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What is Lēʻahi Journal?

Lēʻahi is an annually published journal dedicated to the thoughts and works of Kapiʻolani Community College students in PCC 20, ESL 100, ESOL 94, English 22, and English 100 courses.

The purpose of the journal is to provide the students a venue for artistic expression through exceptional writing and visual storytelling.

Stories capture moments in life, moments that are made up of feelings, reflections, and ideas. Memories and experiences become meaningful through the act of storytelling.

Lēʻahi Journal 2010 explores personal narratives written by students of differing backgrounds. Each entry in this journal is a story that represents the author's unique experiences. Changes and transition from the past to the present are key elements in each story. The form may change, but the need to discover meaning remains.
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Past to Present
What are you doing right now?

For most of my life I’ve had a passion for playing music and writing poetry. These days I am not so much involved in the arts. Instead I devote most of my energy to going to school and working a full time job. When I am not working or study, I can be found reading, watching movies with my beautiful girlfriend, learning tai chi, practicing yoga, or playing my awesome sounding guitar.

What are your future plans?

In the future I plan to continue my education with a goal to have a career in mathematics. I would also love to publish books of short confusing poems, see more of the world, and become a politician as an old man.

Read on for his award-winning story >>
I do not consider myself to be a brave person, nor do I feel that I am adventurous. For the most part, I like to keep events in my life pretty safe and predictable. However, if reaching a goal becomes an imperative task of mine, then I will do all that is necessary to attain it. Sometimes my actions may appear to be adventurous or brave, but to me these actions are just a necessary part of achieving the set goal. A great example of a necessary adventure I had happened during the time that I worked as a bike-taxi rickshaw driver in the downtown streets of West Palm Beach, Florida. Out of all the necessary adventures that took place during this time, one was the most life changing.

It was about 9 p.m. on a young Friday night. The crescent moon waned high up in the South Florida tropical skies. Lined with palm trees, the noisy streets of City Place, a fancy retail and restaurant district, were alive with taxi cabs and bike-taxi rickshaws all looking for the same thing, cash. Amongst the commotion of lively pedestrians I saw my next fare, a couple in their late twenties. I eagerly watched the couple walk out of the movie theater and up to the curb near where I stood.

Attempting to get the man’s attention as his eyes scanned the street probably looking for a taxicab, I called out in an inviting tone, “Hey! You folks need a ride?” Having one arm around his girlfriend and the other in the air ready to wave down a cab, he turned to me examining me in disbelief and then looking back at his girlfriend. After seeing the smile on his girl-
friend’s face, he then redirected his attention to me.

“We’re going downtown. Do you go there?” he said with an obvious skeptical tone in his voice. With a big smile on my face

“Yes, of course I do,” I said. “Hop on. I’ll take you there.” His expression immediately changed from skepticism to excitement. After a brief discussion of money and the destination, my new customers and I were ready to go, but just before they stepped into my taxi, the man turned to look back at a group of four men also in their late twenties. He then asked me if I could call another bike-taxi for his friends.

“Hey guys!” he shouted to the four men. “We’re gonna take this rickshaw to the club! He’s getting one for you, too!” As this was happening, I managed to spot a couple of my bike-taxi pals casually cruising by towing vacant cabs. Immediately I flagged them down and informed them of what I thought would be a guaranteed fare. I then returned my attention to the conversation between the man and his friends, but only to find the man’s friends laughing at me.

“We’re not riding on one of those things!” One of the men blurted, insulting my line of work. “Look at this kid’s legs! It’s gonna take him forever to get there!” Flagging down a passing taxi cab, that jerk of a jock muscle-headed guy went on to say to my customers, “Come on, man! We’re taking a cab! Are you two coming with us or what?”

At this point, it was clear that my chances of getting this ride had greatly decreased. Then suddenly from my left, Tom, one of my bike taxi buddies shouted, “Hey pal, you’re mess’n with Mark-Anthony! He’s gonna get there
before your stupid cabby does! And when he does, you'll wish you would've taken a bike-taxi, jerk-off!"

Not looking offended in the slightest, the four men began stepping into a taxi cab. One of the men stood, staring at my clients and appearing to be waiting for a response. Also fixing his gaze on my customers, Tom shouted, "Ride with Mark-Anthony! He's gonna get there first!"

“So... What're you folks gonna do?” I asked in an emotionless straightforward tone of voice.

With a serious expression on his face, the man looked me in the eyes and said, “If you get there first, I'll tip you extra.”

My heart began to pump wildly at the challenge presented to me. Displaying a huge smile on my face at the sudden turn of events, I simply replied, “OK.”

Finally in agreement, the couple hopped in my cab, the four men were all in the taxicab, and Tom screamed cheers for me while cursing many R-rated obscenities towards the cab driver. The door shut to the taxicab and just like that, the tires screeched, burning rubber against the pavement before speeding off. Though I felt intimidated at the speed in which the taxi accelerated, I did not worry. I knew I had an obligation to win. I had to win for all the rickshaw peddlers in the entire world that had to go head to head every night with these stupid cockroach taxicabs. Plus, my customer said that he would tip me extra.

Pedaling as fast as I could, I caught up with the taxi driver. He was stranded
behind a car at a stop sign. I signaled for the oncoming traffic in the left lane to stop while I entered the oncoming lane. Passing the cab and signaling for the car in front of the cab to let me by first, I passed the stop sign making a hard right turn down a stretch of pavement exiting City Place. Already completely dripping with sweat, I accelerated to my top speed. I also knew that as soon as that stupid cabby cleared the stop sign, he would be on my tail in no time.

The roar of an engine was fast approaching behind me. Speeding past was the cab as he beeped his horn in mockery of my non-gas powered vehicle. I watched as the cab neared the main road, Quadrile Drive. With certainty, I devised a little plan. “After I clear the main road,” I spoke softly to myself, “I can use a couple of backstreets to make the ride even quicker.” That plan, plus speed, and power, should equal my victory, I hoped.

Finally approaching the main road, I prayed that I wouldn’t have to stop to wait for passing traffic. Quickly, I crossed Quadrile Drive. I remembered seeing the cab driver turn left, so I knew that I should go straight and try to cut him off later. Turning down a back street that I knew was usually free of traffic, I imagined my opponent catching every red light on the path he chose, but I knew that I couldn’t count on that. Suddenly, a sting of excitement began to run through my chest as I saw South Olive Street in the distance. If I made it to that street, it would just be a straight two-block shot to my destination.

“Please no cars. Please no cars,” I prayed as I approached the upcoming street. I didn’t slow down as I looked as hard as I could for an approaching vehicle. If I saw one, and only if I saw one, did I plan to slow. A car was approaching, but luckily not in the lane I needed to be in. Right before I
made the left turn on to South Olive street, I felt every ounce of my body and mind come alive. An extreme dose of adrenaline had me soaring my already top speed travel to a new peak. While making a sharp left turn onto Olive, I heard something fall from the back of my cab. Quickly, I looked down at the pavement behind me to see the man’s cell phone falling to the ground. I hoped that he wouldn’t notice. If I stopped, then I was sure to lose this race. I was not going to stop. Besides, the phone fell near the curb, so it was not going to get run over.

With my focus back on the road before me, and breathing like a mad-man while trying to contain this new wild energy unleashed upon me, I passed one block and was rapidly closing in on the second. Getting closer to my destination, I feared what I might see. Was I to see the cabby waiting, just to laugh at me? Was I foolish to ever think that I could race a taxicab and actually win?

Then, Clematis Street, I made it! I immediately scanned the area as I approached the night club. “Where is that cabby?” I whispered in frustration to myself. It wasn’t until I pulled up to the curb of the nightclub that I saw him. He was pulling up to the nightclub as well, except he still had a good 10-foot drive to go. “There he is!” I screamed as I pointed in his direction laughing with much relief. I couldn’t help but jump out of my seat. My passengers were also overjoyed at my victory. All three of us were jumping up and down as we waved our hands, screaming into the air.

Finally, the cab driver pulled up. Only then could I see the expression on his face. His mouth was wide open and his jaw dropped. His eyes seemed to be opened just as wide as his mouth. With both of his hands tightly clinching the steering wheel, he was leaning forward over his dashboard star-
ing in disbelief at me through his windshield.

“That’s right, man!” I yelled in a smart-aleck tone, “You lose!” I said while laughing.

“And like I promised,” the man said to me while reaching into his pockets, “Here is an extra tip.” Pulling a wad of cash out, he began to display a very troubled look on his face. “I think I dropped my cell phone,” he exclaimed.

Shucks, I forgot all about his phone. I didn’t feel worried though, because I knew exactly where it was. “It probably fell somewhere along the way,” I said confidently to him, “I’ll go and see if I can find it.”

Hopping back onto my bike, I headed straight for where I knew the phone had dropped. In no time I was back to him with his phone in my hand. In exchange, I was awarded a very generous tip. Just like that, a life-changing goal was reached all while producing a great adventure.

Sometimes life can be so grand.
THE SOUNDRACK OF MY LIFE
by Clarence White

In the soundtrack to my life, you will hear how my father, a young man from the “Jazz rich” Baton Rouge Louisiana, set out to conquer the world. You will hear how his voyage would bring him to the “Gee chi” soaked harbors of New Bedford Massachusetts, where he would meet my mother, the daughter of Cape Verdean immigrants. A traditional courtship form the first date to the sweet nights of slow dancing to the smooth sounds of Marvin Gaye. The relationship of two melodic souls took shape like the black & white keys of a piano. Listen and you will hear two hearts beating in unison while my mom stares at the twinkle in my dad’s eye.

On June 16th 1980, you will hear the funkadelic noise of Rick James coupled with the percussion like slaps of dominos being slammed down on the table as my father and friends celebrate his last solo birthday. Little did he know, the day would be disrupted by a phone call from my aunt announcing the arrival of his baby boy. From the sweet soft lullabies at night in my crib, to the pop-up books as a toddler, I would eventually make music of my own. In the fourth grade, I would start adding tunes to this soundtrack myself when I blew into a saxophone for the first time. Naturally, I went from learning the basic note scale to performing and competing in several musical venues.

In my life’s soundtrack, you will hear the boisterous and amplified shift of a “happy-go-lucky” child to a “this world will march to my beat” adolescent. If you listen, you will hear the silencing of the saxophone that’s been
neatly placed back in its case and the turning up of the urban born gift we call hip-hop. As I peel off the parental advisory warning label from the latest Wu-Tang album, you will hear the giggles of young girls while they whisper in each others ear and the rumbling of my crew’s nerves as we muster up the courage to talk to them. An innocent time in my life by far but the tides would turn. The chirps of squad car sirens, smashing of expensive glass windows, and other troubles would drown out most of the pleasant sounds up to this period.

In this spontaneously composed audio of my life, you will hear the crowd cheering at one of my football games underneath the Friday night lights. As the marching band plays on, my teammates and I have secured yet another victory. Listen closely and you will hear the rap, rock, and reggae music blaring out of control at one of many house parties in this stage of my life. To my surprise, the greatest thing I would hear during this time was that somewhat cheesy song played at my graduation on June 11th, 1998. Although I’ve heard this song many times before, this moment was much different because now it was being played for me and the 670 other students who have earned it.

Taps, Revillee, and Colors, are just words to the majority of the people on this planet, but at one point for me, the opening, mid-point, and closing of each day. As I march my way through boot camp, I shape and mold myself into one of the newest members in the United States Navy. If you listen, you will notice the guitars and basses of the rock-n-roll riffs as we sailors are hard at work keeping the shores of our great nation safe. Liberty Call!!! This snippet of audio would give me the green light to embark on my dream of seeing the world. I’m listening to the harmonious sounds of Asian instruments, Mexican Mariachis, and even that selfless and spiritual voice on the
loud speaker, each of the five times the Muslims of the Arab world prayed.

My Navy experience couldn’t have unfolded any better, even if it had been scripted in Hollywood. For starters, the U.S.N. decided to induct a whole recruitment class in honor of the U.S.S. Constitution, “Old Ironsides.” As the bagpipes play on the drummers beat their drums, I think back to early childhood when I came to see this ship on a field trip. Now at the age of 18, I’m being sworn into the NAV with 89 of my new brothers. While I focus on standing completely straight and not breaking formation, I notice my mother standing in the crowd with a look of joy on her face as she witnesses her boy become a man.

In this soundtrack, you will hear a variety of musical sounds, languages, and even animal calls. Aboriginal horns in the outback of Australia, ancient and modern rythyms of Japanese, Thai, and Korean cultures alike, can be heard in this life’s musical composition. I’m amazed to see how good the communication is between these native people and me, the foreigner, considering that we don’t speak the same language. It was humbling experience being so far away from America and sometimes in countries that didn’t really care too much of my homeland. I definitely heard some unpleasant things said in some rural areas of the world yet received an immeasurable amount acceptance from Asians, Africans, and Arabs just to name a few. Once in awhile, I replay some of the moments when I go to converse with people who had these voices with tones that were so different than my own.

I purposely waited to mention, aside from everything else that Navy had brought, that it would introduce me to my new home. As you listen, you will hear the sound of a 747 jet shutdown and the voice of the Captain saying, “Welcome to Honolulu.” Yes, ladies and gentlemen, Hawai’i, the place that
would have the most profound effect on me, much to my surprise. I can’t help but be mesmerized by the sound of Polynesian drums and the swishing of and skirts as these beautiful wahine dance hula with such grace. I would eventually make my way to the baggage claim, but not before hearing two local guys laughing as I walked by. Before I could get upset, I saw myself in the mirror and realized it must have been the jacket, sweater, long pants, and boots that I was wearing that provoked the laughter.

In the soundtrack of my life, you hear an array of melodies in the various night clubs frequently visited by me and my peers. As we vibe out to the high energy techno sounds, my friends and I relish in the fact that now is our time to explore the female aspect of life, in full force. I am of age now, 21, and I could not be more ready. My heart pounds vigorously, as I dance not more than four feet away from this 10ft speaker, looking down at this extremely beautiful young woman groove to the music. In the midst of all the chaos, I can’t help but to notice how attracted I am to this female. I guess this was the point when I discovered one of mankind’s most primal behaviors, the desire to be physically and emotionally attached to a woman. The club scene definitely provided me with countless opportunities to be social and to explore, but I never anticipated meeting my first love in this environment.

In this soundtrack, the sounds of a young man’s heart melt can be heard as I discover the love from a woman. The day I met the young lady who would be the first to touch my heart, was the day I truly loved being a man. The introduction alone was unreal because we ended up having the same initials and we were floored by the other’s appearance. We laughed and talked for awhile, totally forgetting that we in a public place and surrounded by people. From that point on, we treated one another as equals, spending everyday
that we could together. Through her, I learned how important it is to have a mate.

At this point in my life, I've heard and experienced a great deal of things. Almost all of it has some kind of song, sound, or noise that relates to it. If you listen to the soundtrack of my life, you will hear the agreeable and disagreeable sounds of a man’s growth and still have much more life to live. I will continue to listen and stay in tuned with the world around me but for now, I must press pause.
Growing up around family was the center of my childhood. Holidays, party occasions, and the usual gatherings made it unforgettable. At times, I would reminisce and close my eyes just to picture my family together. I could almost hear my sister share a few laughs with Mom and Dad as we exchanged gifts during Christmas time. The bond that held our family together was so strong that it seemed everlasting. But that all changed in an instant, and unfortunately the foundation of our family began to shatter. My parents divorced, and their children were left clueless and heartbroken.

In 2005, I noticed for a couple of days that my mom was coming home later than usual. I figured she was just working late, and since her drive home from Pearl City was far, it didn't affect me. One night, I walked into her as she entered the house and asked, “Are you working overtime, Mom?”

She walked straight into the kitchen and replied, “No, I just have a lot of paper work these days.” It didn’t cross my mind that she might be doing something wrong because she would always call us from work and ask if we needed anything. Naturally, I wouldn’t question my parents’ actions, and for that reason, I didn’t doubt her.

Coming home one day after band practice, I raced home. I was exhausted, so I stormed up the stairs and suddenly a soft weeping stopped me. Although I could hear my heart pounding, it wasn’t the flight of stairs that made me tremble; it was the sad cry of a girl in the hallway. As I pushed
our door open, my sister gave out a heartbreaking sob and said, "Why did you have to do this to Dad, Mom? Why?" I froze at the door clueless and in shock. I didn't know what was going on, so I headed straight to my room and began to do my homework.

The next day my sister talked to me about what had happened. Her eyes were puffy and her face sad. She grabbed my hand and said in a soft voice, "Mom is having an affair." My eyes and mouth opened wide and my heart fell to the ground. Speechless as I was, questions were popping in and out of my thoughts. "Why would Mom do such a thing?" "What did Dad ever do to her?" "What will happen to us now?" "Who am I going to live with?" My sister started weeping and cried, "She doesn't love Daddy anymore." I couldn't hold back my tears, so I burst out crying too.

Everything made sense. Every late night and every phone call added up to this moment. Mom had a new boyfriend while Dad was alone and devastated. I felt sad knowing my parents weren't going to be together. Two or three months later, my mom moved out to live with her friend. She stayed with that friend for a while and eventually moved in with her boyfriend in Waipahu. All her children were lost and didn't know what to do. Eventually, my sister became distant from us. Then she started living with her boyfriend.

The divorce started affecting every aspect of my life. I would be uncomfortable at home, and focusing in school was getting difficult. One day, I decided to live with a friend. She understood what I was going through, so she let me stay with her for a few months. Despite all that happened, it just didn't feel right being there. So I tried to live with Mom and her boyfriend. But
staying with my mom and her boyfriend didn’t work out as well. Waipahu was too far from town, and her boyfriend didn’t talk much. It was weird. I was basically moving around. I just couldn’t find a place to settle because I wasn’t ready to accept the fact that my parents had broken up. I had to find it in myself to forgive them and I knew that I had to return home. Finally, I made a choice to go back home to Dad and my older brother and straighten myself out.

It wasn’t long until I got to see Dad smile again. My sister and I would always be disrupted because he would constantly ask for computer help. He wanted to learn the basics on the webcam and microphone. I figured he needed to because he was secretly dating someone online. Dad had a girlfriend since he would be on the webcam a lot. Then I finally got to meet his girlfriend online when I walked in from work. She was beautiful, and I thought, “Dad still has game.” I was happy for him. As long as she made my dad smile, I was fine with her being in my life.

A year later he re-married, and five months after, his new wife emigrated from the Philippines. At first it was different. Having another woman in the house was a little out of my comfort zone; however, I learned to accept the fact that Dad needed a better half. With all that happened behind us, it was safe to say that things were getting better. My step-mom gave birth and we were blessed with a baby boy named Adam Gabriel de Guzman. It was a great feeling to have Adam in my life because he taught me lessons that I will never forget.

Although the bond that held my family together broke into pieces, I still stand strong for them. After the end of a marriage, a divorce, and those crazy days, I believe that everything happened for a reason. I know that I
am stronger than I was before. I see things a lot more clearly now because of this hardship we went through. Both of my parents are happy again, and although I don’t get to see Mom often, I never take for granted the times we share together. Dad and my step-mom are proud parents, and I couldn’t ask for anything more than a cute and smiley baby brother. This heartbreak was a life lesson that I definitely will never forget, and as the saying goes, “When one door closes, another one opens!”
Living is the greatest privilege, but that privilege can be taken away in an instant. I never realized the truth of that last statement until not too long ago when a flash of reality hit like a blind side left hook to the face. My childhood best friend was taken from me, and I still don’t know why.

I first met Michael Iida back when we were in pre-school. His mom and mine were already good friends, so we would get together outside of our pre-school. We’d always go to each other’s house and play with our power ranger action figures or anything else we could get our hands on without getting into trouble from our parents. By the time we were in elementary school, we were introducing ourselves as Michael and Josh, best friends. Throughout that time, we made many memories together, like the time we got into trouble for throwing a rock at a boy because he supposedly wanted to fight with one of us. We were a pair and were ready to take on middle school at full speed.

Middle school came around the corner, and Michael and I entered it together, but school didn’t turn out exactly as we expected. Since we both played on different football teams, it was hard for us to be without new group of friends and each other at the same time. Throughout middle school, it had always been hard for us to stay so close. but nevertheless, we kept our friendship somewhat strong. We kept in touch and had time for each other when our mothers would get together.
Then high school came along, and instead of taking it on together, we entered high school with a new group of friends. We didn’t have anything to talk about anymore because we hardly did things together. Since I went on to play high school football and he stopped playing, we couldn’t really talk about that either. Michael then transferred to another high school, which made it even harder to talk to each other. Time went on and we drifted far apart. Someday I would even forget that he existed until someone would bring up his name. I went on through high school without Michael.

High school was one of the best times of my life even though Michael wasn’t by my side. My new group of friends and I were at the top of the “food chain” at the school. At the same time, we were also known as bad influences in our school because we would attend class without a care in the world, and stil get away with all kinds of trouble. We passed each class with flying colors without doing any work at all. We went through life without a care of what would happen tomorrow and how it would affect our futures.

Three years, and it was now May 31, 2008 the day of our high school graduation. That day would have to be one of the happiest days of my life. I don’t think it could have got much better for me, getting my much deserved diploma, surrounded by all of my friends. Also, my walking partner happened to be one of my best friends and the girl I had feelings for since sophomore year. I thought that nothing could bring me down that night, but something did.

After the ceremony, we headed to project graduation at the Marriott. Walking to the ballroom, I had the biggest smile on my face and so did everyone around me who was yelling and screaming in excitement. Then I just happened to walk past one of my classmates, who happened to be my good
friend, crying in the corner. At first I thought it was nothing, probably something between his girlfriend and him. That’s when I saw my mom who was working the check-in counter. She ran up to me in tears and said, “I’m sorry son, but there is something I need to tell you. The police found Michael’s body. He committed suicide earlier today.”

My jaw dropped and tears immediately filled my eyes. I didn’t know what to do at the time and neither did everyone else who heard the news. All I could think about was the forgotten memories Michael and I had made together. I wished I could go back to those days. Every class that graduated before us while we were in high school had a classmate taken from them, and we thought we would break that streak. We got so close, yet we still lost.

The night went on, but my feelings of pain and agony for Mike didn’t, until two of my caring friends came to cheer me up. Then without knowing it, I was literally having the most fun with my two friends. Dancing on stage pretending we were in a concert, I somehow got Michael off my mind. That’s when I realized that life is too short to be mourning the life of a loved one. I also realized that all the idiotic things I did in my past weren’t worth doing and were only affecting the person I would be the next day. But the most important thing I learned was that no matter what choices I make in life, no matter how bad things get, tomorrow is always worth seeing.

Ever since the incident, I try to live my life with no regrets. I take each problem in my life and think of it as a learning experience, like I did with Michael that night.

Although I do regret not keeping in touch with my late childhood friend, I know that everything happens for a reason.
No one really knew why Michael decided to take his life that night. Perhaps the wind was blowing him in that direction along his path and he made the choice to go with the wind. We all have a choice. No one can change the way the wind tries to blow us in life, but we can always adjust the sails.
Fast food was not popular at all when I was growing up in Kalapana on the Big Island. I always enjoyed home cooked meals. In fact, to me that was better than going out to eat. Home-cooked meals are wholesome, pure, and very simple. They keep me with my Hawaiian roots. Lau lau is one of these home cooked meals and it is my favorite food. I remember eating lau lau at every party and on Sundays at my grandpa’s house. Lau lau is a Hawaiian dish that looks like a bunch of wet green leaves; it is very moist, filling, and saturated with flavors, but the delicious taste is what really makes laulau the best. Traditionally, it consists of pork wrapped in luau inside of a ti leaf. Ti leaf has a cultural significance to my Hawaiian roots. Lau lau to me is so greatly appreciated because it brings back memories of my family and friends during special events in my life.

I remember the first time I had lau lau at my grandpa’s house. I was just 7 years old. My brothers and I helped to set up the table and made sure that everyone had what was needed for the celebration. After we set up the tables, I waited anxiously for the arrival of the lau lau. It was so delicious! My mouth started to burst with flavors as I took my first bite out of the lau lau. The juicy meat was salty and tender. In my opinion, my grandpa made some of the best lau lau that I ever tasted. Back in the day, wrapped inside the lau lau was a huge chunk of fat and a small piece of salted butterfish, which were both used to flavor the lau lau. These days, the fat is gone, but the small piece of butterfish is still there.
A few years later, I went to my cousin’s wedding in Kalapana. The wedding was romantic and the ambience was perfect. The weather was beautiful, and the food was out of this world. The party had an imu, which is a traditional Hawaiian underground oven that is heated up with hot rocks. There were live dancers and, best of all, I had lau lau! It was not ordinary lau lau; it was imu cooked lau lau, the best type of lau lau I ever had. The flavors were juicier and more tender. When lau lau is cooked in the imu, it is cooked slower and the heat is on a lower temperature. The reason why this lau lau was made special was because we not only had pork and butterfish, but we also had put sweet potato inside with the pork and butterfish to give it a little sweet flavor. It was quite an interesting taste; it had a hint of sweetness with the saltiness. It also changed the consistency of the lau lau because the sweet potato, when eaten, almost turns into a creamy texture. I can say this is lau lau that I will never forget.

The last time I had lau lau was on Saturday, January 30, 2009, at my cousin Kakela’s first birthday party. I felt so fortunate and happy to be there with my friends and family. As I walked in, I was greeted by everyone. When I looked over my shoulder, I saw my cousin Kelsie, who is Kakela’s mother. She knows that I love lau lau, so she whispered in my ear, “There’s lau lau. Go and make yourself a plate.”

My face lit up with joy and I went straight for the lau lau on the food table. I was so excited about the lau lau, especially after not eating it for a while. I started to eat, and I could just taste all the succulent, earthy, green, juicy flavors in my mouth as if it was my first time. This event was the best because of the lau lau that my grandpa prepared. The moment was memorable and special; my family was there, and the lau lau that brought us together as a family was there too.
Lau lau is very important to me. I love lau lau for its delicious and wholesome taste that is pure and cooked simply by my ‘ohana. The knowledge of how it is made is also very important to me. When I eat lau lau, it takes me back to my childhood when things were innocent and pure. Lau lau helps me remember how important family and friends are to me. I love lau lau for that reason. It is more than just food to me. It represents my way of life; it is my ‘ohana and me.
My heart was racing as I watched the clock count down to zero. The buzzer went off and the announcer yelled, “Halftime!” The burnt smell of hot dogs and hamburgers swirled around the football field. I tried to remember the routine as I watched the football players exit the field. My friend Megan tapped me on the shoulder and said, “We have to go now.” As we stumbled up the crowded stairwell, I wondered what I was getting myself into. Suddenly, we were all holding hands while listening to our coach tell us how proud she was of us. She said, “I know this is your first performance, but I also know it’s going to be great!”

I wasn’t used to a crowd like this one. Coming from a small, private Christian school, I had never experienced anything liked this at a huge public school. I was the little freshman on the dance team just trying to fit into high school. As I watched the final performances of the cheerleading squad, I knew we were next. My nerves began to rise and I felt myself trying to swallow whatever saliva I had left in my mouth. My palms started to sweat. My heart was beating so hard that I was sure the girl standing next to me could hear it. I knew the few moments I had left before potentially getting humiliated were leaving me.

The crowd was so loud, but over it I could hear the announcer say, “Welcome the Kealakehe ESP Dance Team!” I felt like I couldn’t even feel my legs walking on to the football field. I was almost as if I had risen out of my body and floated into the air looking down at my team and myself. I looked up to the cheering crowd seeing my friends and family right up front all
ready with their cameras.

As the music started, my mind went blank. "Music makes me lose control, music makes me lose control." I looked down at my feet and they automatically started to move. I'm pretty sure I was holding my breath the whole performance. My body was going in all different directions, thankfully to the beat of the music. I struck a pose as the song ended and the crowd went nuts. I had the best feeling when I got off the stage. I was high off of life and I wanted to get back out there and do it all over again. That night was the beginning of my love for performing.

Dancing has always been a passion of mine, but the dance team stepped it up to the next level for me. I'm a fairly shy person and like to keep to myself. I went from the little freshman in the back of the class to becoming the leader in front choreographing the dances. Dancing is the one thing where I truly feel comfortable expressing myself. No one in my family has any experience in dancing, so I just had to pursue this one on my own.

After that first performance, I knew that I wanted to become a dancer. I was on the dance team for three years in high school and had the time of my life. The dance team helped keep me from the alcohol and drugs that I saw some of my really good friends get involved in. In my high school, I became known as "the dancer", and I was so happy that I could express my passion to others. This experience has given me confidence to move on and follow my dreams to become a professional dancer.
Unfortunate events in one’s life can prove beneficial in the long run. As an adolescent, I freely participated in activities that brought about legal repercussions. My friends and I would set fire to dumpsters, fields, garages, vehicles, and so on. We would also shoplift from local grocery stores, vandalize and break into cars, and frequently get into fights with the neighborhood kids. It was all in good fun; we were just trying to live carefree lives by doing things that would excite us, with little to no thought of the consequences.

It was a bitterly cold Iowa evening. Based on my peach fuzzed upper lip, I must have been about 14 years old. My older brother, Tyson, and I waited until the neighborhood was asleep before we sprung our plan into action. It was an ideal night for us because the snow had been falling thick and had accumulated steadily for some time now. The abundant white snow made visibility poor and our chances of being noticed were greatly reduced. We could see residents enjoying the tranquility of their cozy little apartments, some besieged around the warmth of their fireplaces. They would never think to check their cars on nights like these.

After thorough reconnaissance and thoughtful deliberation, we had selected the unlucky car. “Over there, that one!” I exclaimed, pointing to an old, baby blue, four-door Cadillac with chrome accents around the exterior. It had been parked in a dimly lit area of the complex, far enough from the main road so that we need not worry about passing cars or possible wit-
nesses. The anticipation was great, building with each passing moment as we hid in the bitter cold night.

"You stay here, I'm gunna take a closer look," my brother said as he confidently pulled out an all black steel BB gun, our paraphernalia of choice.

As he walked nonchalantly in the car's direction, I positioned myself a little further back, offering to be the "look out." Once at the driver's side door of the Cadillac, my brother glanced back at me. I gave one last quick inspection of all the apartment windows that I could see through. Relying solely on my instinct and acute hearing, I was confident that we had gone undetected. I gave the thumbs up. Seconds later, I faintly heard a muffled crack. The snow that had accumulated on the window had acted as a silencer to the window breaking - this was already anticipated.

Aware of not wanting to draw any attention, I vigilantly walked to the car. At that point the adrenaline rushed through my veins like an open floodgate; my nervous breath was clearly visible in the crisp air. Each step released a small crushing impact in the snow, as if I were walking on egg shells. Upon my arrival, Tyson had already unlocked the passenger door for me. Once inside the Cadillac, I felt the sudden warmth from the interior, not that it had recently been running, but because it had been sitting for some time, allowing the snow-covered exterior to furnish a warm refuge for us inside.

I could tell by the devilish grin on Tyson's face that we had hit the jackpot. A Pioneer Premier CD player lay in the dash, dual Alpine amplifiers were secure under both the driver and passenger seats, and of course, some kind of goodies awaited us in the trunk.
“I’ll get the CD player, you get the amps!” he yelled with an apparent sense of urgency in his voice. Equipped with only one Phillips screwdriver, one flathead screwdriver, and a pair of scissors, we began dismembering the car audio equipment that belonged to the baby blue vehicle.

It was us against time. Much like a firefighter saving lives from a burning disaster, we also worked frantically. One thing was always certain – whenever we were illegally occupying someone else’s car, time itself seemed to stop. A second felt like an eternity. After the CD player and amps had been successfully removed, we stashed them in a safe spot in the bushes some distance from the crime scene. Laughing and giggling like two little schoolgirls, we journeyed back to the Cadillac to claim our last prize that lay in the trunk. The thrilling adrenaline rush that I felt just moments before was not as intense, but I was still in a heightened state of mind.

As we discreetly walked back, my brother and I attempted to divide up the splendor evenly. It was a rather difficult task considering there were three individual pieces and only two heirs. We ultimately agreed to see what awaited us in the trunk before any allocation of assets would take place. Back at the scene, the night was still suspiciously very calm, quiet, and frigid.

Tyson inserted the flat head screwdriver into the cadillac’s chrome trunk keyhole. He held it secure in place with both hands and looked away, as if he were avoiding eye contact with welding arcs. I stepped back a couple of feet and launched a straight kick with the heel of my boot to the handle of the screwdriver. The impact released an alarmingly louder echo than I had expected. “Shit!” I thought.

The job was done, the keyhole was empty, and we could easily penetrate
the trunk with the screwdriver. We looked around hoping that no one had heard the commotion. Certain that they had not, we moved on to our final task. The anticipation now was greater than ever before in the night. I felt like I did on Christmas morning, savoring the last and biggest present for last! Heart racing and eyes glued to the trunk, we pried open the Cadillac to reveal its magnificence. The wait, the suspense, and the risk had all been completely worth it at the point. Staring back at us were two twelve-inch massive black subwoofers with red lettering reading: Rockford Fosgate. They were enclosed in a beautifully constructed transparent fiberglass box.

“Holy shit!” we both exclaimed simultaneously.

Wasting no time, we launched our skinny bodies into the trunk, gripping both hands around the enclosure. It must have been as heavy as both of us combined; however, nothing would stop us. We hurdled through the snow as fast as our legs would allow, struggling to maintain balance over the sporadic patches of ice that were frozen across the pavement. There was no way to remain hidden at that moment, we just ran until we reached the safe refuge of our apartment on the other side of the complex. Each gasping breath for oxygen gave a needlelike pain as the bone-chilling air made its way into my lungs. We eventually made it back to our apartment to deposit the subwoofers, but we did have to venture back to recover the rest of our night’s trophies.

Tyson and I eventually became embroiled in serious legal trouble as a result of the Cadillac incident. We were spotted by a resident who had notified the local police department. My brother was sent to a 12-18 month juvenile academy, and I found myself in a three-month intensive, rehabilitative juvenile boot camp. While at boot camp, I learned some life lessons that have
molded me into a more levelheaded and responsible individual. I suppose I could have just ‘done my time’ at boot camp, neglecting the reflection process entirely. But if I had done that, would I still be entangled in the legal system today? Probably.

Nonetheless, I took this unfavorable moment in my life as an opportunity to see things in a mature light. In the end, I stepped away from the treacherous boot camp experience having learned selflessness, teamwork, respect for my peers and their property, and, most importantly, I learned that my actions, no matter how miniscule they seem to me, can greatly affect my family members.
Growing up in Hawai‘i is very special. Our local culture is vastly unique as it is a hodgepodge of many different cultures all mixed together. I would like to believe that here in Hawai‘i, we take the best of all peoples and marry them together, and the result is a vibrant rich society. This mixture of cultures reminds me of my mother’s beef stew from my younger days and the values it symbolized.

My parents migrated from American Samoa to Hawai‘i before statehood in 1959. Because of the cultural differences, going to school was a privilege; they had menial jobs. My father worked at Ziebart Auto Rust Proofing. He picked up a lot of overtime, which resulted in coming home late. We seldom had dinner with him, but my mother always made sure she had put some away in a covered bowl in the middle of the dinner table. My mother also worked. She had a job at Fort Shafter for AAFES as cashier in the breakfast and lunch hall. I have three brothers and one sister. My brother Steven is the eldest, then myself, my brother Tony, my sister Carolyne, and Thomas the baby. We were like many other immigrant families in Hawai‘i, doing the best we could and contributing to society at large as good citizens.

My mother and I always went to the open market together. I enjoyed going with her; it was a treat for me. My eyes would feast on all the fruits on the sidewalk and the assortment of vegetables, some of which I couldn’t pronounce the names. All I knew was they looked so delicious. I also knew there might be a chance we would have her special beef stew for dinner.
However, depending on our money, there were times when we only picked up items to prepare something trouble-free for dinner like ramen noodles and green onions.

Our dinners at home were very economical for the most part. We normally had hot dogs or Franco spaghetti mixed with spam over hot rice. Because we were a local family, rice was our staple, and sometimes that was all we had. Once in a great while, my mom would prepare her special beef stew meal for dinner normally on her day off.

My siblings and I routinely walked home after school. I can still recollect that there were a few special days that my walk from school was more pleasant than others. While holding my brother Thomas’ hand, I would count my steps on the way home. As I got closer, my nose immediately perked up when I smelled onions being sautéed with salt and pepper and the hint of garlic. I remembered what a wonderful aroma this was. It could only mean one thing: that we were having something grand and delicious for dinner. By this time, we would run our fastest to get home.

On our way home, our hopes and anticipation grew; we craved beef stew, mom’s home cooking. Like the hungry lioness that picks up the scent of her prey, I could just taste the beef being added to the onions while the scent wafted through the house. It drifted down the street as we came to a vigorous halt at the door step. We were so excited to have dinner that the rumble in our hungry bellies grew. I rushed to do all my chores and homework, then bathed and sat quietly waiting patiently for my mother to say, “Hurry up! Come and eat now.” I would be the first there. Like every meal, she would serve the stew over hot rice.
My mouth overflowed with juices as I bit into the cut beef. The beef was so tender, so soft it required no effort in chewing. The sauce was a symphony of flavors as I slurped every spoonful. I could describe almost each key ingredient my mom had measured for it. Not even the “stew gods” could prepare this sauce better than my mother. As I tasted the vegetables, the carrots would just dissolve in my mouth. The heat on my tongue created tiny beads of sweat on my forehead from the tang of red hot chili peppers. To step up the color and essence of her stew, she also added a lot of green and orange bell peppers, which kept me wanting more. As my back molars crunched into the celery, the liquid from it tasted as if all the ingredients were hidden inside. The overcooked and ripe tomatoes, with sweet Maui onions, gave a hint of sweetness that only my taste buds could recognize.

No beef stew was complete without overdone potatoes I silently thought to myself and inhaled them at the same time. Potatoes were always a must in my mother’s stew. I ate my beef stew ever so slowly and savored every taste; my stomach was already asking for seconds. I will always cherish these pleasant days as a little girl running home to devour mom’s beef stew. To me, it was like a special occasion every time she prepared this meal for her family. Today, I enjoy making beef stew once a month for my family with my mom’s recipe. I see beef stew as a metaphor as to why I love being local and living in Hawai‘i. We take the best from all the ingredients available and then marry them together in a big pot. The end result is an outstanding potpourri. Yet that the product is not complete without an extra helping of love and aloha, and so it is with my mom’s beef stew!
Trees by Jennifer Kihara

Trees. The tall and beautiful, staples of life here on our planet. Calm, collective and invigorating. Trees provide oxygen for us, homes for others, and beauty for all. They represent growth, life and love. Without trees, our mountains and valleys would be bare. Without trees, the human race would not exist. They complete our circle of life. I wish I were more like a tree, big and strong and able to provide so much for those around me. Or more like a tree in the sense that they know exactly where they’re going in life, which is up. They grow towards to the light, and that’s what I love about them.

In high school, I never explored serious career options and after I graduated was left confused and undecided about my future. I was lost with no sense of direction whatsoever, thinking how I was going to end up nowhere in life. During my year in Oregon for college, there were, what looked like 50 different types of trees outside my dorm. They were so beautiful in the
fall, changing to orange and brown and then turning back to green, yellow, and bright red in the spring. I admired these trees during tough times as they brought beauty to my eyes and somehow calmed me into thinking everything was going to be alright. Even if I stay confused, I’ll still be on a branch growing towards the sun. I choose to rise up by becoming a better person, student and daughter while I find out my passion in life.

Now I’m back home, still undecided about what to do, yet with a new found direction, which is the same as those trees you see outside. I want to go up. That may mean something different to everyone but to me it means anything is possible.
Broken Home
by Ashley Trapp

You know how the saying goes? The one about how things are not always what they seem to be? I take that statement very literally as well as personally.

You could say that growing up, my life seemed perfect. I was an only child who got everything she dreamed of and more. Whether it was extracurricular activities or educational endeavors, I always persevered and many of times were recognized in school for these achievements. You could say I was somewhat of a poster child, entering pageants and hula competitions. I had the proudest parents anyone could ever ask for. They were supporting, encouraging, loving, and yet divorced.

Yes, I said it. They were divorced from the time I was 3 years old. Now I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking what’s the big deal? Divorce is so common this day and age. And yes it is. But the effect it has had and continues to have on me, has been life altering.

My parents, due to their personal struggles, called it quits when I was very young. They moved into separate homes and right away began to live separate lives. Just as expected, they began to date new people. As a very young child, this was completely confusing and misleading. What was I sup-
posed to call these people? "Mom Number 2?" "Auntie?" Or maybe Mrs. Whatever would be more appropriate? Who knew? I eventually resolved to Auntie and uncle, as the most suitable solutions. I not only had to began accepting these new people into my life, but I also had to get used to a new living arrangement.

I would eventually become acquired to three homes: My dad's place, my mom's, and my grandparents. With the hectic craziness of my situation, my parents decided that I should live with my grandparents. I was practically raised by my grandparents in every literal sense of the word. They provided for me, got me to school, and disciplined me, and more. To top everything off, my father soon after up and moved a complete island away.

I remember feeling displaced, like there was truly no place to call home. To call my home. I often wondered if I had done something wrong, if I could have done something differently to have a different life. A life where my parents were together, in love...how it was supposed to be.

After the years passed, things progressively got better. Not perfect, but better. The biggest challenge is, as a child from a divorced family that I still cope with today, is the struggles of opposing views. I have always believed
that a child from a broken home, should not be forced to choose sides, like tug of war. It is a terrible and psychologically exhausting experience for a child. Feeling torn and alone was something I felt quite often.

I do not believe my parents realized they put me into such situations, but I feel their anger and animosity got the better of them from time to time. During my younger years was when it was the hardest. I spent most of my time silently nodding and acknowledging my parents when they spoke ill of my other parent. But once I was older and stronger to speak my voice and opinion, I firmly put an end to that. I would no longer stand for such horrible behavior and I felt it made my life much easier in the long run.

One day I got a phone call from my father, stating that he had finally decided to get remarried. Now keep in mind that my auntie had been with my father since my parents separated and had been a constant in my life since then.

I fell into complete shock. I didn’t know what to say or what to do. The only words that could come out of my mouth was “Uh uh” and “Okay.” It was a completely awkward conversation. In some ways, I didn’t know why it was such a surprise. I knew in the back of my head that this day was coming, but I hadn’t realized what an effect it would actually have on me. But then this month, I had cried a lot and realized I was reacting this way because
deep down inside, I still harbored some hope for my parents’ reconcile. All the emotion I had bottled up for so many years came out of me like a hundred rivers rushing into a single bank. So much emotion, and nowhere for it to go.

Like everything else in life, I was able to change and adapt to what required me to do so. Looking back, I understand that everything that has happened to me, and everyone who has touched my life in some way, has shaped the person I am today. If it wasn’t for my struggles, I would not have been able to grow into a strong and independent woman. From my struggles I am able to see what type of life I would rather live for my children. From my struggles, I am me. I have lived in a broken home, but have realized that in the end, I was cared for. I was and continue to be successful, and I was loved beyond all possible measures. Like a bird flying from its nest, I have chosen my path and have set out for the future.