ART + ESSAYS

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THAILAND’S infamous sex industry is now thriving more than ever, according to the United Nations’ Office on Drugs and High Crime, citing Europol’s estimate of an annual worth exceeding several billion U.S. dollars. In the bustling city streets, patrolled by hundreds of young workers soliciting their smiling products, hundreds of hotels and thousands of brothels tower over the city, obstructing a glittering emerald coastline saturated with sex. No longer the same obscure fishing village it once was nearly three decades ago, Pattaya is a city built by the economic forces of the sex tourists’ dollar.

First popularized as “recreational” resorts by U.S. Marine troops stationed at the nearby Sattaship during the Vietnam War, “sex tourism is about the only business conducted” in the impoverished villages of Pattaya. From these humble beginnings, Pattaya attracts over a forth of Thailand’s eight million annual visitors, and life in the sex tourism centre virtually doubles when winter comes, bringing European and American business” (Akkara 01). There are perhaps “more sex workers per square mile in Pattaya” than in any other region of Thailand, says Dave of the Sexwork Cyber Center, “perhaps the world,” all clawing after the foreigners’ dollar (“Pattaya: The City & Geography”).

With advertisements such as: “Pattaya Beach Adult Tours: Thailand, Sea, Sun, Sand, Sex Friendly Men 18-80, fly from L.A,” located under Google’s sponsored links column, the battle continues. Guilty of trying to shamelessly establish an ethos-based appeal of an adult beach tour by using an ad populum fallacy to make everything appear like tantalizing bait, this particular advertisement is presented in such a way that these “pleasure tours,” as they are often called, exemplify not only Thailand’s “anything goes” atmosphere, but it also presents Thailand as a “sex-friendly” fantasy playground, ideal for adult men eager to indulge in the euphoria of their own carnal desires.

Operating out of an office near Pattaya’s southern coastline, a travel agent, identified only as “Lyn,” elaborates on how “Pattaya is not a city for children to grow up in” given the “great demand for young girls and boys in Pattaya,” “where tourists, some of them well past retirement age can be seen with their arms around girls hardly in [their] teens.” She estimates nearly half of Pattaya’s population of two hundred thousand citizens in the year 2000, as “outsiders” participating in and ultimately perpetrating its flesh trade. She says that even
with a “good moral education,” “children’s thinking will be influenced by what they see around them” (Akkara). But this depiction doesn’t apply for all of Thailand’s young workers.

Exhausted and beaten into submission like disobedient livestock, serving several dozen (about 30-40) men every night, hundreds of thousands of women and children in Pattaya are weakening in this relentless vortex, all struggling to quench the often violent perils of instant pleasure and paedophilia—in which children are the preferred sexual object (“Paedophilia”). If the souls of these individuals are not already shattered, their remaining shells are breaking. Stripped of one’s freedom, of one’s youth and innocence with each passing night, these women and children are living lives of sexual exploitation, a perplexing phenomenon transcending moral rationalization or economic benefits, beyond human understanding. Some of these workers are broken beyond repair. Awareness must to be raised in vulnerable areas like Pattaya to educate children, the walking targets, the future banks, about the omnipresent dangers of sexual exploitation dominating their country; medical and psychological services, stable environments and healthy alternatives to this red-light entrapment should be implemented as well.

Along the city streets and in thousands of Thai brothels are the concentrated areas in which these young women and children are virtually being reduced to commodities of human enslavement as if they are the world’s secret sex machines. According to the Ministry of Health, “Commercial sex workers can be found in hotels, bungalows, guest houses, tea houses, beer bar, gay bars, go-go bars... karaoke lounges... massage parlors... saunas, coffee and shaving shops, cafes, restaurants... male hair salons, and many work as call girls” (“Child Prostitution”). Over three thousand beer bars line Pattaya’s streets alone. “South Pattaya is where every bar has girls waiting in the door, bringing customers for cheap sex and beer. In every bar, naked girls are trained to be bait for sex tourists,” according to Leonard Calcagno, a renowned Montreal sex columnist. Simulating something like a “high-school beach party,” Calcagno says every beer bar is adorned with tacky Christmas decor, “but with a hundred horny drunken tourists looking and touching underage smiling merchandise” (“Killer Pattaya”).

With scantily-clad bodies radiating red-light promises, these young women and children are treated as plastic pleasure toys, as machines flippantly marked with arbitrary monetary values according to their sexual appeal, health risk, and sexual mileage. Shuffling up and down the aisles, the john searches through the scintillating flesh he feels compelled to exploit. He yearns after the supple body of one whose congenial flesh, whose innocent and youthful secretions will leave his manly gonads untainted by the bitter disease passively haunting his paedophiliac desires—ultimately, an enjoyable form of “shopping” for such men. Plucked from their seemingly exotic arrangement and auctioned off like cattle, the “smiling merchandise” must yield to the winning bidder’s every whim: aligning her sexual formation with his carnal necessities; sometimes, for a mere five U.S. dollars, the bidder’s seemingly insatiable hedonistic appetite is temporarily quenched. Since STD’s and HIV/AIDS hold
stringent no-return policies, government funded “gloves” are always mandated at these brothels—these men, after all, hope the cash register is the only place at which they'll have to pay.

Virgins are truly a rare “commodity” in the sex industry. Throughout Thailand, virgins, especially Burmese or ethnic Shan virgins, command and receive top dollar. These groups are often exoticized as “special virgins,” partially due to Myanmar’s relative isolation during the past several decades. Over 20,000 Burmese women and girls worked in Thai brothels during 1994, according to the Human Rights Watch Organization (HRWO), with an annual growth of about 10,000 new recruits. In 2000, an increase in the number of virgins being trafficked into Thailand from Myanmar revealed growing demands, predominately from Chinese tourists and businessmen, for virgin workers in Thailand's sex industry. To get an idea of how far these pimps and brothel owners will go for a couple hundred U.S. dollars, the running price of a “virgin,” the pimps and owners themselves will surgically reattach a girl’s hymen in order to present her as a “virgin” if her hymen is broken, or for precautionary measures, ensuring full customer satisfaction during sex. In addition to the decreased risk of STD’s and HIV infection, deflowering a virgin is considered empowering in some cultures; Kevin Bales explains that the Ancient Chinese believed deflowering a virgin has the ability to “reawaken sexual virility and prolong life” (115). Epitomizing innocence cross-culturally, societies treasure virgins for their purity, for their wholesome and untainted nature. The difference between exploited sex workers and myself is that the fate of my innocence is my own. I control my engagement in sexual affairs; however, children and those fallen victim to sexual exploitation are virtually powerless against their masters: subjected to roll over and submit completely, in blind obedience. Searching for a virgin in Thailand, much less in Pattaya, is, unfortunately, a search in vain.

Due to the underground nature of prostitution, accurate estimates are difficult to come by. Based on biannual venereal disease surveys, the Public Health Ministry estimated in 1995 about 81,384 active, commercial sex workers in Thailand (Caye). Other estimates fall between a conservative 200,000 sex workers, in which twenty percent are children (ECPAT), and an inflated 800,000 sex workers working in Thailand at any given moment (Children's Foundation). However, prostitution in Thailand is debated as frequently as the activity itself. ECPAT International indicates that: “Despite many efforts by dedicated groups and individuals, the sexual exploitation of children is a phenomenon that is increasing in scope” (Akkara 01). The reality is that we may never know the exact number of women and children being sold and exploited into Thailand’s flesh trade; nevertheless, what these numbers do reveal is a growing epidemic.

What is becoming of this world? The heart of my childhood was spent in school, in drawing and pottery classes, in tap and jazz lessons. When not perpetually dodging the flying dodgeballs or sliding down hillsides on tattered brown boxes, the days were filled with endless games of hopscotch and jump rope, Tag and Red Rover, Simon Says and Mother May I. At ten years of age, I was so fascinated with the pachydermatous plates of dead skin lining my hands like medieval armor, so consumed in my struggle to successfully climb my way across ten bright orange monkey bars that stood mockingly before me with every endeavor that, ultimately, I was left just hanging from those orange bars like a solemn fruit bat since I could never quite make it past the very first bar. At 10 years of age, the crucial age targeted by pimps and brothel owners, abandoning my childhood dreams of being an astronaut or a veterinarian to financially support my family through the means of my thighs would have been unfathomably absurd—I have nothing on these individuals.

Thai prostitutes are often thought of as willing participants, free to leave what the western world deems sinful as a red-light lifestyle and find work elsewhere, to find other means to survive. In Pattaya, however, a city submerged in the charcoal soot of over three thousand brothels, there is no work to be found elsewhere; essentially, outside support and readily available alternatives cease to exist. Poverty is the leading cause of young women and children turning to prostitution; they roam throughout Thailand’s liquor bars, restaurants, and massage parlors, because they have nowhere left to turn. In 2001, Heather Montgomery, a prominent anthropologist and lecturer in Childhood Studies at Open University, found at least one working child prostitute, ages four to fifteen, in every household during her extensive study of a Thai slum located on the outskirts of Pattaya. The children Montgomery spoke with lacked the appropriate vocabulary to even describe the nature of their work; in addition, she found that these children were being introduced at even younger ages into the industry. However, such vocabulary becomes significant and relevant only when and if one correctly understands the context of their words.
Based on an extensive series of interviews conducted between 1992 and 1993 by the Women’s Rights Project and Asia Watch, researchers found that simply “wearing Western clothes in a restaurant” is what “many girls who said they ‘knew’ they would be working as prostitutes” actually believed prostitution was really about, reports Jasmine Caye, international reporter for the HRWO. “Many also said that they could leave the brothels freely,” Caye says. Nonetheless, lacking money and afraid of being arrested or being sold to another brothel prevented many workers from leaving; in addition, most said refusing a customer was possible but “virtually unheard of because of the fear of repercussions.” Often exploited and sold by their own families, lured, kidnapped, or otherwise imported, these children are working to support the industry everyday.

Buddhism, Thailand’s national religion seems to play more of an influential role in the promotion and halfhearted regulation of its sex industry than anything else, since Buddhism holds no absolute concepts of morality or stigmas attached to prostitution (“The Influence of Thai Buddhism”). The legal system is of no help, either. Following Time magazine’s 1993 cover story exposing Thailand’s sex industry, “Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai announced tough new anti-prostitution laws,” reports Cory Rennel, the senior editor at the Harvard International Review. Despite these laws being established to protect underage minors, “Thai commerce laws sanction prostitution as a ‘personal service,’ even though it is illegal under the penal code”; thus making workers in the sex trade criminals while recognizing “the investment privileges of the sex trade” (Rogers). The crippling effect is that “the new laws silenced the cries of the enslaved children,” and “while the world no longer hears their voices, the industry thrives more than ever,” Rennel explains. Money conjoins flawlessly with the sin of this so-called beautiful world.

Since prostitution has thrived in Thailand since 1350, it is unrealistic to expect the paradigm to shift so quickly (Rennel). In the foreseeable future as I see it, Thailand will continue to promote its lucrative sex industry while Thai families and children, shrouded and desperate to escape the chastity belts of poverty, will continue to exploit and sell the innocence of their own flesh to Thailand’s relentless ringmasters; the cycle is stuck on repeat—game over, start again, pass go, collect B10,000-20,000 ($400-800 USD) (Chang). The focus ought to be shifted from the futile justice of “an eye for an eye,” a prevailing attitude here in America, to implementing stable environments and healthy alternatives in this poverty-ridden nation instead. By exposing the fake “glamour” and economic limelight of Thailand’s sex industry, we can bring awareness to these women and children about the omnipresent perils of sexual exploitation dominating their country—possibly even allowing them a chance to experience similar childhood freedoms that you and I have. Insistence on justice through the means of “an eye for an eye” is nothing more than a series of means that leads to a further end, an end that leaves the whole world blind and pummeled by this relentlessly dominating industry.

Although this problem is not limited to one nation, Thailand holds firm grip over its regional crown of being the sex tourists’ capital of the world. Thai women and children, fallen victim to sexual exploitation, are all suffering from pain imposed on them; their innocence stripped, their bodies battered, their loins erupting in a Gordian knot of instant pleasure and paedophilia, their screams silenced by legal technicalities—when will it all end? The cost of Thailand’s sex industry is being paid with its workers’ bodies, with their lives, their innocence; the cost exceeds far beyond any profits made from this new form of slavery. Make no mistake—this is not an erotic fantasy for these women and children; this is the furthest thing from a pleasurable fairytale—this is sex slavery.
THE VIETNAM WAR ended thirty years ago, but the destructive consequences of Agent Orange still remain in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese people are still suffering from exposure to the chemical. They have lived in silence for decades; last year, they decided to ask for justice in a New York court. The lawsuit drew international attention; however, the verdict had more to do with politics than with justice. Besides suffering from the effects of Agent Orange, the Vietnamese victims are also suffering from the political games played by both the Vietnamese and U.S. governments.

To understand the effects of Agent Orange on Vietnamese people, we need to know what it was and how it was used in Vietnam. Agent Orange was a herbicide with the active ingredient TCDD (also known as dioxin)—one of the most poisonous chemicals known to humankind. The chemical was known as Agent Orange because it was stored in orange canisters. It was discovered as early as the 1940s. Scientists found that it was effective in killing plants with large leaves. They also discovered potential health problems on laboratory animals. Despite awareness of Agent Orange's potential health risks for humans, the U.S. government kept dropping the chemical on Vietnam over a long period of time. According to the article "McNamara's Other Crimes: The Stories You Haven't Heard" by Mya Macpherson of the Washington Monthly, "In 1965, when the government was purchasing millions of pounds of Agent Orange, Dow's internal report stated that dioxin could be 'exceptionally toxic' to humans and that 'fatalities have been reported in the literature.'" Dow was one of the chemical companies that provided the U.S. government with Agent Orange. According to the Division of Veterans' Affairs of New York, between 1961 and 1971, more than twenty million gallons of herbicide, of which 80 percent was Agent Orange, were sprayed over six million acres in Vietnam. Over eight percent of the country was sprayed more than once (Department of Veterans' Affairs). The amount of Agent Orange sprayed in Vietnam was not just vast in both quantity and frequency, but also in concentration. According to the book Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Vietnam by Philip Jones Griffiths, "The herbicide shipped to Vietnam to be sprayed by the military contained up to 50 times the concentration suggested by the manufacturer" (164). The primary purpose of the spraying was to destroy tropical forests believed to be the hiding places of North Vietnamese soldiers.
The secondary purpose was to destroy crops which were the food supplies to the enemy. Vietnam became the largest Agent Orange experiment in the world.

Agent Orange was immediately effective in destroying forests and rice fields in Vietnam, but it was slow in killing American soldiers and the Vietnamese people. Agent Orange is now believed to be responsible for many serious health problems. In the U.S., various studies on Agent Orange’s effects on Vietnam-era war veterans have been made by the Institute of Medicine. They found “sufficient” or “suggestive” evidence for the association between exposure of the herbicide and many diseases such as cancer, skin disorders, type 2 diabetes, and various birth defects. America’s Vietnam War veterans and their children could have free medical care from the U.S. government for their health problems believed to be caused by exposure to the herbicide. They also received a compensation of $180 million from the chemical’s producers in 1984: “6,000 Vietnam Veterans could receive between $2,000 and $5,000 a month depending on how badly they had been affected,” according to the article “Petrified Forests” by Jim Trautman. The period of compensation was between 1984 and 1994.

But what about Agent Orange’s effects on the Vietnamese? According to the article “A Poison Landscape” by William Plummer and Ron Arias of People, “more than 5 percent of children fathered by men who fought in the South—and were exposed to Agent Orange—were born with defects, compared with just one percent of the children who stayed in the North.” Some families who live in the affected areas find birth defects in all of their children. In the article “A Killer Still” in the Economist, the evidence of Agent Orange is described:

Orange and the site of a large spill in 1970, American researchers recently found that ninety five percent of the people they tested had abnormally high levels of dioxin, which has links with cancer, birth defects, and liver damage. Some had concentrations 200 times the usual level. Most worryingly, many of those with high concentrations were born long after 1971.

A similar phenomenon was found by the researchers of Hatfield Consultants Ltd. from Canada who studied the effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam. They estimated that about 400,000 people were killed or maimed by Agent Orange, and half a million children were born with deformities. As Agent Orange is not soluble in water, it remains in the environment for decades or even hundreds of years. Researchers found that the chemical got into the food chains of the affected areas. Agent Orange kills even in peace, after having killed in war: “Agent Orange, [Griffiths] argues, is a ‘genetic time-bomb’” (qtd. in “Horror of Horrors”).

Who cares for these Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange? Most of them live in the poorer areas of the country. They cannot afford to move out of their homeland that has been contaminated with Agent Orange. As they continue to reside in the same places, they continue to get poisoned from generation to generation. The Vietnamese government has not shown any effort whatsoever in cleaning up the environment, nor have they assisted people in moving out from the contaminated areas, let alone warned them about the dangers of contaminated food.

In domestic newspapers, the Vietnamese government indicates that it strongly supports the victims of Agent Orange, but in reality, does little of what it says. While Vietnam is financially and technologically incapable of conducting full scientific research on the effects of Agent Orange, the government does not cooperate with the international community to fully study the issue. For example, in 1995, the government confiscated an American researcher’s blood samples and documented evidence regarding the effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam. It took the U.S. government two years to return such materials back
to the owner, Dr. Arnold Schecter of the University of Texas School of Public Health in Dallas.

There are several reasons for the Vietnamese government's lack of response to the victims of Agent Orange: "The Vietnamese government does not want to harm its promising tourist industry by creating a health scare" ("A Killer Still"). The government also does not want to harm its food exports. Another reason is that the Vietnamese government used to curse the U.S. government; it was far too proud to ask a former enemy for compensation for the victims of chemical warfare. The Vietnamese government's pride was more important than the welfare of its people. Before the normalization between the two countries, the Vietnamese government satisfied all the requirements raised by the U.S. government, such as finding the remains of American soldiers who were missing in action, paying the debt owed by the former South Vietnamese government, and returning properties of the U.S. government seized after the war. But it made no requirements of the U.S. government in return. The Vietnamese government forgot about the long-term health and environmental damage caused by the poisoning of the land and the people: it gives $20 monthly to each former soldier and each child who is affected by Agent Orange. This amount of aid is symbolic; however, it is not enough for the victims' daily meals.

Most of the deformed young people, the youngest victims of Agent Orange, are incapable of caring for themselves. They completely rely on their families who are already very poor; such victims cannot afford medical care. In many cases, they are viewed as a burden by their families. Some superstitious people see them God's punishment for the bad things their ancestors did. That brings shame to their families. As a result, such children are often abandoned by their families and become homeless. Some of them are sent to special villages where they live together and learn how to take care of themselves. Only 12 percent of them are cared for in 11 such villages nationwide. For these young people, the war is still being waged.

While the makers and users of Agent Orange were half a globe away from their Vietnamese victims, justice was even a much greater distance from them. The dismissal of the class-action lawsuit in New York brought about by the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange was heavily influenced by politics. The judge, Jack Weinstein, said that he did not see any legal basis between Agent Orange and the health problems of Vietnamese people. He ruled that the U.S. government did not violate any laws by using Agent Orange in Vietnam. Before the lawsuit ever ensued, the Department of Justice asked the judge to dismiss the case. They were afraid that opening up domestic courts to former enemies would damage the U.S. president's power as the commander-in-chief in cases of war. That is, they did not want the U.S. president to ever worry about legal problems resulting from his decisions. They were equally afraid that letting the Vietnamese win the case would encourage former soldiers from Korea, New Zealand and Australia, who joined forces with the U.S. in the Vietnam War, to sue the U.S. government. Their other concern was that the victims' victory in the courts would pave the way for Laotians and Cambodian victims to enter into similar litigation against the U.S. The chemical giants Dow and Monsanto, who were also sued, cited zero responsibility since they were merely following the government's orders. They said that the government was ultimately responsible for the handling of their chemical. They meant that the U.S. government " mishandled" the herbicide: "The United States is the only country not to ratify the anti-chemical warfare with poisonous gases provision in the Geneva Protocol" (Griffiths 152). The U.S. government never accepted any responsibility for the effects of the poisonous legacy left in Vietnam. The Agent Orange issue, as Suel Jones, a U.S. Vietnam-war era veteran says that it "is not a matter of money, but an ethical problem that the U.S. government is not ready to face" (qtd. in Griffiths 78).

Morality has no place in this case. While hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange are struggling everyday for survival, the Vietnamese and American politicians are playing games. Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange are not just the victims of a chemical. They are also the victims of politics.
CURLED UP in a fetal position, fingers clinched and gnawing at the loose threads of my blanket, demons screaming within, I found myself isolated from the world.

It had been nine years since my acquaintance with the "Lady in White." I had lost a sense of excitement and didn't know which path in life to take; I was in need of inspiration to lead me to what I wanted to become.

On the 16th of December, I saw fragments of snowflakes, like molecules, falling gently outside the window; some of them were caught along the ledge, forming hilltops-like, one on top of the other. Inside the room it felt like a freezer. I was lying in bed under three blankets. I was running a hundred and two fever. Suddenly, I sensed a faint smell of magnolia in the room; s-l-o-w-l-y, as I repositioned my head, I noticed a figure standing at the foot of my bed. I could not distinguish who it was, because at the time I was living alone. The slight breeze blew her chiffon clothing, which accentuated her tall feminine figure, like clouds forming before a heavy storm is about to break.

Could it be that I died three seconds ago or three years ago, and now this figure all in white has come to take me away? All these scary thoughts were in my head.

"Why are you dressed all in white? " I uttered. "Have I died? "

No response, except for a sympathetic smile and a gleam of life in her eyes. I saw her clearer as she came closer to me to gently place her warm hand on my forehead. There was something in the way she moved her fingers, like she was composing an orchestra. Her fingers were long and magical with slight traces of rigid lines that showed the formation of rivers flowing in horizontal definitions. A sense of calm and warmth ran through my veins, then I felt a sudden burst of energy from within me. I could not discern at that very moment whether I had succumbed to the fever or merely gone into a coma.

She sat next to me and, suddenly, I realized that I was in the warmth of her arms, and for some odd reason, all my sense of fear had subsided. I probably knew then that death had triumphed, and I was at the mercy of this strange
creature, the "Angel of Death." I could not utter a word, but all these questions where running frantically in my head, until I caught sight of her gleaming eyes. Then everything stopped for a millisecond.

Her skin of ivory soft and luminous, her ruby lips glistened with great beauty. She reminded me of the Virgin Mary statue that stood in the middle of the altar in the living room of my grandmother's house. Only through the paintings of La Tour had I witnessed such beauty. Nonetheless, it was her cat-like eyes that struck me most; her eyes were the "hall of mirrors" from Versailles that shimmered like the Star of David.

I could not see my own reflection, but her eyes projected a magical cityscape that was filled with life. Her washed-out eyebrows gave vague descriptions of color and contour, yet her nose stood out the most, long and protruding until it curved at the tip like a snow slope.

"I will take you there," these soft-spoken words echoed in my eardrums without her lips moving an inch.

Thus began my adventures in the city of lights.

In the blink of an eye, I found myself in unfamiliar territory. Rays of colors were dancing to the notes of music in mid-air, and I found myself standing next to the lady in white, (Whose name I still did not know at that time) in a crowded café along the boulevard. How gay and lively it was. A brisk thought of Dante's novel came to mind; the lady in white was none other than Virgil guiding me through life. We didn't say a word, but we spoke with our eyes. It seemed that all these artists and writers had congregated in this café. A man in a bowler hat sits in the corner writing, and at times seems caught inside an idea. A group of women in fashionable clothing are gossiping at another table, while two lovers are kissing next to the bar.

We stayed for a while until I realized that we were no longer in the café, but meandering through alleys. A flicker of faint light was coming from the lamppost, casting my shadow on the cobblestone. We stood in front of a doorway until I realized that we were in someone's atelier, where beautiful paintings were hung on the walls.

I have seen most of these in my art books, but never would I have imagined that I would see them in person. In the middle of the room are statues sitting on pedestals; they almost seemed real. I noticed the one closest to me—a bust of a young child made with limestone; under its right eye were traces of dried blood that ran through the ridges. My concentration was disturbed from a faint sound coming from the next room. There, in the room, an older man sat in front of his easel humming to the tune of Mozart. Or was it Chopin? I could never distinguish which one was which.

He was probably in his late fifties, with a handsome profile. I could not see his entire face, but I noticed the ring on his forefinger; a gold band and an oval-shaped ruby in the middle. I used to own the same ring, until I lost it on one of my trips. His hands were beautiful. There was something in the way he held his brush like a baton composing his orchestra. I stood behind him, wondering if he could feel my presence. I supposed it didn't matter much, because it seemed that he was in a trance himself.

I glanced at the canvas he was working on. I recognized the portrait right away. Taped on the upper-left hand corner of the canvas was a portrait of this beautiful woman standing next to me. I couldn't grasp its symbolic meaning, but there was a sense of melancholy in the room that even angels feared. Tears started to form in my eyes and I could only hear the beat of my heart. I ran outside, to the courtyard, gasping for air. The lady in white stood next to me, and, once again, I could feel her sense of comfort.

There, in the distance, a light was shimmering like the star to the north. It was so bright and colorful.

"Where is that coming from?" I asked. "What is that?" As we got closer, I realized it was the Eiffel Tower. I had seen it in pictures throughout my childhood, and was always fascinated by the magnitude of its size. I stood aghast as I surveyed the entire beauty of the city of lights from above. I didn't know how long we stayed up there, until I noticed that I held a phone in my hand; I wasn't talking.

Suddenly, I felt tiny particles of snowflakes gently falling on my face. S-l-o-w-l-y they fell. Then, I too, started to fall; I was grasping for the lady's hand and screaming not to let go. I tried to grab her hands but could feel nothing. It felt like running your hands through water and trying to grasp it. Her eyes began to close gradually as she slowly faded away in the distance.

I started to see some familiar structures and objects in my room through her silhouette. I knew I was coming to realize the difference between the infinite and the reality. I gently closed my eyes and tried to visualize the lady in white. I didn't want this dream to fade, so I lingered in the memory, but all I
could see was the dark-blue spot of my retina.

In an instant, I jumped out of bed by the startlingly loud sound of the phone ringing. It was my mother on the other line asking how I was feeling. I’d never felt better, and, quickly. I dressed and began wandering the streets near my apartment. My subconscious has led me to a historic building that housed antiques and art supplies. I walked in and browsed through the aisles of freshly-primed canvases stacked in an orderly fashion against the wall. I stood in front of the oil paints and gazed at the rainbow-colored hues hanging in alphabetical order. There, I found myself caressing the stubbles of a boar bristle paintbrush. Thunderstruck, I realized at once the peeling label on the brush that it was the lady in white with her flowing garment standing next to the Eiffel Tower.

She held a palette of colors and brushes on the other hand, similar pose to the Statue of Liberty. “Paris No. 4” was the name labeled on the paintbrush.

I asked myself, “Could it be that all these coincidences are symbols to a path that will lead me to what I shall become in this lifetime?”

I suddenly sensed an urgency to go back to my studio and work on my first painting; on the way back to my studio, I heard myself humming to the sensual tunes of Paris.

It has been nine years since I’d dreamt of the lady in white with the sparkling eyes who had led me to my very own destiny.
AS THE OPENING night of Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie draws closer, the actors, along with their nerves, begin to tighten up. Each rehearsal brings forth a plethora of new problems of which the players must resolve, leaving the director in a state of quandary as he must simultaneously deal with ever-inflating egos and finishing touches. An early copy of the play's program has been given to the cast and crew to double check the spelling of their names, bios and such but a debacle soon arises from two of the most antagonistic cast members, Katherine and Lawrence; the director unobtrusively exits. He knows that it is outside of his power to control their conceit-driven argument.

Katherine. Oscar! Oscar! Where is Oscar? There is a typo in the program. Just when you need the director, he odds and leaves. Just like a typical man.

Lawrence. Kathy, my dear, what seems to be the problem? Did your bio forget to exaggerate your talent?

Katherine. Eat it, Lawrence. And don't call me Kathy. You should know very well what the problem is. I bet you and Oscar collaborated with each other to embarrass me like this.

Lawrence. I'm sure you are more than capable of doing that yourself.

Katherine. Go suck an egg, Lawrence. Oscar! Oscar!

Lawrence. There is nothing wrong with the program, you paranoid shrew! Everything is as it should be—perfect and everlasting.

Katherine. Everything is not how it should be! You and your character are listed first in the program! It's the most obvious error in the world, yet you seem to ignore it like the imbeciles you are! Everyone knows that I am playing the lead.

Lawrence. The lead? Of all the times I have ever found you slightly retarded, my dear, this one takes the cake. Your mind is as crippled as your character's leg. Actually, I take that back. Laura was barely crippled. You are far worse than her! I am the lead as Tennessee Williams intended, and you must just swallow your pride and deal with it.

Katherine. You? The lead? You are as illiterate as you are self-obsessed. How can you possibly be the lead in this play?

Lawrence. First and foremost, I am the narrator. The most meaningful insights come from Tom's words. And he doesn't just set up and describe the play's premises and characters, either! Tom sees life the way no other character does, deep and with layers of disguise—and like most literature, that would be qualification enough for a main character.

Katherine. So the narrator constitutes the protagonist. Oh, how foolish of me to have thought differently.

Lawrence. You are a fool. I said no such thing. In works like Catcher in the Rye, 1984, and almost anything else, the main character can view the world as deeply as he can view himself. Listen to part of his opening monologue—might I repeat, his opening monologue—"The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic" (1709). Insights such as that cannot come from a character who merely supports the play itself.

Katherine. I beg to differ. There are many cases in literature and in this play where the narrator is not the most insightful. For example, Laura, who is not the narrator, gives life to her glass ornaments—her glass menagerie by which the play derives its title. By doing this, she shows the audience the true meaning of the play, which in turn shows an even deeper meaning of society and its outcasts in general. For goodness' sake, Lawrence, she allows a beautiful unicorn to be a misfit among horses! Imagine that! A delicate and ethereal creature ostracized from amongst a bunch of horses—dime a dozen horses. She is personifying the unicorn to represent herself! From there, she is showing the audience that the misfits of society are just beautiful creatures who are misunderstood. If that isn't insightful and unorthodox, then I don't know what is.

Lawrence. How Freudian of you, woman. You sound so desperate to have your name listed first. It's quite sad really.

Katherine. I can't believe how unreasonable you are. How can you explain that at the climax of the play, Tom was nowhere in sight? He was washing dishes! Not very main-character-like of him, now is it?

Lawrence. And what, pray tell, is the climax of the play?
Katherine. I hope you are humoring me, Lawrence, or I might have to have you committed for stupidity. The climax of the play is obviously the scene where Laura kisses Jim. The entire play is based around that kiss, around her! Can't you see? Without Laura there is no *Glass Menagerie*!

Lawrence. (*Snidely chuckles*). You really should be in Hollywood, Kathy, because you are inconsistent and full of superficiality. Here you were talking about how deep and unorthodox Laura’s insights were, yet you claim the oh-so obvious when it comes to the climax. That kiss was the climax alright, but it was the climax of the romantic surface Tennessee Williams placed there to please you women who happened to be in the audience. If you think *The Glass Menagerie* is about some old, long lost love, climaxing at a long-awaited kiss, then you are more clichéd than a Hallmark card.

Katherine. Tell me then, what is the meaning and the climax of the play? And don't call me Kathy!

Lawrence. The two go hand in hand, my dear. The play is about dreams that go beyond a high school crush. The play is about needs and wants which require change. Perhaps the first large change was the kiss between Laura and Jim, since she has finally allowed someone into her personal space, yet that is only the tip of the iceberg. The real and most dramatic change, or the climax, dear Kathy, is when Tom leaves the family's apartment for good, marking the ultimate chase of dreams. This is the first domino to a long line of self-sufficiency.

Katherine. And you claimed I was being Freudian. Now you've completely subdivided the play to support your ego.

Lawrence. *My* ego? You're the one who wants to change the program just to satisfy your damn self-righteousness.

Katherine. Of course you would think I'm just thinking about myself. You're a self-centered man who gets intimidated by strong-willed women, so all the blame is on us when we demand recognition.

Lawrence. I have had enough of your man-bashing misandry, woman! To show you that you are wrong without bias, I'll ask Rosie for her opinion on this.

Katherine. Fine with me. I will go too.

Lawrence and Katherine. Rosie! We need your help with something.

Rosie. What is it now?
I AM SHROUDED in sheets that haven’t been changed in weeks. The rank smell of my unwashed body rises from the tangled mess of my bed to join the other odors that have infiltrated from outside and that hover in the stifling room. I live on a street that becomes an open-air market every morning. Fruit, vegetables, sizzling wok oil, and humanity—I can’t see them, but I can smell them. Maybe they can smell me. Summers in Hong Kong are hot and unbearably humid. A corpse wouldn’t last an hour before its putrefaction would alarm the neighbors.

I open my eyes and watch dust motes float in a shaft of light that has penetrated into the enveloping chiaroscuro of the room through a broken slat in the wooden shutters. It spotlights a cockroach scuttling across the wooden floor.

I stare up at the broken ceiling fan and silently continue my mantra. I’ve been lying here for hours without moving. Then my decision hits me like a sadistic epiphany and the apathy that envelops me dissolves. When I stand I’m overwhelmed by a wave of weakness and my vision suddenly narrows to a tunnel surrounded by a halo of black and I slump backwards into the bed. The next time I stand, I’m cautious. I dress myself, grab my purse, the keys to the apartment, and leave.

I press the button to call the lift. My lover Jean-Claude and I call it the Cro-Magnon of modern elevators. In my present state of mind, its narrowness reminds me of a coffin. My heart races and I wish I were already back in my room. When I open the door of the quiet, shadowy entrance of my building and step outside into the sunlight, it is akin to passing from one world to another.

I love the history surrounding Hong Kong. Pirates used to hide among the islands of Hong Kong’s fragmented coastline and rob passing ships of their cargo. The British began their colonization of Hong Kong and the New Territories when the Qing dynasty granted them a 99-year lease in 1898. Hong Kong’s unique blend of British and Chinese culture makes it the most fascinating place I have ever visited. For the last three years, I have been spending my summers there.

When I first arrived, I stayed in the White House Hotel. My modeling agent told me it was a hotel used for lovers’ trysts and for hookers to bring in their clients. Now I’m staying in an apartment in the heart of the infamous
Wan Chai district, a neighborhood spotted with girlie bars. Wan Chai was made famous by the film *The World of Suzie Wong*.

Always a rich sensory experience for me, Wan Chai has taken on a surrealistic aspect that wasn't there a few weeks ago before I closed myself in the apartment. The numerous inhabitants of Wan Chai jostle each other in the crowded streets. Trams and buses, cars and trucks, bicycles and rickshaws vie with pedestrians for space, adding to the confusion. My eyes flit back and forth across the street as I slowly make my way through the crowd.

I perceive everything around me in a slow motion array of staccato images. Ambulant vendors with strident voices hawk their wares. The smoke and smell of sizzling oil engulf me as I pass near the wok of an improvised sidewalk restaurant. Serious faces. Smiling faces. Some people stand tall, mostly the young ones. The older ones, bent by age, are possibly bent by something more—the burdens of a life almost too heavy to bear.

I pay the equivalent of fifteen American cents and take the Star ferry to Kowloon. Distracted by my thoughts, I almost walk into the path of a Rolls Royce that is pulling up to the hotel. The driver warns me with his claxon. A beautiful couture-clad young woman steps out of the car. It isn't unusual to see an elegantly dressed youth arrive in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce to enjoy dim sum at teatime in the pen—it's the "done thing." The click-click-click of the woman's high-heeled shoes takes her past a rather emaciated man sitting in his rickshaw waiting for customers. The rickshaw driver's skin is finely-etched parchment stretched over high flat cheekbones, and his eyes are milky blue with age. He has only a few white wisps of hair left on his shiny baldhead speckled through with age spots. The young woman doesn't acknowledge his presence; he doesn't acknowledge hers. Elegance and wealth live side by side in polite denial with poverty and squalor. Occasionally, they exchange a parasitic kiss.

I buy myself dim sum from a street vendor. It is the first bite of food that I have eaten in almost 24 hours. I continue my walk until I arrive at my destination.

I enter a doorway framed by piles of trash and pass beneath a lopsided sign announcing an apothecary. Inside, a ceiling fan makes creaking noises as it whirls to cool the shop. A young pharmacist is incongruous in his professional white lab coat amidst the bizarre collection of items that fill this store.
I can't identify those mummified things hanging from twine, and the human-shaped ginseng roots filling a basket fascinate me. I imagine them getting up and running away like tiny gingerbread men. Behind the pharmacist are rows of wooden shelves weighed down by ceramic jars that seem to be filled with a variety of herbs, judging by the pungent scents that pervade the shop.

I remember why I'm here when the man asks if he can help me with anything. I explain that I suffer from insomnia and ask if he could give me some sleeping pills without a prescription. He complies with me wishes sans hesitation. The palms of my hands are perspiring. I use the brown paper bag containing the sleeping pills to absorb their wetness.

My reality has become the auditory equivalent of a Salvador Dali painting. I see people animatedly moving their mouths, but no sound accompanies their moving lips. On the ferry ride back to Wan Chai, I'm not aware I'm crying until the tears begin to stuff up my nose. I wipe my nose on the back of my hand. Before returning home, I buy some beer.

Back in the apartment, my hand shakes as I empty the paper bag of its contents. I feel hollow—my thoughts echo inside of me. I sit on my bed wondering which would be the easiest way to take enough capsules to overdose. I take one and swallow it, chancing it down with a long swig of beer. I look at the pile and decide I can't possibly take them one by one. I get a glass from the kitchen and fill it up with beer. I empty the capsules in the glass and swallow this concoction, grimacing at the bitterness. I wonder what it'll feel like to die and how long it'll take. My determination finally frightens me and I begin to sob. Nonetheless, I hide all clues of what I've done behind some trash in the waste bin.

I go to the living room and turn on the television. Benny Hill is on and I find his comic gags grotesque. I imagine his face painted up like a clown's and popping out of a child's bedroom closet in the night—the stuff of nightmares. I think I feel a little different and wonder if the pills are taking effect.

Jean-Claude arrives home unexpectedly early. I slur a greeting, "What's wrong?" he asks. "Are you drunk?"

I don't answer and continue staring at Benny Hill. Jean-Claude grabs my face and forces me to look him in the eyes.

"Answer me!" he says. I watch him search the apartment. He finds the empty bottle of beer. He searches the waste bin and finally finds the discarded bottle and its emptied capsules. Now his movements have urgency as he dials a number on the phone; I tune him out and concentrate on Benny the killer clown.

Not much later, I hear the doorbell. I tear my gaze from the television and see Jean-Claude and his friend Marco looking at me with serious faces. They grab me and tell me they are taking me to a hospital to get my stomach pumped out. I fight both of them. They have to drag me kicking and screaming out of the apartment, but they still can't get me into the elevator. I place both feet on either side of the elevator coffin and Jean-Claude swears. He finally loses his temper and kicks my legs out of the way. Both men need all their strength to finally get me in there. Once the men squish themselves in the elevator with me, I collapse. They carry me to the taxi and take me to the hospital.

The next few minutes unfold in my mind with a slow motion special effect—hazy freeze frames of Chinese nurses with unsmiling faces dressed in white tying me down to the bed. I glance down at my wrists and see them dripping blood. I am perplexed because I didn't slit my wrists. I can even hear the echoes following the fat plop of each drop as it hits the floor. I'm mesmerized. I wonder if I'm hallucinating and what happens next confirms it. I turn my head slowly towards a nurse who has entered the room and who is speaking to me. I think to myself how very strange she can speak without opening her mouth; behind her, other people are dressed in white and they force a tube into my mouth. My vision begins fading and my last coherent thought is a question: "Am I real or am I part of a surrealist reality?"
HAVE YOU lived your life to the fullest? Did you make an impact in anyone’s life or even your own? When your time comes, will you feel complete or will die a life unfulfilled? Dylan Thomas’ poem, “Do not go gentle into that good night” captures this theme. The poem expresses that life is not to be taken for granted; death is inevitable—so make a difference. His main theme in this poem is that no matter who you are and what you have achieved, when it is your end, do not “go gentle,” fight, even “rage” against death.

Thomas wrote this poem—with great passion and meaning—for his ill father. Thomas had seen his father slowly dying for many years and witnessing his dad on his deathbed during his father’s final days, he expresses great sadness and anger. His father had been a very spirited and choleric man all of his life; his character was never soft or gentle. For Thomas to see his father at the end of his life this way was uneasy. This was a clear imploration. At the end of his poem he laments, “Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray. / Do not go gentle into that good night. / Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (17-19). He says “curse, bless” basically saying “yell, scream, praise me” “with your fierce tears,” with the passion and strength that his father once held—don’t lie there, tame and soft. Thomas wishes for his father to fight death, “rage”—don’t fade away. These particular quotes strongly portray the setting and tone of the piece. You get the sense that Thomas is there sitting bedside him in a dimly lit room, holding his father’s frail hands, tears running down his face, angrily yelling at his father, praying that his words might breathe life back into his sickly body.

The second line notes, “Old age should burn and rage at the close of day” (02). When you are old and approaching the end of your life “burn and rage”—scream, yell, have passion, be energetic, don’t just lie in your grave before you are ready. Many elderly individuals decide that they are too old, too tired to continue life’s fulfillment. They believe that there isn’t much that they can do. The “old” give into their “age” and the stereotypes of being old. They “go gentle” into death.

“Wise men” speak of those who are more knowledgeable about life and what it entails. Thomas utters, “Though wise men at their end know dark is right, / Because their words had forked no lightning they / Do not go gentle into that good night” (04-06). What he is saying here is that even “wise men” know that one cannot escape death, but they don’t want to accept this fate be-
DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT

Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

cause “their words had forked no lightning”—they had not made any impact or a difference during their lifetime. “Wise” people live their lives thinking that they make all the right decisions. They think things through, map life out. During their last days they realize that that was not enough. You can’t plan everything.

Subsequent lines depict “Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright / Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay” (07-08). He points out that “good men” that do immeasurable deeds throughout their lives still come to the end, to their “last goodbye,” thinking that their good deeds did not have time to demonstrate all their glory. They too “rage” against death. There are many who go through life recognized for their benevolence. When death knocks at their door, they also realize that their deeds have not come to fruition.

There are those who live life on the edge; these “wild men” also feel incomplete at death: “Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight, / And learned, too late, they grieved it on its way” (10-11). They live life to the fullest; live life by the moment as if it was their last. Though they come to the end of their life, they come to learn “too late” that they actually “grieved” throughout life. They actually were running from real life, from any meaning in life, from the truth. They were trying to mask their sadness and fear. When the end comes, they figure out that it is too late and that they wasted a lifetime chasing an unreachable dream. They too fight the inevitable. Many people go through life nonchalantly, being rather mercurial and not taking life seriously because they don’t want to face reality. They don’t want to confront that they are getting older and they have responsibilities to others and themselves. They refuse to face the truth until the truth finally faces them.

Those trapped in their final moments, men that are sick and dying, “who see with blinding sight”, who see the “light at the end of the tunnel” can, too, live life to its fullest: “Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight / Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay” (13-14). Young, old, healthy, or ill, there is always a chance to fight death and live your life to the fullest. It’s never too late.

I found Thomas’ poem to be motivational and enlightening. I try to live my life the best I can, shape my children to be honorable and caring and to live life to the fullest trying their best at everything that they do, never accepting defeat. Reflecting on Thomas’ words, I can’t help but realize that I live life too
carefully, worrying about what others think or getting easily intimidated. If I were to die today, I would die with regret in my heart. I want to fight to live so that I may complete any unfinished business. The person I need to change is the person who gives up and doesn’t try her hardest. Many times I do just what I need to do to get by. Every day that passes, I contemplate my life and realize that I could have done so much more.

People do not really think about death—it hardly warrants contemplation. But when it approaches, it approaches quickly and as your life flashes before you, questions run through your head. Did I do all that I could have? Did I fulfill all that I needed or desired? Did I make an impact or a difference? Was my life lived to the fullest? Even if you map out your life or not, in the end, is that enough? Will you feel complete? Death does not favor the poor or the rich, the miserable or the mirthful, the saint or the sinner. As such, live your life to the fullest: “Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

“MY GRANDFATHER’S LEGACY”

Expository work by Rico Sablan
OVER THE YEARS, I have often been separated from everyone outside my immediate family for long periods of time. My sense of family slowly fades into nothing more than the intangible memories of times past. On the rare occasion that I reunite with my relatives, my sense of family is renewed in full, once I visit our family restaurant. The mixture of delicious food and the presence of family members always finds a way to comfort my soul. I’m reminded fully of the numerous people that care for me, and love me unconditionally. Hamilton’s Bar and Restaurant infuses me with a strong feeling of family, particularly for my late grandfather; after all, it was his efforts that cultivated prosperity for both our family and our family’s restaurant.

My grandfather, Wilburn Chandler Hamilton, affectionately called “Chief” by bar patrons, is nothing less than a legend. Located in the heart of the tiny island of Saipan, the bar was founded by him sometime in the early 1960’s after he retired from the U.S. Navy, and he is responsible for the large number of long-time patrons that have accumulated over the years. Since then the Chief has made many friends and devoted customers through his natural charm and friendliness. One of these many patrons, Jim Kirby, reminisces about times when he, “enjoyed many a good evening at Hamilton’s bar, and some of those nights, so filled with Ham’s good humor and special talent at storytelling, have become the stuff that memories are made of”(01). This quote holds true for many fans of Hamilton’s Bar because the most attractive part of the bar was not the bar itself, but the personality behind it. The Chief told the most interesting and wildest stories and he told them well. Without the charisma and playful antics that my grandfather was blessed with, Hamilton’s bar would just be another dull, lifeless tavern.

My grandfather loved his bar, and was probably the only man that could have brought so much magic to the place so that it came alive. P.F. Kluge, a former correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, as well as one of the Chief’s good friends believes that Chief “was put on earth to run a bar on Saipan, to shrug, shudder, and shout about local goings-on, and to regard life with a Tennessee hillbilly’s leery squinting eye”(132). When the Chief wasn’t spinning tales of his old Navy exploits or adding to the fire of political debates between drunken men, he would be on the forefront of a conversation about the newest happenings on the island. He was usually quick to state his strong opinions on whatever topic sprouted from the tongues of his patrons in a flurry of “shrugs, shudders, and shouts.” Although he was kind and friendly in nature, he was also very straightforward. If he didn’t like you, he would tell you so outright.

Most of the customers were on the Chief’s good side and joined in on his fun-filled nature. Kluge told of “some nights [when] he breaks out his harmonica, sings navy ditties, dances Smoky Mountain jigs, til Carmen, his Chamorro wife, comes out the kitchen, intervenes, and leads him away”(132). On nights like this, the whole bar would light up and smiles, laughter, and cheering soared throughout the bar. If it wasn’t his harmonica, then he would unveil his banjo and expertly play his collection of country songs to the crowd. My grandfather was a true crowd pleaser, and he truly added flavor to the bar. It’s no wonder he attracted so many customers through his personality alone. Add good food and drinks and you get a perfect atmosphere for all types of people.

Hamilton’s was one of the few places in Saipan where you could enjoy American food. Randy Fennel, another constant patron, remembers stumbling across “Hamilton’s by accident or mistake, following the noise and smell, and finding (to his disbelief) chicken fried steak, with mashed potatoes and gravy, Kentucky style—my first non-rice based meal in weeks”(01). Most of the island was littered with local Chamorro or Asian foods, and to find a place serving mashed potatoes had once been near impossible. According to Mike Imai, an author for the local magazine Isema, Hamilton’s was for “the American away from home, or for the non-American who would like a taste of Kentucky”(19). The menu was filled with American food including salisbury steak, golden brown fried chicken, ribeye steak, mashed potatoes, cheeseburgers with fries, and a whole assortment of other foods. All the customers fell in love with the delicious variety of food, regardless if they were American or Chamorro.

Hamilton’s was actually the downstairs portion of my grandparents’ two-story home. Once you step inside, you’re treated to a nice and cool atmosphere, which proves to be a pleasant escape from the hot and humid air that clings to you outside. You are first treated to a dining area that connects my grandmother’s kitchen to the bar. Red tiles line the entire floor, signifying my grandfather’s favorite color. The walls are covered with nostalgic candy for my elders. Remnants from World War II are laden within a glass case, including rusted canteens, helmets, and pieces of ancient guns. Pictures of the Chief’s younger years when he was in the Navy as well as our family’s crest all decorate the walls nicely. The mixed aroma of cigarette smoke, frothy beer, and food
from the kitchen filled the room. Laughter, the clink-clanking of mugs toasting, pool balls rolling within the innards of the pool table, and the chatter of voices, all drowned your ears.

As you venture further inside, towards the bar area, you are treated to a variety of wonders. On one wall there hangs an orange life preserver, undoubtedly one of the remnants of the Chief’s past. Directly to the right is a hand-drawn mural of some old Western cowboy frowning in your direction with his eyes squinted. Although he bears no resemblance to my grandfather, that didn’t stop bar patrons from naming him John Wayne. Perched menacingly atop the portrait, there rests authentic Texas longhorn bullhorns that almost seem as if they’re sprouting from the cowboy’s head. The adjacent wall holds up the bulletin board, filled with many pictures and quotes displaying tidbits of drunken humor. Beside that wall was the bar’s pool table which required two quarters to shoot a game of pool. An ancient jukebox was snuggled between the last wall and the bar itself. The songs hadn’t been changed for ages, and consisted mostly of old country songs or pop hits from the 60’s. Six stools line up along the bar counter and the cash register was placed somewhere on the far right. The Chief named his cash register his “piano” and would love to have his customers “tinkle his piano”. Behind the cash register is a long rectangular mirror that reflects the neat rows of glasses, and liquor used in the bar. The bar area has remained relatively the same since Hamilton’s first opened.

Recently, after the passing of my grandfather, Hamilton’s has gone through a few changes. John Ravelo of the Saipan Tribune indicates that “when the Navy officer died in 1998, his youngest daughter Ruby Jean and husband Rick Northen took over the management of the bar, expanding business operations and projecting further growth”(01). After the drama that accompanied my grandfather’s death, my aunt Ruby and uncle Rick took it upon themselves to take the helm of our family’s business and as such, made a few changes. The first major change was the transformation of the building opposite Hamilton’s into an add-on for the restaurant. This add-on allowed for more people to enjoy the restaurant as there was more room for larger crowds to attend. The entire menu was redone with many new foods and desserts added courtesy of my aunt’s imagination. Since then the popularity of Hamilton’s has grown and the restaurant as well as the bar continues to thrive with both old and new patrons.

Looking back on my time spent at the bar, I’ll never forget how much fun I used to have, frequenting the pool table inside of the bar along with my cousins. The pool table itself was rumored to be given to my grandfather by Minnesota Fats, a world renowned pool shark of his time. I was only eight years old at the time, but playing on that table made me feel like an adult. I was surrounded by the cheerful sounds of drunken humor accompanied by my grandfather’s voice spinning another one of his famous tales. This particular one involved a chicken named Charlie. He went on to boast that one of his dogs had rescued it during a typhoon and, consequently, it became dog-like in many ways. For example, Charlie wouldn’t sleep in the big mango tree next to the bar like the other chickens, but ate, slept and barked with his many dogs. “That’s outrageous,” chided one of the customers, “I’ve never heard or noticed any chicken barking any of the times I’ve come here, there’s only your dogs!” “That’s because ol’ Charlie is special,” the Chief replied, “he doesn’t bark at his paying customers, but if yer up to no good Charlie’ll pop out from hiding an’ bark you up a storm!” “Alright,” the customer smiled, “so what’s gonna happen when I don’t pay my tab and walk out, he’ll come out barking right?” The Chief retorted in his inimitable style: “Sorry, earlier one of my workers accidentally used Charlie for his stew and he barks no more, I shit you not.” The entire bar burst into side-splitting laughter.

To many, Hamilton’s Bar and Restaurant has become a sort of safe haven over the years. All sorts of people have familiarized themselves with it, and it is a nice place for people to escape their troubles or forget them completely. The food and the company have attracted many dedicated customers over the years. For me, I consider it to be the only place that I can feel truly comfortable in the arms of my family. My grandfather’s legacy will continue to thrive and the countless memories will forever be engraved into the hearts of his loyal patrons. I’m sure my grandfather’s spirit lives on and watches over the place as it ages and begins to change. In fact, I’m sure his spirit is imbued within the entire place itself. Perhaps one day in the future it will be forced to close down completely, but that won’t stop people from remembering the magic and wonder that it once held in their hearts.
This is the third, and final, annual collaboration between adviser Davin Kubota and designer Vuong Phung for *Spectrum Magazine*. On this project, they welcome Jane Wong as editor.

They hope the campus readers will continue to support *Spectrum* and her sister publications by submitting their essays and artwork—to push forth the purpose behind K.C.C.'s student journals—to demonstrate the diversity of opinions and perspectives on this campus.

It was a privilege to work on this magazine. Many thanks to the students, staff, and faculty who contributed to the process. If readers are interested in submitting essays and portfolios to any of the publications, an e-mail to kapio@hawaii.edu would be more than welcome.

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