DIAMOND JOURNAL

Retrospective 2002-2007
Acknowledgements

A very special word of appreciation goes out to those members of the Kapiʻolani Community College family who have helped in the production of this issue, particularly the faculty who continually encourage their students to submit their writing.

The first retrospective issue of *Diamond Journal*, this collection has been chosen by faculty who sifted through student narratives published over the last six years. Even though this issue is almost double that of a standard *Diamond Journal*, many fine pieces could not be included. As always, we applaud the efforts of all the writers who submitted their work for consideration and celebrate their creativity.

The next issue will once again be entirely made up of pieces selected by student editors.

The watercolors on the covers are by Professor David Behlke to whom much thanks is due for his continuing support.

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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.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Fair Chance</td>
<td>Raymond Acosta</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red-Haired Stranger</td>
<td>Karlee Anderson</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than Just a Pair of Kicks</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Wage</td>
<td>Carly Arakawa</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangers in Life and Death</td>
<td>Scott Bartlett</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of the Drill Sergeants</td>
<td>Jonathan Borders</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give Me One Bum-Bye</td>
<td>Regina Chang</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Welfare Office</td>
<td>Chaelene Cruz</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Family Affair</td>
<td>Tony Forman</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Enemy</td>
<td>Lorene L. Glisson</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand New Purpose</td>
<td>Aubrey Hillman</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enchanting Laie</td>
<td>H. Michael K. Howlett</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with Heart</td>
<td>Jay Koseki</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Soul of Kaimuki</td>
<td>Kristen Lee</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Oasis in the City</td>
<td>Andrei Lyovin</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diamond Journal Retro 4 2002-2007
Almost Stolen
Mary Martin ................................................................. 56

The Heartbeat
Anthony Catchen .................................................................................. 60

The Stranger
Steffani Mullen .................................................................................... 66

Flickering Memories
Jason Ordenstein .................................................................................... 75

America's Secret
Elika Otoya ............................................................................................. 78

Iwa Bird
Kenneth Quilantang Jr. ........................................................................... 81

Lost Innocence
Debra Saiki ............................................................................................... 83

My First Car
Randall Sato ............................................................................................. 86

Evolution of a Cyclist
Cheri Scott ................................................................................................. 91

Falling From the Sky
Holly Tammens ......................................................................................... 98

Isamu's Billy Goat
Moriso Teraoka ......................................................................................... 103

The Scar
Juliet Tierney ............................................................................................... 106

Slow Down!
Alan Vandermyden .................................................................................. 110

Sometimes It Takes a Bullet
Norman Wetzler ....................................................................................... 115

My Brush
Yuefei Rishelle Zhou ................................................................................ 119
A Fair Chance

Raymond Acosta

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

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

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

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

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

I walk into the operating room suite, but the surgeon and his assistant, who is a resident doctor, haven’t arrived yet. The anesthesiologist is busy putting the patient to sleep. He will then intubate the patient to ensure the patient receives sufficient oxygen during surgery. A breathing tube is inserted in the patient’s throat to establish this. The surgical technologist is busy setting up his instruments and preparing his equipment for the procedure.

There are a lot more instruments in his setup than I anticipated. The nurse is tending to the patient, making sure the patient is calm and comfortable before going off to sleep. I pull up a chair on the side so I will not get in the way.
The operating room is very cold and well lit. The room itself has the scent of the disinfectant used to clean everything in it. The room is spacious and extremely clean, and the furniture in it mostly consists of stainless steel material. Every person in the room has a mask on, exposing only his eyes and ears. Hair is covered with a surgical cap. Shoe covers are also worn to prevent contaminants from entering the O.R. The nurse begins to prep the patient, using Betadine as she scrubs the abdomen. This is done to clean the surgical site. After drying the soap using a sterile towel, the nurse paints the abdomen with Betadine.

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

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

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

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

Karlee Anderson

One Saturday afternoon, when I was eight years old, my mom and I were running our usual errands. One of these errands was to go to the DMV and renew the registration on our 1987 Toyota Celica.

“Do you want to stay in the car? I will only be gone a minute.” My mom was asking me to do the impossible. Stay in the car on a sweltering day like this? She must be crazy! As I thought about the pros and cons of staying or going, I remembered that I had a brand new toy to play with. This would help me not to focus on the heat so much. Besides, she would only be gone a minute.

“Are you sure?” my mom asked.

“Yes, Mom; I’ll be fine!” I replied.

Opening the door, she called over her shoulder, “Make sure you lock the door!” I quickly did as I was told since I was eager to play with my new troll! This troll had a round nose, large bulging eyes, and lavender hair that stuck straight up in the air. It also had a sparkly purple diamond in the center of its potbelly stomach. If you rubbed it while making a wish, your wish would come true.

As I was playing, not thinking about the heat, I heard someone whistling behind me. I looked in the sideview mirror and saw a man with rusty red hair walking in my direction. Not even thinking twice about him, I continued playing and examining my new possession. The whistling grew louder until it was finally next to my door. The man glanced down at me and turned away.

Not even a second later, he whipped his head around and lowered his entire body to my eye level. He looked in my window . . . right at me! His gaze was piercing and very strange. Despite the heat, a chill ran up my spine and thought my nerves. I didn’t need anyone to tell me that this man was dangerous.

He was stout and chubby and his face was unshaved. After slight hesitation, he must have realized that he had been staring at me for a curiously long time. He slowly turned and walked away. I saw him getting into his old Chevy pickup truck.
“That’s weird,” I thought. He was just sitting there. Minutes went by, and the man
never moved a muscle. As he stared out the mirror on the side of his truck, he reminded me
of an animal waiting to attack its prey.

I was shaking with fear and dripping with cold sweat. My first reaction was to
roll up the windows as fast as I could. The doors were already locked, but I checked them
anyway. As I slid down in my seat, I glanced diagonally to my right to see where the plump,
hairy man was. Little had changed. He was still in his rusty old truck.

“At least he isn’t staring at me anymore,” I thought. His behavior still frightened
me, even though all he was doing was moving around in the truck’s cab, doing who knows
what.

Since I was so scared, I felt like my brain was on fire. I imagined escape routes and
plans of action, what I would do if he came back. I started to look around me, checking to
see if there was anyone that I could ask for help. There was no one to my right or behind
me.

To my left there was a family with children riding their new bikes around in the
parking lot. At the moment, I wished so badly that I was one of those kids. They were not
faced with this looming ball of fire as I was. They were “normal,” playing with their own
new toys.

After I was done feeling sorry for myself, I noticed that the man was staring at
me again. I thought, “If I can just get out and run to those kids, I will be safe.” I planned
everything out in my head; I would just get out and run as fast as I could to the family. Then
I began to doubt myself, thinking what the invading pair of eyes and the body attached to
them would do. “He would probably catch me,” I worried. A wave of hopelessness swept
over me. Realizing that he was much stronger and faster than I was, I had no choice but to
pray that my mom would come back soon.

“Oh, Mom, it’s been longer than a minute,” I said to myself. Grabbing my troll,
I started rubbing its jeweled belly and making wish after wish that nothing would happen.
I tried reassuring myself that everything would be okay and that I was just imagining the
man’s danger.

Sweat rolled down my face. Suddenly I realized just how hot the car was. I looked
at the rolled up windows. I yearned to feel a cool breeze blowing through them, but danger
was still lurking close by. Closing my eyes, I began to say a silent prayer.
A tap on the window interrupted my silent prayers for help. I opened my eyes and looked to see who was tapping. I was the man, the threat. "How did I not see him get out of his truck?" I worried. "What does he want?" We stared at each other for a moment. I didn't want him to see that I was afraid.

"Hey there, little girl!" he said in a forced cheerful voice.

I said nothing.

"It's pretty hot out here. Why don't you roll down your window?"

I didn't move.

"Here. I got this Pepsi. Do you want it? It's nice and cold!"

The man held up the Pepsi. I looked at the can and noticed that it was already open. Images of the chubby man moving around in his truck flashed into my head. My imagination went haywire, thinking that he had been putting drugs in the Pepsi. Reality came back; I knew this was a trap to try to get me to open the door. I shook my head to decline his offer.

"Okay," he said. He walked away slowly.

"A moment later the sweaty man leapt back to where he had been standing. He reached for the door handle. "Click." The door was locked. He tried one more time. "Click." Then he ran to his truck, climbed in, and sped off with tires squealing. Although he was gone, I did not feel relief instantly, not even when my mom got back.

"Sorry," she said. "There was a longer line than I thought." She started apologizing even before her whole body was in the car. She looked at me and could see that I was pretty shaken up over something. She asked, "What's wrong? What happened?"

I quickly recounted the events that had just taken place, leaving out no details, no matter how minor.

"What?" she exclaimed. "Who, when . . . ahh," she stuttered. My mom was in a state of shock.

She held me in her arms to comfort me. My brain felt fuzzy, like it was numb. I could hear my mom talking, but couldn't quite make out the words. All I could see was that
man’s face. I was shaken about the possibilities of what could have happened. My biggest fear had always been of being kidnapped, and the fact that my biggest fear almost became a reality was too much for me to handle.

On the way home, I broke down crying, overwhelmed with the fear I had felt and the relief that quickly followed when I saw my mom’s face and felt her arms around me.

I don’t know if the wishes I made on the magical jewel in the troll’s belly saved me or not. I would like to think it was the grace of God. Needless to say, after that experience, I never stayed in the car while my mom ran an errand, even if she was “only going to be gone for a minute.” There was no way that I was going to risk having another close call like I did on that day.
More Than Just a Pair of Kicks

Anonymous

I love shoes. Boots, sandals, platforms, strapped, black, brown, red, and in colors galore. Casual wear, exercise, dance, and work shoes, you name it, I’ve got it. I admit I have a fetish for shoes. Any shoe that is bright and unusual will catch my attention. My favorite pair of shoes is my Tommy Hilfiger running sneakers, mostly white with a red and blue flag logo that adds a patriotic look to them. They are simple yet practical, and I am able to use them for any occasion, for work, play, or casual wear.

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

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

“Hey, where are you going?” She asked while chewing her gum and annoyingly
More Than Just a Pair of Kicks

snapping it after several chews.

"I just got off work," I replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My friends and I never had to wait in long, crowded lines or pay a cover charge to get into a club. We knew the wrong people to get into the right places. I dated a member of an underground rap group who were notoriously known for their side business of pimping. I was clueless of his extracurricular activities and never asked how he made his money.

I was flattered by being wined and dined. I went to the clubs and drank Alize and Crystal. I ate at fine-dining restaurants at no expense to me. On occasion I was “offered” a little spending money. I would reject the offer, but was later coaxed into taking it. I took the small gifts and favors hesitantly, not realizing that there would be a price to pay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After the little shopping spree, the winning and dining no longer felt like dates: they became business meetings. He changed from a cool guy I played horse with on the courts into a money hungry businessman. The sales pitch was a lucrative job opening for me.

The job description was working first at an escort service, later walking the “track” and possible relocation to Las Vegas to work on a “ranch.” My training would mainly be on the job and earn while you learn. There would also be an opportunity for advancement to the position of Madam. He stated that what I was accepting from him was the same thing, except I would be taking money from other people. The incentives, housing, car, and all expenses paid for. The salary was a generous $30,000 plus a month, minus his percentage that would be discussed at a later time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Naw, that’s a’ight! I got my kicks,” I reply as I smile at him and turn the other direction to walk away.
Okay, here’s the “oh so familiar” situation we’ve all been in. You’re tired. You’re broke. You’re hungry. So, your wallet leads you to the nearest McDonalds and you familiarize yourself (again) with the infamous Dollar Menu. After waiting somewhat patiently behind seven cars you finally place your well thought out order through the speaker. “Hi, can I get two double cheeseburgers and a small fry?” you enunciate as best as you can. An elongated pause follows which provokes a rolling of the eyes. Through your audible sighs, an unintelligible response suddenly breaks through the speaker almost as in the form of another language. Frustrated, you just drive forward and vow to never return again.

Now get up and walk over into a different perspective. Go on and step into the worker’s shoes for a moment.

The worker taking your order through the speaker also has the task of “cashing out” the customer at the window. While speaking through the speaker and concentrating on taking your order they are also conversing with the paying customer and making sure they receive the correct amount of change. The cashier also has the pressure of following McDonalds’ strict procedures such as responding to the ordering customer within five seconds or less and giving a “welcome” greeting. The cashier should take the whole order within twenty-five seconds and end with a suggestive sell, which can be difficult due to all the “Hold on I’m not done ordering” or the “Ummm...what do I feel like eating today” or the “Just a moment, I’m finishing up my cell phone conversation.” When the customer wants a special order on a sandwich, the worker must punch the special order into the register manually. When dealing with money, your drawer shouldn’t be over or short within a $2 range, which can be difficult when interacting with more than hundreds of customers. Going beyond the allowed range can cause disciplinary action to occur. There is also a specified amount of time you’re allotted to receive the payment from the customer and return their change. All of these stressful rules are included in just one position of many at McDonalds. The drive thru cashier is considered the easiest position by far.

Working at McDonalds requires a lot of physical labor and tends to have a very stressful and chaotic environment. I knew this when I was applying to the Palolo McDonalds as a sixteen year old. Being my very first job, I was very nervous, or should I say, naïve. I kept thinking, I would never tell a soul where I work because it is so embarrassing. My friends would cheer me up by saying, “Hey, at least you have a job. So what if it’s McDonalds.” Yeah, but you’re not working there, I am.

As I got ready for my first day of work I could feel my heart pounding as if I had
Minimum Wage

Carly Arakawa

just ran a marathon. *Thud. Thud. Thud.* My stomach felt like a tidal wave rising back and forth. I kept on taking deep breaths as if my life depended on it. I looked into the mirror and gave myself a once-over. My deep, rich blue shirt hung loosely off my shoulders as if it were a bathrobe. My baggy, black slacks added ten pounds to my body frame. *What a great image to start my first day on the job.* “Carly, let’s go now! You should get there early for your first day,” my mom yelled from upstairs.

“Coming,” I yelled equally as loud as I slipped on my stiff, brand new black hat.

The five minute ride to McDonalds felt as if I was transported there in a nanosecond. When I slowly walked in I felt like a foreigner in an unknown country. There was a lot of commotion going on inside. Machines were beeping, crew and customers were talking, and there was the sound of water being sprayed in the sink along with the beat of my heart pounding loudly.

My crew trainer, Sanford, was introduced to me. Sanford was about ten years older than me and had a formal uniform on which made me feel intimidated. He broke the golden silence by saying, “You need to tuck in your shirt so just go into the walk in and tuck it in.” I nodded back in response. Damn, what a bad first impression I’m making already. I received a tour of the whole store with introductions to everyone working; I would now be known as the “new girl.” My self-confidence shrank with each introduction because I could tell their preconceived thoughts by the looks I received. *I’ve never felt so lost in my life. Who knew this place was so huge. Wow, their crew room has tables, benches, TVs, and lockers. The managers even have a TV that shows all the surveillance camera angles by their computer.*

“You’ll be training in grill. You know, learning how to cook meat,” Sanford said while pointing towards the kitchen area. I nodded. *It can’t be that hard to cook meat, right? I cook Hamburger Helper all the time.* He began, “Okay, there are two types of hamburger meat. One type is 10 to 1 and the other is 4 to 1. It’s called 10 to 1 because there are ten hamburger patties equal to a pound. Just like the 10 to 1 patties there are four 4 to 1 hamburgers to a pound. Therefore, the 10 to 1 meat is used in smaller sandwiches like the cheeseburger and stuff. And the bigger meat, 4 to 1, is used for sandwiches like the Quarter Pounder with Cheese, okay?” I nodded again. *God, this grill area is so hot. How can they stand to work in this heat!* So he continued, “You cook in amounts according to how busy we are. The maximum amount you’re allowed to cook at a time is nine for 10 to 1 and six for 4 to 1. You lay the meat down in an assigned order on the grill then press the black button here to close the upper platen on the grill to cook the meat.” *Wait a minute? Huh?*

“Can you please repeat the last part?” I mustered as if they were my first words ever spoken.

Sanford laughed, “Don’t worry. You’ll get the hang of it sooner or later.” Sanford
then demonstrated the complicated process of cooking the meat. “Okay, watch now,” he said while looking at me to make sure he had my full attention, “you lay the hamburger meat in a row of three from front to back. Then push the black button. When the top of the grill comes up you then salt the meat in an ‘S’ shape motion and pull the meat off in threes using a metal scraper and a rubber spatula. Then put the meat in a tray that goes into the meat cabinet. Push the timer so you know when the meat expires. Okay?”

I felt as if I had to memorize the entire Declaration of Independence. I mean, who could remember everything step by step. I swear, at this moment in time I had the deepest respect for any fast food worker. I then worked up the nerve to actually say, “Can you possibly show me one more time please?” I can’t believe all the steps required to just cook nine hamburger patties. And they do all this work for minimum wage.

“Minimum wage, my ass,” I said loud enough for only my necklace to hear.
Strangers in Life and Death

Scott Bartlett

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jonathan Borders

Imagine this: 20 or so large, angry men, yelling at you all at once. All you hear is “Get off the Dang Truck, Privates! Ohh, I see! Just take your flippin’ time! We got all day!!!”

All 200 of us brand new privates were coming off of the truck scared and confused. None of us knew what was going to happen or what was going on.

This is how my first day of basic training started. It happened at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, home of the Artillery. It was a summer’s day around mid-afternoon. Anyone who has been anywhere near Fort Sill knows that when summer time comes around you should turn on your air conditioning and stay indoors. It must have been about 100 degrees outside, but what made things worse was that the air had a dry heat, so you could feel the liquid in your mouth evaporate.

The heat may have made the large, angry men, also known as the Drill Sergeants, more pissed off than they already were. The Drill Sergeants were yelling and screaming and being just downright nasty. They lined us up in a formation on ground level, which was an open area underneath the building where we slept. I didn’t know what was going on or what I was supposed to do.

My puzzlement was answered when a very tall, unusually big (almost like a bear) drill sergeant yelled, “You privates better shut the hell up while the commander speaks.” There was a pause, and then he went on to say, “Do you Dag’Gon Privates understand me?”

Everyone yelled almost instinctively, “Yes, Drill Sergeant!”

From a door that was directly in front of where we stood entered a guy that was short and stocky, with a silver bar on his hat. Everything was silent for a minute or two. I don’t know why, but I felt even more nervous than I had before. I guess it was the anticipation. I wasn’t the only one feeling it though. I could feel it around me; every other private was feeling the same way. Then, out of nowhere, the guy with the silver bar on his hat said very calmly, “Good afternoon, and welcome to Delta Battery 1st of the 40th. I am your new commander, Lieutenant Rhodes.”
I was so surprised to hear him talk calmly. It was like he didn’t have a care in the world. He went on by saying, “Privates, with hard work and determination, every one of you can graduate from here United States Soldiers.”

He paused for a second, looked around at us, and said, “Is that a HOOAH!”

It seemed like everyone was nervous, so when we responded back with “Hooah,” it seemed very weak. “Hooah” basically means yes and is used to acknowledge someone. Lt. Rhodes yelled out, “I don’t think so. Let me ask you again, is that a HOOAH?”

The second time we all yelled in a loud thunderous roar, “HOOOOAH!”

The Lieutenant replied, “That’s more like it.”

At this point, I was thinking to myself that this really wasn’t so bad. After he was done, we were instructed to give a round of applause. Lt. Rhodes walked through the door that he had come out of earlier.

This is where it got bad; it was like unleashing 20 rabid dogs on some innocent bunnies. The drill sergeants that I had forgotten about changed the mood so fast it wasn’t funny.

They were yelling at everyone, “Grab your stuff... put it down... stop moving... you’re not moving fast enough... why are you doing that... Ohh, I see, you don’t want to do that.”

What was happening could be described as nothing more than mass confusion. I didn’t know what to do. One drill sergeant would tell us one thing, and then another would tell us the complete opposite. This nonsense went on for about 10 minutes. Then out of the confusion they all started yelling the same thing. “Grab your crap, get upstairs, get next to a bunk and toe the line!” This was easy for them to say. I knew I had over a hundred pounds worth of stuff, and they were telling me I would have to run up three flights of stairs with it. But, out of fear of what they would do if I didn’t do it, I ran up those stairs as fast as I could.

When we got into our sleeping bay I noticed how clean and quiet it was. Everyone picked a bunk. I didn’t understand what he had meant by toe the line, until I looked down and saw a line on the floor. I stood behind it, looked straight ahead, and tried not to move a muscle. A few minutes went by and you could have heard a pin drop. The silence was unnerving; I didn’t know what to make of it. I guess they were trying to build up the anticipation.

All of a sudden, from my left side at the end of the bay I could hear, “What the
hell is going on here?” and, “Shut up, you!” Four pissed off Drill sergeants came out of side door of the bay. There was no introduction or greeting, just a lot of yelling. Three of them were very big white men. Their names were DS, as in Drill Sergeant; Gould, Dill, and Berden. The fourth was a short Hispanic guy named DS Medina. Even though he was the smallest, he could yell much louder than the other three and intimidate you much easier. The first one I encountered personally was Drill Sergeant Dill. He walked up to me, after yelling at a few other privates, and said, “Hey, Drill Sergeants, we got the owner of a bookstore over here.” It was because my last name is Borders, as in Borders Books.

Another came over; his name was DS Gould. He said, “Well how tall are ya Borders, six three... six four? You think your pretty big, don’t ya? Well, you won’t be that big if I throw you out that window behind you.”

At this point, I was wondering what I had gotten myself into. I could not believe the craziness that was going on all around me. The guy next to me was named Young. He seemed to have everything in order until they checked our personal items. DS Medina noticed that Young had headphones, but no CD player.

He said, “Young, where’s yer CD player?”

Young responded with, “I don’t have a CD player, Drill Sergeant.”

After looking at the headphones, DS Medina noticed they had Delta Airlines written on them. With a half a smile he said, “Did you steal these from the airplane.”

Young said with no hesitation “No, Drill Sergeant, they didn’t ask for them back.” Medina yelled, “Well, hell, crazy, I issued you a bunk. Am I gonna have to ask for that when you leave?”

He paused for a second to stop himself from laughing, and said, “Listen up. We got the platoon rat right here. Private Young likes to steal crap, so you better lock your stuff up.”

Not more than 5 seconds after that, stuff started flying in the air about four bunks down from me. All I heard was DS Berden saying, “What the hell is this Harrell, you think this is funny? Holy crap drill sergeants, we got us a Junior Drill Sergeant.” Harrell had bought a Teddy bear with a little round and brown Drill sergeant’s hat on to send home to his family. This wasn’t the smartest idea. The hat looked like the one Smokey the Bear wears. The next few minutes were something I will never forget. All four of the Drill Sergeants were in his face and seemed to be speaking in tongues. I have never heard so much swearing at one time. Harrell was forced to wear the Teddy Bear’s Drill Sergeant hat for the rest of the day. When we showered that night, Harrell still had the hat on. This madness went on for about seven
hours. For those seven hours, all we did was get yelled at, and do a lot of push-ups and other exercises. During the seven-hour torture session, one private stood out more than anyone else.

You have to understand. Private Nettles was about six-five and weighed roughly 240 lbs. He had been an all-state linebacker in high school, so he was by far the easiest target for the Drill Sergeants. I felt really bad, because he seemed to be doing almost the opposite of what the Drill Sergeants wanted. But, hey, the attention was off of me, so I couldn’t complain.

“Private Nettles, what the hell do you think yer doing?”

“Can you do anything you’re told Nettles?”

“What is wrong with you, Nettles? If I didn’t know better, Nettles, I might think you’re stupid or something!”

It got really bad when we packed up our personal items. Nettles bought about 10 of everything. I’m talking 10 tubes of toothpaste, 10 bottles of aspirin, shoe polish; anything you could think of, he had it. It took him longer than anyone to pack because all of his excess stuff. This didn’t make the drill sergeants happy. DS Gould walked up to him and yelled at the top of his lungs, “NETTLES, DO YOU LIKE ME?”

I think everyone in the room was confused by that question. I knew for sure it was a trick. It didn’t matter if he said yes or no. He was screwed. Nettles hesitated, and with little confidence said, “Yes, Drill Sergeant, I like you.”

Drill Sergeant Gould quickly responded with, “Well likin’ leads to lovin’, lovin’ leads to screwin’, and the only one getting screwed around here is you, Nettles.”

After this abuse, things seemed like they could not get any worse. They did. “Strip down, put on a towel, and have a bar of soap in your left hand,” screamed DS Dill. There were eight shower stalls for the 60 or so of us. They sent us in all at once. It was actually very gross. The next 20 minutes or so in those showers, I would like to forget. I’ll leave it at that.

After we showered, we made our bunks for the first time. This was a time of almost total silence. No one wanted to talk to each other, fearful a Drill Sergeant would be around. It finally seemed like things were dying down. The day was coming to an end, so the Drill Sergeants sat us down and told us what they expected. DS Medina started, “Privates, I just want you to know that I will get nothing but excellence from you.”
DS Gould told us, “In combat you may be in a foxhole with any of us drill sergeants, so privates, you better pay attention ‘cause it’ll save your life, and more importantly, our lives.”

DS Medina said with a lot of pride, “Y’all will now be known as the 4th platoon, and your platoon name is Wolf pack.”

He paused for a second, looking at a piece of paper, and then said, “Wolf pack, you have 10 minutes of personal time, then lights out.”

The whole platoon yelled out, “HOOAH!”

The Drill Sergeants left right after that without saying a word. During the ten minutes we were given, all anyone did was stay quiet and finish up making the bunks. You could hear a few whispers and sighs of relief. I think it was because everyone thought we were being tricked. I was finished, so I got into my bunk and lay still.

“What the hell are you doing, privates? Didn’t I say ten minutes? GET IN YOUR BUNKS!” yelled one of the Drill Sergeants.

I lay in my bunk and thought of home. I missed my own big, comfortable bed but I knew I was there for a good reason. Ever since I was in high school, I had wanted to be in the army. I wasn’t going to give up so easily. It didn’t take me long to fall asleep, I guess because I was so exhausted. I didn’t wake up at all until the loud noise of trashcans being hit went through my head. The drill sergeants were up and ready to make our lives hell.
Give Me One Bum-Bye

Regina Chang

One of the memorable events of my life happened not long after I arrived in the United States. At the time, like many recent immigrants, I couldn’t speak or understand English very well. Because I had no prior work experience of any kind in America the only available job was one my friend had found for me at the Japanese restaurant where she was working. The restaurant was open for lunch and dinner. However, because of my lack of knowledge of the English language and of the local Hawaiian dialect, I had a somewhat interesting introduction to my newly adopted country.

During my second day of work, after the tables had been set for the lunch crowd, a customer walked in while a co-worker and I were sitting and talking at the counter. He wanted to order a drink while waiting for his guest to arrive. After showing him to his table and serving him a bottle of beer, I returned to the counter. When about ten minutes had passed, the bartender told me to check the table to see if the customer would like another beer. Before returning to the dining area, I asked, "What am I supposed to say?"

"Say, ‘Would you like to have another one?’" she taught me.

After having repeated the question to myself several times, I turned around and walked slowly back to the customer’s table, repeating, “Would you like to have another one? Would you like to have another one? Would you like to have another one?” I kept repeating it in my head very fast and nonstop all the way back to my customer’s table. Finally reaching there, I said loudly with confidence, “Would you like to have another one?”

“Bum-bye,” he replied.

Again I kept repeating his order, “Bum-bye, Bum-bye, Bum-bye . . .” all the way back to the bar area to place my customer’s order. Again full of confidence, placing my tray on the counter, I said, “The customer wants one Bum-bye, please.”

The bartender looked at me strangely. “Bum-bye what?” she asked.

“One Bum-bye,” I said. She kept scratching her head and finally ordered me to return to my customer to ask him once more what he wanted to drink.

Totally confused by then, I had forgotten what to ask. “Would you like to have
another one?” the bartender repeated impatiently.

Feeling somewhat defeated, I returned to my customer’s table. Putting on my best smile, I asked, “Would you like to have another one?” Again he repeated, but with more emphasis this time, “Bum-bye!”

“I knew it!” I said to myself on the way back to the bar area; I had been right the first time.

The bartender seemed to be anxiously awaiting my return. “See? I knew I heard it right. Give me one Bum-bye!” I said proudly in a loud and clear voice.

She shook her head and without smiling went directly to my customer’s table. My heart dropped suddenly when I heard the loud sound of laughter coming from the dining area. While all this was going on, my customer’s guest had arrived and sat himself. I knew I would have to take his order too. Asking him, he pointed to his friend’s bottle of beer and said, “Same, and a bucket of ice.”

I thought it was a strange order, but I was sure that I had heard it correctly; a bottle of beer and a bucket of ice. “I’m going to get this order correct this time,” I said to myself. So after ordering the bottle of beer, I dashed to the back room where the ice machine was. Earlier I had seen the bartender fill the beer cooler with ice using the five-gallon plastic buckets next to the ice machine. Filling one of the containers to the top, I returned with the ice to the bar area to pick up the bottle of beer. With beer in one hand and bucket in the other, I returned victorious to my customer’s table.

Placing the beer bottle on the table and the bucket of ice on the floor, I pointed at the bucket and said, “Ice!” Without saying anything, with eyes and mouths wide open, they kept looking at the bucket, back to me, then to each other, finally bursting out in laughter that seemed to shake the entire restaurant.

Turning bright red, I thought, “Now what did I do wrong this time?” I felt tears coming to my eyes and felt the urge to run, which I did, straight for the ladies restroom. I locked the door and sat on the covered toilet and wept for several minutes until I heard someone knocking on the door. It was the manager, bartender, and one of my co-workers. Trying to keep from smiling, they explained what had happened and apologized for not being more helpful. They said what had happened wasn’t my fault. I was simply another victim of the local Hawaiian dialect known as “pidgin English.” “Bum-bye,” I was told, meant “by and by or later on,” and “one bucket ice” referred to a small glass filled with ice only. I couldn’t stop laughing for quite awhile after learning this.
This experience helped me to be a better listener and student of the English language although I still have difficulties separating pidgin from English. It also made me somewhat of a celebrity. As long as I worked at the restaurant, I would often hear someone telling someone else about my “bum-bye” story. Soon, I was responding to nicknames such as, “Bum-bye,” “Bum-bye Girl,” “Auntie Bum-bye” (by children) and so on. I made a lot of friends from this experience and even had customers that I had never met before ask me, “Which one is the Bum-bye girl?”
The Welfare Office

Chaelene Cruz

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

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

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

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

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

Tony Forman

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

The last month and a half of the school year seemed to last forever. I could almost hear the second hands of the clocks at school ticking away. Every time I saw a map of the United States images of my family, flying down the highway eating fast food and looking for hotel swimming pools with slides and diving boards, filled my thoughts. I’d come home and look forward to my dad calling and letting us know how many days until his return. For once in my life I wasn’t bothered by my little brother’s incessant, annoying questions. “Will we get to stay at Disneyland all day?” “Can we fish in Florida?” “Are there big snakes in Arizona?” The questions kept coming, and even I wanted the answers! Then, finally, the day before school ended, Dad was back!

My brother and I loved my dad’s homecomings because that meant that we’d be getting something cool from a far off place- ivory from Africa, knives from Mexico, petrified wood from Alaska. The presents were always educational, and the stories that came with the gift were as good a treat as the trinket. This time, however, the gift my dad brought me was fantastic! An Olympus SLR camera with zoom lenses. A beautiful, black, shiny piece of equipment I was almost afraid to touch. My dad must have sensed my apprehension because he explained to me that he thought that I was very observant and that I was responsible for documenting the biggest family outing ever. I remember the pride that I felt at being trusted to take care of such a cool and expensive camera.

The bell rang on the last day of school, and I rushed to the parking lot where my father was waiting with a truck full of camping gear and clothing. We didn’t even go home from school that day; we just headed west, California-bound towards our first major stop. Disneyland!
At the time, all my brother and I could think about were the amusement parks we were going to visit. But looking back at the trip, my dad really made an effort to show us the coolest places and things that the United States had to offer. The world’s biggest Teepee, the meteor crater in Arizona, the Grand Canyon, the Las Vegas strip, Lake Tahoe; the list went on and on and we hadn’t reached California yet!

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

After a couple of days, we finally reached Disneyland and our excitement was uncontainable! For the whole day we literally sprinted from ride to ride. By the end of the day, all three of us were spent. We stayed the night there, watched the fireworks and the next morning, headed south and bound for Texas and the Gulf of Mexico. Dad painted such a fantastic picture of the ALAMO and the brave men who died defending her that I remember getting out of the truck expecting to hear the clash of sabers and small arms fire. It turned out to be just another tourist trap, but no one could have taken us back in time and really told us about the ALAMO like my father. Then on to New Orleans and the best oysters on the half shell I have ever eaten. I still have a scar from opening those delicious oysters. But all of the pain I endured that night was well worth it. I remember dad being proud of me for sticking it out at the restaurant even though I really sliced the shit out of myself. On we drove through Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and finally to Orlando Florida, home of Disney World and Epcot center. Here we experienced yet another frantic Disney day followed by some unreal fishing in the Keys.

After wetting our lines for a couple of days, we headed due north, Great Lakes bound, listening to country music and talking about life and what we wanted to do when we grow up. You know the conversation: “You can be whatever you want to be”; yeah, that one. I still remember the look on his face when he said those kinds of things to me. His brow would bunch up and his eyes would get so big and bright. A look that I now know reflects his most meaningful advice. I remember being able to dismiss those kinds of comments with ease when I was younger, but when he tells me that he believes and supports me now, it means so much on so many different levels. It took a lot of growing up for me to realize how important hearing that from a parent really is.

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

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

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

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

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

Last September, I went to visit my dad and family in New Mexico for the first time in about a decade. Everyone was really happy to see me doing so well and they loved meeting my wife and son. While I was there, I got a chance to catch up, and mend a lot of fences with, my family. Toward the end of the trip, I went fishing with my dad on a river that we used to fish when I was as a kid. We talked a lot and had an awesome time together, talking about the past and the future and just appreciating each other's company and becoming friends again. I felt like a whole person again for the first time in a long time. I never really realized how important family and my relationship with my brother and father could be or, for that matter, how family ties could affect the direction that my life would go in. Now I'm starting to understand the importance and often think about where I would be if my dad had never remarried and we had stayed together and on track as a unit. Ultimately I dismiss the thoughts, though. I find that nothing gets accomplished when you ponder the "what ifs," and, quite frankly, I like the person that I am, shortcomings and all! If I hadn't gone through the tough stuff and come out OK on the other end, would I be the same person? I don't think so. I'm making the best of what's happened in the past, and I look forward to my future. Most of all, I look forward to getting together again after all this time has passed and revisiting the summer vacation we took all those years ago; just my brother, my dad, and myself. Together and happy again.
It was a busy and crowded Friday night at Scruple’s night club as my friends and I sat at the bar celebrating my friend Lehua’s 25th birthday when suddenly someone said, “What can I get for you ladies?” We looked up only to find that it was an extremely handsome bartender smiling, waiting for a reply. But if I had known how dangerous it could be to leave a drink unattended, I wouldn’t have ordered anything.

We were all at a lost for words when I instantly replied, “Yah, I’ll have a Bud Light and whatever they want.” My friends looked at me as if I were crazy not to have given him a second look, but I knew that if I had I would get into trouble with my boyfriend, so I paid no attention to what they were trying to say to me.

As the night went on, we danced, talked, and laughed as we ecstatically celebrated our night with the birthday girl. I wore myself out with the non-stop “bootie” music dancing. I decided that I needed to take a break, so my friend and I went to the bar and ordered another beer. Then, I heard amongst all of the conversations, music, and dancing, a deep and artificial English voice “Do you want to dance?” It was a young man probably in his thirties, fairly tall and not particularly my type.

Tired and exhausted I said with a smile, “No thank you. I just finished dancing with my friends and I’m taking a break,” as I tried not to sound sarcastic and mean. The man smiled and walked away as if he weren’t bothered by the rejection.

It was about eleven o’clock when one of my friends ordered everyone another round of beers, but I had to decline because I knew that if I drank too much I would not make it to work the next day. Before we left that night the girls decided to make one last toast to our friend, so we ordered shots for everyone. However, the bartender was very busy with other customers so we gave him our order and said that we would be back for it because we wanted to dance to the last song that the disc jockey was about to play. We asked him to leave it on the bar when he finished. We then headed toward the dance floor and danced till sweat dripped down our faces. One by one, each girl slowly left the dance floor and headed back to the bar to get her drink. I happened to be the last one left on the dance floor because some guy came around and put his body within our circle and I was the one to be left with him. I uncomfortably danced with him to be the nice girl that I am, so as to not make him look stupid. Gradually, I made my way off the dance floor so we could make our last toast before we went home. I got to the bar, grabbed my drink, and walked over to my friends. They yelled and screamed at me because I had taken so long. By now, the bar was filled with smoke as we gathered to bond with one another to say our last goodbyes.
We each said some meaningful words to her, then brought our glasses together and swallowed every drop of liquor.

Soon after that, as everyone made her round to the ladies room, I suddenly felt as if I couldn't see anything. My vision went completely black, for about a second I assumed that maybe I had drank too much, but I knew that I only drank three beers and one shot. I knew that I wasn't overly intoxicated, but something was wrong. I made my way out of the club where I found my friends waiting at a table that was just outside the door. At that moment I felt that I had to sit down, because I was feeling really dizzy, almost as if I wanted to throw up. My friend helped me over to the table where she allowed me to put my head on her lap while we waited for our ride home. My friend pulled up with the car and at this point I felt very sick. I could not see anything or anyone. I had no control over my body. My friends had to carry me to the car. From this point on, I don't remember anything that had happened.

According to my friend Tiare, who filled in the details later the next day, I threw up in the car on the way back to my house. We finally reached my house, but minutes before we arrived, my friend called my mother to let her know that she was bringing me home and explained my situation. My mother opened the door to find me all over the back seat, practically in my own emesis. Meanwhile, my friends tried to explain to my mother that I didn't drink too much and that something was wrong. No one had ever seen me that way. They carried me into the house and into the shower because my mom wanted to get me cleaned up. My mom said that it was as if I were dead. I didn't move at all as they carried me, while my eyes looked as if they were in the back of my head.

Once they got me into the house, my mother tried to take off all of my clothes to put me into the shower, which I assume she had a difficult time doing. She left me on the floor of the tub as the cold water ran down my body. She ran down the stairs to get my sister to help her. When they returned, they found me flat on my back, as I sat in my own feces, urine, and emesis. My mother immediately yelled at my sister, "Hurry up, something is wrong. Help me pick her up!" They got me to my feet and tried to wash me up, but according to them, I wouldn't let them do anything to me. My mother said that as she tried to wash my hair, I attempted to punch her. As I swung my arms through the air, they realized that I wouldn't stop and decided to dry me up and get me into bed.

The next morning, I woke up with a pounding headache. Every time that I tried to move, my head would spin which made me very dizzy. Suddenly, I looked at the clock and realized that I was three hours late for work. I immediately jumped out of bed, as I literally stumbled over everything, got ready and left. My mom didn't realize that I had left for work, until she came up to my room to see how I was doing. When she finally realized where I had gone, she called my job to tell my boss what had happened and to check on me before I went on the floor.
When I arrived at work; I stumbled up the stairs to punch in to the time clock. I still felt very fatigued and nauseous. I punched in, put on my smock and went downstairs. When I saw my boss, I apologized for being late. He then proceeded to ask me if I were all right and I explained that I was not feeling well, but I was well enough to work.

Not an hour had passed before I felt as if I needed to throw up again, so I asked for approval to go the bathroom. I literally ran as fast as I could because I felt that I couldn’t control it, but I made it and everything came out. It was mostly liquid because I had no food in my stomach. I sat there on the floor in front of the toilet as my co-worker tried to comfort me while I threw up. After a while, nothing wanted to come out. It was more of a dry heave by now. My boss came upstairs to see if I were all right, only to find that I wasn’t. He called my mother and asked her if she could pick me up because he did not want me to drive home in that condition.

My mother arrived at my job fifteen minutes later and decided that she was going to take me to the doctor. We arrived at the doctor’s office. My mother explained to Dr. McNally what had happened the night before. He immediately wanted to take a blood test. He told my mother to take me home and let me rest. He was going to call us within the hour to tell us what it could be.

While at home, I slept. I felt as if I had been run over by a car. Then, the phone rang, and it was the doctor. He told my mother that my blood test had shown that I had a drug called Rohypnol, also known as “Ruphies: the date rape drug”, in my system. He explained that someone could have put it into my drink while I was at the club, and that I wouldn’t have known about it due to the fact that the drug is colorless and tasteless. He was very glad that my mother brought me in because after thirty-six hours the drug would have been undetectable. I was very upset that someone would try to hurt me with such a violent drug. The doctor told her that it could actually kill someone who had been given too much. My mother said that it explained my behavior last night and that at least we knew now what had made me so sick.

After that night, I realized that I needed to be more careful about where I am and to whom I talk. It was very frightening to know that I could have been taken advantage of if my friends had not been there to help me. Nowadays, whenever I go out to a bar or any establishment that serves alcohol I am very aware of the things that I drink. I also make sure that I don’t leave my drink unattended for a second, because after that night, I know now that I would never want to meet my silent, deadly enemy again.
Brand New Purpose

Aubrey Hillman

The Hawaiian mother, Malu, sat at the corner of the bar where I worked. She occupied a stool to the left of me in her post office uniform, shirt untucked; drinking her Miller Genuine Draft and tomato juice on ice, smoking her GPC cigarettes. The music was cranked up too loudly and the booths were packed with people trying to be heard over the noise; the air was hazy and brown with cigarette smoke and the beer tasted staler than last month’s bag of tortilla chips. Out of nowhere, Malu turned and looked at me, and then her brown bloodshot eyes opened wide as she leaned forward and told me I was pregnant. Where did that come from? How could she possibly know something like that? I thought about the Feng-Shui book she always had in her bag; she would refer to it when she was trying to decide whether or not to go to Vegas and gamble. She used to tell me about her Hawaiian Auntie’s healing abilities; she would cure colic by rubbing a baby’s belly, or use plants in different mixtures to cure various illnesses. Her statement was so uncomfortably strange that I tried to put the thought of being pregnant out of my mind. Laughing nervously, I dismissed the thought of Malu having psychic powers; after all, she was probably just drunk. The choice to go home was an easy one to make; the beer was bad and Malu was acting creepy.

The next day as I rolled out of bed sometime around noon, I started to get a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Why do I feel sick if I only had a couple of beers last night? Can it be true? Am I pregnant? I rushed to the bathroom, and the irony is I had just gotten over my compulsive need to EPT, so there was a stash of EPT’s under the sink (Early Pregnancy Test). I fumbled with the zip-lock bag, the kind with the little plastic zippers that never work when you need them to. Finally giving up and tearing it open with my teeth, I managed to snatch one out of the air as the entire contents of the bag went flying. I scrambled to pick them all up and threw them under the sink slamming the doors with a dull thud.

My heart was pounding; my hands were getting clammy and I broke out in a cold sweat as I stared at the toilet in front of me. I slowly peeled the shiny plastic wrapper away, noticing the static cling; it was as though the wrapper didn’t want to come off. It reminded me of opening a credit card bill that you know is going to be exorbitant. I thought about telling my boyfriend but realized it was ridiculous, as he was probably sick of this routine already. He had even walked in on me doing the EPT before and didn’t even blink as he grabbed his toothbrush and started brushing. “Okay, I’ve done this at least a dozen times.
in the last year, no big deal.” Nevertheless, I could not pee to save my life. Sitting on the
toilet feeling paranoid, I stared at the EPT and thought, hadn’t it always come out negative?
I began to calm down and decided to try again. As I urinated on the little absorbent tip, I
thought about all the abuse I had done to my body. My lungs were black with tar from too
many years of smoking, my liver pickled with alcohol. I always feel guilty while peeing
on an EPT.

Waiting for the results isn’t supposed to take that long, usually five minutes. Five
minutes seemed like hours as I thought about not having accomplished or acquired anything
substantial in my life. I felt the grainy texture of the tiles beneath me; the cold seeped into
my fingertips as I stared at the wall, and, during this time, the light acquired a hospital
fluorescence that I had never noticed before. My chest was tight as I stood up and glanced
at my watch. Four minutes till I could read the results, I started scrubbing the tub, then the
sink, and then the toilet. I checked my watch; a minute and a half had gone by. I dusted.
The top of the toilet tank, the shelves filled with towels, the windows and the counter. I
trudged over to the EPT and looked. I can’t remember now what color it was, just that it
read positive. “What! No way! I can’t be pregnant, it must be a mistake!” I dove under
the sink grabbing one of the EPT’s that had been scattered around. “Maybe there was a hole
in the bag and some water got in and ruined the EPT’s; I’ll try another,” I told myself.

As I sat there waiting for the results of the next test, I hated myself for getting
off the birth control shots that I used to take. They made me bleed constantly and I had
become anemic. “Damn, I’m so stupid, I could have stayed on the pill,” but I could never
remember to take them on time so I always had to double up which meant I was taking
way too many chemicals that affected my hormones. “I thought we used a condom; we
always use a condom.” These self-deprecating thoughts and excuses went on as I stood up
and cleaned the floor. I regret having cleaned the mirror; I tried not to look at myself as I
sprayed the glass cleaner on the mirror, the blue liquid swishing in the bottle, little bubbles
floating around like tiny boats tossed on the waves. The paper towel was crinkly and dry,
drawing my eye along with it as I put it to the glass. I looked older than dirt, with my dark
brown hair hanging lank around my pale and ashy face, my nostrils pinched, pupils dilated,
and eyebrows drawn up and towards each other as though they were trying to prop each
other up. I noticed wrinkles for the first time that day. I don’t know what broke the trance
but I glanced at my watch, noticing that five minutes had gone by and it was time to check
the results. POSITIVE.

I had planned to get my fallopian tubes tied so I wouldn’t be able to get pregnant;
however, I was always too busy partying or, I hate to admit it, too scared. “Now it’s too
late,” I thought, “Maybe having an abortion is a good idea.” Every rational thought I
came up with supported having an abortion: I have no degree, I don’t own a home, I’m not
married, I work at a bar, I don’t take care of my body! However, the idea of killing my baby was like a punch in the gut; it made my belly feel like an open wound and my face got hot as the pressure behind my eyelids built. My throat constricted and tears finally trickled down my nose as I hung my head and cried.

My feet were leaden as I slogged down the hall to my bedroom to tell my boyfriend I was having a baby. Entering my room was like walking through a wall of water, the weight on my shoulders pounded me into the ground as I thought about the words about to come out of my mouth. Nothing felt real—it was like watching T.V. or maybe this is what being a goldfish feels like. I took his hand and squeezed, and as I spoke, his face took on a flat aspect, then suddenly I could see the emotions running rampant over his face: disbelief, confusion, humor, disbelief...

The days that followed were full of activity as the acceptance of my child coming into the world became an observable fact. There were endless doctor visits, yoga and other exercise classes, shopping for baby necessities, shopping for maternity clothes so I could be presentable at work (argh!), rearranging furniture, cleaning every square inch of the interior of my house that was within reach, work, and finally Lamaze classes. I was determined to be as ready for my daughter as I could be within the shortest nine months of my life.

I announced the beginning of my contractions at 5p.m. in the middle of eating dinner with my family on November 22, 2002. I spent a lot of time packing, unpacking and repacking a suitcase and two duffel bags full of stuff to take to the hospital. Finally at 2a.m. my boyfriend said, “I’m so tired of watching you run around here like a chicken with its head cut off. Let’s just go already before I fall asleep and I’m too tired to drive.” The part of being “in labor” that really sucks is when you are having contractions and have to wait and fight yourself not to push until you are finally dilated; for me, the waiting took about 14 hours from the time we got to the hospital. After less than an hour of actual pushing, I gave birth to a seven pound, two ounce, baby girl. I’ll admit I was tired, but it wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be. Despite having warded off the nurses toting painkillers galore, I felt no pain. I looked down at Storm lying on my deflated belly, oblivious to the doctor giving me stitches as I gazed into my daughter’s eyes. I still can’t believe something so precious and beautiful came from me; Storm is 19 months now and can smile with her whole body! It is the most incredible sight a mother could ever see and I get to see it everyday.

The smile usually starts at the eyes; they get luminous and start to squint as the corners of her mouth turn up. As the smile gets larger, tiny little squiggly creases begin to appear over the bridge of her nose. Her little cheek turns pink like my mother’s roses and round like apples. By the time her face is done smiling, you can’t see any of the white in
her eyes because they turn into little downward curving crescent moons and the smile at
her mouth threatens to engulf her face. She jiggles her little body up and down when she
laughs and slightly hunches her shoulders, pulling her hands into her chest, wrists slightly
bent and then throws her arms out. If she is sitting down, she might even kick up her little
feet which have so few lines, all pudgy with baby fat, toenails every color of the rainbow
from the nontoxic washable-ink pens I bought her; she likes to pretend she is the one doing
the painting. She sometimes leans back as she laughs, tossing her head back, her baby
fine warm brown hair floating around in what seems like slow motion; it is usually a mess
since I don’t really like making her sit still when she doesn’t want to. I just want her hair
out of her beautiful eyes. They remind me of the look in a calf’s eyes or warm chocolate
pudding, but a baby cow could never get that sassy mischievous look in its eye the way she
does when she knows she is being naughty and getting away with it or the sad puppy look
she gives me when I drop her off at the sitters. Her laughter is a clean, clear sound like a
bell’s chime.

I resolved not to allow myself to go back to bar life and I’ve come back to school
to get my BSN (Bachelor’s degree in Nursing). For the last two semesters and a summer
session I’ve been a single parent, going to school full-time, and getting straight A’s, and
working in a smoke free environment. I’ve never been healthier or happier in my whole
life.

Thank you, Storm.
Enchanting Laie

H. Michael K. Howlett

Located at the North Eastern tip on the island of Oahu, there is a small town called Laie. Laie is a small and friendly place where everybody knows each other. Laie’s geography could even be called romantic. Beautiful, white, sandy beaches border Laie from end to end. Frothy, white foamed waves crash relentlessly against miles of protective barrier reef. The salty mist released into the air is carried ashore on the shoulders of the ever present trade winds.

This charming little town is what was once called an ahupuaa. The ahupuaa was land sectioned by the ali‘i (rulers) that was just large enough to sustain a healthy supply of natural resources that would be used by the Hawaiian people to support individual communities. This section of land was usually about three to six miles wide and would stand from the ocean to the highest point of the mountain range parallel to it. Laie as a whole is made up of two parts. The ancient Hawaiians named these two parts “Laie Maloo, which was the arid side of Laie,” and “Laie Wai, the wet side of Laie, which was host to many natural water features” (Pukui 128).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almost all of the land in Laie that meets the criteria for development has either
been developed or cleared for farmland. Much of the lower mountainous regions of Laie
used to be rich with native fruit trees. Now the land is leased to immigrants so they can
farm produce as a source of income. Most of these farms are now home to locked gates and
raggedy barbed wire fences that use existing trees along a boundary line as fence posts.
Now the only way to get to any remaining fruit trees is by running away from an angry
farmer.
Present day Laie is over-crowded and over-paved with hideous parking lots filled with loud, ugly automobiles. Traffic lights and telephone poles line the highway. Tourist attractions, fast food restaurants, and supermarkets have all staked their claim in little old Laie town.

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

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

Work Cited

Playing with Heart

Jay Koseki

"Jay! Are those notes supposed to be slurred?"

"Uh...no."

"Then why are you slurring them?"

"Because it sounds better."

"Don't do it!"

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

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

What I was missing was a means of self-expression. Without music I had no release from the harsh realities of the world. I needed a release. I needed music, but what kind of music? How I came to find my musical niche is kind of a mystery. I had heard of Ki 'hoalu, or Hawaiian slack-key guitar, but didn't really know what it was or what it meant. I also do not know where I got the idea that this would be my instrument. All I remember is being absolutely determined to learn this style of music; however, this posed another dilemma.
Playing with Heart

Jay Koseki

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

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

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

One meeting in particular with Uncle Renny sticks out in my mind because it would be one of the greatest and most useful lessons in my life. I sat with my guitar directly across from my teacher. This time his mood seemed to be a bit more solemn than usual. We were working on a beautiful love song called *Sanae*, written by Queen Lili’uokalani, one of
Playing with Heart

Hawaii’s most beloved monarchs. The story behind the song involves the love affair between one of the Queen’s young female servants and a commoner. The speaker of the song addresses a “mist” which flows in and out of the palace. The “mist,” which is an element that hinders one’s sight, is analogous to the young girl and her secret escapades in and out of the palace.

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

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

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

Kristen Lee

Kaimuki is one of the oldest residential neighborhoods on the island of Oahu. All of my life, I have been one of thousands who call Kaimuki home. The neighborhood wasn’t something to reflect upon or even cherish—it just was. Kaimuki was merely a mundane community where life takes place: children went to school, adults traveled to work; people simply lived. I had never stopped to think that Kaimuki had a history all of its own until recently. As I discovered, those who look deeper into the soul of Kaimuki will see the core of this old community, one that embraces its unique beauty and flourishes with nostalgic value and historical significance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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An Oasis In The City

Andrei Lyovin

Walking around the metropolitan Tokyo area, you gag on the indistinguishable haze that is a combination of car exhaust and cigarette smoke. The less than human crowds push you along like a stream of rapids; you’re frazzled, and you need a breather. Luckily, hiding in plain sight a short trip away from the filth filled gutters of the cluttered Shinjuku area is the portal of the Meiji Jingu shrine, where you can escape from the stress of the over-infested streets of Tokyo and effortlessly walk into instant meditation while taking a breath of life’s natural pleasures that you had forgotten existed. One becomes oblivious to the fact that the smog of the city is just right around the bend.

Those familiar with Tokyo had, at least, a glimpse of the stress, even if they chose to take refuge in the numbing and shutting down of senses to become an urban zombie. Getting to work on a normal day consists of maneuvering your body through the onslaught of cigarette smokers, grumpy salary men, and females that always seem to have bad hair days. Homeless drunks often litter the streets, and you have to do an occasional nonchalant rhythmic skip over puddles of regurgitation from overindulging drinkers as you continue on like everyone else as if nothing was wrong.

The train is another big obstacle on the way to work. The jam-packed train station platform is so crowded that you fear for your own life when you are near the tracks. The mob’s movement comes in unpredictable waves that can throw you off balance if you’re not ready to brace yourself. The trains are filled to the very maximum and the attendants shove in every last inch of passenger out of the way of the sliding doors. You are squeezed into an uncomfortable yogic position and can’t move until you get out or it gets less crowded. Personal bubbles don’t exist here. You endure the smell of unwashed hair slicked with cheap grease, un laundered suits, and an occasional whiff of foul, garbage can breath while you try not to gag.

After work and on the way home, the train reeks of alcohol used by a lot to cope with the day’s stress. Like prisoners trying to forget where they are for the moment, there is a look of desperation in the eyes of the salary men while they partially relax their shell-shocked nerves for a break in an unending cycle. A thick heavy cloud of released tension seems to linger in the cars, and you can’t help but breathe it in.
Outside, the streets and buildings are cascading with neon of all colors. There are giant TV screens on the sides of buildings and blaring speakers playing music and advertisements. On the sidewalks, there’s more stimulus than a crowded discotheque. The crowds, lights, and noise all wreak havoc on the senses that leaves you in a confused stupor. Living in Tokyo can really exhaust you mentally and physically. One weekend, my wife (at the time girlfriend) and I took a walk down the road from her home in the opposite direction of the crowds in order to get further away from the hordes of people, and just try to relax. Just off the road a short distance away, we spotted a large opening of some sort that resembled an opening of a temple. Was this the Meiji Jingu Shrine that we knew of but never set foot in? We decided to satisfy our curiosity and crossed over to the other side.

Stepping onto the coarse gravel and entering through a gigantic gate made of cypress, every nerve in our bodies was released of their duty to stand at attention. Without saying a word, we basked in the soothing energy that seemed to bombard us from every side and we remained in awe while we floated down the tree-laden path. The exhilarating cool air filled our lungs with a cleansing sensation as we breathed in the live essence of the place. The fragrant smell of the towering evergreens sent tingling waves of relaxation through out bodies, and we lost all sense of time and space. The sound of the multitudes of birds singing put us further into a trance. We both let out a sigh of relief that communicated our feelings better than any words ever could have. We found peace. We were meditating right in the eye of the high-tech storm we lived in.

The shrine was built in honor of the Meiji Emperor and Empress. During WW II the shrine was destroyed and another was reconstructed in 1958. The Meiji era was a time when the emperor tried to modernize Japan in order to technologically catch up to the west. It’s ironic that now Tokyo has become one of the most modern cities in the world, and here I am taking refuge in a Meiji Period shrine in order to avoid the side effects of the resulting modernization that ultimately bypassed the west.

We walked along the wide pathway, which seemed like an unending road in a spacious garden of enchanting trees. We were mystified by how a place of such magnitude could fit into the small space we imagined this area to be encased in. Both of us were lost in the beauty of it all, and almost forgot all about the shrine we came to see.

The shrine itself was a towering structure made of cypress that seemed as if it were built for humans a bit bigger than normal. The doorways were wide and every feature seemed to be of exaggerated size. The architecture was like other temples I’ve seen in Japan. Roofs where slanted downwards and sloping. It was a beautiful temple, but the power of the place itself overrides anything constructed by man.
An Oasis in the City

One need not look far nor go great distances to get away from the blizzard of invasive stimuli, and nauseating crowds. Entering the Meiji Jingu porthole periodically is a way of keeping your sanity in Tokyo. I will never forget the place where time seems to have stood still since the Meiji period; our hidden sanctuary right in the middle of the technological purgatory they call a city.

References


Japan Information Network Meiji Jingu
Almost Stolen

Mary Martin

It is a late afternoon on Kaua‘i’s eastern side in Kapahi, which is an area near the mountains above Kapa‘a. My mother and I drive into a neighborhood above Kapa‘a High School onto a side street. The narrow road is covered in a fine layer of red dirt that reveals areas of old yellow paint that was scraped off over time. Potholes that look like they have been dug out manually break up the road. Small, worn, old houses with faded red-dirt stained paint sit close to one another on both sides of the street. The houses have small and large yards, some with plants and others with dry grass and piles of what looks like objects from a junkyard: old rusty car parts, an old fridge, tires of many sizes, metal rods. Some chicken coupes are piled next to a fence, and fighting roosters are pegged to the ground in a distant yard with small water dishes at their sides.

We slow down and pull to a stop in front of a low rectangular structure with screened windows, a dirt yard with a large towering mango tree, with a few mangoes waiting to turn color, to the left and three steps leading to a small porch. The dark interior is lit even in the day because of the canopy of trees and angle of the house. A small mixed terrier dog, Shorty, comes running down the stairs ferociously barking. The small lot is surrounded by a variety of cars that line the right side of the street. More cars clutter the yard and meet the edge of the porch. Old car parts, oil cans, and torn blue tarps are lying near some cars.

We roll up onto the left side of the street directly across from all the other cars, facing the oncoming traffic, and park straddling the dirt area and the road so that the mounded shoulder tips the car slightly to one side. My mother tells me, “I’ll be quick, I promise. I just have to discuss some details about our car with Johnny.” Johnny is our mechanic who lives in the junkyard-type property I just described. A couple of weeks earlier, my family’s car broke down. Johnny was a family friend and mechanic, so when we gave him the job, he loaned us a car. I thought to myself, “Yeah right...she’s going to take forever, as usual.”

For some reason, I am sitting in the back seat of the car on the driver’s side. Probably because then I can leave the door open for the cool air and not worry about cars coming by. “Now, I can read my book,” I thought at the young age of eight. I am sitting captivated by my book, “Island of the Blue Dolphins,” that takes me into the world of a young girl’s adventure on a deserted island. My parents’ screenplay, “All Hawai‘i Stands Together” that they had been working on for years, is sitting on the center console of the car in a square leather case. My mom is planning to make copies of it later today.
The neighborhood is noisy with the chatter of kids playing in the street or in their yards on a sunny day. Cars come and go, dropping people off, stopping for a while or rushing off in a hurry. Dogs bark periodically. I don’t hear much of this because the story I am reading is rambling in my head with great speed.

After a chapter or two, I realize my mother is still talking more than she needs to, managing to stick to her usual slow pace. I get a little antsy and drink some water from a plastic recycled bottle at my side. Then I return to reading. I hear a big truck pull up near the house behind the car I am in. The engine is revving and has a deep hum to it. I figure it is some big moke trying to be cool and make a statement with his huge truck, so I keep reading. A car door slams with a wrenching screech, and I figure that someone is just getting out of the car to visit the house or something. In a moment, the monster truck seems to shake the road as it pulls away. Almost immediately, while my ears are filled with the sound of the truck’s rumbling engine, a bleached, ragged haired woman darts out of nowhere, jams herself into the driver’s seat and starts the engine. Pasted against the back of the seat with blood rushing, I realize, “My mom left the keys in the ignition!” A silent scream echoes over and over in my head.

The thief fiddles with the gears, forces it into drive, and hits the gas pedal. Only a few seconds pass before I scream at her, “What are you doing?” I don’t think she saw me when she jumped in the driver’s seat. No answer. My hands are sweaty, my head is spinning, my jaw clenched. No words. “She’s going to drive away with me! What does she want?” My chest fills up and pushes my shoulders up to my ears. I scream, “WAIT!!!!!” As the quivering word leaves my mouth, we begin moving in slow motion, still on the dirt side of the road. Breathing quickly, I grab my mom’s script, in desperation, and with my book in the other hand, plunge head first through the partly open door onto the red compacted dirt.

Dizzy, with my shaking hands molded onto my mom’s script, I see the car whip around the corner and turn left. Sitting wide-eyed and in utter shock, I watch as a glimpse of the small tires and a piece of the bumper disappear through a cloud of red dirt and white exhaust. She is never to be seen again.

My eyes water in response to the haze of dust stirred up by the spinning tires. I feel enveloped in a dream, too overwhelmed to cry. I just sit for a while trying to put the jumbled pieces of what had happened together.

Horrors now creep into my mind. I race from thought to thought of what might have happened if I had been caught in that car. Maybe she would’ve taken me into a secluded house down a dark hallway. She must have been high on drugs!! I couldn’t see her eyes!
Almost Stolen

Mary Martin

The outline of her back, shoulders and short straggly tangled hair that stood stiffly away from her head etched itself into my mind. I see myself duct-taped in the back seat of the car racing over massive potholes and slippery mud on the road to Polihale, the West side. I slip into a horrible nightmare as I imagine what would have happened to me if I had been unable to escape from the car.

This area of Kaua‘i is desert dry for most of the year. The road is lined with old crunchy sugar cane and patches of kiawe trees tangled like clusters of thick fishing net waiting to ensnarl wanderers. A narrow canal runs along one side of the road on the outskirts of the sugarcane. The sun cuts through the windows, melting the tape to my face. We dart around a pothole, ramble through the next, scrape over a jagged boulder, launch over a ditch. I picture her dirty fingernails tearing into my arm, dragging me. Hot sand, dirt, pieces of glass and sharp rocks stick to my sweat. I look out through the red haze at the fireball setting sun. Sand stretches for miles in both directions with a vast bloody colored ocean ahead. My mind leaps to Polihale, where a woman was raped a few years before.

Shorty barks piercingly; I snap out of my feverish nightmare and run toward Johnny’s door without looking for cars, the terrier at my heels. Now the tears sluice down my cheeks; tears of anger at Mom for leaving her keys in the car; tears of terror. I am afraid I will never trust people again. I can’t make sense of it and I am frustrated. I could have died! I would never have seen my family again! Even worse, the dread of my family never knowing what had happened tormented me. My poor mother’s guilt!

Once in the dark house, I blurt out pieces of sentences that ramble out of control like a race horse announcer a few seconds before the finish line, “I was sitting in the car and ....I don’t know, I guess I wasn’t paying attention...” My mother’s eyes follow my mouth trying to pick up and assemble the words I’m throwing at her as she holds me close. “The lady jumped in the car and was trying to drive off with me! The keys were in the car, mom! The keys!” I screech out.

My mom asks, now a little frantic, “What lady?”

My voice cracks, “I don’t know! She was driving away with me! With ME, Mom! I had to bolt out!”

“You were in the back seat?” Mom struggles to understand.

“YES! And I smacked the dirt and she drove off before I realized what happened. I didn’t get a good look at her, she raced away so fast, the dirt stung my eyes, I couldn’t see through the smoke!” With some hope in my eyes, I yelled, “I got your script! I saved it, Mom, its safe!”
Almost Stolen

Mary Martin

My mom sits me up and takes a deep breath saying, “Okay, it’s all over. You’re okay.” But it isn’t okay for me. She doesn’t realize how traumatic that minute was for me. I almost got kidnapped! All she knows is that I am safe and that’s all that matters. At eight years old, I don’t know how to express my fear and the dreadful possibilities racing in my mind. My mom’s face remains perplexed and strained.

While I race through words and choke on my jumping and hiccupping breath, spilling the scenario before my mom, Johnny’s face crinkles. He knows something. He knows what happened! He knows why she stole the car and almost stole me.

Before the loaner we are using fell into Johnny’s hands, it belonged to “the crazy woman.” He explains that she talked him into buying the car cheap for parts or as a fixer-upper. When the deal was done, a year before, he had refurbished the car. He had forgotten about the eerie woman and often loaned it out. He hadn’t heard from her since the day he closed the deal, so he assumed all the details were handled. Apparently, she had a different understanding.

That one minute threatened my life and will always hide somewhere deep in my memory. Just recently this incident, which I thought had been erased from my mind, came alive once again after reading a story that triggered the fear that haunted me for years.

To this day, I never sit in a car with the keys in the ignition, even if I’m in the front passenger side of the car. If I’m not driving, I hold the keys in my hand or sit on them. This may seem stupid or weird, but I was almost stolen!
The Heartbeat
Anthony Matchen

I awoke at 5:00 a.m., the same way I have been doing for some time now. So often my body clock pulled my eye lids open before the alarm even went off. I lay there in bed, fighting the urge to close my eyes again. Then I kicked the covers off and jerked my body up to a sitting position in an effort to throw off the last grip of sleep.

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

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

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

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

Then suddenly, without warning, the van radically jerked to the right, almost tipping itself over from the violent motion of the maneuver. As I watched in disbelief the van rammed up onto the sidewalk. Like a juggernaut, the van barreled along forcing its way between several parked cars and a concrete wall. The van continued on until the concrete wall ended. It temporarily vanished in a cloud of dust as it careened through a hedge and a chain link fence. The van came to rest upright, from my position I could see no major external damage.
Having seen many car accidents before, my instinct told me that the passengers, although shaken, were most likely not seriously injured. I was setting myself up big time for what happened next. My first thought was, "What the *!@!* is this guy thinking?" Then training took over and I reached for the radio mike to report the situation.

AM: "2 Bravo 559" (My call sign)

Dispatch: "Standing by 2 Bravo 559"

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

Dispatch: "10-4" (Understood)

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

That is when something caught my eye. On the sidewalk in front of the house where the van had stopped, I saw something that took my attention away from the vehicle. It was a little girl! What was she doing on the sidewalk? I moved towards her. Her body lay in an awkward position.

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

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

Dispatch: "10-4, 559"

I stood over her for a second. Her long, black hair was strewn across the white concrete sidewalk. She could not be more than ten; "So young", I thought. I bent down to take her vital signs. I would need all my training and discipline now. I had to stay calm. I was presently the only assistance on the scene. The rookie was speechless. I put my ear just above her mouth in an effort to hear or feel for her breath; there was none. I pulled back to look in her eyes.

She had the beautiful eyes of a child, deep and dark. I could also see them looking
past me in a haunting way, straight into the noon day sky, unblinking. I wanted so much to help her but my heart sank as I realized she could not see me. I knelt down by her side. Maybe I missed something. A sound. A heartbeat. A movement. Maybe I could start C.P.R. I tilted my head to get closer to her face. My mind was racing trying to fight off the grip of fear and panic that wrapped its fingers around my heart.

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

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

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

Dispatch: “Oh no! Ok! Ok!”

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

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

At that moment I experienced what can only be described as going from the real world of the five senses to the surreal world were reality is an uncertainty and disbelief and denial are lord and master. There in front of me, trapped under the van, was the motionless body of a third little girl. I would never even have seen her had the second girl’s body not been draped over the wall forcing me to place my head down there.

I swear I became two entities at that moment. The one in the uniform got up and
moved around to the side of the van, got down and crawled under the van to the little girl’s side. The other, stricken with panic and gripped by fear, simply followed along.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All my emotions had been pushed to the limits, anger, fear, denial, sadness. Taken individually they could each be dealt with. The one that lingers is always the most difficult, “acceptance.” There was no way to accept this obscene situation, no justice for this event. The driver later explained he had simply reached down for a bottle of water and lost control of the van. Stupid, yes, but even he was a victim. I did not sleep
for weeks after that event. I was burdened with guilt about not being to help or protect those children. My shield and armor failed to protect them or me. Still, the one little girl under the van did survive, and from time to time, when I think back to that day, I recall the feel of her heartbeat on my hand.
The Stranger
Steffani Mullen

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

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

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

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

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

I looked at him real hard and into his eyes; I was looking for a change in expression or a flicker of guilt so that I could determine whether he had been the one who broke in. He
The Stranger

Steffani Mullen

gave me a look of shock and confusion.

"What? Why is she making a police report?" Kyle asked with concern.

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

"Oh, that's messed up," he responded. Well, I'll come back for you later then but I'd better go before they get here 'cause I don't want to be arrested for violating my parole and get sent back to jail. I'll come back then."

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

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

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

"What the hell is wrong with you Kyle? Are crazy? I can't believe this!" I screamed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We drove in silence to the Ala Moana Hotel; a friend had rented him a room there for three days. We got into the hotel lobby and went to the elevator. We got off at the fifth floor and he directed me to the room. He opened the door and put my bags of clothing down on the carpet. I looked around; it was a typical hotel room. It was a room with a single bed and a bathroom to the left of me. I was relieved to see the big bed because I felt extremely drained and exhausted by the events that had taken place during that crazy day. Kyle sat on the chair in front of the bed and unwrapped his glass pipe from an eyeglass pouch that he used to carry it. I changed into a pair of shorts and a T-shirt while he dumped a bag of ice into the pipe and pulled out a torch lighter. I sat down on the bed, across from him, and watched him in disgust.

He held the pipe and rocked it side to side and inhaled for several seconds while lighting it with the flame. As he let go of the lighter he cooled the pipe on a wet rag that had been set on the table. There was a scorching sound similar to when a hot frying pan is placed under cold water. I looked at his face as he released a massive cloud of smoke. The smoke hid his face from mine and slowly cleared. As it cleared I looked into his eyes and saw absolutely nothing. It was as though he wasn’t even a person anymore. They say eyes are the windows to the soul and I looked into the window and saw nothing but a massive hole of darkness. He held the pipe in my direction and offered me a hit.

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

“No need sleep. I gave that up a long time ago. I quit sleeping like a bad habit,” he said as he laughed sarcastically. “Hmm... I think I’m going on six days already.” He told me as he picked up the pipe. I watched him smoke like an obsessed zombie. He took hit after hit until I drifted off into sleep to the sounds of the pipe cooling.
I woke up nine or ten hours later alone in the hotel room. I sat there for a while and my eyes rested on the room phone. I picked up the phone and attempted to call my mother.

A lady answered with a warm and friendly voice, “Front desk, how can I help you?”

“Can I make local calls?” I asked weakly.

“Well, you’d need to come down to the lobby and pay a fifty dollar deposit so you can use the phone.”

“Oh, okay. Thanks.” I replied.

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

“Did you sleep till now?” He asked.

“Yeah” I replied.

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

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

“For what?” Kyle asked.

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

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

I didn’t answer. He left and I waited until I thought he was gone before I decided to go downstairs to make my phone call. I grabbed the key and headed towards the lobby. I asked the lady at the front desk who was wearing a bright pink muumuu if she knew where the payphones were.
“Sure, right around the other side of this desk.” I peered over at where she was directing me. It was right in front of the glass sliding doors that lead to the street.

“Are there any others in the building?”

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

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

“Hello?” My mother said again.

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

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

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

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

I could only say,”Yeah.”

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

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

“Yup,” I tried to respond casually but my voice began to crack and tears began to well up in my eyes. I knew he was going to catch on so I hung up the phone quickly. I walked past him and went up to the hotel room. He was glaring at me the whole time and I couldn’t take it any more.

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

“Do what?” Kyle replied, as if he truly had no idea what I was talking about.
“Look, you can stop bullshitting me cause I know you stole the ring from my mom and took my watch too,” I exploded.

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

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

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

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

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

“Get in!” Kyle said. I hesitated and the taxi driver gave me a puzzled look. “Don’t make me get out and drag you, get inside the car!” he roared. I got in and he took off speeding down the road. Kyle was wound up and huffing and puffing as though he had just sprinted a mile. He began talking in this excited and amazed voice. I was terrified that he knew I was planning on going home just as he had pulled up.
“Holy crap, you would not believe what the hell happened. I had just gotten out of the shower and got dressed when I heard a knock at the door. I looked out of the peep hole and saw cops, along with hotel security, right out side. I put on my shoes and they were banging on the door. So I jumped off the balcony and ran to the car and dug out. Whoa, that was nuts! But shit, I forgot the damn dope!”

“Well at least you got away,” I said.

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

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

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

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

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

We got near the Ala Moana Hotel and he pulled into a back road that had a hidden alley that led directly to the hotel. I still couldn’t believe he really wanted to go back in there, I mean that sounded crazy! He got out of the car and slammed the door. He walked away without looking at me or saying a word, I guess because we were still so angry at each other. Although I was mad and a large part of me hated him, there was still a part of me that cared for him. I was relieved to think that he would be arrested but I did wish that he had at least said goodbye.
I was very nervous and uncomfortable waiting in that stolen car. I was worried about the cops seeing me in the stolen car so I reclined my seat all the way back. I looked at the time and I told myself that if Kyle didn’t return in fifteen minutes he had been arrested for sure. I waited and stared up at the roof of the car. It was a dirty blue fabric that was stained and had several holes from cigarette burns. The fabric had once been tightly fastened to the roof of the car but over the years had begun to sag and droop from the roof the same way it does off of an elderly person. I studied it as the minutes ticked by; fifteen, twenty, then thirty minutes passed. I knew he had most definitely been arrested but I just sat there feeling numb and not knowing what to do next.

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

“Are you Steffani Mullen?” he asked calmly.

“Mm-hmm” I answered.

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

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

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

Jason Ordenstein

The memory begins just like a movie. A boy walks out of an old movie theatre clinging desperately to his father who walks out with him. He looks to be about five years old; he is still too young to stray away from the immediate vicinity of either his mother or father. Up until this very moment his entire world has revolved around his parents. The boy has a dazed expression on his face. He looks as if he has experienced something that will forever change him. The boy seems to walk in slow motion, unsure of his steps, moving more by reaction than anything else. He turns back slowly, his eyes searching for something back where the theatre is. His gaze stops at the row of movie posters on the wall near the entrance. One seems to stand out more than the rest. It shows a boy like him. The boy in the poster is standing behind a fence. The two boys, fictional and real, seem to be looking at each other. They both seem to have an understanding that the rest of the world will never know. The real boy, still clutching his father’s hand, flashes a small grin at the imaginary boy in the poster...

I have no memories before the age of five. My very first recollections are in fact a series of events both real and unreal which seem to fade in and out in my mind in no discernible order, like a black and white newsreel playing in an empty, smoke-filled theater. The reason for my difficulty in distinguishing truth from fiction in my memories stems from the first experiences I had with movies.

My father first began to take me to see movies at the age of five. These movies seem to have left such a strong impression on my subconscious mind that anything previously inside my head was subsequently pushed out. Looking back, the type of movies that my father first began taking me to were either very mature or very much beyond the presumed intelligence of a normal child of that age. Why did he think that I was mature enough to view them? Till this day, I don’t know the answer to that question. The first movies that I saw—I have forgotten what the first was—were very adult-oriented films from the 80’s, films like: Conan the Barbarian, Excalibur, The Last Emperor, Platoon, and Alien. He also took me to see “classic,” older films, like: 2001: A Space Odyssey, Apocalypse Now! The Godfather, Dr. Strangelove, and The Seven Samurai.

The thing that I remember most clearly, what resonates with me even today, is the feeling that I initially had watching those first movies. It’s difficult to describe. I remember walking out of the theatre as if I was immersed in a living dream. I would walk out into the piercing, overwhelming, virginal-white light, feeling a profound sense of loss. Yet
underneath my sadness there was also anger, a seething type of anger that lurked just below the surface. I was furious with the world. All the colors, and shapes, and outlines of the “real” world seemed to be fake and meaningless. I would yearn to return to that dark sanctuary of dreams that I had just left. I preferred that world, the one that provided me with those living, breathing illusions, than the plasticity of the one I would have to live in. It was here that I first began to truly think, as if a kind of fog that was in my mind had magically been lifted. Before, I would merely look at the world. From this point on, I would begin to “see” the world. Now, I would look to see the true face behind the mask in everything and in people as well. It was here that the creative urge first began to flicker deep inside me. The flickering sparks would—over the years—eventually grow stronger and stronger, building, feeding themselves into the raging inferno it is today.

A few movie experiences are particularly strong. I distinctly remember the feeling of having difficulty concentrating for weeks on end after viewing the movie, The Last Emperor. The movie Platoon shattered my entire world view. It was like every single concept I had about the world at that time—limited though it was—had suddenly crumbled into something I couldn’t recognize anymore. Previously, I had thought people were only capable of being either extraordinarily good or maliciously evil. I learned that the world was different from most of the cartoons I watched then at that age. I learned that there were a lot of things that are not so easily categorized. The amount of secrets the world contained now seemed to multiply by a thousand. I would now start to look beyond my previously simplistic views of the world, and instead begin to see a more complicated view of the world. I would observe a world that was not going to give up all of its secrets so easily now.

One movie-going memory stands out more than the rest. It was after I had seen a French movie called The Four Hundred Blows for the first time. The movie is a simple story of a boy, Antoine, who is growing up wild in Paris. All he seems to know how to do is get into trouble. All he wants to do is go to the movies and to see the ocean one day. After the movie, I was in a state of disbelief. There was something inside me that clammed up, something that did not want to face the “reality” that the movie presented me. I refused to speak to anyone immediately after I had seen that movie. I remember that my father asked me if something was wrong with me, but I honestly couldn’t answer him.

There was something in Antoine that I immediately connected with. I related to how he felt uncomfortable around everyone that he met, yet didn’t really know why. When I saw how everyone clearly treated him differently as if he was some strange, aloof creature, I realized I was seeing myself in him.
Antoine runs away at the moment when he seems to have found some kind of peace. He runs and runs, running so far that it seems that he has run to the other side of the world. He runs so far that he reaches the ocean he has wished to see for his entire life. He edges right up to the oncoming waves that lap eagerly at his feet. He gazes out at the vast ocean. Then in one of the most famous endings in movie history, he stares straight into the camera and the screen freezes on his face; his blank, ambiguous expression hidden away like an undecipherable puzzle for all time.

After the showing my father and I walked out of the theatre. My stomach felt empty, but I knew it wasn’t because I was hungry. The details of my memory aren’t perfect but I remember suddenly realizing that my father had gotten into a discussion with a complete stranger who had also seen the movie. They were discussing why they thought Antoine had such a fervent longing inside him to see the ocean so badly, and why he subsequently ran away to see it. They both attributed it to just more quirky, impulsive behavior from Antoine. In the end they dismissed his actions as being very childish. At that moment I knew that out of the entire audience that saw the movie, a five-year old child—myself—was the only person who truly understood it. I looked back one last time, hoping for something… something of what I had just seen, something more that I could take with me forever. I noticed that the walls near the entrance were covered with the replica posters of the old movies that the theatre regularly showed. In an instant, I recognized the poster for the movie I had seen. It showed Antoine peering out at the world behind a fence, grasping the fence with one hand. The look in his eyes on that poster has forever imprinted itself onto my mind. In the sharp softness of his dark irises, there is a deep yearning, a deep longing, like being immersed in total darkness and reaching out to a beacon of light but coming up just short, grasping only emptiness.

In a strange way, right then and there, I came to the realization that my life would unfold the same way as Antoine’s. Curiously though, I was not sad to know this. Instead, I felt an acceptance for the way things would be. I remember smiling at the poster. The face of Antoine in the poster did not smile back. I know it never will. In my mind it has become something else all altogether. It has meshed with memory and experience so completely that I have a hard time distinguishing what is real from what is not. I will always see him that way now, forever grasping that fence, burdened with a desire that could fill several lifetimes. Perhaps it is truth, perhaps not. Personally, I like it the way it is.
America’s Secret

Elika Otoya

The Second World War took place in the mid-20th century and included many countries. Germany, Italy, Japan, France, China, and the United States are some of the nations that fought in this gruesome war; people all over the world suffered. My grandfather, Jitsuo Nakano, was one of the unfortunate Japanese Americans to be taken from their homes and families and placed in American run “internment camps.”

The Second World War was already in progress when Japanese and American relations took a turn for the worse in September 1940. Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, an alliance with Germany and Italy that secured their interest in defending one another (Cooper 03). After this alliance was formed, things began to fall apart. Against the demands of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Japan invaded Northern and Southern Indochina. In response, Roosevelt cut off all export of oil to Japan, reducing their supply by nearly 90% (McKay et al. 1047). This denial of oil, among other matters, prompted the Japanese to take action against the United States, who at the time was not an active war participant (1047). On December 7, 1941, a few minutes before 8:00 a.m., the Japanese waged a surprise attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii (Maddox 93). My grandfather, who was at home at the time, remembers seeing the planes coming in. This was the beginning of a very different life for my grandpa.

Within the United States a suspicion, and for some, a hatred of Japanese Americans developed; America questioned their loyalty. The Japanese Americans were victims of propaganda and harassment by many Americans who remained convinced that they were spies for the Japanese government abroad (Cooper 04).

John L. Dewit, an Army general for wartime security on the West Coast stated, “A Jap’s a Jap. They are a dangerous element. There is no way to determine their loyalty... It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen; theoretically he is still a Jap and you can’t change him.” (Cooper 06) The general American population began to develop a hatred for all Japanese, regardless of citizenship. My family was among those who felt the hatred.

According to my uncle William Nakano, Executive Order 9066 which was issued by President Roosevelt in February 1942, gave the military authority to remove from the West Coast, all Japanese who posed a threat to United States intelligence. Nearly all 112,353
Japanese people living on the West Coast in California, Washington, and Oregon were taken from their homes and put into American internment camps (Cooper 28). In Hawaii, the vast majority of the population was Japanese, so they could not remove all due to the potential effects on the economy, thus only a few of the Japanese Americans considered a “threat” were removed (Nakano).

My great grandfather Minoru was among the first to go. He was arrested in February 1942 in Hawaii and held by immigration authorities at the Sand Island Quarantine station prior to being sent to a prisoner of war camp in Lordsburg, New Mexico. According to family history, Minoru was active in the Japanese American community in Honolulu. He was a building contractor and built the Waialae Japanese School in Hawaii. In November 1942 my grandfather Jitsuo, who was 17, along with his pregnant mother and two brothers Bert and James, were sent to another camp in Jerome, Arkansas. My grandfather’s youngest sister Akemi was born in the Jerome camp. His other siblings William, Henry and Sumi were in Japan at the time and were forced to remain there until after the war. My grandfather was forced to leave high school in his last year. He would never receive a high school diploma.

It wasn’t until 1944 that my great grandfather would reunite with his family in Jerome. In July of 1944 the Jerome camp closed and the entire family was relocated to the Tule Lake internment camp in California. This camp was known to house radical pro-Japan internees. In 1945 the relocation authorities were attempting to distinguish between the loyal and disloyal Japanese Americans. They were required to sign a loyalty statement that read, “I will renounce my allegiance to the Emperor of Japan. Yes or No” and “I will pledge allegiance to the United States of America. Yes or No.” My grandfather said “No” to both statements in protest against the trampling of his civil rights and in turn was sent with about 60 other protesters to a camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Upon arrival in Santa Fe, my grandfather and the rest of his fellow protesters were told that their citizenship had been revoked. In the winter of 1945, my grandfather was deported to Japan.

My grandfather found his siblings that he had not seen since 1942. They were living in a one room farmhouse. As the oldest son in Japan, my grandfather had to work in order to support his siblings and eventually sent them to live with his father in Hawaii. In August 1946, one year after her release, my great grandmother passed away. She had lived in the camps for three years separated from her children and husband.

The American government restored my grandfather’s citizenship in 1952 when they declared the revocation of citizenship unconstitutional. By this time, my grandfather had already started a family in Japan. They moved to Hawaii in 1972.
Regardless of the obstacles life threw at my grandpa, he always persevered. Without a college education, my grandfather raised his youngest brother and sister, as well as three girls of his own. He became a successful real estate agent and an active volunteer within the Japanese American community in Honolulu. My grandfather passed away on January 2, 2003. There were over 200 people at his funeral; many were friends from the days at the internment camps.

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Iwa Bird
Kenneth Quilantang, Jr.

Kaena Point is located on the northwestern tip of Oahu. On a clear day one can make out the faint image of Kauai far off in the distance. This region of the island is Oahu’s most isolated due to its inaccessibility through normal modes of transportation. The few ways to get to Kaena Point include mountain biking, four-wheel drive vehicles, and the old fashioned hike. This inherent solitude seems to imprint a feeling of loneliness that I have not felt anywhere else on Oahu.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Works Cited

Lost Innocence

Debra Saiki

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

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

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

At about 6 p.m., I heard my husband’s car pull into the driveway. Jason would pick me up when he was done with work and we would have dinner somewhere. I, not very gracefully, struggled into the car and we drove to one of our regular restaurants in silence.

Jason and I had met about 6 years before through a mutual friend. We began dating and I enjoyed his company. We had been seeing each other for less than a year when he told me of his plans to enlist in the army. “Why don’t we get married before I leave,” he suggested. I did want to get married, some day, but I was only 20 years old and didn’t feel ready for that kind of commitment. However, Jason was persistent. “You’ve met my family and you like them,” he reminded me. “We’re planning to get married anyway. Why not do it now?” he said. Well, we did get married, and Jason left for basic training a month later. We wrote regularly, and I also visited him, but it didn’t feel like a true marriage. So, when he returned 3 years later, I was very excited and expected a happily-ever-after life together. Instead, I received a dose of reality.

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

Back in June, when I was about 6 months into my pregnancy, Jason announced that he wanted a separation. That left me speechless, and I didn’t know what to think. What
does a separation mean? Will he be moving out? If so, how will I manage the household and finances? Would he help me? What am I going to do? I was bombarded with so many questions and I had no answers. Thoughts of being alone and being abandoned consumed me for the next three months. After his announcement, nothing changed. He still left shortly after dinner and usually returned sometime after 2 a.m. All the time I wondered if he had any plans to move out, and I was afraid that he might.

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

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

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

My sister must have called Jason because he showed up at the door of my room a short while later, smiling. He said he had gone to the nursery to see our baby; he commented on how cute she was. As he spoke, I looked at his face and remember thinking, “This is not the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. My life would be happier without him.”

I interrupted him and told him that a separation would just prolong the inevitable so I would be filing for divorce. The look on his face was one of disbelief, and I wondered if he was feeling what I had felt three months earlier.
In hindsight, there were many things I would do differently. We were both very young. I was naïve and probably thought that in time he would change or maybe that I could change him. I was too proud to ask for help and, after a while, too embarrassed to admit that I couldn’t make the marriage work. Looking back, I realize that it was foolish of me not to have turned to my family for help. On the other hand, to have finally made up my mind was so empowering. The fog that seemed to be all around me had cleared, and I was able to get on with my life and concentrate on and enjoy my daughter.
My First Car

Randall Sato

With my eyes half-open, I stagger out of my friend’s old, white Integra. We have just arrived at the Safeway Parking lot where I had left my car. Earlier in the night, I had carooled with two of my friends to Noblesse, a small nightclub in Honolulu. Steven and Casey are satisfied and ready to head home. My night, however, is far from over with. Less than five minutes from now, I will experience one of the worst moments of my life.

“Shoots-den, Casey,” I say as I shake hands, “K-den, Steven.”

I lurch towards my beautiful 2004 Mazda 6 type-S. The parking lot lights reflect off of the clean white paint which I had just washed and polished earlier in the day. This is my first car and the current love of my life. Three weeks earlier, my parents had bought it for me as a high school graduation present. They were a little hesitant at first: my mom because of the V6 engine and manual transmission. I guess she worried that I would kill myself street racing. And my dad because of the price which pushed my given budget. He didn’t want to spoil me, but he eventually gave in to the below-blue book deal that we were getting.

More than anything that I could have asked for; the car is a teenage boy’s dream and most would probably agree that it’s too nice for an 18-year-old’s first car. It has the factory sports package which includes a spoiler, lowered suspension, and side skirts to give it a slight import-racer look, 17-inch alloy wheels, tan leather interior with heated seats for that luxury feel, and the V6 engine with a stick shift means that it’s got some balls. The flawless pearl white paint stands out against the black tint. With only 20-something thousand miles on it, the car looks brand-new. Being as materialistic as I am, I am infatuated with this car. It gives me a confidence I never thought I had. It also gives me the false sense of hope that it somehow makes me more attractive, and that girls will magically appear in my passenger seat.

I sit behind the steering wheel and call my friend who’s still up drinking somewhere in Kahaluu. It is three-thirty in the morning. I’m exhausted and half-drunk but the night must go on. I can handle. “Randall Can Handle” is my personal motto.

“Hey, what’s up man? I just got back from the club.”
“Oh, ok shoots... come meet us at the Hygienics Store,” he says in a slurred voice. “We still get some Budlight left for you!”

“Alright, sounds good... I’m leaving Safeway right now.”

“Shoots, den.”

“Shoots.”

The Hygienics Store is a small convenience store located a couple miles north. It gets its name because of its location near a hygienic sewage plant. And yes, the area does smell like you think it might every time you drive through it.

I press the clutch pedal and start the ignition. I had driven drunk countless other times that summer without incident, sometimes in much worse condition. This is nothing new. Just keep an eye out for any blue lights, I tell myself. Not even a block down Kamehameha Highway, I miss the left turn which leads directly onto the main street that the Hygienics Store is located on.

“Shit.” I glance down the road to the left, as I pass through the intersection.

No big deal. If I continue straight on the back road, I’ll eventually end up back on the highway. Hey, it’ll probably have fewer cops anyway, I think to myself. I head down the narrow, two-lane back road, checking my rear-view mirror every couple seconds for headlights. I go through the first bend in the road and look up at the mirror again. No headlights. I’m all alone now; I have the road to myself. I push the throttle then shift into fourth gear. The hand on the speedometer slowly rises. I think of those BMW commercials, with the anonymous man gunning it along a winding, mountain road, and the camera cutting to images of his hand shifting gears; the engine screaming.

I go around the first bend in the road, not taking my foot off the gas. I reach 45 mph. I shift again into fifth gear as I come around onto a straightaway. My Mazda 6 is my formula-one race car, and this secluded detour is my personal race track. I squeeze the gas pedal to the floor and listen to the engine start to climb. 50... 55... 60 mph down the slick asphalt, which is wet from the windward showers earlier in the night. I’m pushing my car to its limits, speeding along the snaky 25mph speed limit road. I’m holding the steering wheel carefully with both hands now. My hands are beginning to sweat. My heartbeat seems to be accelerating at the same rate as my car. The butterflies of adrenaline are surging through my torso. Down another straightaway I reach 65 mph, and that’s when I see it.
Coming up on the left side of the road I notice the yellow, flashing hazard light. Oh, shit! THE TURN! I remember that about 10 yards past this hazard light is a sharp bend in the road that barely makes 90 degrees. In a second, I see the yellow hazard light fly past me. The 15 mph sign passes me a second later. I begin to ease on the brake, trying to give it just enough pressure to make the turn without slowing down so drastically that the car loses traction. I’m closing in on the turn way too fast. Still gentle with the brake, I begin the turn. I feel my body being pulled to the left side my seat. Please make the turn. Please make the turn.

Halfway through the curve, my worst fear becomes a reality. I hear the screech of my tires as they lose their grip on the slippery road. My car is sliding sideways to the left, and forward at the same time. I panic. I take my foot off of the brake hoping the car will go back on course. I slide across the opposite lane of traffic onto the dirt shoulder. I manage not to slide directly into the mountain on the left side of the road. I’ve stopped sliding and I’m going straight forward now. I feel my heart drop into my stomach when I see the sight ahead of me. Strait ahead, only 10-15 feet away is a large, wooden utility pole, about a foot thick. Again, I try to brake quickly but not abruptly; it’s no use. My tires have absolutely no traction on the dirt and gravel of the shoulder. I watch in horror as the large telephone pole closes in on me. I can’t do anything but lightly grip the bottom of the steering wheel at 8 and 4 like they taught us in driver’s-ed class. I brace myself for impact.

POW! Both airbags explode and the car comes to a dead stop. I sit, dazed and in disbelief, staring at the telephone pole in front of me. I stare at my hood which is bent upward like a piece of cardboard. My Gym Class Heroes CD is still blasting. The inside of my car is hazy from the powdery smoke the airbags emit as they deflate. The “new car” aroma is taken over by the pungent smell of smoldering electrical wiring. Indifferently, I pull the key from the ignition, turn off my one headlight, and unlatch my seatbelt. I open the door and step out to see the damage. I am absolutely terrified of what I might see when I come to the front of my car. I shyly walk forward to view the damage. I feel like I’m 6 years old, walking into my Dad’s room, knowing that I’m about to get the belt.

The driver’s side corner of the car looks like a T-rex had taken a bite out of it. The bumper is hanging on the ground, partly attached at one end, radiator exposed. The front, driver’s side tire is bent inward so severely you can barely tell that there’s a tire there at all. A little smoke is seeping out from under the mangled hood. My type-s sports grill is 5 feet in front of the car, on the street.

I begin breathing erratically. My heart is pounding inside of my chest. I feel as though I might have a panic attack.
“Oh, god... What did I do? What the fuck did I do?” I say aloud, in a whimpering voice. All I can do is repeat the same thing over and over again in a weak, delirious laugh, “What did I do? What did I do? What the fuck did I do?”

I want to cry. I’m trying to cry. But the tears won’t come. I don’t know if it’s because of the alcohol, or maybe because I’m in too much shock.

This cannot be happening... this cannot be happening to me... what the hell was I thinking driving so fast? Maybe it’s not totaled... maybe it’s still repairable... maybe we can get this repaired... and everything will be back to way it used to be...What will Mom and Dad think? I just got this car... I love this car... this cannot be happening.

In my head I picture what kind of slow, girly replacement car my parents will get for me with the insurance money. Will they even get me another car? I think about everyone I know, the things they’ll say about me, “He’s such a dumb-ass... He only had his car for three weeks and he totaled it... good for him...he’s spoiled anyway.” Because of this envy, people will only smile inside when they find out about this. I have no one on my side. I’m all alone in this mess.

I walk across the street, off to the side of the road, down towards a ravine, just enough so that I’m hidden from the passing traffic. I figure that I should hide until I sober up to avoid getting a DUI. I kneel down among the ferns on the slope, watching cars go by, several of which pull over next to the wreck to offer assistance. I duck down like a scared cat. They see that the car is abandoned and drive off. A few minutes pass by and I decide that I don’t want to spend the night in this mosquito-infested ravine. I’m at risk of getting an under-aged DUI; can it get any worse than this? I call my older sister, and she arrives shortly before the police officer does.

The police officer asks me a few standard questions for the report. Eventually, he asks me the question that I’ve been dreading.

“Have you been drinking?”

I look down at the ground and pause for a moment. Before I can come clean and tell him everything, he cuts me off and says, “I see dis all da time around dis turn... Let me guess, you were coming down before da turn going around 60, den slowed down to about 50 right around here.” He points towards the bridge before the turn. “Den you lost control right around there.” He’s incredibly accurate. It’s as if he was there, watching me slide out of control.

I’m a little relieved to find out that he doesn’t even give me a sobriety test. Maybe he’s decided that I’ve been devastated enough tonight. He says that I would’ve had to take
a test if I had hit another car or a pedestrian, but since only state property was involved, it would be unnecessary.

It’s been half a year since the accident and it still bothers me to think about it. I don’t know if getting that car in the first place was a blessing or a curse. On one hand, I could say that it has made me a more cautious driver, but the overall embarrassment, frustration, and wound to my ego that the accident has caused just doesn’t seem worth it. I try to tell myself, “Well, at least you weren’t hurt and didn’t kill anyone... at least there was no oncoming traffic when you slid across the street... it could have been so much worse...” This optimistic thinking offers me little consolation. Maybe one day I’ll look back on this and value it as a learning experience, but for now I just want my damn car back.
Evolution of a Cyclist

Cheri Scott

I am a cyclist, and the fact quite surprises me. If anyone had asked me four years ago if I wanted a bicycle, I would have answered, “NO!” I idealized a perspiration-free existence, and the eighty pounds of extra flesh that accompanied me everywhere actually aided in this endeavor. I didn’t have the stamina or muscle tone necessary to climb Leahi, a volcanic crater better known as Diamond Head, which is now part of my daily commute in Honolulu. Some of my bulk simply had to evaporate before my metamorphosis into a bike enthusiast could begin. In hindsight, I took my first step towards becoming a cyclist in the fall of 1998.

“I am going to stop eating chocolate,” declared Melanie. Mel was one of my closest friends; a tall, slender waif with wavy blond hair and green eyes who would forget to eat if she was upset. I feel that demands of “Why?”, however politely phrased, muzzle my momentum when I make a decision so I try not to do the same to others. I never asked Mel what prompted her choice, but her statement electrified me. I did not pause for introspection; I simply deleted chocolate from my diet.

There have been four decisions in my life that took about five seconds to make, and I often wonder where my resolve in those situations came from. When I was fourteen, I decided to become an exchange student for a year during a fifteen minute presentation from the program’s counselor. I spent the next year in Australia. At twenty-one, I was looking for a college where I could begin my undergraduate studies. I felt no zeal for the quest until my father suggested I think about where I wanted to go, rather than what school I wanted to attend. “Hawaii!” my imagination shouted in reply. I bought a one way plane ticket from San Francisco to Honolulu the next day and have now lived here nine years. The third great decision making moment in my life came when I decided to quit eating chocolate.

Headaches, nausea, and debilitating lethargy plagued me for two weeks after I severed ties with my favorite food. I had a part-time job and would collapse into bed in the afternoon after work. I would awake from a two to three hour nap feeling as if I had never slept at all. My eyes would be dry, my temples throbbed, my stomach churned and I had no desire for consciousness. I didn’t make the connection between my symptoms and the absence of caffeine in my diet until a friend watched me vomit in a parking lot and commented, “You’re going through withdrawal.” The observation stunned me, but I knew it was true. Chocolate would never seem innocuous again, and I have not eaten it since
Mel made her startling statement almost five years ago. Anything that could make me feel that ill has to be evil!

Melanie moved to Arizona to live with her brother and work as a waitress at a Chili’s a year after I was weaned from chocolate. One friend exited and another took her place in the form of Soo-Jin Laanui, her husband, and their four children. They met a new version of me, one that was thirty pounds lighter sans chocolate. The children found me fascinating. I was the same age as their parents (old at 27), yet I was single! Inquiring young minds would ask, “Are you going to get married, Cheri?” “Do you want to have children?” I represented possibilities they had never been confronted by in their own home. Soo-Jin was equally fascinated by me. I don’t see myself as an object worthy of study but I know I am forever delighted and intrigued by my closest friends, and saw it as a sign of our friendship that Soo-Jin felt the same about me. After we met, both she and her husband adopted a chocolate-free lifestyle and endured the same trial I had.

A chocolate-less Thanksgiving was the first holiday I spent with the Laanui’s. I arrived forty-five minutes after my ETA, and the walk had caused a bus trekker like me to sweat. The Laanui’s lived only two miles from my apartment, so walking was more practical than taking a bus. Honolulu has an amazing bus system. You can get anywhere on the island, so long as you’re not in a hurry and don’t want to take a direct route. To catch a bus from my apartment to theirs would have required me to walk one third of the distance, wait an indeterminate amount of time before boarding a bus that would take me a couple of miles away from my destination and then deposit me a good ten minute walk from the Laanui’s front door. It was simpler to walk. Soo-Jin was not angry at my tardiness; she had a solution, “You need transportation! I am going to have my husband fix up my bike, and then we’ll give it to you. I don’t use it; someone should!”

“I don’t need a bike, Soo-Jin! I buy a bus pass each month.” Secretly I didn’t want a bike; I had my perspiration-free lifestyle to protect. I could walk slower or take the bus next time to avoid melting. Months went by and Soo-Jin would reaffirm her intention to provide me with a bike each time transportation issues got in the way of us getting together. Could I meet them at Borders? Sure, but it would take me about half an hour to walk there. A movie at Kahala? Ok, but the number One can be a little unpredictable so I’ll be there in an hour and a half. Ultimately though, it was not inadequate transportation that brought a bike into my life; it was a visit from my father.

My parents divorced when I was four, and, over the years, my father would sometimes show up for our visits sporting a tan and an aloha-shirt. I was envious and proud at the same time. How many other kids had a dad who regularly went to Hawaii?
When I reached high school, his trips stopped. I had lived in Honolulu for seven years before he paid me a visit. I was excited he was finally going to make good on his word to visit me. I have always been close to my father. He makes me laugh, gives me hugs, and is very consistent (even with habits that annoy me).

My father’s vacation lasted a week and a half. He would spend his days on the beach reading while I was at work. When I arrived home, he would cook dinner for me and we would walk and talk until I needed to crash. I must have casually mentioned Soo-Jin’s offer of a bicycle, because my father asked if I could get it for him. He is mildly diabetic, and I think he imagined himself a changed man due to the sun on his skin and the beauty of Hawaii constantly before his eyes. Without the stress of his inner city office, his blood sugar had dropped into the almost normal range, and my dad was eager to stay outside in the hope it would drop some more. I called Soo-Jin with my father’s request, and she said, “Of course!” I think she felt that she was flaking on a promise to two people instead of one, and guilt spurred her into action.

“Where are you?” began a typical conversation with Soo-Jin.

“I am at work. I am finished in half an hour, why?”

“The bike is ready.” She sounded like a nighttime news anchor with a juicy story. “She’s beautiful! My husband cleaned her, changed the tubes in the tires, put air in the tires, replaced the back tire, replaced the brakes, balanced the wheels, oiled the chain,” I heard a deep intake of breath, “and she’s ready to go! Get over here!”

I couldn’t help but smile at her pride. “I’ll stop by after work, but I have to go straight home cause my dad is still here.”

“Allllllright then!” Soo-Jin drew the syllables out and shaped them like the curve of an ocean swell.

With perspiration on the brain, I boarded the Number One going towards Soo-Jin’s house. I disembarked at Pensacola, walked four blocks mauka (towards the mountain) past Safeway and the freeway entrance, and turned right onto Davenport. The kids were playing in the street, keeping an eye out for me when I rounded the corner. The Laanui children yelled, “Mom! Mom! She’s here!” Their voices were amplified as the other kids in the neighborhood picked up the cry and yelled, “Mrs. Laanui, Mrs. Laanui! She’s here!” Did those kids ever wonder who was here? I smiled and waved, blushing a little at having created such a spectacle. The Laanuis lived in an apartment smack in the middle of Davenport; by the time I reached their building Soo-Jin was downstairs with the bike. A
Evolution of a Cyclist

Cheri Scott

sparkly, deep purple, Specialized Hardrock mountainbike. It was a man’s model and had twenty-one gears that I didn’t know how to use.

To this day, my knowledge of bicycles has not progressed past the color and the self-serving graffiti provided by the manufacturer. Out of necessity, I have learned to change tubes and tires, adjust my seat, install a rack for packages, and oil the chain. My bike’s other needs are met by a mechanic. I do not tinker, I do not follow bicycle related sports; I ride.

Soo-Jin showed me how to work the quick lock release on the seat so I could adjust it to my height, then the whole gang watched as I mounted my new bike and wobbled down the street and back. Soo-Jin’s brow was furrowed, “Do you know how to ride?”

“Of course I do! It’s just been fourteen years since I’ve done this.” I had a dad waiting at home, so I set off after quick good-byes. The wind rushing past me was exhilarating! How could I have forgotten how good that felt? I am the woman who will hike up Makapuu Point, hop over the protective railing, climb twenty feet down the face of the cliff and stand with my arms outstretched just to be a part of the wind racing across the ocean. I was moving so much faster than the pedestrians! Why did I ever think walking was an acceptable form of transportation? I glided to a stop in front of my building fifteen minutes later, and my thighs trembled when asked to walk me up the two flights of stairs to my front door while I carried my new bike. I left the bike, prepped for display, in the middle of my studio, and found my father reading on the lanai. He took one look at the bike and told me we were visiting Sears after dinner.

I didn’t make the connection between Sears and my bicycle, but after dinner I found myself standing petrified with embarrassment as my father placed various bike helmets on my head and lectured me on their value. I saw I was going to leave Sears the owner of a big Styrofoam headpiece, so I pointed to one of the sleeker models, mutely indicating my preference. My father loudly told me, “No, the more padding the better! You don’t want to make a fashion statement with a helmet! Bigger is safer!” I was greatly relieved when a green helmet finally fit to his satisfaction. The helmet was so large and insect-like that I referred to myself as a superhero named Ant Woman for months afterward. My father also picked up a bike lock, water bottle holder, all-purpose tool and a new squishy cover for the seat on our way to the register.

The shopping trip should have been an indication to me of my father’s plans. He commandeered the bike for the rest of his vacation. My father was visibly tanner when I returned from work each evening. He punctuated the detailed travelogues of his adventures with lots of arm waving and pointing towards the directions he thought he had ridden.
Evolution of a Cyclist

My father returned to California on a Sunday morning, and before I went to bed that night, I made the decision that turned me into a cyclist; I was going to ride my bike to and from work. It was an expensive gift, and I felt obligated to use it. I twisted my ankle Sunday afternoon, but I did not waver. Soo-Jin showed up at my apartment Monday morning to wrap my ankle before work, and ask again, “Do you want a ride?”

“No!”

“OK,” she said with raised eyebrows.

My first commute via bike took place the last working day of March 2001, and lasted sixty-five minutes. I rode on sidewalks, was out of breath the whole way, and felt as though my thighs were on fire when I gratefully dismounted. I walked in circles around the first floor office, alternately panting and taking swigs from my water bottle until it was time to clock in. Climbing the stairs to my office on the second floor caused such pain I could do nothing but laugh. Pain took on a new definition when I climbed aboard my bike for the ride home. My thighs weren’t the only thing that hurt. My pelvis was not used to bearing the weight of my entire body, and my vagina was not happy. I now joke with friends that when I marry, my husband will discover I am a tough old bird. Two weeks would pass before my body would perform without complaints.

Two months passed before I understood how to use the twenty-one gears my bike came equipped with. I was sitting on the toilet one Saturday morning and I glanced at my legs. I gasped and thought, “I am Conana the Barbariana!” My thighs were solid muscle and as thick as ham hocks. While I appreciated the loss of an additional fifteen pounds from riding, it was not my intention to transform myself into a female doppelganger of Arnold Schwarzenegger. I had been riding around town in nineteenth gear; the higher the number, the greater the resistance. Two of my co-workers used to race, and I asked them about my predicament. They assured me I needed to drop to a lower gear for town riding, and informed me of possible injuries to my knees and hips, “You want to arrive at your destination, Cheri, not blow out your joints!” I started using twelfth gear for town and named my bike Magnum Mortis.

I cannot explain where Magnum came from. I have a tradition of bestowing male names on my possessions; I am a single woman after all. Maybe Tom Selleck flashed through my mind during the search for a moniker? Mortis is the name of the steed Death, or Thanatos, rides in Greek mythology. I had recently read On A Pale Horse by Piers Anthony in which Thanatos is the main character. I was so impressed with the abilities of Mortis, who was a sidekick rather than a means of transportation, that I felt it an appropriate
name for my bike.

Aside from my thighs, Magnum Mortis made other changes in my life. I found out months later that my co-workers had a bet going about the cause of my suddenly improved disposition; the favorite theory was I had obtained a boyfriend. Actually, I was taking my frustrations from work to the asphalt and pushing anger out of my body with every tired, strained muscle I possessed. It was a relief to have a clear head during my personal time, rather than reliving aggravating episodes from work punctuated with improved come backs from me.

Despite the benefits I was experiencing, I quickly became dissatisfied with riding through town. Roads I regularly traveled, like Kapiolani and Dillingham, were in terrible repair. Potholes were so wide and deep I had to migrate to the middle of the lane to get around them. Worse than the roads were the cars and trucks and buses and mopeds swarming over the streets. They seemed to think I was in their way, when actually it was the reverse. I longed to ride without having to stop for a traffic light, or slow down for a vehicle that hugged the curb and emitted noxious fumes.

At the end of my first month as a cyclist, I rode from Windward Mall to BYU-H in Laie on the North Shore. After Windward Mall the road is obstacle-free; no lights, no signs, and sparse traffic. The ride was glorious! I took the Fifty-Five bus from Ala Moana Shopping Center in downtown Honolulu over the Pali Highway and arrived at the mall at 6:30 a.m. The highway follows the coast, and I rode ensconced in the majesty of ocean, mountains and sky with a lovely breeze tickling my skin the entire way. I smiled like a maniac and turned down the occasional country rode just to see where it went. I rode past tropical rain forests, beautiful homes, pine trees, fish farms, parks with campers, and local oddities like, "The Hygienic Store." Two hours later I reached BYU. The Laie ride became a weekend favorite, and within three months I turned my sights on Tantalus.

My first attempt to ascend one of the steep roads that circumscribe Tantalus led to vomiting. I chose Mott-Smith Drive as my point of entry to the hill. The street tackles the hill head on, and soars quickly in elevation before joining Makiki Heights Drive, a road that rises slowly through the contorted wanderings of switchbacks. I pedaled with all my might, dropping gears every ten feet and quickly reached first gear, a place I had never been. My heartbeats became painful blows assaulting my chest from within. Every muscle engaged in moving me forward burned; however, I kept my butt on the seat forcing my muscles to propel me forward. Standing on the peddles would have employed my weight rather than my strength for movement. My shoulders tensed in concentration as I was reduced to a woman forcing her way up a paved precipice. The thought of reaching the
Evolution of a Cyclist

Cheri Scott

head of Mott-Smith Drive consumed me. I made it! And then I hurled.

While, I have not thrown up again due to biking, neither have I succeeded in circumnavigating Tantalus in the two years I have been riding. I refuse to try another approach until I am able to push past the crest of Mott-Smith Drive. I have a fantasy that I will one day ride the complete circuit of roads that wrap around Tantalus. There is music that accompanies this dream, "Because We Can" by Fatboy Slim . . . "Because we can, can, can, yes we can, can, can, because we can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can, can!"

In real life I have a daily commute of twenty miles. It is five miles from my apartment to work, a ride I complete in thirty minutes now, instead of sixty-five. (I have a second fantasy about riding to work on empty streets. How long would it take me without cars getting in my way?) From work I ride ten miles towards home and past it again to Kapiolani Community College where I am a student. This leg of the journey includes the volcanic crater I mentioned earlier. The route home is a five mile, downhill roller coaster.

Magnum Mortis made the daily pilgrimage with me for sixteen months before succumbing to an irreversibly broken part (my mechanic could explain better). Three weeks later I was miraculously given another bike by a different patron, a classmate who was moving to Maryland. My softened thighs and groin had to go through a readjustment period again, thankfully shorter this time. My new vehicle is a forest green, and marked by the appropriate graffiti "GT Timberlake." The initials "GT" led to him being named The Green Turtle. Yes, I have another male bike with twenty-one gears. The main difference is this model would better fit the body of a thirteen year old. I look enormous and a little silly perched on the seat, but The Green Turtle does his job. I am forever grateful to the people who have generously given me bicycles, but I will buy the next one.

My lifestyle has an amazing impact on some people. Some try to "help" by telling me where I can buy a cheap car. Others note the bike helmet that perpetually hangs from my backpack, and describe me as athletic. Odd, since I'm easily thirty pounds overweight still. Strangers usually refer to my bicycle solely as a means of exercise. Maybe that’s what a bicycle would be to them; I ride for pleasure, for transportation, for relaxation. I am a cyclist!
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 endured 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 for only six short 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 for my connecting flight 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 soaked with rain 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. I was extremely nervous about the 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 some 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 so 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 in working order.

Instantly after the announcement, the turbulence became severe. The plane was jumping all over the sky, and the other passengers were bouncing all over their seats. The redheaded 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 muffles, 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 brittle 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 exposing 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 the situation is. I was positive she was not telling us the entire truth.

My heart was beating so fast it felt like it had 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’s fate – 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.

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."

There must be a reason for an emergency crew to be waiting for us to land. They were waiting for us to crash.

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.

The entire plane shook violently as we made our descent into Phoenix. No one made a noise and it seemed like no one 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 headlines 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 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.
Isamu’s Billy Goat

Moriso Teraoka

The stars chimed in the sky over Wainaku. The wind filtered through the pomegranate tree. Our family was a typical, large Japanese family living in the plantation cottages belonging to Hilo Sugar Company, the first sugar mill north of Hilo town after Wailuku River. Segregated by ethnicity, our group of cottages was called Wainaku Mill-camp because all of the workers residing in the camp worked in the sugar mill in some capacity.

We had all sat down for the evening meal at our kitchen table that occupied half of the space in our crowded kitchen. With a food-safe standing against the opposite wall and a two-burner gas stove adjacent to the sink, we siblings sat alongside Father on the table-length benches. Mother never sat with the rest of the family and always waited until we had finished our meal before she had her supper.

“Otan, I like one billy goat,” my younger brother asked Father just as we started our supper.

I was older by 2 years and Isamu, my younger brother, was 7 years old.

“Nani?” Father almost choked over his first mouthful of rice. What is Isamu asking for, a pet goat?

“Dooshite?” Father’s reaction to Isamu’s request was, “Why? Let me think about it.” He poured tea into his rice bowl and swirled his chopstick to wash down the last grain of rice, finishing his evening meal.

Father was a caring, loving, and wise person. He always provided for our wants and needs. I still remember drinking our daily pint of milk while attending Ha’aheo Elementary School; our grammar school was nestled in the cane field. The majority of the students drank their concoction of chocolate powder and water spiked with condensed milk and brought to school in a catsup bottle. Father knew the value of drinking milk and our morning snack was delivered to the school. How he managed this, I never found out.

My brothers and I were the sole owners of a regulation leather basketball. We didn’t ask him, but Father bought the basketball from the Beamer Hardware Store in Hilo town for our use at our plantation gymnasium and perhaps for the use of the boys in the camp.
Father was also a strict man. We were not allowed to go to the gym during school week, although it was okay to lend the basketball to the other boys in the camp as their parents allowed them to play at the gym during school days.

But this request from Isamu for a billy goat was a bit of a surprise for him. He was blindsided.

Isamu, for reasons beyond our comprehension, wanted a billy goat. “I no like rabbit or chicken. I like one billy goat,” he adamantly insisted.

And so for the next few evenings, Isamu would plead, “Otan, you going get me the goat?”

Father’s answer was always the same. “I am thinking about it, okay?”

Father was hoping that Isamu would forget about the billy goat and the matter would be solved. But Isamu was as persistent in asking as Father was hopeful that the request would be forgotten.

Every afternoon, as soon as Japanese language school was over, Isamu would rush home, not stopping at Nakamura Candy Store for a penny’s worth of strawberry flavored ice-cake or a stick candy at Yonemoto store, which was managed by two sisters. Leaving the rest behind, passing the plantation manager’s mansion on the hillside, and passing the one mile to Hilo concrete marker, Isamu would turn right into our graveled camp road and head straight to our house; he hoped a billy goat would be waiting for him.

It came to pass that he could not ask the same question anymore, knowing what the answer was going to be. Only his pleading eyes would tell Father that he was still waiting. I started to feel sympathetic for Isamu’s unfulfilled request, but also for Father’s dire predicament.

Father, after a week, was still in the same dilemma: “How can I solve this nonsense?” This was not the only concern in his mind, as his job as the mill’s electrician always demanded the higher priority.

It was a matter of who would knuckle under first.

One morning, Isamu and the rest of us jumped out of bed—to the baying of a billy goat. And as sure as the sun rose from the horizon over Hilo Bay, a goat was munching the California grass behind the kitchen.
“Okan, Okan, Otan wen get me my billy goat,” shouted Isamu as he ran out to pet the billy goat. His shout of joy extended over to the neighbor’s classmate; Teruo, Hidekazu and Tadaichi hurriedly came over to see Isamu’s billy goat.

Mother pleaded with Isamu. “Come eat the asa-gohan and go to school,” she said. Isamu was so elated that he just about forgot to eat breakfast.

Father had long gone to work at the sugar mill when the goat was still sleeping tied to the laundry post just behind the kitchen.

Isamu couldn’t wait to run home after Japanese school to play with his new pet. “You my billy goat, you know, you my billy goat,” he repeatedly cooed while gently stroking the beard of the goat. The ever-hungry goat kept munching on the California grass.

After about a week, all the grass in the backyard was eaten away, and Isamu had to go down by the gulch at the entrance of our camp where a huge ulu tree sheltered an abundance of California grass. Isamu used Father’s sickle, cut armfuls of grass, and none of the brothers helped him. After all, the billy goat was Isamu’s. Water also had to be provided; having a goat was getting to be a chore. Father saw Isamu’s waning enthusiasm and sensed that it was no fun in keeping a goat anymore.

One morning, we awoke to the crowing of the rooster in the chicken coop, but no baying of a billy goat. The grass that was cut the previous day remained uneaten.

Isamu felt relieved. No more goat, no need to cut grass.

“Okan, what happened to the billy goat?” I suspiciously asked. After all, the goat had appeared mysteriously and had now disappeared just as mysteriously.

“Otan returned the goat to his Filipino friend last night,” Mother whispered in despair.

“But the man going eat the goat,” I cried.

“Shikataganai, it cannot be helped,” Mother replied, turning her back to me.
The Scar

Juliet Tierney

I was born in a chaotic period in 1968. China was in the throes of a decade long, plague-like affliction called the “Cultural Revolution.” The fuse of the campaign was lit by playwright Wu Han whose play had angered Mao Zedong, chairman of the Chinese Communist Party. The play, however, received a far different and more positive reaction from the country’s scholars and intellectuals. As ruler of China, Mao was accustomed to having people agree with him. Those in disagreement were like dust in his eyes or a thorn in his skin, and he wanted them removed. The scholars, however, were well known and respected people, so Mao had to hatch a scheme that would snare the scholars. Thus, he used innocent students and workers to foment the infamous “Cultural Revolution” and seized this opportunity to persecute intellectuals from various walks of life.

The Cultural Revolution formally began in 1966. Mao and his wife, Jiang, organized the students into groups called the "Red Guards" and used them to spread their ideology and theories about society. The campaign climaxed in 1968 when, like a flame fed by gasoline, it swept rapidly across the whole country. The targets of this movement were high ranking officials and intellectuals. The relationship between teacher and student, husband and wife, and parents and children suddenly changed overnight. Democracy and law broke down; human rights were violated; and the judicial system was completely destroyed. The Red Guards could search anyone’s house in the middle of the night, break anything they chose, and arrest anyone they wanted. Tens of millions of families were destroyed. Because my parents belonged to a group of intellectuals, our family suffered greatly.

During the Cultural Revolution, numerous marriages were destroyed because husbands were mistakenly labeled as “counter-revolutionaries.” My parents didn’t divorce, but my mother paid a high price for her marriage to my father. When my mother married my father, he already had four children from a previous marriage that had been arranged by his parents to a young girl from the countryside when he was just eighteen. As an educated man he had been unhappy with the prospect of marrying an illiterate woman. However, he could not defy his parents in the matter. Eventually, he moved the family to Changsha, found a job, and decided to end his unhappy marriage. His wife fought back and left three children with my father, keeping just her oldest daughter with her. She believed that no one would marry a man with three young children.

My father was the only child in a privileged family. He never did any housework while growing up, so it was impossible for him to take care of three children alone. He let
his children stay with their grandparents for two years, at which time he met and married my mother.

The relationship between my mother and her step-children was like oil and water. Her step-children were all under ten years old when they were devastated by the dissolution of their parents’ marriage. They stubbornly believed that my mother was the one who ruined their family. Despite having fifteen years experience as a teacher, which required handling fifty-two students in her class, my mother was frustrated by dealing with her step-children. Giving unconditional love to psychologically wounded step-children was not enough. They needed time to adjust and cure their fear and sadness. My mother patiently waited for them and her in-laws to accept her as a family member.

Two years after my parents married, my sister was born. Seven years later in 1968, I came into this world. My birth was not the joyous occasion that one would expect. My father had been arrested before I was born and sent to a remote labor camp for “re-education,” which meant giving up one’s books and pen to do farm work. The accusation against my father was that an article he had written was “against the Communist Party and Mao Zedong.”

My father was not even permitted to come to the hospital to visit his wife and new daughter. In the next bed a young woman who had just delivered a baby was surrounded by her parents and husband. My mother shed a bitter tear. Misfortune continued to plague my mother. She and I had just come home from the hospital when six young Red Guards burst in and searched our house. They burned all of the valuable books and letters my parents had collected, claiming them to be “poisoned grass,” they broke my parent’s wedding pictures and pointed their rifles, with bayonets fixed, at my mother’s chest. They demanded that my mother renounce my father and divorce him. My mother was scared to death. But soon, indignation triumphed over fear. She told those Red Guards resolutely and decisively, “I know my husband. He is a good person! Our marriage is our own business and I don’t need anyone’s advice!”

I cried all the time from hunger no matter how long I suckled my mother’s breast. I even made mother cry in pain as there was no milk coming from her breasts. At that time milk was a rare commodity, hardly ever found in the market. Mother tried to feed me with paste but that would not satisfy my hungry stomach. The sound of my wail was like needles piercing my mother’s heart. She looked hopelessly at her skinny baby and wept. Her husband was not by her side and she had to worry about his safety. Besides me, she also had to take care of her five-year old daughter and three step-children. My constant crying tore her heart and tortured her into sleeplessness and made her exhausted. All she could do was watch as her tears dropped like rain. She was overcome by despair.
Since my father was in the labor camp without income, the whole family relied on my mother’s thirty-six yuan wage—which was about four dollars a month. In order to put food on the table she ignored her heart problem and high blood pressure complications and decided to go back to teaching. At that time my grandmother visited us from the countryside. She comforted my mother and took her six-week old granddaughter back to her house hundreds of miles from Changsha.

My grandmother had lived with her son since my grandfather passed away. My uncle and aunt had five sons and five daughters of their own. The youngest one was one and a half years older than me. Aunt stopped feeding her youngest daughter to feed me. It was amazing to have an aunt like that. After raising ten children, she generously fed me and treated me like her own daughter. She saved my life.

Time passed quickly. Having lived almost three years in my uncle’s house, I thought my uncle’s family was my own, I called all my cousins brother and sister. I did not even remember my own parents or their existence. The peaceful rural life nourished me. In the early morning, the cousins let me ride on the cattle while they grazed. Sometimes they dug out a couple of sweet potatoes to bring home and roast for me. I often followed them to the hills in the back of the house and picked up chestnuts or some seedless tangerines. Sometimes they carried me on their backs to the far pond to catch fish and shrimp. My face gradually turned pink and round. My crying was replaced by giggling.

One day in the summer time my aunt was in the kitchen making lunch. She lit firewood to cook. I was wearing shorts, playing around her with bare feet, waiting for roasted sweet potatoes. After a while, aunt used a steel rod to pull a couple of sweet potatoes out from the brazier, and I ran over and picked up one from the ground. It was too hot to hold, and I dropped it immediately. I shook my hand, stepped back, lost my balance and fell down on that red hot spike. The unbearable pain on my right thigh made me shriek and cry hysterically. The whole family heard me cry and ran over to see what happened. Aunt was frightened. She held me up and saw that there was two inch long burn on my right thigh. I do not remember how they treated me. All I remember was the severe pain, hysterical crying and grandmother’s sob “my poor child, my poor child…”

I celebrated my third birthday in uncle’s house. On that day two guests came from the city. Grandmother excitedly told me that they were my parents and told me to call them “Mom and Dad.” I looked at my parents with strange eyes and did not say anything. Mother came over and tried to hold me, but I ran to aunt. “Yan, your parents will take you home,” Grandmother smiled and said with tears in her eyes. I did not understand what Grandmother meant. “No, this is my mother,” I pointed to my aunt. “This is my home. I’m
not going anywhere.” “Silly girl, I’m your aunt, and this is your mother.” My aunt replied, even though she felt sad as well. Mother could not help herself and buried her head in her hands and wept. She had borne all kinds of wounds and pain, but nothing could hurt more than her own daughter’s rejection. On the second morning my parents thanked everyone, especially my aunt, and were ready to take me home. I desperately clutched my aunt’s cuff and cried. I did not want to go with these strangers. Five hours later we were still in uncle’s house. Mother asked aunt to let her second daughter Fen, who was ten years older than me and with whom I spent the most time, come to Changsha with us. Aunt agreed, and so our family was finally reunited.

More than 30 years have past since my encounter with the searing steel shaft, and while the pain is long gone; my two inch scar is still very visible. It always reminds me of the traumatic moments in my childhood. My mother’s scars, however, were deeply rooted. They never faded and were reflected in her sad eyes all the time. Although she was eventually accepted by her step-children, she could not escape the dark depression that gradually enveloped her. Scar tissue is unlike the tissue it replaces. It is inferior in form and function, and whether visible or invisible, it is the body’s vivid record of a time, and a place, and a terror.

China, too, still bears the scars of her failed experiment with the Cultural Revolution. An entire generation deprived of higher education constantly battles labor redundancy and marginalization, a not so subtle reminder never to repeat the mistakes of the past.
Slow Down!

Alan Vandermyden

Splattered!!! Again!!!! We walked…and walked. Day after day my associates and I would mark off two, three, maybe four miles on Majuro’s sandy, rain-puddled, sometimes dusty road.

But why was I always the one with mud spattered up the back of my pants? I walked quickly, quietly, and carefully in my zoris, but I still got splattered!

Majuro Atoll, capitol of the Marshall Islands, is a five hour flight southwest of Honolulu. As we approach for landing, it is easy to wonder if there is even an island down there!

A runway finally appears, bounded by ocean and lagoon. We find a taxi for the leisurely ten mile ride into town. Through groves of coconut palms we can see the ocean on our right and the lagoon on our left. Sixty four islets, with a total land area of just under 3.75 square miles, form a pearl necklace around the 165 square mile lagoon. Causeways connect the islets of the southern reef, forming a thirty mile road.

As we approach Delap, the large community that has sprung up on a wide spot in the atoll’s reef, the postcard scenery gives way to concrete. Each cluster of houses has a “take-out” or two, painted lime green or orange or blue/green or whatever color was once on sale at one of the two hardware stores on the atoll.

Walking up to the counter of the “take-out” set into the side of the shipping container-sized plywood structure, local residents ask the clerk to hand them the items they need: a tin of sardines, mackerel, tuna, Spam or Ox and Palm corned beef; or maybe ramen, a cola, or just one Pamper, or one Benson (and Hedges), or a Budweiser. The man ahead of me asks for a tin of sardines. The clerk slowly shuffles over to pick it out, then shuffles back to place it on the counter. Now he asks for a tin of mackerel. She shuffles right back to the same spot to pick out the mackerel . . . I’m wondering why he didn’t just order both cans of fish at the same time.

The take-outs sell bread and buns brought in hot from the bakery each morning. The Marshallese people make their way to the take-out most mornings to buy a $1.00 loaf or a bag of buns. They prefer their bread unsalted (we’ve grown to like the flat taste).
More than once I’ve found the clerk still occupied, counting money into the till, slowly, deliberately working her way through a stack of bills. I march up to the counter, asking for a loaf of bread. She just keeps counting the bills. Uh-oh! I’m being an American again! Conditioned to expect service, I assume she’ll just drop what she’s doing and wait on me. After all, time is money, isn’t it? Slow down, riPalle! I relax, lean my elbows on the wide plywood counter, and act as if I had nothing more to do that day other than watch her count her money. Almost immediately, she turns to me, giving me her full attention, asking what it is I need. I have accepted the Marshallese way, and she’s glad to help me.

April 1985. We’re new to the Marshall Islands, asking a taxi driver to take us to an inexpensive motel. He takes us to the Ajidrik Hotel in Uliga–downtown Majuro. The hotel name is nearly impossible for foreigners to articulate, at least until studying the language and practicing the oral gymnastics required, and no one seems to know the significance of the name.

Across the gravel parking lot and up a staircase tucked in a corner of the rambling building, we find the front desk and a friendly clerk who speaks English. We’re shown a room with a twin bed and a double bed, a small refrigerator, a TV, and even a window air conditioner. No blankets on the beds here; it’s far too hot and humid for anything but a sheet. Carpeting is threadbare, but the room is clean. There’s a bathroom with a shower, and a bucket to collect water during the hours the water is actually on. We settle in, and then step downstairs for supper, heading across the gravel parking lot, then along the uneven sidewalk to the Downtown Restaurant which sprawls along the sidewalk in front of the Ajidrik.

Scanning the dimly lit room, we see several couples and families in the booths, eventually taking a table with four chairs near the center of the room. Things feel familiar, having already spent a number of months on Pohnpei, but the language is completely foreign. “Jibba jabba jab kab . . .” Do I really want to study this jibberish? I have purchased books already, printed by the University of Hawai’i Press. We’re handed a menu. “One piece of toast–$.25, Two piece of toast–$.40, One piece of pancake . . . We chuckle. The menu is standard Micronesian fare: rice and mac salad or cole slaw with fried chicken, fish or stew, hamburgers and cheeseburgers, fried eggs, omelettes, or the pancakes for breakfast.

The waitress seats herself at one of the two empty chairs, asking us, “What do you want?” Amused again, we order, enunciating clearly and pointing to the menu items to ensure she understands us. We correctly assume that she knows very little English, hence the abrupt request for our order. She had likely just about maxed out her knowledge of English and may have been apprehensive in getting that much out. She seated herself as a
gesture of respect and politeness. (Years of language study and questioning the people we lived among would help me to understand this.)

We were “missionaries,” we were “riPalles”—“haoles”—Caucasians, we were men, and my associate was obviously much older than she. Our waitress would have been considered very rude had she remained standing while we were seated—especially if she were positioned somewhat behind one of us. We would one day comprehend that what looked like familiarity to us was a sign of deference and respect in another culture.

The first time I was here, a two-year-old girl, Mwijeo, howled every time one of us chanced to walk between her and her mother. She had never seen white-skinned people, and we probably looked something like the descriptions of demons that supposedly inhabit the graveyard just across the grass from the family compound!

My current associate, Eldon, has decided to “go native,” foregoing the use of his wristwatch. I go along with the experiment. We amuse the Marshallese people anyway, obsessively looking at our wrists, as if those lines going round and round have anything to do with life. They’re more concerned with the moon, the tides, the clouds . . . indicators of natural forces that affect the hunt for dinner, and determine the timing of the visit to the next island, or to the main island. But can these two riPalle survive without a watch to lean on? We’ll see!

Maybe we just need to slow down!

Insistent that anyone who genuinely wants to listen will be on time for our “talk,” which has been scheduled for 7:30 this evening, we soon learn that nothing is going to happen until nearly 9:00. After all, there’s no supper until the men bring in some fish, and that’s related to the tide. And then the kids need bathing after supper, and that’s not in a tub with hot running water!

Slow down, riPalle!

We find we don’t really need a watch throughout the day.—We study language, we try to help with food gathering, we swim or snorkel . . . but we can find the rhythm of the day by what others are doing, by watching the tide out the window, or by watching the sun. We’re going to be okay without our wristbands!

We gather some “iu”—“coconut apple” in my Marshallese-English dictionary. It’s the yellow “styrofoam” that fills the cavity of the coconut, replacing the water, once the coconut is ready to sprout. And it’s delicious cooked with rice and a bit of sugar. We gather the nuts and husk them, hoping the iu can be used for lunch. But if not, it will still be okay
by supper time. It just depends on when some fish are brought in.
Slow down—time doesn’t really matter so much!

We bring a hefty supply of batteries out to Likiep. There’s no power generation out here, and flashlights are a necessity, or so we think. But we realize the local population gets around at night without flashlights, sparing their batteries for their radios and for night spear fishing.

Let’s see if we can navigate at night with no flashlight.

We find that it’s really easy on a moonlit night, the coral sand of the trail a glowing thread that winds through the dark grass. On a dark night, we learn to feel the gentle depression of the trail, walled in by the short grass. The grass is worn off around the open well, so we’re extra careful there, veering near the house. And why hurry? In daylight, I can walk across this islet, from lagoon to ocean, in less than ten minutes anyway!

Just slow down and enjoy the evening!

Majuro. Up and down that road: two, three, maybe four miles each day. If we’re lucky, maybe we’ll catch a “shared” taxi for $.50. But then, if we’re nearing Momotaro’s store, I’d rather walk on to the store; they have a jar of delicious homemade chocolate chip cookies there for $.25 each! And there are a few take-outs, scattered up and down the “DUD”- named because it houses the Delap, Uliga and Djarrit communities— that sell vanilla and chocolate ice cream cones. We’ll try to stop at one of those too.

We need to walk to Demon Town too—the place where those few graves are right next to the ocean side beach, just beyond the Marshall Islands High School. It’s a couple of miles up from Delap. We should be able to walk it in thirty to forty minutes. But wait! We’ve assumed that before. Slow down!

We invariably run into someone we know. And we’ve tried the American thing— “lokwe! Good to see you! See you later!” But we started hearing that we’re always in a hurry… rude. Time is not money here! People and friendships are what hold true value here. Take some time to “bwebwenato,” to “talk story.” We may need a couple of hours to walk those two miles, but that’s okay. We may have some interesting visits on the way!

Exercise. I like a brisk two- to three-mile walk most days. No problem. Go in the mornings. People are out in their yards, but they’re not ready to greet me. They’re still putting their face on, brushing their teeth, doing their hair, maybe even bathing
out of a bucket. Kids might be doing the morning “rarō”—picking up the breadfruit leaves, coconut fronds and other litter that has fallen the previous day. Since they’re supposed to keep working, I can march on by without offending anyone! (Except for that one house up at the far end of the island, in Rita Village, on the lagoon side of the road.) Those three or four yappy little dogs can’t abide me going by at American speed! They do it every time: come out and start yapping and snapping at my heels like they’re going to chew me up! But as soon as I relax, put my hands in my pockets, and slow down to the Marshallese amble, they’re satisfied they have persuaded me to accept the local ways contentedly return to their homes, mission accomplished.

And yes! The mud splatters...I finally catch on. Slow down, and let my zoris drag. Do the shuffle that lets everyone know I’m coming. Noisy and slow...but no more splatters.
Sometimes It Takes a Bullet
Norman Wetzel

My life has contained more than a few defining moments; the first sight of my wife, my first arrest, my 30th birthday, and dozens of others. Very few can compare to staring down death. I was surprised by the well of fear and relief that surged through me as my heart slowed, the light faded, and sound became lost in the distance. I was amazed as my thoughts focused from hazy chaos to razor sharp clarity and, in an instant, reality was reduced to simple, rock-solid fundamentals.

I guess it’s expected I say something about how full of life I was as a youth, how energetic I was, how all my potential was bursting out, filling the world around me. It wasn’t like that, though. I was a fairly timid young boy who avoided drugs and alcohol. My family was poor, but I never struggled for the essentials. School had been easy; I skated through with barely an effort, despite the fact that we moved a lot. However, because of the frequent moves, I had made few friends and never really developed worthwhile social skills.

After high school I went to college, because my father had told me I should, and found myself in a strange new world. Until then life had been easy for me, but there, I was the only person I could depend on to accomplish anything. Although I still found the academics easy, responsibility and discipline eluded me. I failed miserably, lost my scholarships, and found myself unable to afford continuing my education. So, having no other options, I went home.

The only true friend I had made in high school was obsessed with the Marine Corps, and we had often played war games in the wilderness outside the town. A few days after my return, he introduced me to his recruiter. I wasn’t truly interested, but didn’t want to disappoint my friend so I listened. The recruiter was a man like I had never seen before; loud, strong and confident. I remember wishing I could bring myself to say and do the things I witnessed him say and do. He convinced me that he could make me like him, and as an added bonus, he would pay for my college. This was a ray of hope. All I had to do was sign on the dotted line. Little did I know that that signature would change my life forever.

Less than a year later, I found myself lying on the freezing sand. I remember the penetrating bone shattering cold and the sand. There was always the sand. “How can the desert be this cold? It’s a desert!” I muttered through rattling teeth. Although to be fair, the tremors in my teeth might have had something to do with the staccato of gunfire my
fireteam was pouring over the mound of rubble in front of us. From time to time someone
would brave the hail of bullets and snap a few rounds back at us.

“What are you whining about, Weasel?” screamed my team leader during a pause
in his fire.

I spat some sand out of my teeth and hollered back, “I said, it’s *%$@ cold! How
can it be this cold in the middle of a desert?”

“Shut up, stupid!” was the reply. “We’re gonna put some rounds downrange at 2
o’clock on that corner there! Head to your 12 and get up under that window! Toss a couple
o’ ‘frags’ in the window so we can clear this building!”

He rose to one knee, triggered a few bursts at the window, and I took the opportunity
to poke my head up and pick my track. It was a straight shot, but wide open with only a
half-brick wall to hide behind if the heat came down. I remember thinking, “This should
be easy. These guys can’t fight anyway.”

I looked at my team leader and gave him a nod. He snapped two more bursts at the
window and began a three count with his fingers.

“Go! Go! Go!” and I was up. I scrabbled over the rubble. I remember cussing
when my sling caught on a piece of rebar, and then I was over the top and totally exposed.
The field ahead was clear though, and I bolted for the window. I stumbled and glanced
down to check my feet. As my gaze flipped back to the window I saw a ragged head of hair
rise into view. I snapped my rifle up to shoot and a freight train smashed into my helmet.
Everything blurred into a smear of black and brown as I felt my head snap back before a
second impact punched me in the ribs. Then the world stopped.

Every swear word I had ever learned, made up, or heard on TV flashed through
my consciousness as I stood twisted in a moment of time. It seemed so quiet. I remember
asking myself why my teammates had quit shooting. Questions flooded into the silence of
my head. “Why can’t I get my feet to move? Am I falling? Who the !@#$ does that @#!$
raghead think he is, takin’ a shot at me? Why is it taking so long to hit the ground?”

Time oozed into slow motion, and the ground came up to meet me. I tried to soften
the blow, but it didn’t help, and I landed like a sack of cannonballs tossed off a high-rise.
My helmet bounced off the packed sand and skidded away. A brilliant flash of greenish-
yellow followed as my head cracked against a rock and then everything disappeared.

I woke up after what felt like ages. I’d always thought things slowly came into
view, first showing you the outline of what was about to be, but such was not the case. I
Sometimes It Takes a Bullet

Norman Wetzel

jerked back to consciousness, but nothing was there. “I’m dead. That &*@$% bastard got me. Well, at least it’s over.” My own thoughts surprised me. I’d always thought there would be some regret over being dead. Maybe some of the fear of death was mitigated by the fact that there was something after death. Whatever it was, I remember being filled with relief that all the stuff I had stressed about just didn’t matter anymore. I was going to miss my family, but they’d get along without me. I had no girlfriend, so that wasn’t a problem either.

After what seemed only seconds later, regret took hold of my mind. “Man, I wasted my life... I should have been nicer to that kid... I knew that hooker in Waikiki was a mistake, but I did it anyway. There was so much I could have done. I could have had a girlfriend! Why didn’t I?”

“So, what happens now?” I thought to myself. “God, I’m here. What comes next?” There was no answer. I looked around a little trying to spot that light everyone had always told me about, but there was nothing. It was empty. Emptiness. No sound. No smell. No weight. Just... nothing.

Then, slowly, there was something; not a pinpoint of light, not a sound, just something. Everything faded in like someone focusing a movie. Smoke rose up in the corners of my vision and swallowed me. It filled the air around me, a choking, burning, blinding, sulfurous smoke that obliterated all my senses. My stomach churned with fear. The worst was true. God wasn’t coming for me after all. I was headed the other way. Faced with the prospect of eternity in Hell, the contents of my stomach boiled out of my guts and into my mouth. I turned on my side to let it out. As I heaved out my last meal, my eyes focused on the sand in front of me. I thought, “Since when does the devil use smoke grenades, and how did that half-brick follow me here?”

Lost in that little world of hellish smoke, confusion and darkness, I nearly jumped out of my skin when a hand grabbed my shoulder and rolled me on my back. I looked up into the dirty, bloody, sweat-stained face of my team leader.

“I told you to clear the building, not get shot, you dumbass! We got the @#$% that did this and the corpsman is on his way! Are you OK? Where are ya’ hit?”

“Well,” I thought, “he is definitely not an angel and, probably, not a demon. So, I must be alive.” I still wasn’t sure that was a good thing, but I was a little relieved I would get a chance to find out.

Later the next day I learned I’d been very lucky. The first hit had just grazed my helmet and my body armor had taken the shot to the ribs. I also had a mild concussion from knocking my head on the ground, but a few days of light duty were all I needed.
Several days of recovery gave me time to reflect on the experience. I sat on an ammo box outside my tent and contemplated “Life”. I was shocked that I felt so unattached to it. I realized I had wasted my life, and the things I had thought were important, weren’t. I wasn’t happy with where I’d been and what I’d done. I was tired of letting others decide my future for me. Right there, I vowed never to let others choose my course. No longer would I stand and watch the world pass me by. Those bullets had indeed killed me. But the part they killed wasn’t one I wanted anyway. Now, I had a second chance and I wasn’t going to waste it. With the sun at my back, the wind in my face and, yes, sand in my teeth, I squared my shoulders and set out for a different future.
My Brush

Yufei Rishelle Zhou

The Chinese calligraphy brush is similar to the brush used for watercolor painting; it has a fine tip suitable for dealing with a wide range of subjects and for producing the variations in lines required by different styles. Since the materials used for calligraphy and painting are essentially the same, developments in calligraphic styles and techniques can also be used in painting. The writing brush is composed of the body and the tip. The body can be made from bamboo, wood, lacquer, and porcelain. In rare cases, the body may also be made from precious materials including pearl inlay, ivory and jade. The tip of the brush can be made from white goat’s hair, black rabbit’s hair, and yellow weasel’s hair. Depending on the function of the tip, the brushes are classified into three groups: a) hard, b) soft and c) mix. Depending on the style of brush that has been selected, a calligrapher can write various fonts and size. The tools used to write Chinese calligraphy include: a) brush, b) ink-stick, c) paper, and d) ink stone. I consider the brush to be the most important tool in writing Chinese calligraphy; without the brush, the texture and stroke necessary to form a word would not be possible.

To understand and appreciate the importance of the brush, we begin with a synopsis of the history of Chinese calligraphy. In an on-line article written by Francis Wood, the written Chinese word can be dated back over 4,000 years, a number based on both legendary tales and archaeological studies (1). During their many stages of evolution, Chinese characters and calligraphy have been treated as an art. Indeed, well into the modern era they have also been considered to have mystical powers. As Wood states, “In China, the written word has long been regarded as powerful, even magical: during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), good calligraphy fetched higher prices than painting.” Calligraphy is picture oriented and is very unique in structure and tools.

When I was six years old my mother and father thought I was an overly-active little girl. On the advice of my grandfather, my parents decided to enroll me in a Chinese calligraphy class. I practiced diligently daily for the first three years of class and frequently thereafter for the next seven years of my adolescent life. I consider my ability to write Chinese calligraphy a precious skill which I continue to practice today.

At first, the brush was not very friendly to me. In some way, I considered it to be a bully, and I wanted to conquer it. At the beginning the brush wouldn’t cooperate, it seemed to have a mind of its own, going anywhere on the paper except where I wanted it to. Everyday for a whole month, I practiced how to write one single horizontal stroke.
by stroke, word by word, and month by month I practiced until I mastered my brush. On
call, my brush has now become a communicator of my thoughts and wishes. I have
learned to look upon my brush as more than merely a writing instrument; it is like a silent
friend that has always been there for me over the years. True to its form, my brush has
allowed me to convey my emotions artistically and consistently for many years.

After the initial five years of writing Chinese calligraphy, I no longer view my
brush as the bully that caused me so much pain in every joint of my hand and arm. I
look upon my brush with pride and respect for its simplicity and functionality. Friends,
family, teachers, and associations have recognized, and compliment, my artistic excellence
in Chinese calligraphy writing. My parents were very proud of the second place finish I
earned at a national competition in 1988.

In the early years of practicing Chinese calligraphy with my brush, I learned the
importance of having a clean and flexible brush in order to achieve accuracy and consistency
in my writing. After each writing session, I would clean my brush by gently swishing it
around in a jar of cool water. I took care not to use warm water, as they dry out the natural
oils in the brush hairs and may dissolve the glue that holds the hairs inside the handle.
Shaking any excess water from the brush I would dress the brush by wiping it against a
paper towel or between my fingers to bring it back to its original shape. Finally, I would
store my brush horizontally in a dry, dark and cool place.

To this day, I continue to practice my Chinese calligraphy. On special occasions,
I write poems and characters as heart-felt gift for close friends and family. A sample of
my work can be seen in Appendix A. Without my Chinese calligraphy brush, I would
feel deprived of a very critical form of communication. One that expresses the traditional
Chinese language in the form it was intended to take.

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