that it had not been a pleasant experience. I remember words like “fire, bombs, and
Daddy's Little Girl

Jessica Novak

died."

A few years later, I had stumbled across a photo album that had been shoved way into the back of a closet. When I flipped it open, I couldn’t believe the contents. It was an album of war filled with photos that my father had taken while he was in Vietnam. There were pictures of mangled bodies in a heap, houses on fire and piles of dog tags lying on the ground. When I told my mother what I had seen in the album, she had told me that album was Dad’s way of remembering, and it was best if I left it alone. When I got brave enough to try to look at the album again, I went back to the spot in the closet. The book was gone and in its place was a family photo album. I never mentioned it again.

As I looked at my father, I thought back to those pictures. It was hard to imagine that my father had been in a place like that or had taken part in anything so gruesome.

“How long were you there?” I asked quietly.

“About eight months.” He turned and looked out the window. “Seemed like eight years” he whispered.

“What was it like?” I asked, hoping I hadn’t pushed my luck. I wanted him to just keep talking. Again, he looked at me, but this time it was as if he was looking through me. Looking out somewhere past the window of the van into the endless darkness. Very slowly he began to speak.

“I don’t even know where to begin. I try so hard to forget, but it’s always there. Just waiting to pop up. I still see some things so clearly. It was the same thing, day in day out. Walk and shoot. We walked for miles through swamps and jungles. Our clothes were always soaked. Our socks would rot right off of our feet. I was always hungry. Our rations were tasteless and sometimes we had to eat while we were walking. Just eating enough to keep going. I don’t remember ever sleeping. We always had to keep our eyes open to every movement and our ears tuned into every little sound. At first all I heard was gunshots and the sound of bombs from planes over head. After awhile, I was able to tune those sounds out. I didn’t even hear them anymore. I never thought I’d be as used to gunfire as I was to the sound of a television.”

I watched him and listened silently. I was afraid to breath or move. Afraid he’d stop talking but afraid he’d continue. I don’t think he even realized I was still there. He was lost in a trance of remembering things he’d long ago tried to bury in his mind.

“I never planned for the day ahead of me. I was never sure that I’d survive through the next hour let alone the day. I started every day knowing it could be my last. I never
made any friends, and I never talked to too many people. I saw people die all around me
every day. I suppose it was inevitable that I was eventually shot. It didn’t hurt as much
as I thought it would and compared to most, I got off pretty easy. My wound was just in
the leg. They sent me home a few weeks later. I was so glad to be home but it seemed like
everything had changed. I had changed.” A loud bang on the window yanked us back to
reality.

“Let me in! It’s freezing out here!!” My mom yelled at us. Dad gave me a small
smile and unlocked the door for my mother. In an instant he seemed to have forgotten our
conversation. He’d shut it behind some small door in his memory. I wondered if I’d ever
be able to open that door again.

“Well it’s about time! So, what’s the latest gossip among the ladies tonight?” I
heard my father ask my mother.

I didn’t hear the rest of their conversation. I was replaying what my father had told
me over and over in my mind. I thought about how things could have been very different.
My father could have been one of the thousands of young men who didn’t make it home
from Vietnam. Even though he was forever emotionally scarred, he had been one of the
lucky ones who’d been able to come home and start again. I thought about all that was
taken from him, all that could have been taken from me. In that moment, I realized that I
might never have had the opportunity to know this man who had been through so much but
still had managed to keep going. My father took on a different role in my life that night. He
became someone real. And I was one step closer to being “daddy’s little girl.”
Kaena Point is located on the northwestern tip of Oahu. On a clear day one can make out the faint image of Kauai far off in the distance. This region of the island seems to be the most isolated due to its inaccessibility through normal modes of transportation. The few ways to get to Kaena Point are through mountain biking, four-wheel drive vehicles, and the old fashioned hike. This inherent inaccessibility seems to imprint a feeling of loneliness that I have not felt anywhere else on Oahu.

My favored mode of transportation is to mountain bike the trail up to Kaena Point. As I take my bicycle off the car rack I feel the loneliness creep up on me. Above I catch the w-shaped silhouette of a single iwa bird, gracefully and patiently patrolling the skies. I am almost oblivious to the sound of the crashing waves just 40 yards off shore of me; the iwa bird has me in its grasp, both it and I are here, lone sentinels at the trail heading to Kaena Point.

Today, the skies are overcast, making the ground bright enough to cast shadows but grey enough overhead to make me feel the uneasiness of the solitude. I put on the rest of my gear and I’m ready to head out on the trailhead. If it weren’t for the pounding surf in the distance, the boulders and trailhead would seem as if they belonged on some other barren planet. As I pedal to the metal gate, I am reminded that this is not Mars by the distant crawl of a four-wheel drive truck strategically making its way towards me.

The metal gate is anked by several large boulders on each side to keep motorized vehicles off the trailhead, but it doesn’t stop the metal juggernauts from traversing around the gate to blaze their own way onto the trail. I slide my body through the gate and instantly I am in the realm of the Kaena Point trail.

The vehicle is closer to me, close enough that I see the people in the truck looking haggard and worn, as if they were in some battle. I wave to them and I get a tired reply and they respond, ”What’s up bra! Only you and some other guys fishing up here. Have fun riding!” I smile as they pass me knowing that’s pretty much all the talking I’ll do for the next two hours I’m on the trail.

“Click”- As I step into my pedals, my legs are tight with anticipation of the ride but I must conserve my energy for the ride out. This part of the trail looks as if it were an unfinished road of some sort, no asphalt, and just tightly packed rocks with a few large stones thrown in for good measure. The smell of the ocean is sweet and thick; I can almost taste it due to the crashing waves filling the air with the thick salty haze. The vibration of
the rocks against my bike makes my hands tingle at first, then I become numb as I get used
to the bouncing about the trail.

The trail is damp with recent rains and it’s starting to cake onto my tires. The tiny
flecks of mud and rocks hit my frame and make sort of music to accompany me on my
lonesome journey.

Historically, Kaena Point “is probably best known as the place from which souls
departed from this earth” (Sterling and Summers 92). This area of Oahu has been the
location of many legends and myths in ancient Hawaiian culture. The name has several
meanings, commonly it is known as “the end” but Mary Pukui states, “Ka ena—red hot.
Kaena was one the relatives of Pele who came with her from Kahiki and decided to stay
at this place. That is why she visited this area, to see her cousin” (qtd. in Sterling and
Summers 93).

As I head towards the end of my journey, I see Pohaku o Kauai in the distance. This
rock is the center of many stories as well:

“It was at Kaena Point that Maui attempted to unite Kauai and Oahu. According to
some legends after stationing himself on the western extremity of Oahu……from
which the island of Kauai is clearly visible on a bright day, Maui cast his wonderful
hook, Mana-ia-ka-lani, far out into the ocean that it might engage itself in the
foundations of Kauai. When he felt that it had taken a good hold, mighty tug at the
line. A huge boulder, the Pohaku o Kauai, fell at his feet.” (Sterling and Summers
92)

The end of my ride compels me to wonder, did the same force that drove Maui
to pull Kauai and Oahu together bring me to the Pohaku o Kauai? Alone I ponder this
question, along with the solitary iwa bird, still circling overhead, as I prepare for the ride
back to the car, back to the end of loneliness.

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Sterling, Elspeth and Catherine Summers. Sites of Oahu. Honolulu: Bishop Museum
Snap. With a gentle touch and a firm hand, I pressed the button on my beautiful silver Olympus camera. Snap. Once the picture was taken, the lens retreated back into the camera and a steady internal clicking sound told me that the film was rewinding and that I had taken twenty-four more pictures of my friends. For weeks I had irritated them with the snap of my camera, always lurking on the side ready for the next great shot. My mission was concise: I needed to have an amazing senior page for my high school yearbook.

I knew what types of pictures I wanted; they had to be clear, vivid, colorful, and illustrate the personality of the person. I was diligent about bringing my Olympus Stylus Epic to the weekend parties, after school skate sessions and lunch hour; my camera was always the only one present. Week after week, Costco was bombarded with my rolls of film, which were to be carefully developed and distributed for pick up in the “S” section.

By November, I had proudly accumulated sixteen red and white Costco folders of pictures. Conscious of the approaching due date, I made a call to my Uncle Matt. Uncle Matt owns HonBlue, a top local printing company that manufactures Midweek coupons to Pizza Hut boxes and especially my father’s blue prints from his architect company. I asked for a family favor.

“I want to see if you can make my senior page for me.”

A few nights later, I sat at his dinning room table and explained my layout sketch to him. On an eight and a half by eleven inch computer paper, I had carefully drawn perfect squares. They covered the paper like an all white chessboard. A picture was to be digitally inserted into each little square. As Uncle Matt thumbed through my 336 pictures he laughed at every one.

“There are a lot of tongues in these pictures,” he said. I nodded proudly with a grin on my face,

“Yup, I guess so,” I responded.

The next step was to pick and choose the most comical and hilarious pictures and crop them. I lay a taped piece of tracing paper over the pictures and meticulously drew squares onto the paper leaving an overlay which would indicate to the technician where to digitally cut my pictures. Once scanned, I mapped out where each shot would go; I was very particular because I was confident each one had a rightful place on the grid. A final
copy went into HonBlue, and a week later, Uncle Matt dropped off a professional cardstock copy of what would be my senior page in the 2003 Kalani High School yearbook. Along with my final copy was a post-it from the technician who had made it; it read, “There are a lot of tongues in these pictures, I counted eleven.”

On November 21, 2002 I handed in my folder to the yearbook committee and awaited the end of the year. In the following six months so much would happened but I had “broken up” with my Olympus; after such extensive use I needed a break before I snapped. Two weeks before the senior’s last day the yearbooks arrived. Excited murmurs and the flipping of pages sounded throughout the campus. I went straight for the last section which contained the senior pages. I found my page among my friends’. It was an eight and a half by eleven inch paper divided into sixty three perfect black and white three by three centimeter squares. Looking up at me were twenty nine of my beloved friends, countless smiles and eleven tongues.

I received so many compliments from students, teachers, and people from other high schools, and though they were much appreciated, I was constantly asked the same questions, “Why are you hardly in any of the shots?” or “Why didn’t you put your name on it?” My answer was always fervent, “Because I wanted it to be different, not just a bunch of cut up pictures glued to a paper. I wanted the focus not to be on me, but on me and my friends.” People didn’t really grasp why I had paid $120 for a senior page when it wasn’t recognizable as mine, but it made perfect sense to me, and I soon realized that even then I didn’t understand the full meaning of these pictures.

Recently, I had my graduation party at Hanaki restaurant. I was surprised with a thirty four by forty inch laminated blow up of my page. It was in full color, and each once tiny square was now almost four and a half inches. My eyes watered at the sight. It made quite a conversation piece in the restaurant. My elderly relatives gasped at the wildness of my friends; I laughed because those were the ones I considered to be the non-explicit pictures.

Carefully I brought it home without bumping any of the corners, and once in my room, I really took the time to examine it. Willis was doing the shaka. Marisa was licking Chad’s nipple ring. Soliven was bent over eating a candy bar out of his own lap. Craig was as handsome as ever. Taryn and Hayly had whipped cream all over their lips. Matt was sucking on a seven inch banana. I had seen these pictures countless times but everything seemed different. Since November of 2002 so much has changed. I was seventeen in the pictures, a year younger than I am now. Kris was not present and neither was Anthony L. or Anthony P.; they are now extremely close to me. But more than that, ten of my girlfriends have recently left for college, four guys did the same. I am no longer close with Justin who used to be my best friend; he will leave for Portland State University in two
Sixty Three Perfect Squares
Cheryl Sakai

weeks. Taryn’s dad passed away. And in April, Kaniela, my “baby” died suddenly and tragically right after his eighteenth birthday. My page began my senior year and ended it. Each of the sixty three pictures is a reminder of a moment that I can never relive again. It is a statement of who I am. Even its organization symbolizes my orderly personality. My senior page captures a great time in my life when we all felt young, wild and free. It was before the graduations, before the good-byes and before the deaths. It still brings me to tears when I see it.
The Longest Month of My Life
Erin Yamane

My story begins on Tuesday, October 8, 2002. It was a beautiful sunny day and all was good. I spent the day running around with my good friend, Kenny, who was moving to Seattle. We took Kenny’s car to Matson to have it shipped, and then we went shopping for “omiyage”, the term us local Japanese use for the gifts you take to family and friends. We were done shopping around 1:00 p.m. and were starving. We decided to go to Hale Vietnam for some crispy, golden brown spring rolls and a big bowl of delicious hot Pho. After our yummy lunch, I took Kenny to his in-laws house in Halawa Heights where he would spend his last night in Hawaii. We said our good-byes, hugs and kisses were exchanged, and I left feeling sad because I knew I would miss him.

That night my stomach started to hurt and I just thought something I ate didn’t agree with me or more likely, that I was catching the stomach flu. I catch everything that goes around. In the morning of Wednesday, October 9, 2002, my stomach still hurt and I was feeling nauseous so my husband, John, called his doctor, Luigi Terminella, who prescribed some medication that John picked up for me before he went to work. I took the medication and felt a little better so I turned on the T.V. in my dark room and lay in my cozy, warm bed holding a pillow and Sammy, my cuddly stuffed dog, to my stomach. John called later that morning to check on me.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Better.” I said, “I think the medicine is working.”

“That’s good. I’ll call you later and see what you want me to bring home for dinner.” John was good about that. If I was too busy with homework, tired or not feeling well, he’d always pick up dinner. By the afternoon, however, I started to feel really bad. I was nauseous and had the kind of chills that make you sweat and give you goose bumps at the same time. My stomach ached, but it was not a stomach flu ache. It was much more intense. I called my husband around 5:30 p.m. as I was sitting on the floor holding the waste basket and buckled over in pain.

“Please come home. I think something is wrong. I need to go to the hospital.” I said as the tears ran down my face.

“I’m leaving now. I’ll call Dr. Terminella and let him know.” John said as I dropped the phone.
By the time John got home I could barely stand up and the pain was unbearable. He rushed me to the Queen’s Medical Center Emergency Room and I remember the car ride felt as though there were hundreds of speed bumps in the road, each one causing more and more excruciating pain. It seemed to take forever. We finally got to the ER and I remember some guy with a white shirt putting me in a wheelchair and taking me to a room where some woman started asking me questions. My husband wasn’t there and I was scared. I couldn’t concentrate and I was crying because the pain was so intense. It felt like someone had stuck a huge fork deep inside me and was turning it around and around twisting my insides. John finally came in and was rubbing my back and I remember him answering some of the lady’s questions and that is all I remember of that.

The next thing I recall is waking up in a dimly lit room with lots of machines on both sides of me, all of which were connected to me by skinny tubes and big tubes and a bunch of wires. There were tubes coming out of my mouth, my nose, my neck, both my arms, and even from between my legs. It’s really weird to have a big tube coming out of your “shi shi” hole. Must be sort of what men feel like, I guess. I don’t know how they walk around with those things! There were wires stuck to my chest, my neck and my arms. There were I.V. bags hanging off tall metal poles and all kinds of machines with lit up numbers and squiggly lines. I looked around feeling a bit disoriented and I remember seeing my parents and my husband. It was a comforting sight. I thought to myself, “Okay, I’m not alone.” I wondered what happened. I couldn’t remember anything. I was uncomfortable, but thank God the terrible pain was gone.

The room felt so strange and sterile, not like my cozy room at home with photographs of the family at my head and my favorite stuffed animals at my feet. The blanket was just a cold, rough, thin, sheet, not the comfy, warm, thick futon I slept with every night. The hospital bed sat high above the floor and had cold, metal bars on each side. It felt like I was lying on two pieces of wood with a crack in the middle that hurt my back. I tried to move to get more comfortable, but it was difficult with all the tubes and wires. I must have tugged too hard on something because one of the machines started beeping. A nurse came in to rearrange the tubes and the beeping stopped.

“Try not to move around so you won’t pull on anything.” she said.

“Easy for you to say.” I thought. “My back hurts. There’s a crack in the bed and its making my back sore” I said.

She adjusted the bed and brought me more old, dated pillows, but that really didn’t make much of a difference. Everything smelled funny. Not stink or stale, but just different, like they were too clean.
Then I noticed my stomach. It was huge! I looked like I was five months pregnant! I thought, “When did this happen? Was I asleep for that long? Is that why I’m in the hospital? Am I pregnant?” I was tripping.

My mom and dad came over and asked, “How do you feel?”

I said, “I feel better because my stomach doesn’t hurt. What happened?”

My husband, John came to the bedside and asked me, “Don’t you remember?”

I said, “I remember going to the ER and the lady asking me questions and that’s about it.”

He asked, “Do you remember having a CT scan?”

“Nope”, I replied.

“Do you remember saying that your dad and I were trying to kill you?”

“What? I said that?” I was shocked at the thought!

“Yeah, you said you dad and I conspired to kill you. Do you remember saying the aliens were coming?”

“No. I said aliens were coming?” Now I felt really stupid.

“Yeah, you grabbed your sister’s arm really tight and said we have to go quick because the aliens are coming to get us.” We all had a good laugh. “Must be the drugs”, John said.

“So what happened? What’s wrong with me? Am I pregnant?” I asked.

“I hope not. You have pancreatitis.” John replied.

I was afraid to ask, but I had to. “What’s that? What’s pancreatitis?”

John said, “The pancreas is an organ behind your stomach and yours got inflamed. That’s why you were in so much pain. You’re really sick.” He said it very calmly, but I could see the concern and fear in his eyes and I could tell he wasn’t telling me everything.

“You’ve been out for a couple of days now.”
"I’ve been here a couple of days already?" I asked in amazement.

"You’ve been sleeping most of the time, except for when you were freaking out about the aliens and stuff." John joked. He’s like that. Very calm, laid-back and even-keyed with a slightly warped sense of humor.

I think it’s the pain medicine." my mother said in a reassuring voice.

"Don’t worry about anything. You’ll be okay.” said my dad as he leaned over to kiss my forehead. "I love you.” I felt so much better.

I remember the first few days of consciousness my mouth was so dry and I was so thirsty and all they would give me was some ice chips. I kept asking for more and more ice chips and when they refused to give me any more I would get upset. I think I irritated the nurses with my constant requests for ice chips. Except for Nurse Nikki, a cheerful, funny, short girl with a slight Chinese accent. She would always get me my ice chips, even if it was just a couple of pieces.

I remember when my sister, Cari, came to visit me. I asked her, “Can you sneak me a Waiola shaved ice? I really, really want a shaved ice, strawberry.” She said okay, but when she asked the nurse if I could have it, she said, “No. She can’t have anything to eat or drink.”

When the nurse left, I told Cari, “Just sneak it in and I’ll eat it when the nurses aren’t around.” I was terrible. I don’t even know why I wanted a shaved ice because I don’t usually eat shaved ice. Those must have been some mighty powerful pain meds because I sure was acting strange.

My sister told me, “You kept lifting my hospital gown over your head, and saying ‘Weeeee! Weeeee!’ I think you thought you were a flying angel or something”.

My mom added, “Yeah, even when the doctors came in you kept lifting your gown and I had to keep putting your arms down.” (I wasn’t wearing panties). How embarrassing! She also said, “I was amazed at how strong you were. You would just push yourself up without any trouble.”

I don’t remember any of that.

My mother also said that whenever I was about to do something, like sit up or get a blood test or whatever, I would say to myself, “Okay...okay...okay.” I guess I was trying
to convince myself that I could handle it. Now she says she catches herself saying that say before she tees off at golf. That’s too funny!

My best friend, Ann, came and brought me some flowers and a Mylar balloon with sunflowers on it. I couldn’t see very well because they made me take my contact lenses out, and with the affects of the pain medication, the sunflowers looked like huge cockroaches to me. I knew that Ann wouldn’t bring me huge cockroaches because she knows how much I hate cockroaches, but I couldn’t stand to look at the balloon and my mom finally had to take it out of my room. Yup, I was acting strange alright!

The days were long, but the nights were even longer. And the most frustrating thing was just as I was able to fall asleep, which often took a long time, someone would come in to poke me again or take my blood pressure or something and wake me up. It was mostly quiet in the ICU ward, often times too quiet, but now and again I could hear moans or cries from other rooms and a couple of times I knew something really bad had happened in another room because I could see all the nurses scrambling around outside and then no one would be around for a long time. Once in a while I could hear the nurses and doctors talking outside my room, gossiping or hitting on each other. That was pretty funny.

Most of the nurses in the ICU were really friendly and it was funny how they were all into doing some kind of craft like bead or making those yarn leis that are so popular now. I realize now how important a part the nurses play in your recovery and what a tough job they have. Some nurses are more business-like and others have more motherly bedside manners. Those are the ones I really liked because the nurses were the only ones that you could talk to or look to for comfort when everyone else had gone home. I must admit I have such a low tolerance for pain or discomfort and I’m very nervous and insecure in unfamiliar places, especially if I’m by myself.

The drugs took away the pain, but they also made it hard to sleep at times because I would have these weird, terrifying dreams and even when I got up I felt like I was on acid or something because sometimes the room would turn colors or get small, then get big again like in Alice in Wonderland. I finally had to ask the nurse to give me some milder pain killer because I thought I was hallucinating. They gave me morphine that I could release into the IV every 15 minutes or so with the push of a button. That was cool.

I also remember them trying to take blood and not being able to get any out of my veins. Several people came in and poked my arms and hands in different places, but no blood was to be found. A blood transfusion was ordered and it ended up that I received two. I felt so much stronger after the transfusions—sort of like Popeye after eating his can of spinach. It was kind of scary that they couldn’t figure out why I was losing blood, but the main thing was that I was feeling better.
The Longest Month of My Life  Erin Yamane

My stomach kept getting more and more bloated and after about a week I looked as though I was now nine months pregnant with twins! It was a most uncomfortable feeling. I have genuine sympathy for all those pregnant women who have to carry that weight around with them. Not only is it uncomfortable, but you feel ugly and freakish. Even my face, arms, legs and sadly, my butt were swollen. And to top that off, I had this red, irritating rash all over, like tiny, red goose bumps. They thought I was having an allergic reaction to the antibiotics so they changed that, but the rash did not go away. In fact, it got worse. The nurses told me not to scratch, but how could they expect me not to? Turns out I was allergic to the “feed bag”.

You know how people say that there are no atheists in the fox hole? Well, I think there are no atheists in the ICU either. You either pray to God to let you die or ask him to let you live, but one way or the other, you pray. One night, I think it was early in the morning, I saw three ghosts swoop down at me from the ceiling. It scared the shit out of me! They were white and whispy and I could see through them, but they had no faces, just dark eyes. I pulled the blanket over my head and pulled Sammy tight to my chest. It’s a good thing I had that “shish” tube or I would have pissed in the bed. As I laid there with my eyes shut tight, I prayed.

“Dear God. Please don’t let them take me. I’ll be good. I promise. I don’t want to die yet.”

The only person I told about this was my sister, Cari. I knew she would believe me, especially since I wasn’t on pain killers anymore. John would look at me like I was nuts, but Cari’s very open minded about these things. She has a friend who apparently can see if someone is going to die. He’s done it many, many times. It’s a gift (I think). He will see the person in a dream wearing a dark hooded cape, and he knew they were going to die. Cari talked to her friend about me and the ghosts and he told her not to worry. He did see me in a dream, but I didn’t have the hooded cape on so I was going to be alright. He gave her some kind of prayer that she said for me the next day at my bedside. My eyes were closed, but I could feel her waving her arms over me from head to toe, like those “Healing Hands” people do. I know this sounds creepy and strange, but hey, when you are in that situation, you think, “Whatever works.” The ghosts never came again. I try to keep an open mind to alternative methods of healing and spiritual beliefs.

Another meaningful moment I remember is the day my brother came and I was sort of sleeping. He grabbed my hand in his hands and put them against his forehead. Then he kissed my hand and said “I love you.” I was so touched. He is usually unemotional and unfeeling and sometimes even grouchy. You know, a typical straight banker type. But he let his feelings show and it was the most beautiful moment I have ever shared with my brother and one I will always cherish. It’s funny how different people handle situations.

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My poor husband went through many stages during this ordeal. The first was his normal, unemotional, strong phase. Then he went through a mad phase, which I think was actually his frustrated and scared time. I remember one day we had this stupid argument.

I said, "When I get out I'm going to eat healthier and drink less sodas and coffee and stuff."

John replied with an angry tone, "What do you mean? You aren't going to drink anything but water."

"I can drink stuff other than water."

"No you can't. You better not drink anything but water. That's all you can have."

"Who do you think you are? My nutritionist? You aren't my nutritionist!"

"Don't tell me I'm not your nutritionist! I'm the one standing here watching you die!"

I was crying, but he didn't care. It was a stupid fight, and at the time I thought he was being a total control freak and jerk, but now when I look back I know he was just letting out some of his frustrations because he was really scared that he was going to lose me. I know he was really tired and the stress was starting to take its toll.

When I was moved out of the ICU ward to Pauahi he seemed to be better and was more humorous and normal again. Poor guy actually went through more than I did since he was conscious during the whole thing and knew exactly what was going on where as I was not. I was kept in the dark about a lot of things. Just recently we were discussing the whole scenario because it was my one-year anniversary of coming out of the hospital. He asked me, "Do you remember when you were hyperventilating and saying that you felt you were going to die so you wanted me there and the doctor called me at work?"

"No, when was that?" I asked.

"The first or second day you were in the ICU. The hospital called me and said you were upset and hyperventilating and I had to cancel my depo and I rushed over to the hospital."

"Why did I say I was going to die? Was I dying?" I asked.
"You said you saw the angels and you were scared. You were dying, but you didn’t know that.” My poor John. He had gone through so much.

The best day in the hospital was the day they moved me out of the ICU ward and into the Pauahi Tower because I got to take a real shower with running water and soap and shampoo! Even though Nikki washed my hair with the dry shampoo in ICU, it was still matted and oily and smelly. I’m not used to being so ungroomed and I don’t like it. I must have stayed in the shower for almost 30 minutes. You don’t realize how much the small things mean to you until they are taken away. That was the one thing I looked forward to everyday.

On a particularly bad day, I went to take a CT scan and the stupid nurse (who was one of those traveling nurses) argued with me about unhooking my “feed bag”.

I said, “The doctor said not to let anyone take me off the feed bag”.

She said, “You are just going for a CT scan. You won’t be off it that long. It will be easier without it.” and she took me off the “feed bag”.

So they wheeled me down and parked me in the hallway outside the CT scan room. I was freezing and feeling so bad by the time they were going to start the CT scan so I told the technician that I didn’t feel well and I thought it was because the nurse unhooked my feed bag and the next thing I remember is being back in my room with one nurse slapping my face and saying, “Lori wake up.” and another nurse shoving sherbet and orange juice into my mouth and yet another nurse attaching an I.V. to my arm. Everything seemed so chaotic. There were nurses everywhere. I had blacked out in the CT room. I had gone into a diabetic shock because the stupid nurse who thought she knew everything disconnected my “feed bag” and my sugar level went too low. My husband came to my room a short while later and I remember Dr. Terminella coming to check on me.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Better. I told the nurse not to take off the feed bag, but she wouldn’t listen.” I replied.

“I’m really sorry about that. Don’t worry, it won’t happen again. In fact, we had a staff meeting and I yelled at them. I said, “Do you know who her husband is? If you killed her, do you realize how many zeros they would have added to the number when they sued our ass?” I thought that was pretty funny, but the funnier part was how the nurses and nurses aids came into my room and asked me questions like, “Are you feeling better? Do you need anything? I got you your juice when you asked me to, right?” or “Can I get
The Longest Month of My Life

you a jello or anything? I treated you good, right?” or “I did everything you asked me to, right?”

The most insane thing about it all was that they assigned the nurse that almost killed me to take care of me again. She made me very nervous, not to mention I was still angry at her, but I tried to be civil and didn’t say anything until I found two needles lying on the floor at the foot of my bed. I was so angry and that was the last straw. I called in the head nurse and told her I absolutely refused to have that nurse in my room. They said she cried and went home because she felt bad that I didn’t want her taking care of me, but she never ever apologized for what she did to me and the needles on the floor was so dangerous because I was walking around my room barefoot.

My favorite nurse in the Pauhi ward was Nurse Suzanne. She was in her mid forty’s (I would guess) and she was tall and dark and had curly brown hair. Suzanne was the only nurse who could give me my insulin shots without it hurting. Since I didn’t look, I’m not sure how she did it, but I do know she pinched my skin before she put the needle in. She was hip. She had tattoos on her front and back of scenes from “The Lord of the Rings” and although I don’t like tattoos, I found it kind of neat because I’m a fan of “The Lord of the Rings”. She was going through a rough time being a single mom and trying to take care of her mother who had Alzheimer’s. On Halloween she gave me some delicious black grapes since I couldn’t have candy and she was one of the few nurses who dressed up for Halloween.

I don’t think I realized how bad off I was until the end of my hospital stay when the doctors finally felt I was able to take the news and I don’t think it really sunk in until months after I was out of the hospital. I left the hospital a diabetic and had to take my blood reading three times a day. My fingers were so sensitive and I had a really hard time finding a new spot to poke. I was on a very strict diet and went down to 102 pounds. That was the only good thing about this whole ordeal. I lost a lot of weight, but this is definitely not a diet I would recommend. The recovery has been a long and slow one. In March I had my gall bladder removed because I was having pains from the gall stones. This may have been the cause of the pancreatitis. I was in the hospital for exactly 30 days, but it felt so much longer.

This episode of my life is something I will never forget. When I was in the ICU, I believe after one of the blood transfusions, my husband said, “You know honey, if you survive this, you should think about what you really want to do because I don’t think you’re happy being a paralegal. You should go to culinary school since you like to cook so much” and this is why I am here at KCC in the culinary program at 44 years old. I survived and took my husband’s advice. It’s a difficult and different experience being a student this time around and my attitude is totally better and more focused. I have a better attitude now and
am a better student this time around.

Since I am still recovering from the pancreatitis, I have to watch my stress levels, my weight, my diet and exercise more. This is definitely a good thing because I never really thought about any of these things before. I also was one of those who would pop a pill for a quick fix for anything. Now I hesitate to take any kind of medication. So I guess I am taking better care of myself now and that definitely is a good thing. Although I don’t exercise as much as I would like to because I just don’t have the time, I do exercise more than I used to. I’m one of those people who hate to exercise, mainly because I hate to sweat. It is such a dirty feeling. But you gotta do what you gotta do, right? So having almost died twice has opened my eyes and taught me many things.

As far as life goes in general, I don’t sweat the small stuff as much as I did before and I get over things faster than I did before. I used to really hold grudges, but now I look at it as “life is too short” and even in traffic, I just turn up the radio and drive with “Aloha” because you never know when your life will be over.

I think the whole experience brought my family closer and made us appreciate each other more. I know it made my relationship with my husband a much stronger one. Everyone close to me went through hell and for that I am sorry, but I never felt more loved in my life. My “gang” of high school friends made me an album of well wishes and photos and my good friends, Joy and Nolan, made me a DVD that was so touching it made me cry. I am so lucky to be alive and have so many people who care about me and love me and this is what this experience made me realize – I am really, really, really lucky to have my family and friends and my hubby, John, who really love me.

I have been given a second chance at life and I am taking it. I always had this feeling that I was going to die early. I don’t know why or where that feeling came from, but I never felt scared of dying until I almost did. Now I realize what I would be losing or missing when I am gone. This experience has taught me to appreciate things, even the small and simple things like being able to take a bath and sleep in my own bed, and especially my family and friends. Although I feel bad for what I put them all through, I believe this ordeal has made us realize that life is fragile, so we should make the most of every minute.
The Longest Driveway
Scott Yim

I go insane if I don’t get to drive for a while everyday. There is just something about driving that calms me down. Maybe it’s the myriad of possibilities that lie just off the road, or maybe it’s that if you don’t stop, you can just drive forever. It never seems to matter where the night takes me while driving but somehow I always end up on the same stretch of road at the end of the night. Between Sandy Beach and Hanauma Bay there is a narrow stretch of two-lane road that has no real name, save that it is part of Kalanianeole Highway. Here, the road becomes a shroud, a sanctuary, a different plane of existence. The long, smooth black of the asphalt becomes the floor of heaven, with a glass ceiling made of moonlight that can hide you from the prying eyes and expectations of the sleeping city as you fly faster, always searching for the next curve that lurks just beyond the fringe of the headlights. Whether this road is a place to hide, to bleed your anger out in a cloud of exhaust and rubber, or a place to come out and just enjoy a nice, clear night in the moonlit company of friends, this road is the nameless friend who is always there. No matter who you are, or what has happened throughout the day, the quiet sanctuary provided by the mountains and ocean become a different place, where road racer, commuter and tourist alike are all old friends to the weathered and weary old asphalt.

Full moon nights are the best nights to drive most anywhere, but on this road in particular, the starlight-soaked view is breathtaking. The road always begins in fourth gear, a slow cruise down Kalanianeole past Koko Marina, under the bridge between the church and the elementary school, and finally through the pass between Koko Head and Koko Crater. A bit of gas up the hill brings the whine of the engine up to 4,300 rpm as the darkness swallows you halfway up the hill, when the last streetlight flashes quickly in and out of sight in the rearview mirror. A small lookout zips by on the left, then the Hanauma Bay entrance to the right. The hill crests, dumping you down the road between a wall of rock on the left and one of the most spectacular views of the ocean anywhere on the island to the right. On a night when the moon is full, the waves glisten and sparkle like silver blanket of diamonds on the water. The waves here hit hard and fly high, spewing their angry mist on jagged coastline pockmarked with cliffs and coves that can be as violent as they are beautiful. Here, on a full moon night, fierce battles are waged between cars that fly past couples making out at the lookouts- the stark contrast of the two events mirroring so well the very nature of the coastline.

It is always easy at this point to drop the car into fifth gear and just enjoy the view but leaving it in fourth is much more rewarding. The view goes out of sight for a second as a small hill flashes by, a wake up call that sends you accelerating quickly against the curve of the gently sweeping left turn. As the rocks drop out of view, a clear night rewards you
The Longest Driveway

Scott Yim

with a stunning view of Lanai: a shimmering collection of streetlights and distant lives on the edge of the horizon. I sometimes cannot help but wonder if there is a road on Lanai that is not unlike the one that I am on. I wonder if there is someone looking at me too, but I am always fairly sure that I am lost to them, smaller even than a thought, as they so often are to me.

Still in fourth at 4,500 rpm and the road begins to drop, rocketing you down the straightaway till you pass the gun range on the left. Then, if you catch the sharp right at just the correct angle and speed, a quick shift and a satisfying thump into neutral and you can enjoy the view to the right for just a moment, drifting silently past Lanai lookout until the cliffs and mountain loom ominously ahead, ready to smother you again under a blanket of darkness and stone. Back to third gear, and a smooth climb to 4,000 rpm sends you floating over the elevation changes of the sweeping s-turn, all the while hidden from everything but the moon and the faint glow cast by the millions of stars that you could never see from the city. Around the bend to the left, and the water drifts lazily back into view through the faint mist of salt that haunts the moonlight like a bad mood. On a bad night, if the road racers stir the night too violently, the misty night air is sometimes tinged with blue and red, the ocean drowned out by the din of wailing sirens, another casualty to the darkness where guardrails and hesitation threaten to mangle and twist the life out of you to the tempo of the violent sea below. On these nights, the road seems to cry as the mist thickens and the waves crash higher- a cry, as if the road were sad to have lost another friend. The small, colorless ribbons that adorn the scuffs and scrapes on the guardrail always make me sad as the journey meanders through this part of the road.

Somehow, the moon always seems to be perfectly in the middle of the water at the next curve, casting an ethereal blue glow just bright enough to see the lines and reflectors that sparkle and fly past you, hovering over the pitch black of the asphalt like tiny plastic yellow and red fireflies. On a still night, there are two moons staring at you. The moon in the water glows luminescent, as bright as it’s reflection in the cloud-speckled sky. A quick bank to the left in the road leads you past Bamboo Ridge, the fishermen’s cars, then past the nameless monument: a rock in the middle of a concrete circle that overlooks the ocean. Somehow, it always eludes me as I whip past the silly stone, why anyone would want to take a picture of a rock. I always smile here as I downshift and a bit too much gas coaxes the car eagerly into the next turn.

Another quick turn to the right, and a bit of complaining from the tires sends you flying almost sideways past Cockroach Cove, then the Blowhole, as you glide past the dwindling mountain, until the barren, jutting cliffs melt into Sandy Beach, and finally into the long smooth straightaway that signals the end of the road, as a traffic light...
and the first streetlight for miles begin to cast their unwelcome glow in tones of green and orange, ruining a road that had been perfect a mere 100 yards ago. Every night I drive this road, and every night the road begs me to turn around when I stop at the light to turn left, back to civilization, to expectations, and to my responsibilities. Most nights I make the left.

On the rarest of nights though, the call of the road wins out and I do turn around and drive past the scenic points, bathed in moonlight – a knife sliding through the mist. The road always beckons, like the grandfather who has seen everything: from the creation of the heavens and earth, to the passing of the thousands of visitors who stop here every year to gaze at the stark collection of rocks and water that are the heart and soul of the road, and finally to the residents of the East side of Oahu: we who are blessed with this road as a long surreal driveway, the familiar gate that signals that home is near.

The best part about this road is that you will not find it in any tourist guide. Nowhere in Oahu weekly, any tourist site on the internet, and not in any book does this road appear, save for slightly less than lip service as “a large touristy turnout between Hanauma Bay and Sandy Beach” (shorediving.com), as if the sweeping turns and postcard perfect views were simply a means to an end.

The history and folklore of this road extend only as far back as the memories of the men who built it, carving it out of the very mountain way back when even Honolulu proper was still an infant. No, to most people the majesty and raw beauty of this road is lost in a flurry of maps and looking for parking for the various scenic points that are mentioned in the tourist rags, and the hustle of weary people trying to get home. Somehow, in all of the commotion of life happening, the beauty of this road is lost in the translation from point a to point b. For me though, it is not the stops on the sides of the road that I love, it is the drive. From the constant pull and tug of the road that dances the car deftly through the turns, to the damp smell of the salt in the air, to the darkness and shadows that grow thick and deep in the shadows of the mountain, the gentle hum of the rubber on the asphalt, and the whine of the engine that can hide the crashing of the waves if you don’t listen carefully- the curves of this road are heaven.

Here the asphalt is covered with the faded and tattered traces of lifetimes of precious moments, memories of laughter and smiles, and of sorrow and tears that have long since dried up. A coastline that was once ruled by Mano the shark amakua, has become infested with surfers and boogie boarders. The swampland that once nourished the thirsty mountain has left if dry and barren. The lush valley beyond the hills that was once hunting ground and homeland to the Hawaiians of old has become landfill and track homes. The fish are gone now, even at Hanauma Bay where they have been replaced with red tourists that float.
like strange lobsters in the key made by the reef, current, and father time.

Modern days have changed and shaped the whole of Oahu, especially in recent years. The city has grown and become crowded, buildings are knocked down and rebuilt, but this road remains nameless and surreal, the place between awake and sleeping. So will it remain until long after I am dead and gone. Generations will pass, and this road will still be the same magical, awe-inspiring, priceless stretch of asphalt that it has always been, calling to anyone who will keep it company sometime in the magic hours between dusk and dawn. So if you haven’t already driven it, try it sometime, you will see what I mean.
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