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We applaud the efforts of all the writers who submitted their work for consideration and celebrate their creativity.

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The Scope of *Diamond Journal*

*Diamond Journal* specializes in publishing works of nonfiction 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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An Unforgettable Lunch  
Jessica Dang

It was just a little over a month ago that I began my new job at a jewelry store, working with the tour department with many visitors from all over the world. I love working with people, public speaking, and meeting all the different types of people there in the world. In the little time that I’ve worked there, I’ve found it fascinating to have met Romanians, Australians, British, and many other people.

One thing that really intrigued me was the people who didn’t speak English. I would go on the internet and study the various languages thoroughly so I would be able to communicate with the foreigners, and, although I had a few faux pas here and there, I was able to answer their questions and help them out in anyway I can.

One day, several couples came in who were hearing impaired, and no one was able to communicate with them. I knew my basic sign language, which was just how to spell things out, but it was far too difficult to spell out every answer to every question, but I tried my best and saw the smiles on their faces. It made me feel so good!

A few days later at school, an older man in one of my classes was explaining that he had learned sign language since he was five, so I decided to approach him after class. “Tom,” I acknowledged, as he unsteadily tried to put his shoes back on, “whenever you have the time, I would appreciate it if you could teach me some sign language.” He cracked a smile. “Sure, I even have some books that I’ll lend you the next time we meet for class.”

I was so happy that he was more than willing to help me out. I was hoping that we could get together that day to study it since I had an hour or so to kill before my ride came, but when he walked in the other direction, I decided to grab lunch in the cafeteria.

Ironically, he too was grabbing lunch in the cafeteria! I tapped him lightly on the shoulder and smiled innocently. “Having lunch?” I asked.

“Yup,” he said, scooping mounds of pasta salad into a foam bowl.

“If you haven’t got any other plans,” I asked hesitantly, “would you like to join me for lunch and maybe teach me a few signs?”

“Of course! That would be great,” he replied.

All the tables in the cafeteria were taken. He seemed to be heading to a table with a few people at it, so I figured that he had forgotten about having lunch with me to sit with his friends, but he waved and encouraged me to join them. One of his friends politely pulled
up an extra chair for me and helped me put my cheeseburger and Mountain Dew on the table.

"Hi!" I exclaimed, and just as I was about to introduce myself, it appeared that the three other people sitting at the table were deaf. They signed to me something that looked like a salute, so in question, I turned to Tom.

“He says ‘Hi, nice to meet you, and where are you from?’”

I looked at both him and his friends. “Tell him it’s nice to meet him too, and I’m from here.” There were two other girls at the table as well who were signing back and forth. They also signed to me, and soon I began to pick up as Tom translated. I signed back to them, and tried my best to have a conversation with them.

Even though they were deaf, they looked ecstatic. I stopped signing for a minute. I noticed countless people around us staring, as if there was something wrong with being deaf and signing. A music group was performing local Hawaiian music in the cafeteria, and everyone’s voice tended to get louder over the sounds of the music. Then I thought, besides Tom, I was the only one at the table who could hear this loud chatter. I was the only one who could enjoy the music that was being played behind me. And I was the only one who had the ability to have a cell phone, to hear it ring and hear the person on the other line speak.

For once, I did not care what other people thought of me. I didn’t care that the people were staring at me, or that I was having lunch with a bunch of ‘strangers’ who were hearing impaired. I didn’t care if people I knew wondered why I was sitting with them, and never did I feel superior because I had the ability to hear and vocally communicate. I even suggested that we have lunch again together.

My friend called my phone and told me that he had arrived to pick me up. I signed back to my new friends “Thank you,” and “See you later, bye.” At that time, I put my phone on mute and walked away, with a better understanding of myself and other people.

Sometimes in life we take the simplest things for granted without realizing that so many others in the world aren’t as fortunate. Every time I turn on the radio, hear the phone ring, or listen to the birds chirping early in the morning, I will be thankful for such a blessing, and always remember what I learned the day I had lunch with the hearing impaired.
The Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Andron Garrigas

“I’m pregnant.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I said I’m pregnant, Andron.”

“No, you’re not.”

“You asshole, I think I know my own body.”

Margaret’s body was a medical museum piece: the washboard bosom, the vacuum-packed rib cage, the graphic pulleys in her arms and legs. Try to imagine the state of her reproductive system. Her uterus was a sort of freeze-dried cube; a coroner might have mistaken it for a bullet. Her pubic hair was a tumbleweed.

“Look, you can wave that gun around, but the fact is-”

“I missed my period.”

“It’s called amenorrhea.”

“I bought a test.”

“A hysterical pregnancy test? It turns blue if you’re a madwoman.” Margaret’s face changed. Never pour lighter fluid in a jack-o-lantern. “Baby, we haven’t had sex for ages.”

“Screw you. I’m pregnant,” she said, storming off. I thought about calling her parents; they’d put her in a clinic before. Margaret was the family skeleton.

What, dear reader, does an anorexic have in common with a star? Autocannibalism. Let me explain. An anorexic is 90% fat. Her central region, or core, houses a furnace that converts fat (the most abundant element in the universe) into energy. After what seems like billions of years, the fat is depleted. At this point, a moral weakling would cry out for bread. An anorexic, on the other hand, asks herself a question: What Would Ghandi Do? She intuits the true nature of original sin: an apple has 66 calories. Better to render muscle, connective tissue, and organs than sacrifice enlightenment. Everything must go. She chops up the Chippendale for firewood. What happens now? With nothing left to burn, the furnace is retrofitted to process an intangible. There is enough energy in a cubic nanometer
of sanity to power an anorexic for days. Sanity, however, is a nonrenewable resource.

Margaret was in the kitchen, poring over the anorexic’s cookbook. Would she opt for Alka-Seltzer (a nutritious shake), sugar-free Jell-O (fillet of ghost), or cotton balls dipped in cola? Unsurprisingly, she decided not to eat. Hunger is satiety. In the light of Orwellian optimism, there is no such thing as a half-empty glass. To Margaret, an empty glass is brimming with transparent nectar.

Later she holed up in the bathroom; Margaret loved to play Chinese whispers by herself.

“I need three hundred dollars ... for an abortion!” she screamed. Three hundred dollars? Who said it was easier to destroy than create? Abortion, I wanted to tell her, is not a kind of crash diet. I opened the door; Margaret had bought a pregnancy test.

She was sitting on the toilet, marshalling her hypochondria. In a few moments, Margaret would know the truth. If a smile played on my lips, it was just a schadenfreudian slip. I looked on from the boondocks of morality.

Her passion spent, Margaret dazedly let go of the stick; it clattered to the ground like a bloody foil. “Positive?” I said.

Of course it wasn’t. Margaret stared into space. Her nose was a fantastic limb with the organization of a cathedral; its grand portals echoed with hysteria. She was shaking. Vindication was smuggled into the jaws of defeat. I fumbled with her hair. It felt real, like a voodoo doll’s. I uncovered a pink ear - one serene gear in a raving cuckoo clock. The iris that shields empathy dilates and contracts involuntarily. I held her to my chest and waited, like I’d thrown myself on a grenade.

* * *

Remember the Law of Conservation of Matter. Character flaws are indestructible; they can only be rearranged. A successful dieter is really an ingenious collage of “before” pictures. Who said it was easier to destroy than create? Margaret is, in the literal sense, a loophole. In order to rid herself of both fatness and skinniness (a deceptively clean slate), she had to transcend the material world. Anorexia is an out-of-body experience. Vacuity is the key to perfection.

The kingdom of absolute purity is situated on the head of a pin. Its citizens are always dancing. The pilgrimage there is not for cowards. Go for a walk in the forest. The
forest is littered with objects: a fret of twigs and cupped leaves, a thunderstruck mast, a hecatomb of fruit. Now approach an area of forest which has been clear-cut. Something is erected on the borderline. Look at the totem pole that honors and exemplifies anorexia: a head on a pike. The pilgrimage starts here.
Honolulu Dorks and the Jurassic Rock
Thomas Gebhardt

The two friends I’ve known the longest are Eugene and Jarrett, and one of my most memorable times with them was in the fifth grade. I really got to know them that year through a horrible disaster. Sometimes it takes a tragedy to pull people together. This story is for my friends, Eugene and Jarrett.

The year was 1994, and I had just started the fifth grade. Jarrett and I used to play “German dodge ball” and “sham battle” together so I knew him but not really well. I met Eugene on the first day of school. I got to class late, and the only seat was next to him. Luckily, he turned out to be really cool.

I had recently watched the movie *Jurassic Park* and had become obsessed with dinosaurs and paleontology. I wanted to be like Dr. Alan Grant. One day during recess while playing around with Jarrett and Eugene, I tripped over a rock. It was only a small piece but there was something about it that mesmerized me. The way it was shaped and the way it had an eerie smoothness that resembled the skull of a raptor. From the beginning, I was totally convinced that this was a dinosaur bone in our school playfield. My friends believed me and were totally supportive of my plan to uncover it.

The following day we began the excavation. Every time we had recess, we would go straight to the site and begin digging around the rock. The rock now had a little empty moat around its perimeter. Luckily, the rock was near a tree that provided us shade daily. We brought tools and packed food and water. It was our mission and we could not do or think about anything else until we uncovered that fossil.

People were curious about what was going on by the tree so they would often come by and look at what we were doing. Some people even joined in. A couple of months in, we had an entire team digging and working around the tree. They were just as obsessed as Jarrett, Eugene and I. Everyone was convinced it was a fossil. When we got about a foot of it revealed, I actually began to notice that it wasn’t really like a fossil at all. But by then, it was so massive, and I was so involved, I couldn’t stop.

The school year was coming to an end; we were about to graduate and move on to middle school, and we were still digging up this gigantic specimen. We believed we had most of it uncovered. Our plan was to just yank it out using everybody’s strength. We all grabbed a piece of it and tried to pull it out with all our might. It wouldn’t budge.

We began to turn against one another blaming each other for not being able to pull it out of its socket in the ground. It was the heat, the humidity, the dirt and the many hours spent sweating, tired, thirsty and annoyed that just finally climaxed to an explosion of fury.
among us. After yelling at and fighting each other for a good few minutes, we all collapsed onto the ground, trying to catch our breath.

One of the kids who recently joined was in crutches at the time. He decided he wanted to give it a tug. Still on the ground breathing heavily, we all watched him grab it and tug on it; it was lifting. The hardened soil around its base was now crumbling and falling apart. We all got back up and helped him pull it. Slowly, we got it out of the dirt, and then we were able to lift it and hold it for a few seconds then drop it.

We did it. We had uncovered our dream fossil. It was monstrous and almost impossible to lift but somehow, we pulled it off. After the obsession of uncovering it went away, I remembered that it didn’t resemble a fossil at all. In fact, it suddenly came back to me that dinosaurs didn’t even exist in Hawaii! But nobody cared; it was just so amazing that we were able to uncover such a huge rock. We all stood there staring at it, with the cool breeze blowing gently upon our sweat and cooling our exhausted bodies. We then noticed that the tree began to rumble. We shifted our eyes to the tree. It began to rock and shake. It then leaned to the side and fell into the hole we had made. We watched in astonishment, speechless. It was beautiful. The tree was slanted now, next to the humongous rock and a deep hole. We were given detention until the end of the year. Every day we had detention. We just had big smiles on our faces.

Although it was a complete disaster and we got into a lot of trouble, it was somehow worth it. I had made some great friends, accomplished an almost impossible feat and we were even able to leave our mark right before we graduated from elementary school. To this day, that tree stands slanted and a huge rock sits beside it. I’d like to think that the tree and the rock are friends and that we did them a favor by uncovering the rock. It seems like the tree leaned over to be closer to his friend. Through helping them become closer, we became closer. So it just goes to show that even the times of great hardship, disaster and stupidity can be turned around into times of great triumph, cooperation, rare friendships and undying determination.
Finding My Strength
Shawnee Hammer

I give this story to my husband and my mother. I hope you will better understand this life changing event. And hopefully you will better understand your wife and daughter.

I remember the exact moment my life changed. My pager went off. I looked at the number and didn’t recognize it. I was on my way to a Rolling Stones concert. Filled with excitement and not wanting to think about anything else but rocking out to the Stones, my pager went off again. I saw the same number. At first I went to throw it in my purse planning to ignore the page, but then I felt different. Nothing bad or good, just different. Something was telling me to answer the page. This happened before there were cell phones, so I needed my friends to pull off the freeway and find a pay phone. This was not easy. They finally agreed and we pulled into a Texaco station. While I was rummaging through my purse for change, my pager went off again.


“Oh Shawnee, thank God you called!” It was my stepmother. “I need you to come back to Salem,” she said. The concert was in Portland, which was about an hour away from my hometown of Salem. Her tone of voice wasn’t normal, which sparked my curiosity.

“Terry, what are you talking about? You know I’m on my way to the Stone’s concert,” I said sounding annoyed.

“Shawnee it’s very important. I’ll tell you about it when you get here. Please just come home.” She sounded more concerned. Given my current situation, I was not happy.

“Terry, I’m not turning back; we’re almost there. Why in the world do you want me to come home anyway?”

“Please, I don’t want to say anything over the phone.” Instead of scolding me for talking back, her voice was soft with worry. I knew something was wrong.

“What’s wrong? Please tell me.” I was starting to get nervous. I could tell that Terry was trying to collect herself.

Finally, after what seemed to be a long pause, Terry answered me, “Your father has had a heart attack.”
I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “What? No,” I said. “He’s fine. I just saw him earlier today.”

“Shawnee this is serious. Please hurry. Meet me a Salem Memorial,” Terry’s voice trembled. I hung up the phone and immediately my heart sank. My first thought was that this couldn’t be happening. My father has to be okay! I started to realize how much my father meant to me.

My friends were supportive and we turned around right away. The car ride was quiet, making it seem twice as long. Not knowing the severity of the situation, my mind wondered like crazy thinking the worst. What if I lost my father? I started thinking about the last words my father had said to me earlier that day. He was on his way out the door. My father, full of love, would always end our conversations with an “I love you.” He always said that you never know what could happen so make sure the people you love know how you feel. I sat there wishing that I had let him know how I felt more often. My father was the strongest person in the world. He was six feet two inches tall with a massive build and he would help me solve any problem I had. I kept thinking that I would fall apart without him. My father was my rock.

After about an hour’s drive, we arrived at the hospital. My mother, stepmother, and two brothers were waiting for me outside. On the way up to my father’s room they explained to me that he had had a massive heart attack and was in a coma. Being very honest, my stepmother told me that it didn’t look very good.

I sat in the waiting room for a while. I couldn’t bring myself to see him yet. I thought maybe if I didn’t face him he would be okay. I kept thinking about how much he meant to me. I thought about how much he taught me in just seventeen years and how much more I still needed to learn from him. I thought about his incredible patience and his great sense of humor. I thought about how hard he worked to give my brother’s and me the best life we could ever ask for. I thought about how he took care of my grandmother for many years without complaint. His desire to help others amazed me.

I sat there for about an hour and I finally realized that it would be foolish to waste any more time. Walking in the room and seeing him lying there hit me like a ton of bricks. I had never seen him so helpless. He was hooked up to several machines and his only movement was the slow rising and falling of his chest. Tears filled my eyes. I felt as if I couldn’t breathe and for a few moments I don’t think I did. It felt so surreal. I sat down next to him and wondered where his mind was. Could he hear me or see me? He looked like he was sleeping and didn’t seem to be in any pain. Doctors went in and out of the room along with family and friends. Eventually everyone went home except my stepmother and...
I. I didn’t move from my father’s side and finally dozed off with my head on the hospital bed.

I don’t know what time it was when the door abruptly swung open and woke me up. Trying to focus, I could barely make out a nurse entering the room. My stepmother followed her, but then she led me out of the room. Realizing what was happening, my heart sank. I think about fifteen minutes passed when more of my family rushed to the hospital. We were all sitting in the waiting room when my father’s cardiologist came in. All he said was, “I’m sorry,” or at least that’s all I heard. My heart broke for the first time right there. It had really happened. I had lost my father.

My stepmother did all the work, gathering his things, and talked to everyone. I isolated myself from everyone. I kept thinking that there was no way I could go on without my father.

Later at my mom’s house lying in bed, my pillow soaked with tears, I realized that all this time I had been crying for myself, not because my father had just had a heart attack and died. What about his pain? What about my family? What were they going to do? My father meant just as much to them as he did to me. I needed to talk to someone, so I woke up my mom. I explained everything that I had been feeling. She reminded me of how my grandmother’s passing had affected my father. I was very young but I remember that my grandmother and my father were extremely close. My mother said that when Grandma died, it was like part of my father had died. She was his rock. When he had a problem she would help him solve it. My mother explained that after the initial pain of my grandma’s death my father realized that he could grow from her passing. He came to realize that he had the strength to go on without his mom. During the time of my grandma’s death, I remember my father telling me that everything happened for a reason, and that if I look hard I can find something positive in any situation. Until that point I never realized that my father learned that from losing his mother. That night I went back to my room thinking very differently.

It’s been almost seven years since my father passed away, and I think of him every day. His death changed my entire outlook on life. It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to go through, but it taught me that I had the strength to do amazing things, even without my father. The things my father taught me help me in every aspect of my life. I hope he knows how much I learned from his life and death. I believe that if I search hard enough I can find the strength to get through anything.
Doing Time Set Me Free
Eleanor "Nono" Haunga

Ironically, being incarcerated was the biggest reality check that saved my life. It may sound a little crazy but it’s true. If I had a chance to save my past, I wouldn’t change a thing. This experience introduced me to my true self, and I realized the weight I have carried with me throughout all these years has finally been lifted. There are no more worries and unnecessary embarrassments, such as dealing with "chronics" (addicts) day in and day out, or dodging the police. The list of difficulties is endless, but to sum everything up I am finally free!

I am not embarrassed about the fact that I smoked "ice," or crystal meth for most of my high school years and that it continued on for about 11 years. I am also not embarrassed to say that I was incarcerated for dealing drugs. However, I am so relieved that that chapter of my life is over. I now understand how foolish my choices were and I am not ashamed to share my experiences. Perhaps through writing about what I went through, I will be able to help someone else by giving hope and encouragement.

The first time I ever set foot in a correctional facility, I was sentenced for one day at the OCCC (Oahu Community Correctional Center). It was for an assault charge that resulted because of a domestic situation. It involved my boyfriend at the time and a "batuna," or "ice slut" (a female who does sexual favors for drugs). My boyfriend had been missing all day and I was getting suspicious. I saw them both in my car and assumed that something was going on between them. They were sitting side by side with their heads hanging low as if they were hiding from someone. With my heart pounding in my breast, I yelled out his name. He turned to me but I was already in the car. He got out of the car as if to run away from the confrontation. I did not care about what he was doing. I just reacted. She screamed for me to let her explain but I could feel smoke coming out of my ears. With fury in my eyes I clenched my fist back and plunged it into her face repeatedly. My boyfriend tried to stop me, but all I could hear was her screaming. I told her, "Don’t ever let me catch you with my man!"

People from a gambling house came out to help her and that’s when she called the police. Because the assault charge was performed on federal property, the court placed me under the Weed and Seed Program. I was no longer able to set foot into Chinatown. My stay at OCCC was not an uncomfortable one because I knew everyone there, and I would be leaving the next day. The only thing I thought about was getting high and finding my boyfriend.

My second time in jail, I was sentenced to 90 days. I was at a gambling house in Chinatown. I gambled all my money away but I had a couple of "rocks" (rock cocaine) I could sell. I was standing behind a fenced gate for cover just in case the Weed and Seed
officers were nearby. A "chronic" walked by and I called out to him, "Hey! How much you need?"

He replied, "I only have thirty dollars, so can you hook me up?"

I told him, "Sure, come through the fence so the cops can’t see me." I was letting him out of the gate when the officers with Weed and Seed noticed me and placed me under arrest. Soon enough I was in court before a judge who sentenced me to 90 days. The judge released me from the Weed and Seed program, which is a program that restricts participants from entering certain zones where drugs are commonly sold.

This time the court sent me to Kailua at the Women’s Community Correctional Center, or WCCC. As I walked into the facility, I was astonished at how clean everything was. The "C.O.,” or correctional officer, handed me a sack of clothes, pillows, sheets, then walked towards my housing unit. When I entered the unit I became very nervous. The unit looked like a dorm. The fact that I had to spend the next three months here sent terrifying waves of fear down my back. There were beds along the left and right sides of the walls, almost like an army barracks. The unit was filled with the clatter of different voices; I could hear someone yelling D-O-M-I-N-O-S while playing the game. I could hear singing and laughing. There was so much going on in the unit. Suddenly the room became silent and all these faces turned to me. Some of the women hopped off their beds and walked over to me to say hello. I recognized most of them, and I was no longer nervous.

During my stay at WCCC, I thought I found Jesus. I joined the church choir, went to Bible studies, and also went to church. I felt myself changing there. Three months was the longest time I stayed sober; I was taken aback at how nice and calm I was. My boyfriend noticed a difference in my attitude too. He would say to me, "Babe, you seem so calm and happy in there. I can feel you smiling even though I can’t see you."

I talked with my boyfriend nightly. I only had about 20 more days left of my sentence; then I would be with him. All of a sudden he was not home for my calls. I started getting excuses from his aunt for him not being there for my calls. I was a little hurt but I brushed it off. There was one thing I learned about doing time, and it was not worrying about what went on outside the fence or bars. I could not control what was going on out there, so I tried not to think about it and just kept myself busy with things to do. It was hard but I managed.

Twenty days passed and I was finally released. The first thing I wanted to do was look for my boyfriend and apologize to him for all the drama I caused when all he tried to do was love me. When drugs linger in a relationship, there is no room for love and affection. For me it was just getting high, making my money, and gambling it. I went back
to Chinatown and found out that my boyfriend flew to the mainland the same day I got out! I was spinning! The worst part of it all was that he left with another girl. Going back to Chinatown, I totally lost it.

I was devastated and there was only one escape for me and that was to get high. Every time I thought of my boyfriend, I would smoke up even more just so that I could numb my heart. In doing so my game started to get sloppy. I no longer cared if I was serving drugs right in the open where any cop who was wandering might see. I would make so much money and at the same time gamble it all away, only to go back out on the streets to sell my drugs and make more money. There was no purpose in my life. I was like an uncontrollable ping-pong ball that was just pinging and ponging! While I was PINGING, I finally got arrested for serving twenty dollars of rock-cocaine to an undercover agent. The cops told me, "Nono, you’re going to do some serious jail time."

I was distraught and could not bring myself to accept what was happening. I did not want to do more time than I had to, so I asked him if he could do me a favor. I told him that I had an "ice pipe" in my pocket and asked if he could just take it out of my hands. He took it out of my possession then took me to OCCC.

After the shocked stage, which is the, "I didn’t do it, I’m innocent" or the, "They got nothing on me, I’m getting out tomorrow", attitude evaporated it finally hit me. My God I was really going to jail again but this time, a little longer. I was not sure as to what would become of me. What I did know was that I wanted to get high and that I did not want to be in there. Later, I was informed that I was going to be sentenced between 18-26 months. Angry at the world, I became uncontrollable, emotion-wise that is. I could not picture doing four months let alone a year in jail. I was furious and broken. All the feelings about my boyfriend that I tried to numb out were now seeping through my pores. There were no drugs to hide my pain, and I did not want to break down. I was struggling not to surrender to my feelings.

Fear pumped through me when I was told by a "C.O." that I would be transferring to San Bernardino County Jail. Since I was a federal detainee, Oahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) was unable to accommodate me because federal and state inmates were not supposed to associate.

The first week I was there, I noticed the deputies seemed to cater to Hawaii inmates; they were more lenient with us. It may have been because we were more hygienic and respectful. On the fifth day there I was sent to the "hole" or isolation for an incident that happened. I assaulted another inmate because she was picking on some Mexicans that were nice to me from day one. I was to spend 25 days in the hole, but the deputy sided with me.
and I only spent five days there.

I was a little freaked out because of how diminutive the room was. In this little room I spent a lot of time thinking. I had a Bible with me and began reading. As I read the Bible I came to a passage in Luke, where Jesus talks to people about loving their enemies. That chapter blew me away; I could not believe that I understood what I was reading. I felt my Heavenly Father in the room with me, and I was so moved by the heart-felt revelation. He told me that I was going to be all right and to trust him. Overwhelmed by His grace, I finally allowed myself to cry. I cried so hard that it hurt.

Leaving the isolation unit, I felt like an enormous burden had been lifted off of me. I felt free. The five days that I spent in the hole did a lot of good for me. I felt like I did not have to fight anymore. All the questions that I had were somehow answered. I came out of there with a glow. Even the other inmates noticed a difference in me. I started singing more, laughing more. The other ladies would ask, "How can you be so happy in here?" I would then share my experience with God, about how He lifted the veil from my eyes.

When the Federal Detention Center by the airport finally opened, the U.S. marshals slowly started sending us back to Honolulu. We were all homesick and were happy to return. I flew back a day before September 11. Feeling jet lag from the flight, I slept in, waking up to my cellmate and five other ladies crying. I could not understand anything that they were saying; they just dragged me out of bed towards the TV. In order to hear the TV a Walk-man with earphones was needed, but I did not hear anything.

What I saw on the screen took my breath away. Everything around me went mute. I did not even notice my friend Nania passing me her earphones. I was glued to the ground. Somewhere in the crowd around me someone said, "That could have been you in the plane." (I flew with United Airlines, and one of the planes that went down was a United Airlines’ aircraft), but that was not what mesmerized me. I could not believe what I was seeing. For once nobody was worried about her court case or her own insecurities, or her boyfriend’s whereabouts on the outside world. It was like time froze. That night we all formed a circle and held hands in prayer for the victims and their families. This incident helped open my eyes on how I was wasting my life away. On drugs, I do not think I would have felt anything about September 11, proving how numb I was to reality.

As time went by, I watched everyone leave, only to come back in two months tops. My friend left and was back in a week. I approached her and asked, "Why are you back here? You just left and you’re back again. What happened?"

She began to tell me, "The first week was easy, but it was getting difficult to isolate
Doing Time Set Me Free

Eleanor “Nono” Haunga

myself from people I used to socialize with. Because once they found out I was no longer in prison, they would come by my house constantly. No matter how hard I tried to tell them I’m through with that life, they kept on coming back. They came back one day when I was feeling defeated and one thing led to another, and now I’m here."

I started to cry, so I held her and said, "You will be all right. Let’s pray."

After that scene, I became angry. I went to my cell and started to talk to God. So many questions were running through my mind. I asked him, "Is this my destiny too? Will I be released from here only to return?" I was scared, so I kept telling myself to be strong and let God take care of me. If I trusted HIM, He would not forsake me. Whatever happened, I was going to keep my faith and lean unto His understanding and not mine. I could not see the big picture yet. That day I felt so determined to turn my life around. With help from God, I knew I was going to succeed. It was a shock to finally realize what was happening around me. We are people who made bad decisions, paid the consequences, and are released to a freedom that is unfamiliar to what we are used to. So we give up quickly and settle for what we think we know. I refuse to believe that that will be my fate. I told one of the older women that when I left I would not be coming back. She replied, "Knock on wood."

I said, "I did not have to because it was different this time. This time I chose life!"

My time came and Judge Malloway decided to release me two months earlier for good behavior. I started to doubt, and my fears and worries flooded my thoughts once more. The fear of falling short and coming back was overwhelming. I forgot everything that I promised myself I would do when the opportunity came. I even disrupted headcount so that I could be reprimanded and lose the opportunity of getting released early. While sitting in my cell, my cellmate would tell me for hours, "When you get out, please eat Zip Pak for me from Zippy’s, and then go to L&L and eat a chicken katsu plate." I just laughed, NOT really hearing her. One of the caseworkers talked with me, and I told her I was afraid to leave. She understood and said that it was only natural to feel that way, but I should think positively and move forward.

With all that I had been through, I left, and it was an awesome feeling. I stayed at a Halfway house for about four months. When I left the Halfway house, I had a job, a place of my own, and a second job. Two months later, I bought my first legal car, which I am so proud of. My probation officer and I have a good rapport; he has helped me along my journey too. I surround myself with successful people, so I will be able to follow their lead. I even had a chance to give back to the younger community last year by sharing my experience with seniors from Farrington High School (Kapalama Health Center). Now
I am attending Kapiolani Community College, and I have a strong feeling I will not stop there. I feel very excited about my new life and what the future will bring me.

Today, I will forevermore appreciate the simple things that life has to offer, which is the sun on my face, the wind through my hair, or the friendly smiles that pass me. I now absorb it all. Most of all, I enjoy spending time with my family and new friends. I do not have any regrets about my past. I know now it has made me a better person. How funny it is to go through trials and tribulations thinking it is never going to get better, yet all we are required to do is slow down and just be still… and listen… really, really listen.
Ride of My Life
Victor Henry

The sickening smell of burnt rubber and engine oil loomed in the air. The combination overwhelmed my senses and I felt nauseated. I fought for every breath I took and ignored the surging pain to my left knee. Gathering whatever energy I had left, I staggered to the nearest sidewalk and sat. Grasping my chest, I focused on calming myself to regulate my breathing. At that point I realized blood was flowing freely from my left leg just below the kneecap. Exhausted, I took off my over shirt and tied it around my knee to stop the puncture wound. Sirens rang as I recollected the events leading up to this scene.

That morning had started beautifully. Birds were chirping, the sun shined through overhead – the whole shebang. Breakfast was amazing as well. Nothing beats eating Jack in the Box ten minutes before class starts. I chuckled at this thought and peered at my good friend, Jason, running to class beside me.

“We’re going to be late now,” Jason said glaring at me.

It was not Jason’s idea to eat breakfast that late; much less eat at all. It was his persona that let me convince him to do so. Jason is the type of person who follows those with ideas that involve fun, regardless of how absurd that idea may be. He had, however, a weakness to peer pressure, and I was often the one who did the pressuring. Little did he know how much trouble he would’ve saved if he hadn’t listened.

“Man!” Jason hollered, “Who the hell gets breakfast this late?” Ignoring Jason’s excessive whining, I continued running until I saw someone heading toward my direction. I stopped and squinted for a better view. Within seconds, I grinned and realized who it was. Enthusiastically I ran and embraced my good friend Irene.

“Well, well, well. Looks like we’re all late for physics,” Irene joyfully said.

“Look,” I laughed turning to Jason, “Irene isn’t going to class. We may as well not go. Let’s get her to come with us.”

“What about physics?” Jason whined.

“A joke,” I shot back, “that class is a joke, let’s go!”

Physics was a class where slackers such as I would get away with anything. The work was a joke, and the teacher had some kind of hate/admiration type of attitude toward me. She would curse at me after class about being inattentive and then reward me with A’s. Cutting class was no big deal when you are guaranteed the grade. Reasoning kicked in and
I realized going to class would be a wasted opportunity to do whatever I pleased.

“You’re not going to class either?” Irene inquired.

“Guess not, we’re late anyway and it isn’t like going to class would be any different than not going,” I rationalized. “Let’s take a joyride.”

That’s what happens when you receive your first car at the age of sixteen. You think you’re invincible and can do anything you wish. Joyriding is one of many ways to enhance your privilege of owning a vehicle. I guess you could say the decision was unanimous. The three of us shot through traffic aimlessly. Within half an hour we approached this large abandoned industrial area. I decided to park there so we could deliberate on our destination.

“Victor,” Irene asked as she approached me, “you told me once you knew how to drift right?”

I was always a person who desired to prove my worth. I lived by my no limits philosophy, which meant that anything and everything that makes me think twice about fulfilling my desire is an obstacle that must be overcome. Fear, common sense, and second thoughts were things I chose to ignore for what I believed was the greater reward. Adrenaline rushed into my veins as I smirked and seized the opportunity to show off my agility with the ’93 Tracer. Telling everyone to exit the car, I strapped on my safety belt and prepared for the ride of my life.

40. 50. 60. 70. My eyes quickly darted from the speedometer and the road. My left hand clutched the steering wheel as my right firmly gripped the hand brake. Everything blurred behind me as the rear tires screeched and spat out a trail of smoke. Within seconds it was over.

Lifting the handbrake, I sharply steered right when the turn approached. The Tracer whipped right and I quickly counter steered trying to regain control of my car. Within a split second, the car whipped back into alignment and flew into an upcoming turn.

“Shit!” I yelped.

The vehicle failed to grip back onto the road and slammed into the concrete curb. The Tracer, upon impact, spun wildly out of control. Even feelings of panic did not have time to sink in as I slammed into a huge light pole.
My vision faded as I fought to stay conscious. I instinctively grabbed my keys to turn off the ignition. The searing heat prevented me from doing so by slicing my thumb and index finger. The intense heat from the impact conducted through the large metal key, burning anything upon contact. Discouraged and scared, I tried to get out. I grabbed the door handle and tried to push the door open. The door did not budge. I tried ramming the door with my shoulders. Again, the door refused to move. Frantic, I kicked the door with both feet as hard as I could. The door finally ripped open as I stumbled out.

Feelings of relief swallowed me while I gasped for air. I stood standing inside a blanket of white smoke spewing out from the hood. I fought for every breath I took. The stench of burnt rubber and engine oil scoured the air around. I staggered away from the wretched fumes looking for a clearing to sit in. Sharp pains drilled into my left knee as I made my way to a nearby sidewalk.

Thousands of thoughts raced through my mind. What am I going to do? What about my car? What will my parents think? I stressed out and realized breathing had become much more difficult. I figured the hard impact must have knocked my breath away. Slowing my breathing pattern, I noticed two figures running to me.

“I called the cops and the hospital!” Jason sputtered, “Don’t worry, you’ll be alright.”

“Victor, are you okay?” Irene’s voice trailed. “Oh my God! Look at his knee!” Within minutes I lost consciousness.

“Ugh,” I groaned. “I must have been out for hours,” I thought. My vision blurred for a few seconds before anything came into focus. Paramedics, friends and family surrounded me and stared with unforgettable looks on their faces. One of the doctors began to speak.

“He’s a lucky guy. If the vehicle had not spun the way it did,” the doctor paused as if trying to find the right words to say, “then the chances of a traffic fatality would have been very likely. He suffers from a one inch puncture wound to his left knee and a punctured lung.”

I will never forget the looks on my parents’ faces. My mom bit her lower lip as the doctor explained that a tube was necessary to suck the air out of my chest. The air in my chest pushed against my lung, and it had to be sucked out in order for my left lung to inflate again. My dad stared blankly ahead, yet it was easy to see that he was tormented inside with sadness, disappointment, anger, and fear. Their concern for my wellbeing allowed me
to realize how valuable my life was to them. I found myself enraged with my actions and inconsideration of my life. Regret and feelings of failure plagued my thoughts for a month. How selfish and inconsiderate of me if I had not lived through that accident. I will never put anyone who loves or cares for me through that torment again for a foolish reason.

Morphine was required to sedate the pain after surgery was complete. Oral painkillers replaced morphine when I was released from the hospital a week later. Now there are two permanent scars to remind me how grateful I am to be alive today. When I finally arrived home, I had to look outside. Surprisingly enough, it was a beautiful day. With a newfound sense of appreciation, I took a deep breath and admired birds chirping in the air, sun shining overhead – the whole shebang. Did I mention that breakfast that day was amazing as well?
A Learning Experience
(Dedicated to my mom)
Danya Hottenstein

Mom, there has been something on my mind that just won’t go away. The different events in my life and growing up in the Hottenstein family have made me who I am, and I wanted to say “thank you” and let you know that I appreciate all the things that you have done for me.

I’ve read a few passages lately that make me think of all the little things and how it is important to live life to the fullest and not be afraid to take action to do something different. One poem that really stuck out for me is called “If I Knew.”

If I knew it would be the last time
That I’d see you fall asleep,
I would tuck you in more tightly
and pray the Lord, your soul to keep.

If I knew it would be the last time
that I see you walk out the door,
I would give you a hug and kiss
and call you back for one more.

If I knew it would be the last time
I’d hear your voice lifted up in praise,
I would video tape each action and word,
so I could play them back day after day.

If I knew it would be the last time,
I could spare an extra minute
to stop and say “I love you,”
instead of assuming you would KNOW I do.

If I knew it would be the last time
I would be there to share your day,
Well I’m sure you’ll have so many more,
so I can let just this one slip away.

For surely there’s always tomorrow
to make up for an oversight,
and we always get a second chance
to make everything just right.
There will always be another day
to say “I love you,”
And certainly there’s another chance
to say our “Anything I can do?”

But just in case I might be wrong,
and today is all I get,
I’d like to say how much I love you
and I hope we never forget.

Tomorrow is not promised to anyone,
young or old alike,
And today may be the last chance
you get to hold your loved one tight.

So if you’re waiting for tomorrow,
why not do it today?
For if tomorrow never comes,
you’ll surely regret the day,

That you didn’t take that extra time
for a smile, a hug, or a kiss
and you were too busy to grant someone,
what turned out to be their one last wish.

So hold your loved ones close today,
and whisper in their ear,
Tell them how much you love them
and that you’ll always hold them dear

Take time to say “I’m sorry,”
“Please forgive me,” “Thank you,” or “It’s okay...”
And if tomorrow never comes,
you’ll have no regrets about today.

After reading this poem over and over again, one thought comes to mind: that my mom and I had never discussed some of our issues from when I was a teenager. I need to let her know that I acknowledge the hard times that I put her through. One of these moments that stands out happened at the end of my junior year in high school. My mom and I were constantly fighting and bickering. I was at a point in my life where I was
trying to figure out who I was and where I fit in.

One of the main conflicts was curfew. I was always arguing with mom about how late I could stay out and that it wasn’t fair. I had just started working at The Chart House and had a new group of friends who had become my role models. I looked up to them for advice. I quickly realized that they made a nightly habit of hanging out after work and just relaxing and reminiscing about their shift. They were all older and I didn’t want to be “the young little kid that had to leave and be home by midnight.” Shannon, one of my coworkers, asked me if I had to go home soon and told me it was past my bedtime. Everyone started laughing. I let them know that I was the one in charge and that my parents trusted me to make the right decisions, and for being 16 years old, I was more mature than most kids my age.

I argued with my parents that if I could keep my grades up, stay on the honor role, and stay out of trouble, then I should be able to do whatever I wanted. And that is what I did. Mom and Dad were okay with it until I started coming home really late. We never talked about a set time to be home; it just couldn’t be “too late.” One night I had been hanging out with the crew, and we all decided to go up to Allyson’s house. Her house had an extension on it that was sound proof, so at anytime of the night, we could blast music, be loud, noisy and just have fun. Time slipped away from me and before I knew it, it was 4:30 in the morning. I needed to get home and hoped that when I got there, Duke, our dog, wouldn’t start barking and wake everyone up. I quietly pulled up the driveway, and of course the dog was going at it. I got out of my car as fast as I could and yelled, “Duke, it’s me, be quiet. Duke stop, Dukie boy, Duke, shhhh.” I knew everyone had heard and looked at the clock. Man, Duke blew it for me; I was caught. My parents didn’t get up right then to say anything, but I knew it was coming. The next day Mom and Dad started by joking around about how late I had come in and then tried to tell me that I needed to be in by 2 o’clock or I would be grounded. “Ha, ha, ha,” I said, but they weren’t laughing.

Even after I was caught, I still argued and fought with my parents to prove that I was an adult and needed to be treated this way. I felt bad because my mom was in tears from fighting so much. Even though I can’t consider myself a “bad teenager,” I was the worst kid out of the five in my family. I wanted my mom to fight with me till the point that I was going to run away. But it didn’t happen. My mom broke down and wrote me a letter. Of course, I thought it was going to be a mean letter telling me how bad I was and what I was doing wrong. The letter didn’t say this at all. It said that she has been meditating a lot and saying prayers. She had been trying to find inner peace and forgiveness and had been listening for answers from God. Also, she pointed out that she knows I’m a good person and wants to sit down and talk, not fight.

You would think this would have touched me in some kind of way, but being the
A Learning Experience

Danya Hottenstein

teenager that I was, it made me mad. I wanted her to fight back. So with me being so stubborn, we kept arguing. We even argued about what radio station to listen to in the car. On Maui, it takes about half an hour to an hour and a half to get anywhere, and that whole time I would keep putting the radio on the top 10 station, 102.7. Immediately she would put it on the oldies, 98.3. We would say a few smart remarks back and forth and then after a while she would hit my hand away and yell, “Fine then, we’re not going to listen to anything at all.” We rode in silence the rest of the way home.

Sometimes it was better and sometimes it was worse. When I turned 18, I realized that we were different people and at this time I had to move out. Once that happened, everything changed. My mom and I became friends. I called her up all the time for advice on shopping, cleaning, and cooking. Even the first time I got really sick, I headed home. I went back to my old room and my old bed. My mom was there, cooking me homemade soup and giving me Tylenol. I knew that I could count on her for anything.

I look back on it today, and I know that must have hurt her deeply. We have yet to talk about that moment when she gave me the letter. I don’t want another day to pass, so I am going to let her read this story and I want her to know that I apologize for all those years before and to thank her for always being there when times were rough. My mom is the most caring, thoughtful person in the world and I appreciate everything that she has done for me. I can’t say that I regret the things that happened, for they are a part of life and, as our family would call it, a “learning experience.” All of these things in life made me who I am today.
My Halloween Nightmare
Jennifer Izumi

Halloween has always been the wicked stepsister of the holiday family. For most people Halloween means candy, costumes, plastic skulls and decorated pumpkins. For me, this was also the usual scene; however, on the fateful night of October 31, 2003, I experienced the other side of Halloween. It was the eerie and scary side, the part that’s supposed to be just fun and games like haunted houses with ghosts and goblins. This night, on the other hand, was no fun and games, just fright and terror; it would be a night I would never forget. There was a full moon, and coldness in the air. Something in the atmosphere wasn’t right to me and somehow I knew that the night was not going to be typical. Something unknown and possibly not good was lurking in the darkness. With that uneasiness, I headed toward Halloween with excitement and wonder about what was to come.

It was late in the afternoon when my room became filled with a constant parade of friends trying to piece together our costumes for the night. We anxiously tried to get dressed in our rock’n’roll theme. My guy friends looked absolutely ridiculous in their blond wigs, and eye lined eyes while we girls complimented their rocker fashion with fishnets, knee-high boots, and big furry jackets as we portrayed ourselves as their “groupies.” After about an hour and a huge clutter of clothes in the middle of my room, we finally filed out of my house and into the numerous cars parked outside ready to start the party. When we got there, I was so filled with excitement that I jumped out of the car and started walking towards the huge party house that was decoratively adorned with illuminated pumpkins.

The party was starting and the crowds were coming in droves. After making my rounds and saying my “hellos” to everyone, I stumbled upon my good friend Skylar. Having not seen him since the accident, I quickly ran toward him trying not to hurt him as I gave him a big hug. Unfortunately, two weeks prior, Skylar had been in a horrible car accident while driving in the mountains. The driver was drunk and drove the car off the side of the mountain. Falling hundreds of feet, Skylar suffered a broken neck, arm, and over fifty staples in his head. It had been exactly sixteen days since the accident, and already he was out and partying, neck-brace and all. On top of his head was a tall Mad Hatter hat that accompanied his costume, which fortunately covered the frightening appearance of his gruesome wounds. Assuring me that he was fine and feeling “up-to-it,” he strolled inside with me.

Hours had consumed the party, and the night was coming to an end. The remaining very drunk partiers gathered in my friend’s downstairs bedroom, which was hot from all of the sweaty bodies roaming in and out. The overbearing smell of alcohol made my head twinge with pain as my headache continued to worsen. I walked upstairs and outside to
get a fresh breath of air when suddenly I heard people screaming. At first, I tried not to pay attention, remembering that drunken people were seldom quiet and in control, but the screams only got louder. I ran back inside and tried to push my way down the stairs as terrified faces pushed past me. “Oh my god, what’s happening?” I frantically asked. But I received no answers, just more shoving as my friends went flying by. “He’s going to die! Help!” my best friend Maria shouted as she hysterically shook me. Hesitantly, and fearing the worst, I walked down to the room. I turned to my left and it seemed as though somebody had hit a fire hydrant, only it was spewing blood instead of water. Red blood was splashed on a wall. In shock, I watched Skylar holding his head, bleeding profusely all over himself, the walls, and the remaining spectators. He was completely drenched in his own blood, and the few who remained were speckled with red all over their clothes and bodies. Everyone stood frozen in shock. It was as if my mind had left my body and I was in a trance. Everything in the room went quiet until Maria’s cries of panic brought me back to reality, “Jen, call the police!”

I ran to the phone and desperately tried to steady my hand as I dialed 911. It seemed like hours had gone by as we impatiently waited for help to come. Despite the large amounts of blood still gushing from his head, he “seemed” fine as he tried to assure us he was going to be okay. When the paramedics finally arrived, we directed them downstairs and watched in disbelief as they picked up the broken and still bleeding Skylar. I will never forget the sight of his limp body dripping blood, staining the floors as they lifted him onto the stretcher. In a moment, his eyes rolled back into his head and he was unconscious. I touched his cold hand and watched as he was taken away in the ambulance.

He was taken to the hospital, and the next day I went to visit him. It turns out that the bleeding was caused from a torn scab sitting on top of his staples. The staple pressed on a blood vessel and made it pop, causing the excessive bleeding. Skylar is fine now and had no permanent damage, but the memories will last forever. I wouldn’t say my Halloween experience that night was ruined, just stained with memories that will take a lifetime to forget. Halloween will probably never be the same again for me, and once a year on that day, I will always be reminded of my Halloween nightmare.
The Unfinished Game
Loreen Kawewehi

Summer time in Nanakuli is super hot and Grandpa’s house is no exception. The fans in every room are on but do little to lessen the heat.

“Can you hurry up? It’s your turn,” I said wiping the sweat from my forehead.

“Kanoe, no rush me,” my cousin Nainoa hissed back.

With scars to prove every year of his eight-year-old life, Nainoa is as stubborn as they come. I call him a poor sport because he hates to lose. But I guess that’s natural for one hardhead kid like him.

“I know you stalling because you going lose,” I grumbled.

Pulling his UH baseball cap down over his eyes, I can see Nainoa smirking behind the cards that were dealt to him nearly twenty minutes ago. His reign as “Crazy Eight Champion” is near its end and the smell of victory – my victory – is in the air.

“Nainoa! It’s time to go!” Aunty Kalena hollered from the screen door. The ride from Ewa Beach usually took twenty minutes but today, for some reason, it seemed like Aunty made it in ten.

“See, I told you to hurry up! Now you gotta go, so beat it,” I complained throwing my winning hand across the coffee table. “We’ll finish this game when you come back next weekend.”

“No forget to kiss your Aunty and Grandpa good-bye before you leave!” Nainoa’s mom reminded him as she made her way back to the car.

“Ok, we go finish this up next time. See you next Sunday and, oh yeah, best of seven wins!” he yelled as he ran out of the house.

From my bedroom window I could see him laughing.

“Nainoa!” I yelled, “Nainoa over here!”

Jumping up and down, I waved my hands frantically above my head. He knew it was my way of telling him that I wasn’t mad anymore. Nainoa stuck his body out of the truck and began posing like his favorite pro wrestler, Hulk Hogan. He always had me laughing with that stunt of his. With a final wave of his hand, their car disappeared into the
Nanakuli sunset.

The cool evening air was a welcome change to Grandpa’s house. Even Keala, the household mutt, was enjoying the gentle breeze as she lounged on the linoleum floor in the kitchen.

I was already in bed when the ringing phone startled me. It was probably my sister Melia’s boyfriend so I decided not to answer it and gave in to the sleep demon. As I drifted back off to sleep I could faintly hear my mother’s tired voice across the hallway. The last thing I remember is thinking that my sister would be dead meat tomorrow morning.

“Girls, wake up. It’s Monday, time for school.”

“We’re up Mom.”

I was the first to notice that she wasn’t dressed in her everyday suit and skirt attire. She didn’t seem the least bit sick to me but who am I to judge.

“Mom, aren’t you going to work?”

Massaging a dollop of V05 in my head, she continued brushing my hair, “No. I have some errands to do today.”

For some strange reason there was something in my gut telling me otherwise, but I decided not to worry about it.

As we rode into town, traffic on the H-1 freeway was at a standstill. I realized that the silence in the car was deafening because the radio was off.

“Mom, can you turn on the radio?”

I could see her yellow stained fingertips shaking nervously as she puffed on her fourth cigarette this morning.

“Sure,” she answered half-heartedly, “I forgot.”

As she extended her arm to turn on the radio, I sensed a bit of uneasiness in her voice.

“We’ll be back with the news at the top of the hour right after these messages,” the disc jockey’s smooth as velvet voice announced over the airwaves.
“The name of the eight-year-old boy who was electrocuted last night in Ewa Beach has been identified as Nainoa Fatu Jr.,” reported the female voice.

I couldn’t believe my ears.

“What a coincidence!” I thought to myself and smiled, “Nainoa is gonna get a kick out of this when he finds out that another boy on our small island has the same exact name as his.”

The smile on my face faded when I locked eyes with my mom in the rear view mirror. The look on her grief-stricken face spoke a thousand words and I could feel myself trying to gasp for air.

“Mom? Is that our Nainoa that got electrocuted? What’s going on? What happened?” I pleaded as my voice began quivering.

Stirred awake by the commotion my sister demanded a straight answer, “Mom, tell us, what’s going on?”

“We’re on our way to the hospital. Aunty Kalena called early this morning and said that Nainoa was electrocuted last night. You girls know how kolohe he was yeah? Well, he was dared by one of his friends to climb to the top of the light pole and that hardhead kid took on the challenge. He was on his way down when he started losing his grip.”

Tears began to roll down my mother’s freckled cheeks as she took a puff on her cigarette to regain her composure.

“Nainoa reached for the nearest thing his skinny hands could grab on to. Instead of the telephone wire, he grabbed onto a live electric wire.”

After a few more puffs Mom continued, “Girls, things are not looking good. Aunty asked if I could bring you two to the hospital because she knew that Nainoa would want that. He’s unconscious but she thinks that he is able to hear and understand when people are talking to him.”

When we arrived at the hospital, I convinced myself that Nainoa was probably not as bad as they were making it out to be.

Deciding at the last minute to stay in the waiting room, my sister gave me a hug and
whispered in my ear, “Tell Nainoa that I love him and I’m going to miss him.”

With that I made my way down the ICU hallway to Room 2 with my mom. I could hear the rhythmic beeping of the monitors and gasps of air the artificial breathing machines were producing. I stopped dead in my tracks when I came upon the sign that read “Room 2.”

As I peered through the window, my heart sank. The lifeless body of my favorite cousin lay there as if he were asleep. His head was shaved and swollen to three times its normal size, but I knew it was Nainoa because I recognized the four-inch scar near his left ear.

Motioning us to come in, Aunty Kalena made her way to the glass door and opened it so we could come in. After hugging me she spoke in a hushed voice, “Kanoe, if you want to talk to Nainoa you can. Just hold his hand and whisper directly into his ear.”

My tears began flowing freely as I made my way over to the chair next to Nainoa’s bed. I reached over and took his lifeless hand and placed it in mine. It was still warm, and that was all the comfort I needed.

I began whispering in his ear of all the fun times we shared together. I rambled on and on and found myself expecting Nainoa to answer – but he never did. Aunty finally asked me to finish up so others could come into the room.

As I bent over his bed railing for the last time, I placed my lips next to his ear and whispered, “Nainoa, I’ll understand if you don’t make it to Grandpa’s house this weekend. We can always continue our Crazy Eight Championship match in Heaven.”

From the corner of my eye, I could see a single tear form and fall gently across his left cheek. He understood everything I said, and I took great comfort in that.

My cousin Nainoa passed away later that evening surrounded by family. His legacy continues today with the Crazy Eight Championship Tournament that we hold during our Annual Christmas Eve Family Gathering. I was the reigning champion until last year when my son, Nainoa, took the title away from me.
Precious One
Lianne Kimoto

When I found out that I was pregnant, I was only 19 years old. I knew who the father was, but I did not know what to do. Everyone told me that I wasn’t ready and that I should have an abortion, but of course I was stubborn and said, “I did it, and how can I murder such a little one?” That is when it all started.

Before I gave birth, I had previously gone three times to the emergency room at Kapi’olani Medical Center thinking that I was having contractions, but now it was for real. I had horrible cramps in my stomach and felt sick. My boyfriend at the time took off from work early to come and take me to the hospital only to find out that all I wanted was for him to drive me around first. As we pulled up to the emergency room, I could barely walk and the attendant didn’t bother to help me open the door or get me a wheelchair. When I finally got settled, I found out I was already six centimeters dilated and had only three more centimeters to go. It only took thirty minutes for me to be able and ready to push, and half an hour later, out came my precious baby girl on February 25, 2003. She was 7 pounds 11 ounces and 21 inches long.

We couldn’t think of a name for her so we brought her home as “Baby Girl Kimoto.” Soon, though, her name became Raeanne Michiko Makanamaikalani Kimoto-Montgomery. The first weeks were hell because she kept crying, and she was so small to bathe and change. After a while, we got the hang of it, and her daddy went back to work. I would take her on walks and sing and read to her until he came home.

My life had changed so drastically that I didn’t even notice. My friends would call to ask me if I wanted to go to the movies and out to dinner, but I always told them I couldn’t. I had to stay home and take care of Makana. Sometimes they would call just to talk stories with me and I couldn’t talk long because Makana would be hungry or maybe just crying for my attention. So I couldn’t just go to a movie or go hang out with friends; I couldn’t even talk on the phone when I wanted to. All of my attention, love and patience turned to this little precious creation. Makana became the center of my world without me even knowing it.

At five months old she started to crawl. Wow, this little person can finally move around on her own, but now she didn’t want to be carried. At nine months she started to walk, and somewhere in between there, she learned to say, “Ma.” The most wonderful feeling in the whole world is when your child knows you and calls you “Ma.”
I remember one day I was at work and thinking about her. I realized that my little baby girl is now becoming her own person and pretty soon she won’t need me as much. I thought of how I gave birth to her and how we brought her home and how I fed, changed, and bathed her and now, she can walk on her own. Time flew by and I realized that I didn’t have time to appreciate any of it.

Even if she is only a year and a half old, Makana has shown me so much of the world that I had forgotten as I grew older. She showed me how neat trees were, how to smell every flower, how to wake up at 6:30 am every morning, and most of all how to appreciate and look at everything in life.

Then, her father and I separated mainly because I don’t think he could handle the overwhelming responsibility. He couldn’t go out with his friends every night, and he couldn’t just do anything at anytime anymore. I understood and accepted the fact that my life has changed to focus on Makana, but he couldn’t accept it. That was fine with me because my focus is on her and nothing else. If he wasn’t going to be supportive and give her everything she deserves, then he doesn’t deserve her.

Then I became a single mother, trying to juggle my daughter, working full-time and going to school full-time. I know I should have waited to have a child, but I am glad I didn’t. I love her and now that I think about it, if I didn’t have her with me now, I would probably not be in school, not working and still partying my life away. I would have no responsibility, no goals and nothing to look forward to. Every day that I go through, especially when it is tough, I can only think of her and that I am doing it for her.

Now, everyday when I come home, I have her waiting for me yelling, “Ma!! Ma!! Ma!!” I wait all day just to hear her call me. She loves anything that I give her, and neither of us can wait for a day off so that we can go to the park and just have fun together. I also need to acknowledge my mom. If it weren’t for her, I wouldn’t be able to go to work and go to school, and I would have an insecure, rotten daughter. The only way that I can do everything I am doing is with the support of my mom and daughter.

I am dedicating this story to my precious baby girl, Makana, to show her that I always loved her and always will. I will do anything for you to make you happy, and I will be there for you for the rest of your life.
Family Nightmare
Kyle Lau

It was five in the morning when I received an alarming call which started my family’s nightmare. Answering the phone, I heard a serious tone from the other line; it was the police.

“Son, I’m sorry to say, but your mother has just got into a car accident and is in critical condition,” said the officer.

“What! Are you serious?” I asked. My heart was pounding with fear. The thought of losing my mother felt like my life was coming to an end. I gave the phone to my father and, now knowing where the accident happened, we fled to the scene.

My father, my two sisters and I were sitting in a car full of silence, hearing nothing but the sound of the engine; then my dad started to cry. Seeing tears in my dad’s eyes put me in agony. It made me want to murder the person who did this to my mother. As we got closer to the scene, all my dad could say was, “Don’t worry you guys, Mama’s going to be okay.” From the backseat came the voices of my sisters praying for my mom’s well-being. I didn’t know what else to do but be strong.

Red, white and blue flashing lights were all we could see as my dad pulled over on the side of the road. Walking passed the restricted area, I could see my mom’s helmet cracked by the face shield, moped nearly split in half, and the engine only held on by the wires. That image alone gave me an idea of how injured my mom must be. Not caring about the surroundings, my dad and sisters ran to my mom as she lay on a flat bed. Conscious, but in panic, I could see the tremendous pain she was going through. I stepped next to her, and she reached for my hand. When I grasped her palms, she was warm while my fingers were oddly stone cold. The fear of losing her had drained the blood out of my hands. Seeing a simple grin on her face was extremely overwhelming.

We followed the ambulance to Queen’s hospital, waiting fretfully and fearing the news that was to come. It seemed like ages before anyone approached us. Then, there he was walking with heavy footsteps towards us with his spotless white coat and a brown clipboard.

“Mr. Lau, children, your mother is very tough. She could have been paralyzed, but thank god she had her helmet on. This is a critical time in her life where she really needs your love and support. Do all that you can, but all in all, she’s going to be fine,” the doctor reported.

The relief we shared at once was breathtaking.
Staring at my blank ceiling later on that night just made me realize how much my mother meant to me. What would become of my family without our mom? The truth is our family would have slowly fallen apart. My mother is the heart of the family. She nourishes us, protects us, supports us, but most importantly, loves us with all her heart.

For a good six months, we hand fed my mother, carried her to the restroom and wiped her down with a warm cloth every night. Sooner than we thought possible, she stood tall, but still unable to walk or find her balance. In the seventh month, she was going to physical therapy, and the only thing passing my mind was the thought of being able to see her walking and move once again. Not to be disrespectful or anything, but I missed my mom cooking for me, doing my laundry, and just taking care of me in general.

I will never forget the hard times that my family had pulled through. It was a little under a year when my mother emerged and was fully functional. Whenever I see her walking, talking, sitting or standing, I thank God for giving her a second chance. It is now our turn to nourish her, protect her, and support her, but mostly love her a hundred and fifty percent.
Driving Failure Yields Life Lessons
Thomas Lau

At this very moment, stop and remember when you were sixteen years old. Remember those fifty required hours of driver’s education? Sweat trickling down your forehead and your stomach churning as you thought of the dreaded parallel parking routine. Those hours of trial and error finally finished and you’re finally getting your license! That chance to finally drive a car without one of your strict, nagging and overcautious parents by your side yelling “STOP” every second. Ultimate freedom is at hand and you can’t stop smiling. You wallow in pride as you display your new license to your non-driving friends. More so, a seemingly new chapter of your life is starting. There will be new sights to see and new experiences to encounter with this new responsibility. Every sixteen year old experiences these feelings, but I didn’t realize that this would be a turning point in my life that led to new lessons learned.

“The DMV testers are all evil people who hate their jobs and find satisfaction in shutting down every sixteen year olds dreams,” said my friend David, sourly. He clenched his fists and his face masked a hidden bitterness as he described his own road test misadventures. David was an older friend of mine who had acquired his license, but had failed three times on the road test. He informed me that the Dillingham DMV branch was the most difficult place on the island to take the road test. He even half-jokingly suggested that I would not pass on my first two tries, just as he had not. I knew he would be wrong because I felt calm and confident whenever I thought of passing the road test. My good friend then advised me that I needed to make an appointment, since the testers began to line up daily at four o’clock every morning. My energy level dipped suddenly, and this announcement made me break out into a cold sweat. My brain began to create images of failure because I wouldn’t get enough sleep! I loved sleeping in, and sometimes I would only begin sleeping at four a.m.! Heeding my friend’s advice, I scheduled an appointment, paid my eight dollar fee for the upcoming road test, and returned two months later for the precious test appointment.

It was three in the afternoon on a hot, sticky day. On the drive toward Dillingham, my mother was very nervous and was ever more cautious about my driving habits. She even reprimanded me for switching lanes “too quickly”. My feelings were the total opposite of hers since I felt a confident and strong energy flowing through my entire body. I just KNEW that I would leap over this hurdle just like Superman leaping over tall buildings. We finally arrived at the DMV through thick traffic. I quickly dashed out of the car, strode up to the counter, and announced my arrival to the lady. I was here for the test.

I was directed towards a waiting room full of a dozen young and nervous drivers. You could see the perspiration glistening on their foreheads, even in the air-conditioned room. They began reciting rules from their driver’s manuals, and shaking their legs
Incessantly. The licensed drivers, who had brought them, were offering their own tips for road success, but to no avail. The want-to-be driver looked as dazed as a deer in headlights. As one road tester approached, all eyes would judge this tester, access his/her “niceness quotient”, and exchange quick comments about how lucky or unlucky the driver had been.

Almost in slow-motion, a tester started to approach the waiting area. I could hear the groans of my fellow test-takers as each concluded that this was the most difficult tester of them all. ZING! All of a sudden, my intuition kicked in and my stomach hardened. “Please, let it not be me!” I silently prayed to myself. “THOMAS LAU” called the old man after his seemingly ten minute crawl to the waiting area. My fate was sealed. My confidence started to wane. It seemed that my friend, David, might have been right about me having to take this test twice. I crawled like a tortoise to his beckoning, since I didn’t want him to be my tester. I sincerely hoped that I would find myself waking up to a bad dream, or at least that he would transfer me to someone else. After some paperwork, I reluctantly led this man to my car where I would attempt to receive my license.

Immediately, the tester told me to get into the car, roll down my window, and signal my tail lights. I chuckled to myself and whispered, “No sweat,” and did as I was told. The tester got into my car and we were off. My heart raced as I was setting out on my own little adventure. Leaving the DMV parking lot, I approached a stop sign and was told to make a left turn. I signaled a left turn and proceeded to do what was instructed. I was shocked to see the tester scribbling something on his clipboard. My palms began to sweat and the humidity of the day was not helping. The instructor sensed my inner feelings and told me to roll up the windows and turn on the A/C. The thought of making a mistake in the first minute lingered in my mind. Making a mistake was sharp and painful, like a knife cutting into my heart.

Up ahead was a traffic light, and I was told to take a left turn. I immediately signaled left, and the instructor began scribbling something on his clipboard. WHAT?! I couldn’t believe this man was marking me down for another mistake! I quickly relived the previous moments in my mind and I couldn’t find a thing wrong. I prayed hard that he was just doodling. All of a sudden, my friends words from earlier came back to me. “Only three mistakes…” I had committed a mistake before even leaving the driveway and another one just now. I wasn’t sure what I had done wrong, but if I wanted to get my license, I had better get my act together and start driving well.

Now, as I approached the intersection, the tester told me to make a left turn. I knew I had to yield to oncoming cars, and there were so many that I began to panic. The light was turning yellow, and the last car did not yield. I was in the middle of the intersection,
Driving Failure Yields Life Lessons  

Thomas Lau

and I was told to back up. After scribbling some more notes down, the tester told me to return to the DMV. My heart was broken. I knew that I had failed. “I need to pass this test! I worked fifty long hours for this moment!” I begged. He calmly rejected my pleas and, after a few more of my fits, he led me back to the DMV office. I had committed four mistakes, and I discovered what they were: not waiting three seconds at the stop sign, signaling too early, not head-checking the bike lane, and blocking the intersection.

This experience has taught me very valuable lessons on not being overconfident in my abilities. Better to be humble. In life, it is important to keep an open mind, like infants, instead of a closed, cocky mind. I was close minded because I believed I was a great driver who would pass on my first try. When I failed, it was a wake-up call for me, and I have applied this lesson to my life. I began to understand that life is not as easy as it first seems. One has to work hard and keep an open mind to succeed. The new mindset I adopted was that there is never an end to what you can learn and that I will continue to learn throughout my whole life. I also learned the value of persistence because after three more grueling attempts and waiting in lines at five in the morning, I finally received my driver’s license. Looking back, I realize that the road-testers had actually done their job since I have never been in an accident. I am no threat to the safety of drivers and pedestrians thanks to them.
Burning Out
Ardie Manuel

It was a hot day as I sat in my health class waiting for the bell to ring. As the teacher talked, I daydreamed about getting in the car and making my way home. Little did I know that I was going to learn one of my biggest lessons in life. “R-r-ting!” went the school bell. The students got out of their seats knowing that the school day had come to an end.

While I made my way to the parking lot, I could see the student drivers heading the same way I was. I crossed the road separating the student parking lot from the library parking lot. There, I saw people blasting the sounds of their stereos, starting their cars, and revving their engines. A lot of people were into the racing scene, and this caused the students to “soop-up” or modify their vehicles. I made my way to my car where a bunch of my friends were parked. Most or all of them were also into the racing scene. Many of the cars you would see consisted of Civics, Accords, Preludes, and 240sx. I remember everyone parking in a reverse style so that you could see the front of his or her car when you would walk by.

As I started my car, I let the engine run to warm it up. My friends did the same. I remembered that it was Jon’s birthday. Usually, when it is one of our friends’ birthdays, we would do them a favor. Jon put up his index finger as if he were pointing to the sky. He said “Ardie, one time!” It meant that he wanted me to burn out for him. My friends always like to do those types of things like burnout, race, or rev their cars just to hear their aftermarket exhaust. I told him, “Nah! Not today.” He replied, “C’mon, one time for da boys.”

I rolled out of the parking lot and the peer pressure started to kick in. It was as if an angel and a devil stood at each side of my shoulders. The devil was saying, “Do it, they’ll think you’re a fag if you don’t.” And the angel contesting, “Don’t do it, remember what your parents taught you about driving?”

Unfortunately, I gave into the temptation. The vehicle in front of me was a handi-van school bus. The bus went forward which made me think I had enough room to accomplish my stunt. So I held down the clutch, shifted into first gear, and held the gas pedal down. The tachometer’s needle started to rise and my car’s engine got noisier. Then the tachometer’s needlepointed to 4,000 rpm, then 5,000 rpm, then redline. As soon as the needle hit then redline, I “popped” or let go of the clutch. The tires made a screeching noise and my tires lost traction. My car then regained grip of the road and I could smell the odor of burnt rubber in the air. The car pulled forward, and right before I could hold the car in place… “SMACK!” That was sound of my car hitting the bus in front of me. My hood
Burning Out

Ardie Manuel

folded and looked as if it were the top of a tent. Some students even said my car bounced
back. I couldn’t believe it, my first car accident.

I turned off my car and ran to the vehicle in front of me. I could hear the screams
of frightened children. I approached the driver, along with her assistant, who looked at
me furiously. We had to remove the students from the bus and transport them into another
vehicle. I sat on the curb by the road and asked myself, “What have I just done?” The
driver looked at me with disappointment while she called the police. While we waited for
the police to come, she talked to me and said, “Boy, no follow your friends ladat! Not worth
it you peel out. You can hurt somebody.”

I thought about what she said to me and let it sink into my heart. That day, all I got
was the embarrassment of other students and a police report. I learned that elders give you
advice for your own safety. This experience not only changed the way I drive but, also the
way I think about life. Now I know the reason why my dad once told me, “You can always
replace your car but never a life, so think about the way you drive.”
Wot, Like Beef?
Randy Rivera

Ala Moana Beach Park is a big and beautiful slice of heaven. It is representative of the image of paradise that tourists have long associated with Hawaii. The entire park and beach complex is one of my favorite places. Conversely, sometimes the park reminds me of hell given its history of turmoil. Those conflicts have taken place in the water and on land.

The vast swimming area that runs parallel to the park, which has distance markers at the 500 meter and 1500 meter mark, was once an old boat channel named the Ala Moana Channel. The completion of the beach and park complex in the ‘30s brought about a conflict among the residents. “With the development of the park, conflicts arose between swimmers and boating enthusiasts” (Clark 62). Swimmers and boaters were in conflict over space to do their water activity.

It gets no better on land. Ala Moana is a haven for homeless people, especially when shelters are overcrowded. “City officials said complaints about illegal campers and homeless people monopolizing Ala Moana Beach Park facilities prompted an early-morning sweep through the park today...Police estimated that about 100 people camp illegally at the popular beach park on any given night” (Antone). Homeowners are in conflict with people who make the park their home because both want more space at the park.

Sometimes the conflicts at the park lead to the extreme: death. A man was killed there a little over a week ago. “What may have been a fight over food ended with one man dead Sunday night. It happened at Ala Moana Beach Park in front of several people” (KITV). Two men were in conflict for basic necessities.

Why can’t we all just get along? It’s 11:30 on a drop dead gorgeous Fourth of July morning. There is absolutely no visible speck of green at Ala Moana Beach Park. It has been utterly camouflaged by tents, BBQ grills, beach mats, humongous children’s toys, and anything else you could think of to bring to the beach. Rebecca and I are here to enjoy the holiday, the beach, the fireworks at night, and the aloha spirit traditionally prevalent among this crowd.

We make the mistake of not preparing or planning for the day. We are both of the spontaneous persuasion. We also make the mistake of staying out late the night before and not waking up before sunrise prior to coming here. Diehard veterans of this annual festival know a lot better. They start planning for this the year before, right after the previous Independence Day holiday. The best spots at the park are taken by people who have executed this plan out with military precision.
Traffic is a standstill within the beach/park complex. Only fools would even bother coming here on this particular day and time. Rebecca and I are big time fools. Sitting there in a silver Geo Metro, we are going through our normal bitching routine. Although we both do it, I can honestly say that she does the vast majority of the bitching. She bitches about why we stayed out so late, why didn’t we stay home and pack our stuff, why did we bother even coming here, why I wear Speedos to the beach instead of board shorts like a normal local guy, and so on. Suddenly, things start to get better…or so we thought.

A family of four in a Toyota 4-Runner, parked by the tennis courts, starts to pull out. It seems as if one of the little kids had vomit all over himself. I overhear the father yelling at him; “Kaleigh, you stupid portagee kid! How many times I gotta tell you, only half wun bottle of Heineken not da whole ting! You still wun keiki you know”. As they start to leave, we start to ecstatically move in for the kill. The only problem is that we weren’t the only ones bearing down on the prized parking stall.

As Rebecca and I start to drive forward into the parking space, the gigantic Chevy doolie in front of us starts to back up into the same stall. We both think that we have the right of way. We both do not give way. We both start honking. We both start yelling. We flash the bird at each other. Finally, we both get out of our respective automobiles. That is where the similarities end.

There is seven of them and only one of me. While I’m not exactly a little guy, I am not a massive football lineman like each one of these scurrilous seven. Rebecca is yelling frantically for me to get back into the car and just yield to them. She tells me there’s always next year. I become a walking paradox. My brain whispers to me listen to your woman, but the XY chromosome in me shouts to me stand your ground. Me dancing with seven partners. It all seems so unfair.

The seven of them do not stand a chance against me! I am the ultimate martial arts movie buff. I know all of Bruce’s, Jackie’s, Jet’s, and Uma’s movies by heart. I am also a 121st degree black belt in Street Fighter II Championship Edition and Mortal Kombat. I even have a throw down line, “Boards don’t hit back…but guys in Speedos do.” Realistically, they would need at least seven Shaquille O’neals to have a chance with me.

Each one of the seven burly individuals is of a different ethnic group: Caucasian, Hawaiian, Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, and Samoan. The lowest and most stinging blow possible comes from the Filipino. He says, “Brah, you bettah get your shahkbait narrow eyes back on da plane and go back to Tokyo where you belong.” Unbeknownst to Chewbacca, I am a local Filipino just like him.
Wot, Like Beef?

Randy Rivera

The super silly seven each got into their respective on guard positions ready to take me out. They are ready, and so am I. If I do go out, which ain’t gonna happen, at least I’ll go out on my shield. Suddenly, like a finely tuned orchestra, they all start to vomit in perfect unison. It turns out that they all drank a half a bottle too much of Heineken. After their bulimic display, they stumbled around clumsily as they try to find that elusive balance. As I laughed, police came to escort the intoxicated bunch out of the park. Unlike Jackie Chan, they are definitely not drunken masters.

Honestly, I am happy that the fight of the milennium was cancelled. I am even happier because I took a stand against the not so magnificent seven. I’ve never been in a fistfight my whole life so naturally I wonder how I would have fared. I start to wonder if I would have been so brave if Rebecca wasn’t there. The wondering turns on a switch in my head.

So many life lessons flow through my head. They all have conflict as the theme. Gotta struggle to use the beach. Gotta struggle to use the park and bathrooms. Gotta struggle to find refuge when you homeless. Gotta struggle to get food when you starving. Gotta struggle to find parking. Gotta struggle to find ones own identity. Gotta struggle against jerks to gain inner strength. Gotta struggle with inner demons to learn how to make peace with them. Gotta struggle with different peoples, ethnicities, and cultures in order to find peace or compromise. Gotta struggle with hard essay topic in order to find something deeper, more profound, and more valuable than a good grade. Gotta struggle with girlfriend to wear Speedos at the beach. Gotta struggle to get what you want or need. Gotta struggle, gotta struggle, gotta struggle, gotta struggle in order to stop struggling...until the next struggle.

Works Cited


Dwight’s Training Breeds Painful Stress
Bruce Schaaf

In the cold brutality of the business world, it is not a given that the tigers will always eat the lambs—sometimes menacing cats will just give their victims a not-so-gentle nudge in the right direction. Ultimately, I remember their nudges well.

Watching the car turn the corner and move slowly towards the main driveway, I notice that several groups of coffee-drinking salespeople start to break up the little huddles they form in the early mornings as they wait for the boss to arrive. It’s a scene that changes little as each morning rolls around. When the boss finally arrives, grown men scamper in several directions like children at a high school when the principal arrives on the scene. Each man finds something to do, something that might bring him into favor with the general manager, who was now pulling into his private parking spot next to the main showroom door leading out into the lot of shiny new cars. Naturally, the general manager gets to park in the prime location, the parking spot considered the kiss of death by the sales staff. Any salesman, who has ever had his personal car accidentally parked there when the boss arrived, always seemed to soon disappear from the company roster of employees.

As usual, the car door opens and out steps a cheery faced man with a Starbucks coffee in one hand and a briefcase and McDonald’s sandwich in the other. Most mornings, I try to make a point of saying “good morning” to him, and enjoy his ever-cheery morning mood as this is usually the last time of the day that he is so carefree and pleasant.

One by one, all of the salesmen make their way to the time clock to punch in. After clocking in the start time on my card, I return it to its rightful place in the dusty card bin on the wall that is located in the employee’s lounge. Today is Thursday, and our weekly sales meeting will be starting in five minutes in the training room located in the small showroom building at the other end of the car lot. This building with towering glass windows for walls, sits close to the corner of the property that fronts Main Street, nestled in the shadow of the extra large neon sign like a rhinoceros hiding in the shade of his favorite tree. As I put one foot in front of the other, making my way towards the small showroom, my familiar thoughts drift off about how this trip between buildings never changes. I transfer the hot cup of coffee I’m carrying from one hand to the other, and glance over our inventory of shiny new vehicles. The rows of cars laid out on both sides of my path are each parked in perfectly aligned rows. Glistening new paint reflects the morning sun in a rainbow of colors. The vehicles are purposely parked with alternating colors so that no two cars of the same color are parked side by side. These cars are arranged like multi-colored bulbs on your grandmother’s Christmas tree.
Arriving at the building, I make my way to my favorite seat in the back row in the rear of the well-lit room, stopping only to pick out a doughnut from the box that is always waiting for us on the table. Barely a moment goes by before our general manager walks in the door, and prepares to start our meeting. You can feel the electricity amongst the sales people rising as he walks into the room. This quality is reminiscent of how tiny hairs will stand up on your arm during a lightening storm. His very presence sends a charge of energy racing through your nerve endings, and at the same time, the thought of becoming his “negative” example at today’s meeting (the big cat’s gazelle to consume), pulsating a rippling set of waves across the sea of fear that resides within your mind.

This is a man that one would consider truly “larger than life.” His name is Dwight Marquette and along with being the general manager of the largest car dealership in the area, he also owns a local bowling alley. He is a short man, with a rounded face and a bit of a bulbous belly. On the one occasion that I saw him in a tee shirt at the bowling alley, he reminded me of my sister when she first became pregnant with my niece. He has a receding hairline, which is always well groomed, without a hair out of place. His hair indicates a clear Elvis style. His expensive and always well-pressed suit always impresses me. This man must have a closet the size of my living room. I have noticed him wear at least two dozen different classy suits. As he walks past one of the young sales people, he gives the kid a glare, and makes a comment about the lousy write-up the kid brought to his desk the day before. Of course, he was referring to the paperwork a salesperson brings to the manager when a customer wants to negotiate a car deal. His comment to the young man brought a slow moving icy shiver to the nape of my neck. Memories of my own uncomfortable trips to this man’s office with less-than-favorable results flood back to my mind. My lame write-up’s always produced the usual response from this tough manager. “Trying to give away another car today, huh, Bruce?” Or “Yeah, what the heck. This dealership doesn’t REALLY need to make a profit, now do we?” After my usual excuses, he would always lean in closely, give me one of his disappointed glares, and say something to the effect of “If you were not such a weak salesperson you would do your job and sell this guy the VALUE of this car and he would make a better offer for it. Then we could all make some money.” He would then pencil me back a counter offer for my customer, and toss the paper back across the desk at me, motioning for the next salesperson in line to take my seat.

A slap on my back by a friend of mine and his question as to whether or not I am awake this morning, jerks me out of my painful trip down memory land and back to reality. The manager’s demeanor has changed now and the cheery face of the man who climbed out of his expensive car earlier this morning, has already started to show the expression of a man in charge, someone who brings out the best in each of us gathered here this morning to hear his rah-rah speech. He is a very talented speaker and has a way of making you want
to succeed, like my old high school coach who would bring out every ounce of effort when I was playing football.

Dwight is impressive alright. He rules the roost with an iron hand, much like the dominant rooster in a chicken coop who harasses his covey of hens to keep them in line. He struts around the room, giving each of us that look to let us know he means business. There have been times when I could sit and talk to this man as though he were an older brother listening to my woes of life’s little speed bumps. However, most times he remains a “pharaoh-like” dictator, whose sharp tongue would rip into your ego at a moment’s notice and raise havoc with any self esteem you brought with you that particular day. He is a man considered a bully by most people’s standards. There has been many a time he used words that would carve into your pride; these words were like new razor blades that would leave marks on your face during an early morning shave following a long night out on the town.

Despite the time that I have worked for him and all the belittling name calling that I took from him, I now look back at those days and I retain no ill feelings toward him. He succeeded in molding a tough and talented salesperson out of me. Even with his brash way of treating employees, I can see now that his methods of training had a rightful place in my past. Without that strong handed slap to my ego, I probably wouldn’t have turned out to be the successful man I am today, able to employ the talents I have mastered at sales.

Sometimes you have to lift your chin up, stand tall, and take what’s coming to you head on. And if you’re lucky, you’ll fulfill your desire to become a person who can look in the mirror and see someone who has become all they can be. Someone larger than life.
Life is a Bite in the Fin
Reyn Sugiyama

We live on a rock in the middle of the biggest body of water on this little planet. There is no way a teenager my age can resist the call of the ocean. My brother and father fish, my mother and sister sunbathe, and I bodyboard. The water is a place where I feel most at home and relaxed. The very motion of the ocean puts me to sleep. But in this experience, the ocean aroused me rather than lulled me to sleep. The day started off as a normal Saturday morning, an argument with my parents about getting a job, Spam, eggs and rice, Saturday morning cartoons, and a trip to the beach with my friends. The only difference was the south shore swell that was supposed to come in that day.

When we arrived at Queens’ beach, my feelings of anger from the recent argument had exploded into pure joy. I gazed beyond the tight Speedos and gay men, past the lubed-up red skinned haoles, and saw the ocean, the happiest ocean I had ever seen! The waves were breaking picture perfect lefts. The water was like glass, smooth and clear, and you could see right to the bottom. Not only was the ocean happy, the sky began to open up and reveal the bluest sky ever. I could hear the sweet rumble of the waves calling out to me; the few people in the water seemed to be enjoying themselves too. The surfers were like artists painting the waves with the white wash of their movements.

When I got my leash and fins on, we finally jumped into the water; it was so refreshing. The paddle out took forever and a day. Isn’t it funny, that whenever you are in a rush, time seems to go slower just to mock you? At this point I was rather happy with the taste and smell of saltwater, the sunlight refracting off the water, and even my barely-healed board rash reopening. When we got to the breaks though, the water was as flat as a newly paved highway. Now the ocean was having its kicks too. I was able to look straight across the horizon, no waves. I did, however, see a honu, a sign of good luck or a good day.

By the time the sets were coming in again, everyone else in the water had gone, so the six of us had Publics’ to ourselves, three long boards, two body boards and a short board. Steph, Nicole and Raena caught the first wave. Steph took the right, Nicole the left and Raena went right a bit and then unleashed the smoothest 360 spin. Kelly caught the second wave of the set and rode a nice left. Tyler and I had waited for the last wave of the set, and the biggest. It felt good to move my almost stiff muscles. The drop was exhilarating; it was so fast. I took the right and Tyler ripped it up on the left. It went like this for a while. To burn time in between sets we would sing Jack Johnson songs, talk about how long it took Steph to get on her board this time, and throw jokes around at each other.

After a couple hours, I decided to take it easy a bit and relax my cramping calf. I paddled out a little to avoid the breaking waves so as to be left with my vacant thoughts and
Life Is a Bite in the Fin

Reyn Sugiyama

sun burned body. I loved being in the water. The smell of the Sticky Bumps wax on our boards, the up and down motion of the ocean and even the rash on my stomach; I loved it all. Suddenly I awoke from my daze; my admiration of the ocean around me caused me to lose track of my location. The wind had not been blowing earlier, but had suddenly picked up enough to drift me a hundred yards away from my friends.

Since my rash was getting pretty bad and my shoulders were already tense, I decided to ditch my board. So I dove into the water and swam beneath the surface dragging my body board behind me. I swam for a couple minutes, and then, as if I inherited Spiderman’s Spidey Sense, every single hair on my body stood at end. It was as if I had a full body acupuncture. I tingled all over. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a big dark shadow, and right then I pulled my head out of the water. I did not want to look or know what it was, but human nature kicked in, and I stuck my head back into the water praying that it was a rock or a coral head.

What I saw was definitely not a coral head, unless coral heads also had fins and eyes. About twenty feet away from me was a seven-foot tiger shark. I thought I was going to cry as a surfer’s (or any other person in the water) greatest fear was now headed in my direction. I had no idea what to do, so I started to swim as fast as I could towards the reef. Luckily there was a set coming in so I was able to get some speed. On the second wave, however, I slipped off my board. Boy, sunscreen may protect you from the sun but not sharks on your tail. And there I was, twenty-five yards away from the safety of the shallow reef and twenty-five inches from becoming chum.

All I could think of as this animal of death started to circle me was, “I’m never using sunscreen again.” My life did not flash before my eyes; I did not think about my past regrets, not even my family or friends. Why did I have to put sunscreen on my chest? It serves no purpose. I’m lying chest down most of the time. Why am I so dumb? I was ridiculing my stupid actions so much that I almost forgot where I was and what was happening. I started to notice that it was slowly closing the circle around me. The only thing I could do was keep eye contact with its 8 ball like eye and move slowly towards the reef. Without warning it came right at me. I turned as fast as humanly possible, got on my board and swam as fast as I could. As I was swimming, I thought about how I used to tell everyone that the reason I swam so fast was because I imagined that a shark was after me. This brought a whole new meaning to my words.

I caught a couple of bumps to put some distance between myself and death. Just then two things happened; one, I was able to see the reef, and two, a big enough swell came to push me to my only refuge. At this point I thought that I was pretty safe, but was I wrong. Out of nowhere, the jaws of death crunched down on my fin. It seemed as if its
teeth were biting into a stick of butter, smooth and fast, a clean bite. Luckily it was only my fin (I kinda like my foot). Once again my slick body slipped from my board and my head slammed into the reef. The taste of blood became the new sensation in my mouth, overtaking the saltwater. And that was the last thing I remember.

When I came to, there was a lifeguard over me, and I was on the beach once again. I could feel the hot sand on my stinging back. It felt so good. As I was slowly regaining consciousness, I realized that this lifeguard had just given me CPR. Have you ever noticed that there are no pretty female lifeguards? Baywatch is a joke. The only thing I remember from CPR was ABC. Open the Airway, Breathe and then Compress.

A little while afterwards, the ambulance came to take me to the hospital. I gave my board, which was amazingly still strapped to my bicep, and my fins to Tyler. I looked at my bitten fin and saw that only centimeters remained between my toes and the teeth mark. I learned two things that day: treasure what days you have on this pebble of a planet and never put sunscreen on your front because you never know what might come up and bite you in the fin.
The Worst Day of My Life
Allyson Tada

As I sat down, my mom and stepdad were quiet. Something was terribly wrong. I could feel it, like the eerie silence in horror movies. Something really bad had happened. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it. In the ten seconds that passed by, a million thoughts rushed through my head. My grandma, is she becoming more senile? My step-grandma, did she break another hip? My cousin Crystie, did she get into an accident? Or was it my dad? Blood rushed to my head, every second my heart beat faster and faster as my mom said slowly, “We have to talk to you…your dad…” Her voice trailed away and my heart skipped a beat. What could this mean? He was fine. I just saw him the other day. What could possibly have happened? A car crash? A burglary? WHAT? I was going crazy.

My stare became a gaze. I looked across the table. My hands were in my lap and I was sitting Indian style on the ground. I glanced up at my mom and she was looking deeply into my eyes. She was very serious and her eyes were watery.

“The doctors ran some tests after he found out he had the blood clot in his leg. They knew something else was wrong. Allie, he has cancer.”

Did I just hear her right? Cancer? That dreaded disease that slowly murders the white cells in your body one by one? That disease that makes your body a victim of a crime? How could this be? The words began to sink into my brain. My dad might die. I began to feel hot, like how sunlight makes you sweat; only it was ten o’clock at night. I felt a burning sensation starting in my heart and move through my body, coming out of my eyes. My vision became blurred for an instant and then I blinked hard. A familiar drop touched my lips and I could taste its saltiness. Then more drops came flooding my face, flooding my face with tears. I was in shock. My dad has cancer. Those words began to burn a hole in my heart, the flames engulfing every last bit of it. Why my dad? He was fine, nothing looked wrong with him! I didn’t see any difference in him.

Trembling, with a dazed look still on my face, I asked, “Are you sure? Did you talk to him? Did he tell you? Or did Crystie? How advanced is it? Where is he? Is he okay right now? What’s going to happen to him?” The question poured out of my mouth like water spilling from a cup onto the floor. I wanted the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

“The cancer is pretty bad, I think. I don’t know actual numbers but your dad wanted me to tell you. I think it’s too hard for him. The doctors think it’s esophagus cancer and that it has spread to his stomach. They found ulcers in his stomach, and he is still looking at options for treating the cancer. I think the most immediate thing they will do is surgery.
The Worst Day of My Life

Allyson Tada

You can ask Crystie or me any questions that you have about all this. I’m sorry, but try to be hopeful.” My mom began to cry too. So that was that. I knew the truth. My dad has cancer, and it isn’t going to go away by itself.

I began to understand why they call cancer a disease. Cancer has an effect on the patients as well as their surroundings, their family, their doctors, and their entire life. It takes a hold on those people and everything in their world. And it changes everything drastically. It gnaws on the cells and muscles until there is nothing left. It squashes any hopes and dreams that people may have for their future. It leaves family and friends devastated over the fact that a loved one who once was happy, is now suffering every day from a microscopic foreign object that lies hidden within his or her body. Thinking about this “disease” made me sick. I could not believe that my dad had it. It was the worst day of my life.

I made an arrangement with my teachers at my high school and stayed home for about two and a half weeks of my senior year. I wanted to be with my dad and be there for him, just as he had been my whole life. I learned how to help my dad when he needed it. Helping him get up to walk to the bathroom or helping him position his pillow before he went to sleep every night. It was the least I could do.

I saw the disease slowly conquering his body while I took care of him. I will always remember the strength that my dad showed me. He never complained about his pain and he fought with his own body to walk and to feed himself until it was impossible. He protected me from seeing the pain he was really going through until his last day. His acts of courage taught me to be strong. He helped me accept his death by accepting what was happening to him. He knew that he wouldn’t be suffering anymore.

Looking back at this incident, I remember the confusion, anger, and sadness in my heart. My dad is gone now, to another world where pain doesn’t exist, and although it was the saddest part of my life, I changed for the better. I now view my world differently, knowing that, although life can be hard at times, being strong will bring new and better things into your life.
Falling from the Sky
Holly Tammens

It seemed horrifically ironic to die when I was on the brink of starting a new life. Getting into a plane crash is not something you actually think is going to happen to you. Even people who are afraid to fly can rationalize that driving your car is more dangerous than flying in an airplane.

I am not a person who is easily frightened or shocked. Most people would tell you my personality is very mellow and non-reactive. I am only twenty-eight, but I feel much older. The abundance of trauma and life experience I have lived has made me very strong; in fact, it has made me numb to all the emotional drama of life itself.

When I was twenty-three, I fell in love with a man who moved to Hawaii. We knew each other a short six months before I decided to follow him to Honolulu. Leaving Michigan, my home of twenty-three years, never crossed my mind before we met. I gave myself one month to pack up my Michigan life.

There was a severe thunderstorm the day I left Michigan. The storm stretched over most of the continental United States. The weather delayed my plane leaving Michigan, making me arrive late to my connection in Chicago. The airline held the plane for me. My luggage and I had to be shuttled, in the rain, to the awaiting 757 on the runway. I climbed up the temporarily attached staircase to the entrance of the plane, getting rain soaked in the process. As I entered the cabin, the friendly attendant with fiery red hair told me I could sit anywhere. The tone of her voice was caring and cheerful; thankfully, it eased my nervous thoughts about moving to Hawaii. The plane was surprisingly empty. There were only about fifty people patiently waiting for me to pick a seat. I was relieved to find an empty row, so I could stretch out my legs a little. As I sat in my seat, I lifted up the armrest dividing the two seats, so I could sit with my back to the window and extend my legs out over the seat toward the aisle. I wanted to relax, and calm my nerves by reading my book by Kurt Vonnegut. A sigh of content, yet subtle, then gradually extreme nervousness escaped from my mouth. I was extremely nervous about this huge life change awaiting me at the end of this ride; nonetheless, I was happy to have such a spacious seat, and plenty of time to catch up on my reading. Interestingly enough, flying has never made me nervous; in fact, I view it as a good time to rest my mind by reading and sleeping. It must have been my moving away from home that was causing my nervous heart to thud rapidly.

The take-off was normal, and we ascended into the gray sky. My nervous thoughts about moving made concentrating on my book impossible. I stared out the window at the limitless black clouds, and flashes of lightning. Did I make the right decision? What would my new life in Hawaii be like?

A few hours into the flight, the pilot made an announcement. He said, “You (the
passengers) may have noticed that the right side of the plane has become very quiet. This is because the right engine has failed. We don’t know why this has happened, so we will have to make an emergency landing at Phoenix airport.” I silently panicked. I thought it was crucial for both engines to be working.

Instantly after the announcement, the turbulence became severe. The plane was jumping all over the sky, and the other passengers were bouncing all over in their seats. The redhead airline attendant fell to the floor of the plane. I tightly gripped the armrest to control my thrashing upper body. “Has the pilot lost control of the plane?” I thought to myself. A woman with frizzy, blonde hair, in the row across from mine, made a horrific sound. It was a scream. It is a sound I will never forget. It was a sound that disturbed my soul, changing me forever. Her deafening cry moved through my entire body, piercing my eardrums, and stopping my terrified heart. She lost all control of herself, and screeched repeatedly: each scream was filled with escalating fear. “We are going to die!” She yelled. I heard more noises all around me. Other passengers began shrieking and shouting. A tall man with gray hair, in the back of the plane, yelled, “What is going on?” as his voice cracked. I tried to look around me. I spotted a middle-aged woman, ahead of the terrified blonde woman. She was sitting quietly with her hands gripping the armrests. Her knuckles looked white; her face was gray. Tears fell from her tightly-closed eyes, down her lifeless cheeks.

My mind skipped right past panic, and I went into shock. This was not real. The scene around me became like an old movie, grainy with faded colors. The sounds of the other passengers faded to muffled cries. I calmly said to myself, “I am going to die. I will not make it to Hawaii.” This thought came with such ease, like it was a fact; it seemed to be my destiny.

Everything around me slowly dissolved, and I became freakishly consumed within myself like a zombie. The uproar around me became far away muffled, as if I was plugging my ears with my fingers. The head of the seat before me consumed my vision; the tiny aqua and gray fibers appeared distinct, and their pattern complex. I wondered why the airline chose such a bright, tacky blue to represent them. Far away, I could hear what sounded like words slowly forming and becoming progressively resonant. I realized there was another announcement being made; instantly, my senses were shocked into an elevated state. The scene around me became intensified: vivid colors and deafening pandemonium ensued.

The next few minutes are almost erased from memory. The fiery haired flight attendant tried to regain control of the chaotic passengers; I am not sure how she did it. The turbulent plane made it nearly impossible for her to stand, and she clutched the wall next to her. She picked up the intercom, and my heart sank. Her hands were violently
shaking, and her perfect ruby red hair was now unruly from when she was struck down by the wild turbulence. She roughly demanded that everyone calm down. “We are going to be fine!” The flight attendant weakly shouted. The tone of her voice was shaky and bumpy like the thrashing plane. She attempted to use a high volume with her voice, but it ended up sounding petrified and frail. It was cruelly obvious she was scared. She could not control her panic, and I wondered how she was going to control the nightmare that was unfolding in the cabin of the plane. The flight attendant dropped the intercom, and turned around so her back was facing the horrified passengers. I observed her shoulders heavily rise and then fall as she took in a powerful breath, and slowly let it out. She turned around to face us, picked up the intercom, and brought it up to her pale face. “We are going to be fine.” The attendant reiterated. This time the tone of her voice was eerily composed yet forceful. This new tone of voice did not comfort me. After all, she is a human first before she is a trained flight attendant. Her composure had slipped; her rickety voice and frazzled exterior exposed her genuine terror. I knew this steady voice was the voice of her training. I knew only hours of practice could make her voice sound so peaceful when she looked so disordered. She stressed the fact that panicking was not going to help the situation. She explained to us that the plane was able to function with only one engine working. She said it was important for us to land as soon as possible, because the pilot did not know why the engine had failed. There may be a malfunction with the plane that could possibly cause more complications. “It is important for everyone to calm down,” the attendant yelled. “We will land safely.”

I did not believe her. Her wild red hair, disheveled voice, and trembling hands gave her away. I could see how gray her face had turned. The contrast of her pale skin against her thickly applied pink blush, and her monotonous expression, made her look dead already. Flight attendants are supposedly trained to not let the passengers know exactly how severe this situation is. I was positive she was not telling us the entire truth.

My heart was beating so fast; it felt like it became one continuous thud. The building pressure in my ears and abdomen, from the change in altitude, was agonizing. As my hands and face became numb, I was certain I was going to faint. Every muscle and organ in my body violently shook as if my body temperature had dropped. It felt like my body was giving up to the plane itself – preparing for my demise.

It took us one hour to get to Phoenix. Every passenger on the plane was gravely quiet. Before this moment, I was unaware of how terrifying silence could be. My mind was devoid of all thoughts. The fears I had earlier about moving to Hawaii were ripped away with two words: engine failure. I became acutely aware of every movement the plane made. Every jerk and loss of altitude became the cause of our plane falling from the stormy sky. The aircraft soared through the air like a massive communal coffin.
Falling from the Sky

Holly Tammens

The pilot made another announcement. “We are ready to make our descent into Phoenix. As a precaution, there will be fire trucks, ambulances, and police waiting for us on the runway.” He warned. “Do not be alarmed; this is normal procedure.”

I was not convinced that anything about this flight was “normal”. Landing the plane safely would be the final test. Would the pilot lose control of the plane on the way down? I questioned the possibility of the landing gear failing, sending us crashing into the cement on the runway. As if I was in a dream, I could feel the violent impact with every nerve ending in my body. I envisioned the floor underneath my feet cracking open as the plane impacted with the earth, exposing the threatening concrete below. I imagined myself floating above the wreckage and witnessing the turmoil and devastation; I could see the jagged bits of the plane amongst the murderous flames and dense smoke. There must be a reason for an emergency crew to be waiting for us to land. They were waiting for us to crash.

The entire plane violently shook as we made our descent into Phoenix. No one made a noise or even breathed. The plane fell closer and closer to the concrete runway. Looking out the window, I spotted all the emergency vehicles sitting in the midst of a heavy fog. The torrential rain made it hard to see exactly how many ambulances, fire trucks, and police cars there were: their numbers seemed endless. The revolving red and blue lights of the emergency vehicles seemed to stretch for miles. I knew this was it; this moment would soon turn into tomorrow’s headline news, and the end of my short life. Instantly, I became enraged; I did not want to die like this. I felt the misery my family would feel as a result of my death; especially because we had lost my sister only two years prior in a shocking car accident. It would kill my parents to lose their only living daughter. I began to cry. The swirling red and blue lights of the unending emergency vehicles blurred as the tears flooded my watery eyes. I wanted to squeeze my eyes shut so I could wake up from this nightmare, but I could not tear my gaze away from the rotating lights waiting on the runway.

My eyes fixated on the moving concrete rapidly approaching our plane. The wheels of the plane connected with the ground, and the momentum sent us roughly back into the air. The plane bounced off the ground several times, exerting so much force that it felt like my body would break free from the seatbelt. As we connected to the runway, the rear of the plane began to fishtail violently. It felt like the plane would spin out of control, because it was not losing speed. The aircraft stopped so abruptly that my forehead smashed into the seat ahead of me.

I sat bewildered in my seat. No one stirred. It was a shock to not be moving, after being thrashed around for the entire trip. I could not believe we were still alive. It
Falling from the Sky  
Holly Tammens

seemed as if the noise of the world had been turned off. It was spine-chillingly quiet. I was absolutely expressionless as I sat in my seat, staring straight ahead of me, but seeing nothing. Everyone on the plane sat utterly emotionless and ghost-like – we were not supposed to still be alive. In fact, I was not sure if we had really made it. The ghostly minutes dragged on as the other passengers and I gradually left our shock behind. Simultaneously, everyone on the plane cheered with absolute joy to be alive. We did not waste any time getting off the plane; actually, we all ran to the safety of the airport terminal. We made it!

The airplane could not be fixed. We had to wait eight hours in Phoenix for a replacement plane to be sent from Chicago. I wanted to be alone, so I found a quiet corner to contemplate the events of the day. Repression, the brain's natural defense against traumatic situations, was already setting in. My memories did not seem real, and it was hard to recall the details of the experience.

The path ahead of me became so much more important. I was moving to Hawaii! There was a moment when I was sure I would not escape death. The journey to my new home became so profound because I faced my own mortality. I was ecstatic to still have the chance to make this incredible move. All the nervousness and doubt I had, in the beginning of the trip, faded into pure excitement for the unknown possibilities waiting for me – on a little island called Oahu.
Leaving the Nest
Jane Winhall-Rice

Footsteps clattered noisily along the tubular passageway. The piercing whine of the enormous engines filled my head. I relished the noise. It seemed to envelope me and dull the sadness that I thought would consume me. The flight attendant looked at my boarding pass, gave me a fake plastic smile and uttered something unintelligible. French! The plane’s wheels were firmly pressed against the concrete- South African concrete! And I was already floundering in the bewildering realm of this foreign habitat. A place where blank stares meet simple questions and feelings of inadequacy lurk in every statement. I was relieved to be in my seat, glad to be able to turn my red swollen eyes towards the window and avoid the stares of strangers. The adrenaline resulting from my frantic dash for the gate and then boarding this flying machine that was preparing to transport me to another world began to fade away. Pure sadness, heavy and smothering, replaced it. I struggled to quiet my sobs as stopping them entirely was impossible. I kept picturing my parents, driving back towards our home, dazed by the fact that their only child, so near to them for 18 years, was suddenly gone.

Conflicting feelings swamped my head for the duration of the 14-hour flight. As the plane pressed on through the endless African night, I could see the glowing specks of campfires below, not the expansive twinkling sprawl of the cities, now so familiar. I soared over the Tropic of Capricorn, over the equator, over the Tropic of Cancer- each moment bringing me closer to my adult life and to my beloved.

I had first met Shurd in Cape Town, South Africa, eight months before. I was a timid girl, recently graduated from a girls’ private school. He was a dashing American adventurer of 26 years who had traveled through India, then southwards through Africa. Only a guitar over his shoulder and all his worldly possessions in a paper bag.

It had been three months since I had seen him. We were to meet in Paris and then move wherever the circumstances would lead us, working when necessary. A vast blank page would follow my arrival in Paris—a foreign life, with a foreign man, on a foreign continent.

I stood, backpack at my side, beside the luggage carousel in Charles de Gaulle airport. It was 5:00 am. The voices on the intercom and the people bustling about spoke a strange language that was a bewildering mystery to me. I strained to construct some sort of meaning out of it, wishing that I had paid more attention during French class. They spoke so quickly! Words melted together like a cryptic incantation that I couldn’t make out. Later, squashed into a Slovak bus or train, I would often marvel at the peace the foreign
words and sounds would bring. The lack of chatter—mundane peripheral conversation that I could not help but understand and process back home—was bombardment I could not escape. Here, language would become a sort of music.

I watched the passengers from my flight drift off into the strange land behind the huge windows I stared out of. They all seemed so comfortable, so at home. I noticed that their breath was foggy. I was still in an area of limbo: a sterile heated airport with harsh fluorescent lighting that stung my tired eyes.

I looked about me for Shurd. The anticipation and excitement were excruciating. My mind buzzed with ridiculous anxieties: Would he be here? Would he still want to travel with me? Had he suddenly changed his mind?

As the minutes went by and the area cleared of people, a new emotion—fear—crept in. Where was he? After 45 minutes had passed, I was rapidly losing composure. I had never even remotely considered the possibility that he wouldn’t show up! I rummaged through my purse for my phone card. I had absolutely no way of getting hold of him! The only call I could possibly make would be to my parents and that would only cause them tremendous fear and worry. I tried to think calmly and logically, but my panicked state, along with the toll of lack of sleep and hours of weighty emotion, made my mind feel like sodden cotton. I simply stood there and waited. The strings of my thoughts tethered to a single person, trying to reel him towards me. An hour passed. I felt ill.

A figure appeared at the opposite end of the virtually empty hallway. The figure was still—dark and small against the pale shimmering tiles and the vast bright space. I don’t think I breathed. Shurd walked towards me slowly. I could not move. He wore a midnight blue velvet jacket with a dark red rose through the buttonhole. I crushed the rose as I hugged him tightly. Only then did I cry.

Now the delight began—such newness to imbibe, to inhale along with the crisp November air—underground trains, cobblestones, magnificent cathedral spires, gorgeously ornate buildings, balconies, hot chestnuts and crepes on the roadside, mottled pigeons, quiet cafes, ancient bridges guarded by imposing statues, rivers, swans, falling leaves, humanity’s history almost palpable in the air. Everything was so completely different from Africa.

Eight years—and many adventures later—I find myself on the furthest possible landmass from my loved ones on Africa’s tip. I have made a few, all too brief, trips home over the years and the partings were never easy. Growing up is a harrowing experience, no matter how fledged one may be.
That Kind of Love
Kari Wright

I stepped out into the thin October air. People scurried by. Cars screeched around the corner of 5th onto Market. Cable-cars rattled and stopped, letting their passengers in and out onto concrete platforms in the middle of the street. It was as if they were all hurrying to get home to safety before the night took over the streets. I expected to see the dark gray Mercedes outside waiting for me with Sean on the phone taking rapidly, one hand still on the steering wheel ready to pull out in to the traffic. But his car was not there. I had been waiting for two hours, standing outside until the chilly sunlit air sent me into shops that had nothing I wanted. Since last month he had done this. Often he would say five minutes when he meant fifty. He had a lot going on, yet I always expected him to be on time, just like I always expected him to give me part of my paycheck that I gave him to pay bills, or let me go out with my girlfriends that were becoming more and more distant.

Shadows lengthened; what was left of the day gleamed on the tips of twenty story buildings. A couple walked by, hand in hand. I felt the cold bite into my heart; I wished I had that kind of love. Mine and Sean’s relationship was never like that. Sean did everything for me; he really loved me, and I cared for him, but it was hardly love by my standards. He sometimes got carried away and threatened me about what he would do if I left him or cheated on him, but I guess people don’t think straight when they feel for someone. I quickly learned that his temper was blue hot after he became suspicious of me and locked me in the house for two days. I also learned not to lie; he had cruel ways of getting the truth out of me. But I would never leave him, not after how much he had helped me. As long as I was good to him he would be good to me.

After graduating from boarding school, I moved in with my older sister Cindy for the summer. Living in a city was like being on another planet; I had grown up in meadows, not parking lots, where trees were taller then buildings and where there were three deer to every human. Eighteen months flew by, so did many jobs, and three different universities. I struggled to pay my bills, barely making it from paycheck to paycheck. My bank account was over-drawn and I owed friends money. I had no idea how to make things work. That’s when Sean found me, or maybe it would be better to say, saved me.

“Excuse me miss. Do you need a cab?” It was the old valet man. I had been standing there for too long.

“No. I’m fine. My boyfriend will be here any moment.”

He only nodded. The words were more for me. The minutes felt like hours as I shivered in the oncoming dark. I knew better than to keep on calling Sean; he was not picking up the phone anyways, and if I took a cab there would be a fight. Tears were welling
up inside of me. I whispered under my breath, “Sean…Please hurry.”

I waited. I don’t know why I got in a yellow and for some reason instead of my home address, 30 min south of the city, I told the driver to take me to a nearby hotel. Sean would yell at me, but he would forgive me if I told him I got it for us to spend some quality time together without all the distractions of home. Curled up under the covers the ice melted from all of me but my heart. Why was I at the bottom of his list of priorities? I was a perfect girlfriend; never started fights, never questioned him about where he was, always did whatever he asked. In my nest of warmth, I dozed off into the world where none of this seemed important. I woke suddenly to the sound of my cell phone. The sun was already on its way back bringing with it the pastel colors of dawn. I had not meant to spend the night. My stomach turned into a knot of fear.

“Sean…?” My voice was still scratchy.

“Where have you been all night?” To my relief he was calm.

“You were taking so long. I was so cold, I got a hotel room. I thought that we could spend some time together, but you never called. I’m sorry I fell asleep.”

“Is that right? Where are you at? We are going to have breakfast.”

I breathed in deeply, giving him the address. He was not mad at me after all. He was going to apologize for making me wait and would never leave me like that again. I got up quickly to wash my face and finger comb my hair.

The moment I saw his face though the crack in the door, I knew that I was wrong. But he was already pushing his way inside and there was no stopping him. His smile twisted, and his eyes gleamed with silent rage.

“Well hello Kari. Good morning? What, no hug?” And it was in his voice. Mocking.

I backed up into the room trying to get some space. Hugging him would be like wrapping my arms around a scalding stove.

“I’m fine. How are you?” I tried to make my words smooth, calm, but I knew that there was a waver to them.

He looked a mess; he had not shaved, and there was a spaghetti stain on the front
of his white t-shirt.

“You know how I’m doing. If you don’t do what I tell you to, how is this supposed to work out? We are team and I need you, but it looks like you’re trying to leave me.”

I wanted to scream that there had to be someone out there that would not leave me waiting all the time.

“I was cold. I didn’t mean to fall asleep. Sean, I don’t want to leave you, please…” No matter what I said it would have been the wrong thing.

“You wanted to get out of the cold? Why didn’t you just go home? You don’t need a fucking room. You want to waste my money on a room. Who have you had in here? What guy have you been fucking?”

“There’s no one. I got the room for us. I’m sorry, I just wanted…,” my words sounded meek. They were only coal to his fire.

“If you’re lying I will find out. Just remember you are nothing without me. I made you.” His voice did not rise but his hand shot through the air between us and I could feel my neck being crushed under his fingers.

“If you were cheating on me, I’ll find out who it was and skin him alive. And then beat the hell out of you. You want that? And you know what I’ll do to you if you try to leave me. I know how much you love that little brother of yours. Now you’re going to get your shit and come down to the car nice and quite.” His words were a hiss, pressed out between his clenched teeth.

I could hear my voice finding its way past his hand and out of my mouth, just raspy shrieks. The wall behind me hit the back of my head, or maybe it was the other way around. I dug in deep with my nails into his wrist, trying to prevent the burgundy mist in my brain from becoming too thick to see through. A swarm of wasps flew through my ears and my heart jumped like a bull frog in my chest. My legs kept kicking and I could feel myself moving up the wall. His face was in mine, spitting words and saliva. Then there was air, and light and sound. The door was closed as footsteps sounded in the hall.

I crumpled to the floor, like a doll tossed aside. I touched the welts that were forming on my neck and suddenly I knew that it was entirely my fault. Maybe my head hitting the wall had knocked some sense into me. Why had I not seen all the warning signs? I had traded in my freedom for false security that had turned into a cage of hostile threats. I had mistaken his overbearing nature to be a man truly in love when it was really more like
a man training his new dog. I had become his bitch. From day one, he was slowly teaching me to obey and I so easily obliged him.

“You don’t have to worry about a car, I’ll have a driver take you.” I did not argue.

“I’ll keep it in my name, you have too much going on as it is.” I thought him nice.

“Why don’t you let me take care of that.” And soon I found myself helpless, wandering around in a maze. Every trip to the store, every conversation on the phone, every penny I made or spent, every breath I took had to be approved by him first. And I was the one that had let him have my life; I gave it to him because I did not know how to be responsible for myself. I kept lying to myself about how much he loved me, how he just wanted to take care of me, how everything he did was in my best interest. The freedom I used to take for granted was gone and only I could get it back.

As I pulled myself off the floor, I felt the weight of a 200 lbs man fall of my back, but when I looked there was only a piece of his white cotton tee shirt, the last of him I hoped to ever see again. As I dialed 911, I knew he would not leave my mind or my life easily. Around every corner, in every shadow, he would lurk. With that one phone call I was not only making myself homeless, I was putting myself as well as my family in danger. But I had no choice. I had to leave. If I could have foreseen the future, I would have seen myself working two jobs, living happily alone in a city 2,459 miles away, with a car in my own name along with all the necessities for a comfortable life. All I had to do was have faith in myself.
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