

# DIAMOND JOURNAL



Spring 2003

# DIAMOND JOURNAL

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## Dust

Anonymous

*"Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!*

*The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;  
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,*

*We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun."*

As those last words echoed throughout the hospital room, I watched four tears roll down her cheek. My cousin reached over the bed to wipe them away with a tissue. My great grandma was unconscious and probably couldn't hear what we were singing, her favorite hymn ever, yet she cried. She knew, as well as we did, that there was no more hope for her recovery. At the rate her heart was going, her condition could only worsen. I wanted to cry, but I wouldn't allow the tears to come. I stood next to her bed, holding her hand and wondering what to do next. I looked around the tiny room and saw her sisters, brothers, sons, daughters and a few of her grandchildren. I was the only great grandchild there. Everyone else was in the waiting room. There were two chairs, a nightstand, a closet, a sink, and right next to that, the door to the bathroom. The walls were bare; this was hardly a place for decorations. The only contrast was the red and green writing on the dry-erase board that shouted the names of the nurses tending to the patient.

I looked at my grandma then back at the dry-erase board. I didn't like the



uncomfortable expression my grandma wore on her face. I didn't like the way there was no beautiful, reassuring smile I was so used to seeing as a child. I didn't like the way her hair was matted against her scalp, making her seem older than ever. I didn't like the way the tubes came out of her from all places going back into machines and bags and to who knows where. I didn't like the way her skin looked, pale and yellowish like aged wax. It looked like she was decaying right before our eyes. Her lying there on that hospital bed so small, thin and fragile looked all wrong. She didn't belong there; she belonged at home, sitting in front of the TV watching the UH volleyball game.

I glanced back at the dry-erase board as everyone was doing their own thing – either talking softly amongst themselves, looking at grandma with concern and worry, or staring off into space like I was. The dry-erase board was written in bright colors that stood out in the depressing room. There were four names on the board, each trying to attract the passer-by's attention. All four got mine, but I was irritated. It wasn't a happy room; it was a room with a patient who was on her deathbed. The board started to get to me. What was this vulgar piece of wood and metal doing hanging on the wall of a morbid room? I wanted to walk over to it, take it down and hurl it out the window. But my cousins would have thought I was crazy if I did anything like that; the windows were locked and I couldn't have opened one; I was holding my grandma's papery but comfortable hand and refused to let go. I wanted to do something to get that thing out of my grandma's room. I felt so much anger and tension that I had to let go of my grandma's fragile hand before I squeezed it too hard.

I remember when grandma had been in the hospital about four months earlier because she had fluid in her lungs. We all knew that she would pull together and be back at home in no time. The nurses and my cousins decorated the dry-erase board in the room so that when she woke up in the middle of the night she would see the board and have more hope because she knew that people loved her. We did those things because she needed the support, and we knew she could come out of the darkness. Those times were much more comforting. All of her family still came to see her in the hospital; we talked to her, comforted her, encouraged her, and told her that everything would be okay. Everything would be okay . . . things were different then.

Yes, things were different. Grandma had a love for UH sports ever since one of her grandson's friends played basketball in college. She was a die-hard fan for such an old lady. Her family meant so much to her, she would do anything for any of us. But she was a very stubborn person. She always knew what she wanted and accomplished it. She was headstrong and optimistic. She was the one to bring the family together. I remember all of the kids would go to her house to swim. We'd have lunch with her and sometimes din-



ner. Those were the best of times. We played in the sun all day long and turned so brown that grandma would claim that she hardly recognized us. She knew exactly how to make everyone happy. She was a woman of gravity. Everyone and everything was pulled in by her charm whether they liked it or not. I was pulled in. We all were. We still are...

The gloomy room came back into perception and I noticed I was still staring at those bright, glaring words. There was no hope anymore. She was given no chance to try when she was admitted to the ER. She had no chance after that seizure. Everything was wrong, all wrong. She had been so healthy when I went over to her house to swim just a few days before she went into the ER. But I won't be seeing her at her home anymore. My cousins and I would always swim together. But there would be no more joyful swimming. We had lunch after we swam. But Grandma wouldn't be there to cook us fabulous lunches. I didn't get the chance to ask her how to make her famous chi chi dango. She was supposed to live past ninety to see my graduation. She promised me. But she won't be there. She was so healthy. Not anymore. I didn't understand. I didn't want to understand.

I couldn't get over that dry-erase board. The little rail under it held a few different colored pens, an eraser and the dust collecting at the edge of the metal made me cringe. The dust was created from the many erasings made in the past. Though it wasn't the health factor that pissed me off – it was how easily the nurses could erase away a schedule, a life, as though it was common for a person to die in their care. I knew from previous experiences that the floor we were on was for those who were terminally ill and wouldn't last long. I couldn't get mad at the nurses because they were just doing their job. But that pile of eraser dust showed how many lives had passed through that room. How could it be so easy to erase a person's last days away? How could it have been so easy to draw cute little get well notes only four months ago, then erase it when she went home? If I had tried to draw right then, my hands would not have permitted it. She wouldn't be able to see it or grasp some bit of hope from it. She wouldn't be waking up in the middle of the night ever again. The board was devoid of any cute drawings. There were only the nurses' names in coarse colors.

I heard everyone around me gasp. I looked at my grandma, then realized that I had missed her last breath. I was standing there getting worked up about eraser dust when my grandma was dying. She would have wanted me to see her, see her last second of life on earth, but I didn't. I didn't know what to feel. The anger from the eraser dust was still circling around my head. I heard the long, steady beep of the heart monitor. The screeching was unbearable. I couldn't stand it. I didn't believe that my grandmother had just left us. It wasn't possible. We never expected her to leave. She couldn't. She was just sleeping on the bed like before. But she wasn't. The long beep told all. There was no denying it. I

wished so hard that she would open her eyes, look at all of us in astonishment and tell us to get out of her way so she could go home. I wished with all my strength that she would do that.

I knew that it was impossible, but that was the only thing I wanted in the world, besides getting rid of that ridiculous dry-erase board. I didn't want another life to be erased into dust.



## Understanding

Anonymous

I was watching the local news one morning and there was a story on it about an elderly person beating their spouse to death with a cane. The spouse had Alzheimer's and must have driven the sane one over the edge as well. I just sat there and nodded my head. I completely understood the situation. Oddly enough, I can understand what the beater was going through.

As I'm trying to catch the rest of the story, Grandma blocks my view of the television. She's sweeping the floor in a flurry of agitation. She's swept the floor about ten times in the past hour. The finish is wearing out on the wood floor. The swishing noise is really grating on my nerves. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if she were really sweeping, but she's just moving the broom around and around in circles, almost as if she's mopping the floor.

I have to go back to my home office and shut the door. I can hear her coming down the hallway, smacking the broom into walls. The clacking against the floor boards is an all too familiar sound. I call my Mom and talk to her for awhile, just trying to catch my breath. She tells me to go and get the broom and hide it, but I know that'll just further agitate Grandma. Plus she'll ask me every five minutes if I've seen the broom.

As soon as I'm feeling better, I open up the door of the office. Her bedroom is just across the hallway and her door is open. A horrible odor is slowly pouring out and seeping through out the rest of the house. I look down the hall and spot her in the living room, so I sneak into her bathroom, flush her toilet and go back into the office and open the window. Grandma has forgotten the simplest task like how to flush the toilet.

I lay out her clothes for her to change into and tell her to get ready. I have to drive her to the doctors' office for a follow up appointment. She's in an adult day care program Monday through Friday and a TB test is required once a year. She's mad about something, but I have a hard time understanding her because she's grumbling to herself. We get up to the office where they know her well. The first thing they ask me is if she's in a good mood. I just smile at them knowingly. Usually I'll accompany her to the room, but they just have to read the test so they tell me that I can wait in the waiting room if I want. I can hear her raising her voice to the nurse. "I'm not going! I'm not going there! I told her I don't want to go!" I go back to the room that she's in and I ask her what's wrong. "I told you I'm not



going to the mainland with you. I don't need to be here."

"It's ok, Grandma. We're not going to the mainland. Let's go home okay?" She follows me out. I promised her I'd take her home, but by the time we're out of the parking lot, she's forgotten already and is arguing with me again. On the way home I had to promise her seven times that's where I was taking her. Instead I swing by the adult day care and drop her off. She's instantly pacified and is pleased to see the care givers at day care. Grandma actually thinks she's going to "school" where she "teaches."

She likes to hang out on the porch when she's at home. We've fenced it in and a portion of the yard. She walks around the yard and talks to the trees, the sky or to herself. She'll sit for hours and pet her cats. They used to be indoor cats, but she kept locking them up in her room all day. The carpet became their litter box, one more thing for me to clean, one more odor to deal with. I tried to put a litter box in there for them, but she would stuff litter down the drain in her sink, so eventually we had to convert them to outdoor cats, something they still protest about in the middle of the night, up on the roof.

Grandma used to be a really good house cleaner, but not anymore. She sticks dirty dishes in the cabinet. She thinks a brief swipe with a damp dishcloth constitutes washing dishes. She applies the same concept to cleaning the toilet. Yep, a brief swipe with my dishcloth. Needless to say, we spend a lot of money on them. No matter where I hid them, she can find them.

She stashes food in her bedroom even though she eats all day long. We have shakedown on a regular basis, usually when she's in day care. We recover the food that she's stashed, along with a lot of our personal belongings that she's claimed for her own. Her personal hygiene has reached an all time low. She doesn't put anything except trash into her laundry hamper. I have to go through her clothes once a week and decipher what's clean and what's dirty. Unfortunately, it's easier sometimes than others.

We get a lot of unsolicited advice on how to care for her. The first and foremost is "Why don't you get her Depends?" "Have you ever tried to put a 127 pound, 76 year old in a diaper?" I ask them. "Trust me when I tell you that there is no reasoning with her, and she is not going to slip it on herself."

There was the episode over her dentures too. Once I took her to the dentist to have the hardened polident cleaned off of them. Afterwards she kept hiding them. Once we went out to dinner and didn't realize until we got to the restaurant that she didn't have any teeth!

When dinner is over at home, it's a race to clean the kitchen and put everything away. I know if I don't do it, she'll want to and it'll turn into an argument. I sit down to watch a movie, and Grandma will ask me what's for dinner. There's no sense in telling her she just ate, so I tell her we're skipping dinner and just having dessert. Then I get her a piece of pie or cake or whatever I have on hand. She loves sweets, and this works for her.

At the end of the day, I breathe a sigh of relief. Another day is over and we've all survived. I go back to her room. She's been in there half an hour now. I peck on the door. I can never hear her, so I just open it up. (We replaced the old door knob with one that didn't have a lock.) I look in to make sure she's ok. Her lights are on, the windows are all open and she's standing in the middle of her room changing. This was never a problem before, but a new sub-division was built behind us a few years ago and now she's just flashing anyone who might be watching.

I close the windows and the curtains and help her into bed. I tell her goodnight and turn off the lights. I go back to my movie and sit down. My husband and I look at each other simultaneously; we sigh and roll our eyes. A few minutes later, Grandma pops out of her room. "Goodnight Jimmy, goodnight Cindy," she says. "Goodnight Grandma," we say in unison. Ok, so she'll come out another twenty times and tell us good night. We know the drill, and she does fall asleep eventually.



## Day of the Drill Sergeants

Jonathan Borders

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

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

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

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

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

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

From a door that was directly in front of where we stood entered a guy that was short and stocky, with a silver bar on his hat. Everything was silent for a minute or two. I don’t know why, but I felt even more nervous than I had before. I guess it was the anticipation. It wasn’t the only one feeling it though. I could feel it around me; every other private was feeling the same way.

Then, out of nowhere, the guy with the silver bar on his hat said very calmly,



“Good afternoon, and welcome to Delta Battery 1<sup>st</sup> of the 40<sup>th</sup>. I am your new commander, Lieutenant Rhodes.”

I was so surprised to hear him talk calmly. It was like he didn’t have a care in the world.

He went on by saying, “Privates, with hard work and determination, every one of you can graduate from here United States Soldiers.” He paused for a second, looked around at us, and said, “Is that a HOOAH!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

What was happening could be described as nothing more than mass confusion. I didn’t know what to do. One drill sergeant would tell us one thing, and then another would tell us the complete opposite. This nonsense went on for about 10 minutes. Then out of the confusion they all started yelling the same thing. “Grab your crap, get upstairs, get next to a bunk and toe the line”

This was easy for them to say. I knew I had over a hundred pounds worth of stuff, and they were telling me I would have to run up three flights of stairs with it. But, out of fear of what they would do if I didn’t do it, I ran up those stairs as fast as I could.

When we got into our sleeping bay I noticed how clean and quiet it was. Everyone picked a bunk. I didn't understand what he had meant by toe the line, until I looked down and saw a line on the floor. I stood behind it, looked straight ahead, and tried not to move a muscle.

A few minutes went by and you could have heard a pin drop. The silence was unnerving; I didn't know what to make of it. I guess they were trying to build up the anticipation.

All of a sudden, from my left side at the end of the bay I could hear, "What the hell is going on here?" and, "Shut up, you!"

Four pissed off Drill sergeants came out of side door of the bay. There was no introduction or greeting, just a lot of yelling. Three of them were very big white men. Their names were DS, as in Drill Sergeant, Gould, Dill, and Berden. The fourth was a short Hispanic guy named DS Medina. Even though he was the smallest, he could yell much louder than the other three and intimidate you much easier.

The first one I encountered personally was Drill Sergeant Dill. He walked up to me, after yelling at a few other privates, and said, "Hey, Drill Sergeants, we got the owner of a bookstore over here." It was because my last name is Borders, as in Borders Books.

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

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

He said, "Young, where's yer CD player?"

Young responded with, "I don't have a CD player, Drill Sergeant."

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



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

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

Not more than 5 seconds after that, stuff started flying in the air about four bunks down from me.

All I heard was DS Berden saying, “What the hell is this Harrell, you think this is funny? Holy crap drill sergeants, we got us a Junior Drill Sergeant.” Harrell had bought a Teddy bear with a little round and brown Drill sergeant’s hat on to send home to his family. This wasn’t the smartest idea. The hat looked like the hat Smokey the Bear wears.

The next few minutes were something I will never forget. All four of the Drill Sergeants were in his face and seemed to be speaking in tongues. I have never heard so much swearing at one time.

Harrell was forced to wear the Teddy Bear’s Drill Sergeant hat the rest of the day. When we showered that night, Harrell still had the hat on. This madness went on for about seven hours. For those seven hours, all we did was get yelled at, and do a lot of push-ups and other exercises.

During the seven-hour torture session, one private stood out more than anyone else.

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

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

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

“What is wrong with you, Nettles? If I didn’t know better, Nettles, I might think



you're stupid or something!"

It got really bad when we packed up our personal items. Nettles bought about 10 of everything. I'm talking 10 tubes of toothpaste, 10 bottles of aspirin, shoe polish; anything you could think of, he had it. It took him longer than anyone to pack because all of his excess stuff. This didn't make the drill sergeants happy.

DS Gould walked up to him and yelled at the top of his lungs, "NETTLES, DO YOU LIKE ME?"

I think everyone in the room was confused by that question. I knew for sure it was a trick. It didn't matter if he said yes or no. He was screwed.

Nettles hesitated, and with little confidence said, "Yes, Drill Sergeant, I like you."

Drill Sergeant Gould Quickly responded with, "Well likin' leads to lovin', lovin' leads to screwin', and the only one getting screwed around here is you, Nettles."

After this abuse, things seemed like they could not get any worse. They did.

"Strip down, put on a towel, and have a bar of soap in your left hand," screamed DS Dill. There were eight shower stalls for the 60 or so of us. They sent us in all at once. It was actually very gross. The next 20 minutes or so in those showers, I would like to forget. I'll leave it at that.

After we showered, we made our bunks for the first time. This was a time of almost total silence. No one wanted to talk to each other, for fear a Drill Sergeant would be around. It finally seemed like things were dying down. The day was coming to an end, so the Drill Sergeants sat us down and told us what they expected. DS Medina started, "Privates, I just want you to know that I will get nothing but excellence from you."

DS Gould told us, "In combat you may be in a foxhole with any of us drill sergeants, so privates, you better pay attention cause it'll save your life, and more importantly, our lives."

DS Medina said with a lot of pride, "Ya'll will now be known as the 4<sup>th</sup> platoon, and your platoon name is Wolf pack."

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

The whole platoon yelled out, "HOOAH!"

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

"What the hell are you doing, privates? Didn't I say ten minutes? GET IN YOUR BUNKS!"

I lay in my bunk and thought of home. I missed my own big comfortable bed, but I knew I was there for a good reason. Ever since I was in high school, I had wanted to be in the army. I wasn't going to give up so easily. It didn't take me long to fall asleep, I guess, because I was exhausted.

I didn't wake up at all until the loud noise of trashcans being hit went through my head. The drill sergeants were up and ready to make our lives hell.



## Two Birds With One Stone

Eric Franke

Starbucks, a place of serenity and peace. A place where someone can go and relax, read, and have a cup of coffee. I had been working at the Starbucks store in my hometown of Kailua-Kona for three years, since the beginning of my sophomore year in high school, and one of the first things I was taught during my training was that Starbucks tried to offer itself as a “third place.” A place that wasn’t home and wasn’t work but a place to enjoy peace. That is why none of us working that morning expected the event that was about to unfold. When the peacefulness was shattered like a Christmas ornament in the path of a rhinoceros.

It was a weekday morning like most mornings I had spent in that store. The sun was just rising and the place was packed with the usual crowd on their way to work, or to drop their child off at school, or both. The scent of the mixture of coffees filled the room. The Sumatra, the Arabian Mocha Java, the Espresso Roast, and the Café Verona among others, all mixed to form an aromatic masterpiece ever pleasant to the nose. The olfactory senses filled with café delight.

I was just starting to get into the groove of things, as I was not far into my shift. The regulars were in their usual places. Buckley was there with his pocket full of dimes, ready to spend all day with us, trying to impress us with his many splendid witticisms. Or so it seemed to him. Mike was there with his wallet full of bills, trying to buy a drink for every eligible lady in the place. Then there was Elaine. Elaine was an attractive forty something who came into the store most mornings to get her Chai Tea Latte.

“Hello, Elaine,” I said.

“Hello, Eric, how are you?” She chirped back in her usual friendly and giddy way. She gave her drink order to Vicki who was working the register. Vicki called the order to me.

“Double Tall Soy Latte, please, Eric.” Just as I was about to repeat the order back to her in confirmation, suddenly and without warning, CRASH! A loud sound echoed through the normality and disrupted everything, putting the store into chaos. Business people ducked under tables and near counters trying to avoid whatever it was that caused the commotion. Vicki, out of reflex yelled, “Everybody hit the ground!” She fell to the ground faster than a



sumo wrestler in a pair of roller-skates.

Vicki was from California, so she automatically assumed we were under fire from some ruthless drug lord. The rest of us, however, had lived in Kona for a while, so we stood at attention, staring outside as if we were little kids staring at a "Where's Waldo" book. After the initial shock wore off, we realized that a large rock had been thrown through the front window, and glass lay everywhere. It appeared everyone was all right. The rock had landed in one of the few unoccupied chairs. Our store manager Dave was immediately in hot pursuit of the culprit, leaping in Olympic fashion over the four-foot counter that stood in front of him. "Call 911!", he yelled to me as he dashed out of the store.

I ran into the back room and dialed the emergency number on the store phone. Ring, ring, finally an answer at the other end, "Nine-one-one. Please hold." I couldn't believe it. *Only in Kona does 911 put you on hold*, I thought to myself. The lady on the other end answered after a short time and I went through the necessary steps with her. The cops were on their way, so I went back out to the front of the store to help restore order. The customers were handling the disruption better than I had expected. I looked out the window to see Dave talking to a man across the street, just a stone's throw away. The man was sitting on the grass. He was middle aged with a thin build, and he wore a backpack. I watched Dave finish his conversation and walk back inside the store. "What's going on Dave?" I asked.

Dave went on to tell me that the man across the street was homeless. He was tired and hungry and was trying to go to jail so he could get something to eat and to get some sleep. Apparently he had tried the same thing late the night before, but the police wouldn't take him in because it would have been more of a reward than a punishment for the man. The man obviously assumed he would get more attention by casting his stone in a place occupied with people.

It worked. The police arrived and took the man into custody and then questioned a few witnesses. Slowly the store returned to normal, although we discussed the incident for many days after. Experiencing what happened that day spawned in me many curious thoughts about human survival and society and hunger and how people deal with problems.



## Why Did I Resist?

Rollie Grafious

It is a warm Friday night just before the beginning of summer. I am looking round at all of my closest friends and acquaintances having the time of their lives at the raging party my roommates and I decided to throw. All of a sudden, the door bursts in and men come charging into the house. They are all dressed in black and they all have helmets on their heads. They are armed with assault rifles and are carrying shields in front of them. All that you can hear is the sound of their voices yelling at you to "get down on the ground!" My first reaction is to panic and fight back. The fighting doesn't last long. I am thrown to the ground by several officers and put into an ankle lock by one of them. All I can do while feeling the pain shoot through my body is scream in agony. I am shouting at the top of my lungs for them to let me go. I am calling them every name in the book. I am demanding for them to show me the warrant. None of this is doing any good, so I try to take a deep breath and calm myself. I plead with the officer to let go of my ankle because I am experiencing intense physical suffering. He agrees to let go of my ankle as long as I keep quiet. I promise that I will.

After things slow down a little bit, I start to notice everything that is going on around me. I see the King County, Washington State SWAT Team still pointing their rifles at us. I hear a helicopter unit hovering up above, and I see its searchlights moving around outside. I also notice the sounds of K-9 units barking.

I am completely astonished. I feel as if I am in a dream. I am angry and scared and I can hardly believe that this is reality. I am realizing more each second that what is happening is real. I don't want to be here right now, but I have absolutely no choice. What am I to do?

My friend starts joking around, and I join in to try to lift the spirit in the room. Immediately, the same officer grabs my ankle and I return to a world of agony. I feel as if my ankle is about to snap. I plead through my misery. He tells me that he doesn't want me to say a word. I promise that I will be quiet. Anything is better than that pain.

After searching and rummaging through the house, the officers lead my friend, J.C., out in handcuffs. He is being arrested and investigated for VUCSA, which is Violation of Uniform Controlled Substances Act. It seems that the officers found a scale and some plastic bags, which count as evidence against him.



Now I am being handcuffed. I can't believe that I am being arrested on the same charge. Is somebody playing some kind of sick joke on me? I wish I hadn't resisted and had just kept quiet. I wouldn't be in this position. Now I am going to jail and there is nothing that I can do about it.

The officers lead me out of the house, down the driveway, and put me into the back seat of the car. J.C. and my other friend, J.R., are here with me. It seems that J.R. has some warrants out for his arrest, and he was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. I am extremely uncomfortable. The handcuffs are locked too tight and they are cutting off my circulation. I ask if the officers can loosen them up, but they just shake their heads.

The car starts to move and we're on our way to the "big house." I am trying to convince myself that this is only a nightmare, but it isn't working. There is no way out. Not long after, we roll up to the King County Correctional Facility. I never thought that I would be in this position. We get out of the car and are escorted to the booking area. In the booking area we sit, waiting for them to call our names. One by one, we are called into a room to be booked and fingerprinted. The officer takes my picture. He tells me to turn to the left, then to the right. After my mug shots are complete, it is time to move on to the next room.

An officer directs me to a counter and tells me to start taking off my clothes. I hand each piece of clothing through a little window to another police officer. It is now time to bend over and spread my cheeks. I make a wisecrack, but the officer doesn't seem to think it's funny. How depressing this whole situation is. They tell me to stand up and I am given an orange jumpsuit, a pair of socks, and a pair of slippers. I walk out of the room after putting on my new clothes and go to the next room to wait with the rest of the prisoners. I notice that my friend and I are the only ones wearing orange jumpsuits. All of the others are wearing blue jumpsuits. We figure out that the reason for this is that we are being held for felonies, while all of the others are being held for misdemeanors. This makes me feel much better.

It is now time to be escorted to the cellblock. Since the court hearings aren't until Monday, we have to spend the whole weekend in jail. This is getting worse by the minute. One of the officers calls out each of our names and tells us which holding cell to go to. We are each given a pillow, a blanket, and a personal hygiene kit. How luxurious. We are being treated like royalty. We go to our assigned cells and the doors are locked shut. I try to get some sleep, but it's next to impossible. All I can think about is going home. I finally manage to get a few Z's.



I wake up to eat breakfast and soon figure out that I shouldn't have eaten it. The food is terrible, I have no freedom, and there is nothing I can do about it. After being locked up in my cell again, I exhaust myself trying to figure out things to keep myself occupied. I do a lot of sleeping, a lot of reading, and a lot of push-ups. At least we have access to books. I would go insane without them. This is the longest weekend of my life. Minutes feel like hours. Hours feel like days. We spend twenty-three and a half hours in lockdown. I can think of nothing that could be worse.

Finally, Monday rolls around and I'm waiting to be escorted to the courtroom. The officers bring us to the room where the hearing is to take place. I see my mom, dad, and one of my sisters sitting in a small room behind safety glass in the rear of the courtroom. I feel embarrassed that they have to see me this way; nonetheless, I am extremely happy to see them. After a few cases are heard, my name comes up. My mother explains to the judge that she is here to speak on my behalf. She tells the judge that I will be moving back in with her, where I will be under near constant supervision. The judge says that she will allow me to be released on my personal recognizance. I am ecstatic after hearing those words come out of the judge's mouth. Anytime now I will, once again, be a free man.

After being led back to the holding cells, I am hardly able to hold back the excitement of being released. My heart is pounding and beads of sweat are collecting on my forehead. Time is going even slower than before. When am I going to get out of here? After a few hours, they call my name and tell me that it is time for me to be released. A load of weight is lifted off of my shoulders. I'm escorted down a couple of long, narrow corridors and brought into a room to strip my jail attire and jump back into my own clothes. When I receive my belongings, I am finally free to go.

As I walk through the door, the smell of fresh air slaps a smile on my face. Immediately, I get down on my knees and kiss the ground. I am free! I have learned an important lesson, and it is now time to change the error of my ways.

# **My Father, My Hero**

Miriam Karratti

## *INTRODUCTION*

I know of an affectionate man who has perpetual love and dedication for his family and closest friends. He is my father, my hero. Although he may not be known to most as the greatest war hero who ever lived, in my eyes and in my heart, he is.

## *INTERVIEW*

It is a beautifully sunny day at Waimanalo Beach Park. The sun is right above the tall pine trees, and the birds chirp happily at the dawn of a brand new day. The smell of the salt air blowing in from the ocean is comforting. I savor this moment by closing my eyes and tilting my face up to feel the warmth of the sun. I feel relaxed as my stiff posture turns into a slouch. The slight breeze gently moves my hair against my face and shoulders, and I smile, feeling calm and at ease with nature. As I sit on the green dilapidated picnic table, I begin to clear my mind and focus on the upcoming discussion I will be having with my father -- a discussion that, I hope, will aid him therapeutically as well as help me to better understand his experiences in the Vietnam War (Barr 12).

I readjust myself on the bench, open my eyes, and pull from a folder all the notes and questions I want to ask my father. Thoughts go through my mind as I decide what questions are relevant to the subject I want to focus on. The brightness of the sun forces me to frown, and I automatically feel the need to cover my eyes with sunglasses. Just as I'm gathering all my papers, I notice a familiar stature in the distance, walking toward me. I look up and smile. It is my father, dressed in blue jeans, a salmon-colored polo shirt, and black sneakers. Dark sunglasses cover his brown, tired eyes, . He flicks his cigarette butt from his fingers and exhales the remaining smoke from between his lips.

His name is Myron Kalani Karratti. He was born on January 28, 1946, to Ernest and Margaret Karratti. He is the second child and the oldest son of six children. He was raised in Kalihi until the age of 17, at which time he moved with his family to Waimanalo. He is a proud man, standing 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighing approximately 190 pounds. The lines etched on his face are just a hint of his life experiences.

I stand from the picnic table and greet him with a smile; he reciprocates and goes to the picnic table to sit down.



"Hullo," he says with a grin on his face.

Trying not to seem so eager to get right to my questions, I ask, "Are you feeling okay?"

"No," he says, "I feel with my hands." Jokingly, he smirks and runs his right hand down the front of my face.

"Oh dad. Ha, ha. Funny," is all I could say with a smile.

"Where's my grandkids?" he asks.

"Ikaika and Keala are in school. Aloha is at the sitter's. Are you hungry? Do you want to get something to eat before we start?" I ask.

"Maybe later," he replies, running his right hand through his perfectly proportioned head full of gray hair.

He adjusts the sunglasses on his nose and joins his hands together in a grip. It almost looks as if he's praying, as he slowly bows his head down and asks, "Alright then. What do you want to know?"

I reach for my folder and pull out my first sheet of questions. Eagerly I ask, "How old were you when you were first drafted, and what branch of service were you in?"

Calmly he replies, "I was 20 years old and drafted into the Army. I went to Fort Ord in Monterey, California, for basic training and then to Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma, for advanced-training. I was a Corporal E4 and was in the 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery, Bravo Battery. Two hundred of us were flown directly to our station located 20 miles northwest of Saigon. We landed at the Tan Son Nhut air base on January 28, 1967, on my 21st birthday. Upon our arrival, we were under attack by the VC (Viet Cong) where 15 soldiers instantly lost their lives. After two days there, we were then sent to the 1st Infantry Division, also known as the 'Big Red One' (or the Bloody One)."

As he tells his story, I watch his gestures change from relaxed to agitated. He begins to shift around on the bench and then clears his throat before continuing. I notice his brows begin to turn in and come together, as if he is bothered by the next thought. I try to turn his attention away from that disturbing thought for a moment and bring him back to me.



"How did your family feel when you were drafted? Were they nervous? Scared? Were they apprehensive? They must have been quite proud that their son was going off to war to defend a country in turmoil?" I asked.

"Well, your Uncle Kenneth and Uncle Bo also served in the Army during the Vietnam War. But they were in (finance) while I served in combat. I'm sure my parents were proud of me, but I never knew 'cause no one told me how they felt. I was also married, and your mom was pregnant with you before I was drafted. After you were born, I was very happy."

"Let's stick to that part for now," I interrupt. "You were married when you were drafted, and mommy was pregnant with me?"

"Yup. When I received a letter saying you were born, I was very happy. That changed my outlook on life 'cause now I had something to come home to. When I first went there, I didn't think I was going to make it back -- let alone, alive or even in one piece. I was scared, especially when we all first stepped off the airplane in Tan Son Nhut. You could have 'shit' in your pants if you were fired upon that quickly. We realized it was no exercise. This was the real thing. The experience we went through casts a negative shadow on a lot of Vietnam Veterans. We feel we were wronged in many ways. Since our return home from Vietnam, we haven't been taken care of like other veterans that followed. For example, veterans from Desert Storm were treated far better; they were recognized and praised when they returned from their tour of duty. Our recognition we received when we returned home was being called nasty and hurtful names like 'baby killers' and 'murderers' from our own countrymen. These people don't even have a clue as to what really went on in Vietnam. The war was between North and South Vietnam. North Vietnam wanted their country to be unified and free, while South Vietnam turned into a communist nation. We were sent to Vietnam to give direct aid to South Vietnam."

As he continues, his voice changes. He clears his throat again, as an indicator to me that he's beginning to feel those hurtful emotions return. I stop writing and look up at him. "Do you want to take a break, dad?"

He brings out a cigarette from his shirt pocket and lights it. He inhales a long breath and then exhales, turning his head away from my gaze. He takes another puff and turns back to me, continuing. "I don't feel we completed what we were sent there to do. I feel good about fighting the enemy in their own back yard, but all the killing and stuff - it's hard to forget. I'll never forget." He puffs again from his cigarette, exhales and continues. "There were a lot of people we helped. After we went down to the villages to see what kind



of damages had been done, some of the villagers actually came out and thanked us. There were even a lot of innocent people who were killed.”

Feeling a little overwhelmed, I put my pencil down and looked up at my father. “Is there any particular war story experience that you would like to share?”

He takes a last puff and flicks the butt away. He exhales the smoke from his mouth and continues, “Our base camp was attacked six months into my tour of duty. I happened to be on guard duty around our perimeter. There was a firefight, and a grenade was thrown at my position. My partner, Private 1st Class Gene Washington unselfishly threw himself upon that grenade to save my life. I immediately went into what we call ‘shell shock.’ It lasted approximately one week. After coming out of shell shock, I felt so lost, like I didn’t know what was going on around me. To this day, I can still see this image repeating itself in my head.”

I am thrown backward in awe at the thought of what has just been told to me. Shaking his head, he puts his head down and wipes a tear from his left eye. It’s quite obvious how much hurt he still feels, even after his return some 33 years ago. I reach over and gently rub his shoulders. I feel at a loss for words. I’m not sure how to respond to this sudden shift in our interview. I feel there are still a few things he’d like to get off his chest, so I gently ask, “Is there anything more you want to add? Any closing comments you want to share?”

He takes what feels like a long minute, puts his head up, and nods. “Yes, I do. First of all, quote me on this. When this war [with Afghanistan] first started, myself and seven other Vietnam Veterans tried to re-enlist as servicemen for the United States. We wanted to make things right again. We felt this was our opportunity to correct the wrong that had been done to us in Vietnam (Gomez 14). If you think about it, and I mean really think about it, it doesn’t matter who we are or what our religion is. Our nation is free. Our government and our lifestyle are so different than those of a war-torn country. We have our freedom. Our children and grandchildren will always know what it is like to be free and not have some ‘power hungry’ guru come into our country and dictate what we can and cannot do. Have you ever heard of that saying, ‘Give me liberty or give me death,’ before?” He turns his focus to me and the intensity in his tearful eyes reflects more emotion and even anger.

I reply, “Yes, but I don’t know who said it.”

“Well, right now it doesn’t matter who said it. What matters is the thought behind it. You, too, would say something similar to that for your freedom instead of being run by a communist government, wouldn’t you?”



I nod and stretch my right arm over his shoulder to acknowledge his emotional suffering. I am in awe at the impact of this talk. He stands, takes out another cigarette, and gives me a hug. This time, he squeezes my arms as he is hugging me and kisses my cheek.

"Sorry daughter," he whispers in my ear. "I better leave now before I really break down."

I nod and return his hug, saying, "I love you, dad. Thank you for your time and sharing your experience with me. I'm sorry if I stirred up some bad memories for you."

He pulls away and pats my right cheek, saying, "I hope you get a good grade for this. If you do, it was worth it. If not, well that's the breaks. I'll see you later. Give my grandkids a kiss, and tell them I love them." With that, he turns and walks away from me.

"Bye, Dad. I love you. Thank you again."

He continues to walk away and gives a final wave before disappearing into the parking lot.

### DISCUSSION

The sun is almost directly in the twelve o'clock position, indicating high noon. Although the breeze is still present, the heat from the sun has intensified slightly. I sit a little longer, trying to put my notes together, all the while thinking about all that he's said. It's quite obvious how very much alive these memories are still for him. Clearly, there are a lot of issues he needs to deal with to be able to release these hurtful emotions and carry on with his life. Perhaps his way of dealing with these memories is to relive them through war movies. After all, he is an avid fan of war movies and doesn't think twice about watching ones he's already seen, maybe ten times before.

My father was forced into a horrible war at a very young age. Even though he returned from the Vietnam War over 33 years ago, the memories are still fresh in his mind as if it happened only yesterday. The sense of fulfillment that comes from serving one's country and accomplishing a worthwhile deed was stripped from his grasp when he and his fellow servicemen returned home from the Vietnam War. Being denied proper acknowledgement from the country that sent them off to fight someone else's battles is undeniably a betrayal of the highest order. American servicemen sacrificed their lives in battle. As a result, their lives have been put on hold and strong emotions have been hidden for many years. Many of my father's fellow soldiers are still lives missing after all these years.



This war was against the communist North Vietnamese and the Vietcong. It did not directly involve our country, yet our men were sent there to "give aid" to the South Vietnamese in their fight against communism (Wexler 78). The servicemen who fought in that war should not have been treated unjustly or unfairly. But in every controversial situation, there will always be a scapegoat. Unfortunately, in this case, our Vietnam Veterans are the scapegoats.

### CONCLUSION

My father is a brave and courageous man. He may not have the type of recognition many war heroes from the past have had, but having the strength to overcome the effects of the war and strive to build a better life for himself and his family makes him a hero to me. He continues to endure all of life's many challenges and tries to live the best way he knows how. He is a man who has and continues to face obstacles that seem to be overwhelming. I appreciate my father for his noble and invaluable service to his country -- the same country that turned away from its thousands of Vietnam veterans once upon a time (Kakesako 3). I admire his dedication. I admire his strong will. I am grateful to our Heavenly Father for blessing me with this man. He is my father and my hero.

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## **“Where’s the toilet paper?”**

Lydia M. Kiefer

As I dashed down the oriental section of the Safeway supermarket, I could feel my muscles start to tense. I tried to hold back the unpleasant expression on my face as I made my way up to the front. “Sir, where can I find the restroom?” I asked the short Asian clerk. “You have to go to the back door, which is on the left side of the dairy section,” he politely replied. With no time to waste, I hustled back down the aisle to the back of the supermarket. I began to panic. “Excuse me!” I said, as I dodged the oblivious shoppers, who appeared as nothing but obstacles to me. I finally found my way to the green door.

As I entered the backroom, I frantically searched for any possible hint of where the restroom could be. To my left, I noticed two doors. Without hesitation, I quickly headed towards the door with the blue lady type-symbol, which hung eye-level on the door. Almost colliding into the door, I turned the rusty doorknob to enter the small restroom. I hurriedly locked the door with my shaky hands. Frustrated, I grabbed a paper toilet seat as if it was just another obstacle trying to slow me down. As soon as I sat on the “intimate throne,” tension was released immediately. My discomfort vanished. When the overbearing task was through, I automatically geared to my right to grab some toilet paper. “Oh no!” I uttered aloud, “Where’s the toilet paper?” A sudden feeling of panic rushed through me. I frantically searched every crack and corner in front of me, but toilet paper was nowhere in sight.

Have you ever stopped to ponder what you would do if you ran out of toilet paper? How would you handle the situation? Toilet paper affects our daily routine, and yet, it is seldom remembered. It is a vital necessity that is usually taken for granted.

Before toilet paper was invented, different materials were used which varied amongst different cultures. In Ancient Rome, public toilet facilities provided a sponge attached to a wooden stick that soaked in a bucket of brine (salt) water. Those who lived in the wealthier suburbs of Rome used wool and rosewater. In Coastal Regions, mussel shells and coconut husk were used (mussels shells particularly). Europeans used marvelous fountains, occasionally with the luxury of warm water. In the Middle Ages, the French invented the first bidet for both sexes, unfortunately with the lack of modern plumbing. People from Islamic cultures wiped themselves first with a smooth stone, rinsed with water, and then finished off by drying with a cloth. Pebbles were used to blot the end of a male’s penis after urination. Men would carry re-usable stones and pebbles with small pitchers



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of water in their turbans during their busy work hours. The Colonial Americans were dependent upon the core center cobs from shelled ears of corn, whereas the Eskimos used handfuls of snow.

Finally in 1880, the British invented the first actual toilet paper that was designated for wiping. The toilet paper texture was coarse, and came in a box of individual squares. Although the British preferred the coarse type of paper, the Americans were not satisfied, so in 1907, they invented a softer and fluffier toilet paper. Although soft toilet paper did indeed add a touch of comfort, it remained too luxurious for many of the middle-class Americans, so they continued to drift towards other paper products, such as old discarded mail and newspapers that were hung up by a nail in public restrooms and in the privacy of civilian homes. Soon after, the Sears catalog also became a popular wiping material. In 1930, however the texture of the Sears catalog pages became glossy and smooth, which made a less absorbent wipe. This angered people, and many complaints were sent out to the Sears Company.

Today we are spoiled by the choice of different luxurious brands of toilet paper, such as Scott, Quilted Northern, Kleenex, Charmin, etc. There are over 5000 companies that produce bathroom tissue—trying to make our lives more convenient, clean, and efficient. Although we would think today that all cultures use toilet paper, surprisingly some cultures still abide by their old habits. In parts of India and Arabia, people exclusively use their bare left hand for wiping. They consider it disgusting that other cultures use toilet paper, as it leaves behind an unpleasant residue. Furthermore, Americans skip to the toilet an average of 6 visits per day, adding up to as much as 47 minutes in a single day. Women spend more time with toilet paper than men, or approximately 32 months in a lifetime versus 25 months for men, and object most often to men leaving the seat up.

Each time we reach for the "cotton-savior," an average tear of 5.9 sheets is ripped from the roll. 44% of people wipe from front to back, and 60% look at the paper having just wiped, 42% fold, 33% crumple, 8% do both fold and crumple, 6% wrap it around their hands, and at least 50% of people have at least once wiped with leaves or has used a tool somewhat alien (8% hands, 1% money) (Great 2).

Almost 100,000,000 toilet paper rolls are used a day ("Formula" 1). Without toilet paper our lives would be chaotic. Let me inform you of a few steps you should take into consideration to help conserve the needed necessity that we subconsciously neglect.

Step 1: Always begin by folding the toilet paper sheet by sheet. This method would minimize the number of sheets wasted. Crumbling the toilet paper into a bunch would

"Where's the toilet paper?"

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limit its usage to one wipe; you would practically waste the entire roll.

Step 2: When blowing your nose, start from the first sheet to the next. Not one sheet of toilet paper should be left untouched when you are blowing or wiping your nose.

Step 3: Avoid using toilet paper as a substitute for cleaning anything other than the human body parts. Why use toilet paper when there are materials that are already designed for that purpose?

Step 4: Always be conscious of the number of toilet paper sheets you use, depending on the load of your task. You are now probably curious to know what happened next in my hunt for toilet paper story. As you now know, I panicked because I couldn't find any toilet paper in front of me. For a second, I reluctantly paused to consider what possible materials I would be forced to use as a substitute for toilet paper. But as I peaked behind me, I noticed there was a roll of toilet paper there the entire time.

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## **The One Pumpkin Seed**

Alika Kruger

I remember one day I came to my kindergarten class at Wilson Elementary School, and the teacher said that we would be making a chocolate cake from scratch that day. Obviously, she caught everyone's attention because it wasn't going to be a normal day of learning. She proceeded in making the cake starting with the mix that she bought from the store. She reminded us that the instructions to make the cake were on the back of the box. She then poured the mix into a big bowl. That day we were excited because every kid in class knew that, after all her talking, we would be getting some of that cake.

Before she placed the cake in the oven, she held up a single pumpkin seed and said that she was going to place it in the cake. At that moment all of us kids became confused. She then explained that after the cake was cooked, she would cut the cake into as many pieces as there were children and the child that got the pumpkin seed in their piece of cake would receive a prize. We instantly became excited now knowing that not only were we going to get to eat cake, but we also had a chance of winning a secret prize.

She then placed the pumpkin seed in the cake and placed it in the oven to bake. Before we knew it, the cake was cooked. Although we were all so eager to eat it and find out who would be the winner of the mystery prize, we had to wait until the cake cooled down. Eventually it cooled and she proceeded to cut the cake. She placed the slices on paper plates and gave one to every child. We all started to eat our piece of cake in suspense, knowing that we could come across the pumpkin seed that would make one of us the winner of the prize.

All of a sudden, I heard my friend Ryan scream out with excitement; he had gotten the pumpkin seed that every child in that class hoped to get that day. His prize was a crown made out of paper; a new king had been crowned. I'm glad I didn't get the pumpkin seed in my piece of cake because I thought that prize stunk.

I wish the teacher had decided on playing a game where all of the kids could come out to be winners at the end of class, instead of just one kid going home feeling like a champ. I don't know exactly what she was trying to teach us that day. Maybe she was trying to teach us about how the odds of winning are so slim. Maybe she thought that if she baked a cake then we would behave in class because kids will do anything for a sugar based food, such as candy or cake. That day, when I saw one happy face and many sad faces, I

realized that with every “winner” there has to be a lot of “losers”.



## Stand Next To Your Fire

Dylan Little

So there I was, in the middle of two bulky, hairy security guards, being hoisted out of the Garden of Eden (or at least it was the Garden of Eden in my mind). Through the large glass double doors I was taken, and once back outside in the blistering cold, I was told never to return again. I was driven out back into the harsh, cruel world whence I had come. I'd been given a taste of bliss - true, unadulterated bliss - and now I'd been exiled from my sanctuary.

Okay, maybe that was a bit too dramatic and abrupt for the opening of my story. I'll start over again from the very beginning, skipping over the "David Copperfield crap" and going straight to the very week preceding my encounter with this paradise of mine, the tragic end of which I've described to you.

I had just arrived at SeaTac Airport. This was my first time visiting Seattle, Washington, and I'd always wanted to be here ever since I'd learned of its booming culture, diverse art community, and dreary weather (I had never been too fond of the sun, and had grown to detest the heat and humidity of Honolulu, my hometown).

From my first drive through downtown Seattle, I knew that I was at home. The landscape, filled with steep hills and plentiful trees of various species, was unlike anything I'd seen before. The antique buildings and street lights had a vintage vibe that so greatly appealed to me, I could've very well designed them myself. Farther down, past all the office buildings and shops and restaurants, was a dock that housed huge boats of all types before a body of water that stretched out to the surrounding islands. Although most natives ("Seattleites," they're often called) probably wouldn't think twice about these things, you have to understand that this was the first time (at least that I can remember) I'd been exposed to such a drastic and pleasant change in environment and climate.

Over the next week, I'd grow to love Seattle even more, overlooking the city from the top of the legendary Space Needle, experiencing the tranquillity of Volunteer Park and taking in the sights and sounds of its gorgeous plant and animal life, indulging in some of the best seafood I'd ever tasted, browsing the various art and music stores of the University district, seeing snow for the first time on the Olympic Mountains, and - probably the most wonderful thing of all - visiting various guitar stores and music clubs that many musicians I admire from the area have frequented in the past.



Of course, nothing I'd witnessed or experienced so far could prepare me for my final journey, the one I'd been saving for last. Unfortunately, I'd slept in on the final day of my vacation. When I woke up and looked over at the clock, I was horrified to see '1:15pm' in large, bright green font hovering over my sofa bed from the lamp stand opposite it. In a near panic, I jumped out of bed, threw on some thick jeans and numerous layers of long sleeved shirts (it was about 50 degrees outside and had been raining nonstop the day before), performed quite possibly the quickest teeth brushing in the history of teeth brushing, and hurried out of my hotel room with my camera, journal, and some reading material haphazardly thrown into my book bag.

After catching the monorail from Westlake Mall all the way to the Seattle Center, I'd finally arrived at my destination, albeit one hour before its closing time. I entered through those large, glass double doors I'd mentioned earlier, paid the entrance fee, and walked into a vast, empty area. I was standing in the entrance room of Seattle's famous music museum, the Experience Music Project.

Since it was closing in a mere hour, I didn't have enough time to take the full tour, so I ignored the cassette tape guides and went straight for the Alternative Rock area. On the way, a monolithic statue made of over 200 various guitars and basses towered over me, casting a shadow over nearly the entire first floor. Saying that I felt minuscule and insignificant in its presence would be an understatement. I resisted the strong urge to pluck the string of the \$2,000 Rickenbacker bass that rested just at my eye level, opting instead to take pictures of the entire piece. A few jaw drops later, I continued toward my destination.

As soon as I'd arrived in the section, I was welcomed by an array of alternative rock memorabilia, including various pieces of musical equipment that once belonged to prominent Seattle musicians and were propped up behind large glass display windows. Mudhoney guitarist Steve Turner's vintage lake placid blue Fender Mustang guitar and old, beat up Electro-Harmonix Big Muff fuzz pedal - arguably two of the most integral pieces of guitar gear in the shaping of the buzzy, abrasive "grunge" sound - sat next to countless "grunge" merchandise, including pencils, clothing, and - get this - hair gel. I always knew that the indie rock movement of the early-90's was over-commercialized and turned into a commodity by record industry bigwigs, but never in my 'grungiest' dreams would I have guessed that they had "grunge hair gel" on the market. On the front of the bottle was a picture of three stereotypical 'cool kids' with bed head (the fashion of those days) and the phrase, "Get that grunge look!" Equally amused and disgusted, I snapped a few pictures of the products and moved on.

A television screen to my left aired interviews with various members of the Seattle



independent rock scene of yesterday, including Bruce Pavitt, co-founder of Sub Pop Records (once the hippest label in town), and Mark Lanegan, lead vocalist of the Screaming Trees. Some other television screens aired interviews and concert footage of contemporary Pacific Northwest artists, including - most notably - Modest Mouse and Sleater-Kinney, which happened to be two of my favorite bands. I browsed the area for a few more minutes, then, sadly, I had to leave, for time was running short and there were countless other things to see.

My next stop was the very top floor, where various instruments were scattered around in sound-proof booths and musicians were invited to jam with each other. It was empty for the most part by the time I arrived, but I managed to find a drummer roaming around in the area. I cranked my amp, he picked up his sticks, and together we jammed on a few guitar riffs I improvised. Then came the inevitable...I played the opening power chords to "Smells Like Teen Spirit." A half-smile crept up on the drummer's face, almost as if he'd been waiting for me to initiate the song. We'd never even met each other or played together prior to this, but the musical chemistry in the room was exhilarating.

Exiting the booth deafened and moving over to the next section, I could barely hear the voice over the PA announcing that the museum would be closing in approximately 20 minutes. I continued into a room filled with articles of clothing that once belonged to either musicians or mere entertainers. Unfortunately, a majority of the items on display belonged to the latter. This was easily the shortest stop of my visit, as most of the room was dedicated to outfits worn by Madonna and various other pop divas, which didn't interest me. I did, however, get a couple pictures of former Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash's trademark top hat and a moth eaten sweater that once belonged to the late great Kurt Cobain, former singer and guitarist of Nirvana, and one of the most influential pop songwriters ever.

The next few minutes consisted of my wandering around and looking for another area of interest. I couldn't find a section dedicated to the blues or classic rock, and I had just skipped over the funk section when I stumbled upon a long, dimly lit hallway that led into a large room with carpeted walls. I could faintly hear "Voodoo Child" being played inside, so I immediately entered.

...And then I saw it. It was all the way across the room, but my vision centered on it and everything else just seemed to fade into darkness. It...arguably the most recognizable and influential instrument in all of rock history. Yes, it was Jimi Hendrix's white 1968 Fender Stratocaster with maple fretboard, propped up in front of a cardboard cut-out of the man himself. The guitar was slightly beat up from the abuse it sustained from years on the road, but other than those few dings and scratches, it had aged beautifully. Its once matte



white color had faded into a much richer tone, accentuating its vintage status and rustic appeal. It looked as if it hadn't been touched since Hendrix's death. It was still strung upside down - a modification performed on all of Jimi's Strats, as he was a left-handed player and right-handed guitars were (and still are) substantially less expensive and easier to come by - and the whammy bar hung from its bridge, its chrome shining against the florescent lights from the ceiling.

More awe-inspiring than its marvelous appearance was the fact that it had once been held by the greatest blues/rock guitarist, and quite possibly the most innovative guitarist, of all time. Its frets were worn in from all the string bending and sliding it absorbed. Hendrix's technique and virtuosity were imbedded into this instrument. The guitar beckoned me from the other end of the room to come and run my hand across its beautifully contoured and worn in body.

I approached the display glass that only extended about six-and-a-half feet high. Sweat was running down my forehead and my heart pumped anxiously in anticipation. I took a couple photos of the guitar, but photos simply weren't enough. I was not content to just stand next to Hendrix's fire and marvel at it for the next ten minutes. "You're not walking out of this museum without touching this," my inner-child told me in a demanding tone.

"No!," argued the more mature portion of my psyche. "I'm not tainting a rock n' roll artifact, and I'm certainly not going to risk ruining the last day of my vacation doing so."

"But don't you see," responded my inner-child, who had now calmed down and suddenly adopted Jimi Hendrix's speech mannerisms in an effort to persuade me. "This is a thing of beauty that's meant to be held and cherished, not to sit idly behind display glass. Go on and touch it, baby. It's all good. He wouldn't have minded, trust me."

In the midst of this conversation, I immediately thought of that Rickenbacker bass that was a part of the guitar statue I'd seen earlier. I couldn't even work up the nerve to touch that for fear that I might cause it damage, but here I was, staring at an infinitely more valuable instrument and seriously contemplating whether or not I should lay my hands upon it. I cautiously scanned the room, noting that the few visitors were occupied in other areas, and finally decided to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I closed my eyes, extended my hand, got on the tips of my toes, and reached over the glass to lay my hands upon the holy grail.

And lay my hands on it I did. I stroked its body, ran my hand across its pickguard, plucked the bottom strings with my index finger, and turned the plastic volume and tone



knobs that very well might've been last turned by Hendrix himself. I was in such a state of bliss that I didn't even notice the alarms go off and the room flash bright red. Even as the security guards came to reprimand me, and as the other visitors in the museum watched in disbelief, I still stood there entirely motionless, save the tips of my fingers, which were still caressing the guitar.

Fortunately, I wasn't arrested, just banned from returning to the museum ever again. My first instinct after I finally floated back to reality was to scold my inner child (the serpent in the Garden of Eden who persuaded me to touch the forbidden fruit, if you will), but after giving it some thought, I instead thanked him for encouraging me to take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity. On the plane ride back home, I went over the incident and the events that lead up to it in my head, then tried to figure out what exactly it was that finally convinced me to do what I did. Did I think that I would extract some magical power from the guitar, causing my musical skill to increase tenfold? Or maybe, just maybe, that one moment of bliss that seemed to stretch on for an eternity was reason enough.

## Mr. Dodo, I Still Don't Understand

Daniel Loo

Of all the businesses that the Dodo family could have started, why did they choose to run a funeral home? And after deciding to start a mortuary, why did they feel the need to include their family name in the title of their business? "Dodo Mortuary" is so dumb sounding; you're almost ashamed to say it out loud. I shouldn't tease, though; my grandma would scold me for laughing at a place that holds so many sad memories for so many people.

I am about to become one of those many people, and I am scared - scared to get out of my mother's van, scared to walk through those doors, scared to see my friend lying in his casket. Call me a coward if you want to, but for me this is the stuff nightmares are made out of-never-ending rainy afternoons at Dodo Mortuary.

Of course it's raining; it's always raining in Hilo. The rain on this day is a light, eerie mist, almost a thin fog, and it's making today even sadder than necessary. And although I hate the rain, I have to admit that it's appropriate to the setting. Under the low hanging gray clouds, I can see the dark blue silhouette of Mauna Kea, and a stripe of sky behind it, painted orange by the setting sun. It's nice, but calling it downright beautiful seems wrong; depressingly beautiful, I would say.

My mother and my sisters drop me off at the top of the parking lot, and I stand in the slight drizzle for a few seconds, clutching my condolence card. I don't like this card because it seems so lacking. I would almost rather not give it to the family. I've written whatever I could think of on this card, but none of the things that I actually wanted to say. "Sorry" just isn't enough, but I'm all out of ideas, and I feel like a moron. Who gets writer's block on a sympathy card? I don't feel too bad though; my mom has a Master's degree in English, and even she doesn't know what to write.

Standing at the top of the parking lot, looking down at this oddly named building, "plain" is the first word that comes to mind. It's no architectural masterpiece, and its boring beige paint job is probably used in retirement homes to keep heart rates down. This building would never be noticed in downtown Honolulu, but in Hilo it stands out because of all the greenness. The small parking lot acts as a cement moat, keeping the surrounding jungle at bay. The building itself is designed somewhat like an inside out reception hall, with a covered patio for serving refreshments and bathrooms that are set apart from the main building. I guess bathrooms separate from the main hall are a must in mortuaries; who wants to be



hearing bathroom noises in the middle of a eulogy? Even more embarrassing, who wants to be *making* bathroom noises in the middle of a eulogy?

I walk uncertainly past the bathrooms and up four cement steps to two swinging glass doors. This is the entrance to the main room, where the actual viewing takes place. This room makes me nervous, and I don't really want to go in yet, but as they say, there's no time like the present. I take a deep breath, open the glass door, and look for my friends inside, keeping my eyes away from the front of the room. I know what's at the front of the room, and I don't want to see it yet.

Thankfully, my friends are sitting in the last row. I feel very self-conscious walking in here alone. Normally I try to hit that "smart, confident, 21-year-old" stride, but my aura has lost all self-confidence and direction, devolving into a goofy pre-teen with oversized clothes, and I'm sure that I'm giving off more of a "confused, lonely, 12-year-old" vibe. Which way do I look? What do I do with my hands? Should I tiptoe?

This main room is rectangular, designed just like the sanctuary of a church. Long, light brown wooden pews line both sides of the room, covered by a high, pointed ceiling. The same, coma-inducing paint job from outside is continued on the inside walls, accented by a worn brown carpet. Large, plate-glass windows make up the left and right side walls of the room. They're tinted a deep shade of purple; why not rose, I wonder?

I take a seat next to my friend, and immediately wonder about the music they're playing. Hey, I like 50's doo-wop as much as the next guy, but I never pictured it to be used during a funeral. "My Boyfriend's Back" starts playing softly, and the whole scene suddenly smacks of surrealism. My friends are supposed to die of old age, not when they're 19; funerals should be held in huge cathedrals with Latin words in their titles, not funeral homes named Dodo; and a person's last viewing should be accompanied by somber instrumental music, *not* Golden Oldies. This just doesn't happen.

I sit in the last row for ten minutes before deciding to walk up to the casket. Five minutes later, I finally get up and walk to the casket...slowly, one step at a time. My lonely 12-year-old vibe has de-matured to a scared 9-year-old, shrinking from an awkwardly dressed ego with knobby knees into a shy self wearing dirty jeans and a t-shirt. I'm sure everyone in the room is looking at me and wondering who the little boy in the mismatched clothes is. I keep my eyes on my dirty black shoes, the patternless carpet, the scuffed pews, anywhere except the front of the room. "Runaround Sue" is playing now. This can't be real.

Here I am, this is it. End of the line. It's a nice wooden casket, nicely padded, and



look at all these flowers, with their soft pastels. The wreaths have little shiny banners with words written on them, but I'm too busy to read right now. I close my eyes, brace myself, and look at my friend for the last time.

My first glimpse of him sends me tumbling back down into toddler-hood, turning me into a 3-year-old who has to tip-toe to peer cautiously into a coffin. He's wearing a nice black tux, as if he's going to the prom, and his hands are folded on his chest. There's that short brown hair I know, spiked with gel; I remember when he grew it long, and we'd tease him because he looked like Jean Claude Van Damme. His eyes are closed, like he's taking a nap - strange, because I can't recall ever seeing him sleep, or even pass out. There's that scraggly goatee I remember; he never could get it thicker, no matter what he did. But wait a minute, something's wrong with his skin. What happened to his nice tan? Why is his face this faded yellow-brown color? That's not natural - who is this?! What is this? What is this thing in this dead box, because it definitely isn't the boy I know. The boy I know is full of laughter and energy, a vibrant, living human being. He is not the empty, lifeless corpse in front of me. I don't know what this is that I'm looking at, but it's not my friend, and I can't look at it for another second. I walk away from what was my friend, greet his family, and take back my seat in the last row.

After seeing my friend's body in a casket, I don't think I want a viewing at my funeral. I understand that people may need it for closure, because I did. If I could remember the last time that I saw my friend, or the last words I spoke to him, then I would not have gone to this funeral, because now the most vivid memory I have of my friend is of him in his casket. It saddens me to imagine that someone's last memory of me will be of me in a box, wearing bad makeup. If I do have a viewing, I am going to specify that it not be held in Dodo mortuary. I still don't know why the Dodo family chose to keep their name in the business, but I do know that it doesn't make me giggle anymore, not the way it did when I was a kid.



## **An Oasis In The City**

Andrei Lyovin

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

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

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

After work and on the way home, the train reeks of alcohol used by a lot to cope with the day's stress. Like prisoners trying to forget where they are for the moment, there is a look of desperation in the eyes of the salary men while they partially relax their shell-shocked nerves for a break in an unending cycle. A thick heavy cloud of released tension seems to linger in the cars, and you can't help but breath it in.

Outside, the streets and buildings are cascading with neon of all colors. There are



giant TV screens on the sides of buildings and blaring speakers playing music and advertisements. On the sidewalks, there's not stimuli than a crowded discoteque. The crowds, lights, and noise all wreak havoc on the senses that leaves you in a confused stupor. Living in Tokyo can really exhaust you mentally and physically.

One weekend, my wife (at the time girlfriend) and I took a walk down the road from her home in the opposite direction of the crowds in order to get further away from the hordes of people, and just try to relax. Just off the road a short distance away, we spotted a large opening of some sort that resembled an opening of a temple. Was this the Meiji Jingu Shrine that we knew of but never set foot in? We decided to satisfy our curiosity and crossed over to the other side.

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

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

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

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



the place itself overrides anything constructed by man.

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

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## **Mr. Singh's Experience with Alcohol and Altitude**

Terence Mar

It was supposed to be a routine flight from Fiji to Auckland, New Zealand and back to Fiji, but things turned out quite the contrary.

Everything started off routinely. As a flight attendant for Air Pacific, my job responsibility involved serving passengers during the flight. Towards the end of the beverage service, I approached a medium-built, elderly gentleman by the name of Mr. Singh, who I thought wore the most outrageous toupee. "Would you care for a beverage?" I said.

"Yes, could I have a gin and tonic?" he responded

"Most certainly," I said and offered him a drink.

During the meal service, I had the responsibility of beverage service again, but this time, with a meal. I approached Mr. Singh and said, "Would you care for a glass of champagne, wine or beer with your meal?"

"I'll have a glass of wine," he said with a smile.

I offered him the drink, smiled and continued to complete the service throughout the cabin.

Prior to the commencement of the in-flight motion picture, it was customary for flight attendants to offer passengers a drink, in order to avoid interruptions during the movie. I got to Mr. Singh again and said, "Before the movie starts, would I be able to offer you a drink?"

"Could I please have another glass of gin and tonic?" he asked with a smile. When I served him the drink, he said, "My son Vishnu works with Air Pacific, and I am a retired engineer with you guys. Do you know my son, Vishnu? He works in Finance."

"No, I don't," I said. "We cabin crew really don't go into the office very often, so have little opportunity to mingle with the ground staff." At this point I needed to proceed with my service, so I said politely, "Excuse me Mr. Singh, I need to check on the other



passengers. I will come back and have a chat with you when I'm done." We were so busy during the remainder of the flight that I never did go back to complete the conversation.

When the aircraft came to a complete stop outside the terminal building, and passengers had begun to disembark, I noticed that Mr. Singh was not looking well. In fact, he looked drunk. I was surprised because from previous experience with flying, it was uncommon for passengers to react so drastically to a few alcoholic drinks, considering that it was consumed with a meal. I was also surprised because during the flight he showed no signs of being inebriated.

As I approached Mr. Singh to find out how he was, he beckoned forward, made an, "Arrrgh," sound, and released a barrage of fluid from his mouth, which landed all over his seat.

I quickly rushed to the back galley, which was just a few rows behind me, grabbed a damp cloth, rushed back to Mr. Singh and said, "Are you ok?"

"I'm OK," he replied, while he wiped the vomit off the shirt.

"Let me wipe that off your shirt," I offered. I wiped off the excess vomit with the damp cloth. Realizing that he was in no condition to walk to the front of the aircraft on his own, I said, "Where are your bags? I'll help you to the door."

"My bag is in that locker, and my duty free liquor is in that plastic bag," he muttered. I retrieved his hand-carry luggage, then said to Mr. Singh, "Give me your hand," and guided him to the front of the aircraft.

As we got to the disembarking door, I noticed the ground-handling agent. Ms. Walsh was a very short lady who had brown curly hair and very piercing eyes. "Hi," I greeted. "Would you be able to help Mr. Singh through the terminal?"

With a disgusted look on her face she replied gruffly, "You got him drunk, you look after him."

I was angry that Ms. Walsh offered no assistance, but I was unable to let Mr. Singh fend for himself in his present condition. Having no one else to assist him, we proceeded through the terminal.

As we descended the escalator, towards the baggage carousel, Mr. Singh suddenly

lunged forward. Realizing that he was in trouble, I yelled, "Watch out!" grabbed him by the collar, and yanked him back. This action prevented him from falling down, head first.

"Thanks, man," he said in a drunken voice.

As we approached the baggage carousel, I realized that he was having difficulty focusing. "Where are your bags?" I asked.

"One's a large brown one and the other's red," he slurred. "Oh, there it is." Suddenly, out of the blue he declared, "I want to vomit."

Shocked, I quickly removed the bottle of alcohol from his duty-free bag and said, "Here, vomit in the bag."

He proceeded to vomit, "Arrrrgh," and simultaneously let out a loud fart, "Phhhph."

I cannot find any words to describe how I felt at that instant. I wished a hole had swallowed me up.

However, feeling sympathetic, I enquired, "Are you all right?" This time I did not get a response from Mr. Singh.

The spectacle was witnessed not only by all the passengers in the vicinity of the baggage carousel, but also by two Air Pacific employees, flight attendant Vernon Simpson and Captain Dass. To my horror and embarrassment, they laughed boisterously.

A nearby immigration officer by the name of Mr. Stevens, a large man with disheveled and a wrinkled uniform, also witnessed the incident. He waved us over to his immigration desk and barked to Mr. Singh, "Where's your passport?"

"Here's your bag," I said, offering Mr. Singh the bag.

"Thanks, eh," he acknowledged with a sigh.

"How is it that he is so drunk?" Mr. Stevens questioned in an accusing tone, glaring directly at me.

"I don't know," I replied. "He had the same few drinks as everyone else."



As I was speaking, Mr. Singh interjected in a slurred voice, "Officer, I'm here for an eye operation."

It was at that moment that I realized why he had acted in such a manner. The alcohol must have reacted with the medication that he was taking. Overwhelmed by the situation but in a hurry, I blurted to the immigration officer, "Sorry Mr. Stevens, but I really have to return to the flight as I have to fly back to Fiji in twenty minutes."

"Ok," he hesitantly replied.

"Thanks, bro," Mr. Singh in an exhausted, yet appreciative tone.

"See ya," I replied. I immediately proceeded back to the aircraft.

To this day, the memories of that particular flight are fresh in my mind. My awareness of the effects of alcohol and medication has been heightened. But perhaps more importantly, I now have a deeper empathy for others who are in vulnerable situations.

## Nightlong Nightmare

Holly Myers

After a long day of working, I went to the beach to relax and wait for my boyfriend to get done playing basketball at the gym. I always go to the beach at nighttime to wind down from a long day. The sun had just set and you could faintly see the moon reflecting in the ocean. All I could hear were the waves coming in and out, an occasional car driving by, and the sound of the November trade winds blowing through the palm trees. I was leaning up against a tree in my baggy jeans and my red sweatshirt, with my car keys in one hand and a cigarette in the other, staring out into the ocean. A girl walked up and blocked my all too serene view. She was wearing blue jeans and a black t-shirt. She was a little bit bigger than I, but still pretty skinny, and about my age, maybe a little older, perhaps twenty. She had a dark complexion that looked light against her solid black T-shirt, like the sand against the ocean.

"Can I bum a square off you?" she asked softly.

"Ya, but they're in my car. Hold up a second." I walked to my car and grabbed a cigarette for her. I returned to the beach and handed her the cigarette and offered her a lighter. She lit her cigarette and thanked me. We stood there a couple of minutes in silence, both staring out into the ocean.

She asked me, "Do you know a guy named Jasper?" I shook my head no. "He's my fiancé, and I can't find him anywhere."

I shook my head again. I really didn't feel like talking to anyone at the moment. I took my cell phone out of my back pocket to check the time. As I looked down I felt something hard hit my left cheek. It didn't cross my mind that I had been punched in the face, so I looked to my left to see what had happened. Big mistake. She punched me a second time in my mouth. I fell on the ground, and she jumped on top of me and punched me a few more times.

"Give me your car keys!" she yelled in my face.

I wasn't going to give up anything if I might stand a chance fighting her, so I held my keys as far out of reach as possible and I started fighting back, and we traded blows for a couple of seconds. That's when she wrapped my hair around her fist and slammed my



head into the concrete sidewalk. I started realizing maybe she had an advantage in the fight, so I started screaming for help.

She covered my mouth with her free hand and said, "Shut up and give me your keys. I have a gun."

It's funny how a word like "gun" can make you re-think everything you're doing. Right when she said it, I shut my mouth and handed her my car keys. With her hand still wrapped up in my long, brown hair, she got up and picked up my cell phone that lay on the ground a foot or two above my head. She pulled my hair for me to stand up; I was being a bit reluctant because I was in some kind of a daze trying to realize what had just happened. She yanked a little harder and brought me back to reality. I got up, and she pulled me behind her to my car.

On the way to the car she chuckled and said, "I hope you're not claustrophobic."

When we got to my car, she opened the trunk. There were a lot of boxes and junk in my trunk. With her one free hand, she tried moving things around, but it didn't seem to work.

When I saw a van pull up a couple parking spaces down from my car, I thought maybe they would help, but I couldn't get any sound to come out of my mouth. She noticed the van too and closed the trunk. "Just get in the car." She pushed me into the front passenger seat of the car, and we drove off.

We drove through Waikiki and turned down a street that was known to be an area where all the drug dealers, hookers and pimps hung out. We drove by an apartment building, and she honked the horn. About thirty seconds later, my cell phone rang and she answered it.

"Ya, I have Holly and the car, what do you want me to do?" She listened to the person on the other end of the phone for a minute, she said, "Shoots."

She hung up the phone. I sat there a little in shock for a minute. I guess it hadn't hit me until then that this had all been set up. I lit another cigarette and took long, deep drags while I thought to myself for a minute.

I looked over at her and asked, "So, what do they want you to do?"



"I need to use your car for a while and when I'm done doing some things, I'm supposed to bring you back to my uncle." She replied in a calm voice. After a short pause, she continued, "I'm not going to baby sit you. If you need to go to the store to get cigarettes, I won't follow you in, but if you try to run, I'll hunt you down and kill you. And if you tell anyone what's going on," she paused, we were at a red light. She looked me strait in the eyes with a cold dead stare and continued in a monotonous voice, "I'll kill you; I've done it before."

I thought about what she had said and tried to ignore the last part of it. "Why does your uncle need to see me?" I asked, imagining the worst scenario in my head.

"He needs to talk to you about Gi." A guy I had gone on a couple of dates with three months ago came to my mind. He was a small Korean guy who hung out in Waikiki. The last time I had spoken to him was a couple of months ago when I told him I didn't have the time to date.

"What does this have to do with Gi?" I asked skeptically.

"Apparently he's in love with you," she said, "and he's pretty sour you won't be with him."

"So, what does that have anything to do with this?" I said with a little bit of an angry tone in my voice.

"Well, he told my uncle about it, and my uncle told me to come and tax you and make you get back with Gi." She looked at me and handed me a napkin that she found among the trash in my car, "Wipe the blood off your face, it'll give me away." Apparently my lip had gotten cut in the fight; it hadn't even hurt at all until she pointed it out.

After checking myself for any other cuts I thought back to what she had said. How could Gi be the reason for this? It seemed ridiculous, we had only gone on a few dates. I was about to question more into it, but I held my tongue and let it go. Whatever the reasons were they didn't matter now. We drove by Jack in the Box and we both saw my friend Maria sitting in the parking lot with a couple of other people. Before pulling into the parking lot, my driver had some instructions for me.

"If anyone asks my name, it's Candis. That's the name I go by when I turn tricks. If they ask about the car, I bought it from you tonight. Now, try to look like you're having a good time." I nodded my head, and we drove into the parking lot.



Maria walked over to the car as soon as she recognized it was mine. She was wearing her normal red bandana and Capri pants with a white shirt.

Looking at me, Maria asked, "Why you not driving?" I gave her a pitiful look, and before I could reply Candis jumped into the conversation.

"Maria, come cruise."

Maria looked at me one more time and looked at Candis and said, "Hell, no."

She walked up to the driver's door and tried opening it, "Candis, if you like talk, get out and come over here."

Candis put the car in reverse and jumped a curb and drove out of there.

"What was that all about?" I asked.

"My uncle wants me to tax her and tax her friend, that guy with the long hair," she replied as she nodded in the direction of the guy Maria was standing with.

After that I could only imagine how this night was going to end. I started thinking of crazy ways I could get away from her. My mind kept floating back to the idea that if I told anyone or tried to run, she would kill me. The idea didn't seem too far out of reach.

For the next twenty or thirty minutes we drove all over Waikiki talking. She started talking to me like I was just another one of her friends. When we ran out of things to say, she turned the radio up really loud and sang along to it.

She looked over at me, "Look like you're having fun. It looks too suspicious that you're sitting there all sad."

I sang along with her, and for a moment I felt safe. For that moment, I felt like I was just in a car cruising with one of my friends. As the song ended, my safe feeling ended with it, and I went back to chain smoking my cigarettes.

We continued to drive through the all too familiar streets in Waikiki with the radio volume loud as it would go without muffling the words of the songs. All the stores were still opened and people on their vacations were walking in and out of stores with shopping bags in their hands. We drove by a corner where a lot of my friends were hanging out

drinking beers. Seeing my friends brought back a little bit of that safe feeling, and gave me hope that I would get through the night, and tomorrow wasn't too far away. After the song ended, I turned down the volume on my stereo.

I looked at her and said, "Look, Candis."

She interrupted me and said, "Stop calling me that, you're not some trick I'm turning. Call me Andrea."

"Ok, Andrea," I turned and rolled my eyes as I took a deep breath. "If I just give you the car, will you just let me go?"

She thought for a minute and turned the corner and parked the car. "Can you promise me you won't tell no one?"

"Promise," I replied.

"Good then. In ten minutes I'm gonna call my uncle and tell him you ran away from me. He'll come out looking for you, so get out of Waikiki."

I nodded and said, "I need my cell phone so I can call my friend to come and get me." She handed my cell phone to me. "I also need my house keys off of my key ring to get home." After a moment of thought, she handed me my house keys as well.

I turned and walked as quickly as I could across the street to Nick's Fish Market. I called my friend Mark, who lived in Waikiki, to come and get me. Mark pulled up in his black corvette less than five minutes after I had called. I got in the car and started crying, not knowing what to say to him first. I stuttered out a few sentences, and he got the idea.

Mark drove me home and told me I had to tell my dad. He called up a few of his friends, and he went with them to go look for my car in Waikiki. I walked into my house, and woke up my dad. Half asleep, he asked me what I wanted.

So I blurted it out, "Ummm, dad. Someone stole the car."

He thought I was joking. I tried explaining it to him, but he wouldn't hear any of it. His usually white skin turned a reddish tint with his fury and his long black hair kept falling in front of his glasses. I called the cops, and, in about ten minutes, a cop showed up and talked to me. He was a chubby, white guy with reddish hair. He asked me a few questions



and took my statement.

As the cop was leaving, he said, "I'll call you if anything comes up, but chances are they won't find your car."

It was almost one in the morning, and there was no way I was going to get any sleep, so I turned the TV on. A couple of minutes later my cell phone rang; it was the police officer.

"We have your car and a few people in custody. Can you come down and identify the person that stole the car?"

"Ya, sure. How am I supposed to get there?"

"I'll send an officer to your home to pick you and your father up in about fifteen minutes."

The cop came and picked me up and took my father and me to the Kalakaua and Young Street 7-11 gas station. The backseat of the cop car was plastic and uncomfortable, and it didn't help to calm my nerves at all. They had lined up the girls that were in my car outside the gas station, and I drove by and identified Candis right away.

The cop dropped me off across the street at a police substation, and I filled out yet another police report and answered more questions from a detective. Before they released the car back to us, the cops pulled my dad aside to talk to him. While they were talking, I went outside to smoke a cigarette. I looked across the street at Candis. They were putting her into the backseat of the cop car I had just been in. As they drove by, she stared at me from the window. Remembering back to the talk we had in the car and singing along to that one song together, I felt terrible for what I had done to her, getting her arrested and all. My cigarette had burned down without me even smoking it. I was sitting in sort of a trance when a cop came up and tapped me on the shoulder and pulled me back inside the substation to get me away from Candis' sight.

They released the car back to my father, and we drove home. My father and I drove home in silence. My car looked normal, like nothing had ever happened. The night looked normal, and everything seemed like it was just a dream, a nightmare. All I could think of was how small and weak I was. All I could feel was sorrow for myself.

For the next week, I woke up in the mornings with a "victim" feeling. I went through

my days feeling as if I was just a puppet and some being from above was just pulling my strings when he felt like it. I felt as if I had no control over anything anymore. Since then, although I don't feel like a "victim" anymore, I'm always left with an overwhelming sense of how small and weak I am in this world. Everything we know and think can change in a moment, and we really don't have any control of what happens in this world. The only control anyone really has is how we react to our own experiences and the knowledge we walk away with.



## A Little Green

Karen Nervell

After twenty-four exhausting hours of airplane travel and transiting in various airports, my cousin Shirley and I had just arrived in Paris, France for the start of our three-month backpack through Europe. Even though we were on a tight budget, we allowed ourselves the luxury of staying at a 4 star hotel on our first night so we could get a good night's rest before the start on our travels.

Europe has a very efficient and sophisticated train system. You can reach almost any destination you want by train, so our main mode of transport was using the "Eurail Pass" which allowed us unlimited train usage during our three months in Europe.

I remember how excited I was on our second day as we checked out of the hotel and headed for the train station. The morning air was cool and fresh. As I was taking in all the new sights and sounds, and the streets were filling with people, I looked around for directions to the main train station. Everything was written in French, and I found it a little overwhelming at first and surreal at the same time. I remember thinking how much we take for granted being able to read and communicate in the English language. With our trusty map in one hand and our pocket sized book, "How to Speak French" in the other, Shirley and I managed to make it through the streets of Paris to one of the main train stations.

The first place Shirley and I wanted to visit was a small quaint town called Saint Emilion, which was famous for its red wine. We got a copy of the train schedule and were soon on our way. The train ride was great as we got to relax and see a lot of the beautiful green French countryside. We then reached the train station where we needed to get off. I remember stepping out onto the platform thinking . . . umm, this train station seems a little quiet, even deserted, and it occurred to me that maybe we had gotten off at the wrong stop. We looked back, but the train was long gone. We both guessed that we were in the right area, and all this mistake meant was that we would need to walk by foot a little longer to get to Saint Emilion. Coming from New Zealand, I guess I had been a little naïve and very "green" when it came to traveling abroad. Although Shirley was a lot more street-smart than me, it was my turn that day to do the map reading, and I was determined to get us to the Saint Emilion Township.

We left the train station and started walking, water bottle in one hand and map in the other. Rule 1: When traveling abroad don't walk around with your map in full view

so everyone can see that you are a tourist. As we were walking, I was trying to figure out where on the map we were so I could navigate us to our destination. I was getting very frustrated, as I could not figure out where we were. Then out of the distance I saw a car approach on this quiet country road. Rule 2: Don't waive down strangers in cars to stop. Hooray I thought, someone to help us, and I waived down the car, which stopped.

The Frenchman inside rolled down his window and smiled at me. I remember thinking, he's an overly smiley man, but did not feel any apprehension. I opened up the map and spoke slowly in English, "Where are we on this map?" I heard my cousin mutter something to me, but I did not pay attention to her. The Frenchman still did not answer me, but continued to give me a big cheesy smile. Again I looked him in the eye and said slowly, "Where are we on map?" Again he did not respond in any way apart from looking at me. He was now grinning like a Cheshire cat, and I tried one more time, "Where are we on map?" There was still no help from him, and I stepped back. Because I had been looking so intently at his face, I did not notice that his right arm had been moving the whole time. I looked into his car to discover that he was not wearing any underwear. He had removed his private parts from his shorts and had been pleasuring himself the whole time! I screamed and ran off after my cousin.



## **My Last Day on Planet Earth**

Patraic

“Wow, that looks awful.” Those were the first words I remember hearing during one of the many times that I regained consciousness. Not exactly what you want to hear when you are lying in a hospital bed with tubes and wires coming out of your body. But he wasn’t talking about the tubes and wires, he was talking about the x-rays that the doctor was showing him, x-rays of my body. The “He” that I am referring to is my brother-in-law Gary. I had been staying with Gary and my sister at their place out in Nevada for about a month. My mom had thought it would be a good idea for me to go stay with them on their farm for awhile. At the time, I just figured that she thought it would be a good idea to get rid of me for a while.

You see, my mom was afraid to answer the phone because the high school counselors or the principal were always calling to explain what kind of trouble I had gotten myself into. I got tired of all that, so I took the G.E.D. and got out of high school early. Now that I was out of school, instead of the school calling, it was always the police, telling her to come down to the station and pick me up. They were pretty much on a first name basis with my mom down there at the police station. When I look back now at some of the things I used to get away with, I honestly believe that if it wasn’t for the fact that they felt sorry for her, they probably would have thrown me in prison.

My parents got divorced when I was about fourteen or fifteen years old. That didn’t really bother me all that much. What bothered me was when they were still together. That’s when I started using drugs. I didn’t like being around when they got into arguments, so I would go out and get high. They used to fight all the time, so, I used to do a lot of drugs.

Well, I guess I had just pushed my mom to the limit. On the way home from our lastest little get together with the local police, she informed me that she had spoken earlier with my older sister and my brother in law. It seems that they had come up with this master plan to save me from myself and my destructive ways. Yup, living on a farm out in the middle of nowhere in northern Nevada. How’s that for a master plan?

Now don’t get me wrong. I love my sister and her husband. They’re good people. Very religious, mid-west farmer type people. But you see, I grew up near San Francisco, California. It does not matter what you like to do to have fun. Music, movies, shows, restaurants, you go into the city, and you can find it, anytime. What the hell am I going to do on a farm out in the middle of nowhere? A big night out for my sister and brother-in-law



is when they go to Winnemucca, an hour and a half drive, to go bowling. Whoopee!!!! Someone save me from all the excitement. Well, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be; it was worse.

It was winter time, so they didn't have any crops growing. It gets pretty cold up there in northern Nevada during the winter time. I was actually beginning to wish they did have a crop, just so I could go out and work in the field. Imagine being so bored, that the thought of working in the field seems like a good idea. I had brought my motorcycle with me, but I couldn't ride it because it was snowing all the time. But, that was about to change. It had stopped snowing for about a week, but it was still very cold outside. There was still a little bit of snow and ice out on the fields, but the roads seemed fine. That was all the incentive I needed. Do you remember that movie *The Shining* with Jack Nicholson? How they were all snowed in at that hotel during the winter? Yeah, I was beginning to feel a lot like that. So I decided that I would take my bike out for a spin. Now this was heaven. I had finally realized the one good thing about living out in the middle of nowhere. Nothing but open highway as far as you could see, and not a soul around.

I'm out doing a dry run on my bike, going about ninety-five. By dry run I mean that I'm testing the road, getting a feel for it, so later on during the second run I will have a better feel for the road, and then I can really open it up. So I'm cruisin down the road at close to a hundred miles per hour, and up in the distance I see a small little black patch on the road. Now, when you're going that fast, what you see down the road in the distance, well, it kind of comes up on you pretty fast. No big deal. So they patched the road a little. I figure the roads out here get so little use that it's nothing. What I didn't realize was that it wasn't a patch in the road, it was water. Still, a little water is no big thing. But there was one big difference that had not occurred to me. We've all seen those "slippery when wet" signs that they have on the sides of the road. But what they don't tell you is that in northern Nevada, in the winter time, what that really means is, really, really slippery when frozen. Well, I found that out the hard way, as soon as I drove over that patch of ice. As soon as I hit this patch of ice, I know it's over. There's no doubt about it; I'm going down. The only thing I can do is decide where I'm going down. I've got two choices. I can go off the road and land in the dirt, or, I can slide down the road a few hundred yards and turn myself into a big pile of human hamburger. I went for the dirt.

It's amazing how fast your mind works when the adrenalin starts pumping. I had crashed on bikes plenty of times before, and normally I would have just let go of the bike. But this time it all happened so fast that I never got the chance. Before I knew it my back tire had hit some kind of bump as I got to the side of the road, which caused me to get thrown off the bike. It was right about this time that the whole experience started to get



really strange. It really is true what they say about your life flashing by in front of your eyes. Although it's not what you may think. It was like somebody just waved a magic wand, and everything went into slow motion. It wasn't like I was watching a movie or a slideshow of my life. It was the exact opposite. All I could think about was all the things that I never did. The last time I had seen my mom, she had told me that she loved me. You know how it is when you're a teenager. I just shrugged my shoulders and said "yeah, yeah, Mom, whatever." Now, more than ever, I wished that I had said "I love you too, Mom". There were so many thoughts going through my mind. Please god, not now. Not like this. Not now. I'm not ready. Give me one more chance, please!! Well, I got that chance, after what seemed like an eternity of pain and physical therapy.

I've used my new lease on life to make amends for all the things I've done in the past, and all the things that I haven't. I do this by living everyday like it is my last day on this planet. Now, I know that may sound kind of gloomy, but it's not if you really think about it. If you knew that you were not going to see your friends and family anymore, don't you think you would want to let them know how you felt about them, before you were gone? Before it was too late? You see, I could die tomorrow, and I would be okay with that. Because I have made my peace. Have you made yours?

## **Half Brother**

Lilibeth E. Rhylander

I came from a big family: four sisters and eight brothers. One of my brothers died when he was eight. My mother had two of my brothers five years after my father died. Most of my brothers are outgoing, energetic, daring, and brave. They love outdoor sports - fishing, playing basketball, boating, mountain climbing, and swimming. My half brother, Freddie, is the exception. He would rather stay at home and do housework and plant flowers around the yard.

Freddie is tall - about five feet eleven inches - and weighs 160 pounds. He has fair skin and straight, thick black hair like deep sea water above his neck. He has a silky smooth face with beautiful brown almond-shaped eyes and long lashes. His lips are red as if he has lipstick on, and he is blessed with a fashion model's well aligned teeth, which are sweet and white as sugar when he smiles. My family and others think he is a good looking young man.

Whenever I visit my family in Manila, I always make a promise to see everybody. The last time I went to Manila, Freddie did not show up.

"Where is Freddie?" I asked my sister.

"Freddie has the flu, and he does not want to see the doctor or nurse because he's afraid to get poked with a needle," my sister said. "Three of our brothers carried Freddie to the hospital, and the doctor gave him some medicine to take instead of an injection."

"How is he doing so far?" I asked.

"He is getting better," my sister said.

Freddie does not want to deal with people, and he dislikes making friends. He stays away from Manila so that nobody will bother him. He lives in one of our houses in the countryside of Aklan Province near a river and a highway. Although it is noisy whenever cars or trucks pass by, he still wants to live there.

Once, while Freddie and I were watching TV, he looked at me and smiled with pleasure. I asked him what he would like to do when he grew up.



"I would like to be a beautician," he said without hesitating. "Hair styling is fun, yet I have to be creative."

Bad experiences had made him think that school was not for him, and he lost his confidence to go to college. When he was in grade school, Freddie went home sad or angry, yet he wouldn't tell why he was upset.

One day my sister saw his badly bruised left arm. She was worried about it, and she asked him what happened. At first, he was reluctant to say anything, but my sister threatened him, "I will tell mom."

He said his classmates had fought inside the classroom, and he happened to be watching two of his classmates hitting each other. During the fight, the teacher wasn't there and most of his classmates were making too much noise, which disturbed the class next door. Only Freddie, and a few others were not acting up. Then Freddie noticed that his classmates were suddenly in a hurry to sit down, but Freddie was too late, for he saw the teacher at the doorway with eyes full of anger glaring at them. When the teacher came closer and pinched his arms without hesitation, Freddie's eyes were full of tears from the pain. Although he tried to explain what had happened, it was as if she never heard anything he said. His classmates laughed while he was in pain - physical because of the severe pinching and mental because of the humiliation. After that embarrassment, he stopped going to school.

Freddie seemed to be content just to watch television and to laugh when the show was funny. I interrupted him from time to time by asking questions about school. I told him how nice it would be when a particular someone becomes an important person. He looked at me eye to eye with a serious tone in his voice.

"Do you think I can be a special one someday?" he asked.

"Oh, Freddie," I said, "You already are. You can be whatever you want to be."

I haven't seen Freddie for several years. He went back to school after our talk.

Now he is a nurse intern and is helpful to everybody, not only to his patients, but with his co-nurse as well. He is a good student and a caring person. His good looks go with his heart, and he picked the right profession. I am so proud of and happy for my half-brother.



## **My Home School Experience**

Angela Roque

The year 1994 was a big year for me since that was the year my parents decided to home school me. After my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, my parents felt that the public school system was heading down the drain. Things such as sex education and evolution were beginning to surface in the schools, and this was against what my parents believed I should be taught.

I grew up in a strong Christian family that believed in waiting until marriage before having sex and certainly did not believe in the theory of evolution. In my parents' opinion, God was being taken out of the schools, and a new, radical way of thinking was being introduced. The thought of me being given a condom in sex ed and being told, "We know we can't stop you from having sex, so here's a condom to protect you," was appalling to my mom and dad. They enrolled me in Christian Liberty Academy, and so began my education as a home school student.

At the start of my first year of home schooling, I was excited! Who wouldn't be thrilled to be able to sleep a little later in the mornings? We started our school day when we wanted and could even stay in our pajamas during class. I could also have a drink or snack whenever I wanted and could work on my assignments at my own pace.

I thought this was the best thing my parents could have done for me. No more rushing to turn in a project on time! No more cafeteria food! This was going to be a blast!

As the school year rolled on, I began to miss my friends from public school. I rarely saw them anymore. I didn't get to attend many school functions or hang out with my friends after school. We lived in the country, and this made me feel even farther away from everyone. I was very lonely.

My schoolwork began to get more difficult for me to do. The way I learned was by teaching myself. I read the assigned lessons and then did any paper work on the lessons. I was my own teacher. Since I was in high school, there were several subjects my mom didn't know how to teach me. I was on my own. In spite of this, I managed to keep my grades up and passed the tests home school students have to take for the state. These tests make sure home school students are kept up to par with the public school curriculum.

Even though I was able to keep good grades, it was a hard way to learn. I missed



I missed having a teacher for each class who could help when I didn't understand something. Teachers seem to have a way of helping their students understand difficult concepts that books do not. I had always enjoyed school, and most of it came easily to me. Then I started to dislike school because home schooling was hard for me. I tried to make everyone believe I enjoyed it, but I was very lonely and depressed on the inside.

So the next two years drudged on until it was finally time for graduation, one of the most exciting times for high school students. A season of their lives is over, and another new and exciting one begins. I, on the other hand, did not view graduation in this way. I did not have a true graduation with the ceremony and all of my family and friends watching, cheering me on. No, my diploma was not handed to me and my picture snapped as I shook hands with the principal and superintendent. My diploma was delivered silently in the mail, in a plain brown envelope. There were no bells or whistles or cheers. My hard work and dedication had finally paid off, but there was no one to congratulate me on a job well done. This was how I started my journey into adulthood. I was scared. "What do I do next?" "Where do I go?" These were questions I asked myself over and over.

For most students, their senior year is a time to think about college and get advice from a counselor who provides information about colleges, helps fill out applications, and also helps with scholarships. I had no idea how to find out what scholarships I was eligible for. Neither my mom nor my dad knew anything about it, so college was put on the back burner for awhile. I wanted to go but didn't have the funds to pay for it. I have often thought that if I had been in public school, I might have already finished college. This sometimes makes me feel upset with my parents for doing this to me. I know they were trying to do what they thought was best for me, but I think it was not a good decision. Looking back, I missed out on a lot, and that makes me sad. Maybe I could have gotten a scholarship to a really great college!

All in all, I think my home schooling was not the best decision for me. I think I could have done far better in a public school. High school should be one of the most exciting times in a teenager's life, and I feel that I had that stolen from me. I will never get those precious years back. I would not recommend home schooling to anyone.



## **Wolf in Sheep's Clothing**

Jeong Yun Shimoda

It has been almost eight years now since I quit my job to stay home to raise my children. This was a very good decision and one that I will never regret. During these years, my husband and I have gone through many emotional and financial struggles, and as my children grew up and were getting close to entering elementary school, I was preparing myself to go back to work. I felt a sense of excitement and freedom as I thought about going back to work. We would finally have some extra money, and if possible, I really desired to work from home.

I worried about my children, Michele, who is almost eight now, and Daniel, who just turned five. I hated the idea of putting them in an after-school program, picking them up at 5:30, coming home, and barely sharing two to three hours in a hustle and bustle of cooking dinner, bathing them, checking their homework and finally putting them to bed, only to repeat the same cycle again the next day. My sister-in-law felt the same way about her son and her situation. Her husband was somewhat pressuring her to go back to work, and she was not very fond of the idea of putting her son in a preschool all day. We both began searching for home-based careers.

One day my sister-in-law called me and told me about a home-based business seminar she had heard about on the radio and invited me to go with her to the free seminar to be held at the Japanese Cultural Center. The place was crowded with many people who were curious to find out what this business was all about, and just for attending, the company gave us free phone cards.

A very young looking, local Japanese man, whom I will call John Doe, was the guest speaker. He claimed he was the CEO of Tritech 2000, later changed to JTI Foundation for Research and Development, Inc. His goal was to become one of the Fortune 500, and he presented to us an internet-based home business, which he claimed was currently making \$300,000 a month. He spoke very knowledgeably, with confidence (somewhat cocky at times). There was also empathy and humility in his voice as he spoke about the times we live in. He explained that he felt called to help the low to middle income families reach a status of significance in life by helping them achieve their financial goals by incorporating a "Total Awareness Program" which focuses on mental, spiritual and physical aspects of one's being. He was very impressive, and I totally agreed with him and desired everything he expressed during the seminar. He had our attention, and at the end we signed up to learn



more about this business.

A week went by and no one called us. My sister-in-law was very curious, and she called them to ask about our meeting. They said that they were very busy trying to contact everyone, and our meeting with them was arranged. We convinced our skeptical husbands to have open minds, and they accompanied us to the meeting. Our husbands also became interested in this business, and we got the loans for \$15,000 each to get into this business. They had less expensive packages, but we felt this one was much more beneficial. This was the biggest and only investment my husband and I have ever made, and my husband jokingly said, "Well, if this doesn't work out, let's just think of it as having bought a car." Boy, we had no clue whatsoever as to what we "really" were getting into.

My husband and I had stopped using our credit cards for about two years and had just cleared up all of our debts. We were debt free and were somewhat skeptical about getting into debt again; however, we also saw this business opportunity as a way to achieve our financial goals as well as establishing a home-based business. We kept reminding John Doe and the account executive that we really could not afford to make a mistake and that my husband was already working two jobs to support the basic needs of our family. They humbly and confidently reassured us that this was a win-win situation and that at least we would make enough money to make our monthly loan payments. We were optimistic and the more we listened to John Doe's ideas and his heart, we became confident in our decision. We got our own website, we came up with our domain name, and we were ready to do business.

Along the way we were finding out that the business was still in the process of developing; the account executives, who were also paid members, worked for commissions but were not getting paid what they were promised. Everyone we spoke to told us that they had not seen one penny yet. We were so concerned that we met with John Doe on two separate occasions to express our concerns. Each time he met with us, he was very gracious and humbly explained away our worries and put our weary and doubtful minds to rest. He was always very passionate about what he was doing and very openly shared his intimate life stories with us. At times, though, we saw a conflicting side of him. He sometimes got very emotional and revealed an angry and obnoxious side. When he sensed disloyalty or skepticism, he would make comments about those kinds of people, not specifically with names but in general and we knew he was talking about someone in particular. He also had a way of making us feel inadequate and I think this kept us from speaking up and asking questions. Although we were hearing stories about John Doe not paying the account executives what they were promised, many of them shared their testimonies and supported what John Doe was doing very passionately, at least in front of



us. They were very convincing and I believe they wanted to believe in him as well. They testified to his generous character, and, with tears, some of them shared what a good friend he had been to them. We were very confused, but we tried our best to trust him, thinking that no one is perfect and behind every success there are many heartaches and that John Doe was just going through some obstacles. We tried to remain positive and believed that everything would work out for the better.

About five months after we signed and handed over the \$15,000 check, the problems escalated and John Doe very humbly and openly told us he was being investigated by the FBI for "fraud." He went on and on about his innocence and because of the relationship he had developed with all of us, most of us still trusted him and actually felt "sorry" for him. He assured us that the business would continue to move forward as planned and that he was never going to file for bankruptcy. He said he loved us and that he was being wrongly framed for trying to do the right thing.

On January 2, 2001, we met with John Doe and with his two assistants for the fourth time, to make our final decision about whether we would demand our money back and get out or stick it out to the end. By this time, my husband and I were facing some financial set backs, due to the monthly loan payments, and we were using our credit card to meet emergency needs such as fixing our car. At this meeting, John Doe pleaded with us ever so humbly but confidently, to give him three more months to get the business rolling or he would give us our money back. We were so dumb and naïve, we halfheartedly agreed to his conditions and feeling compassion for this man, my brother-in-law told him that we would give him six more months instead of three. We left the meeting with a sense of accomplishment and my sister-in-law and I continued attending weekly meetings, which were being changed to various locations.

About a month after our last meeting, we heard the bad news through the grapevine. John Doe had filed for bankruptcy and had even pleaded guilty to some of the charges that had been made against him. We were very hurt and feelings of discouragement and anger enveloped us. We were stuck with a \$15,000 loan and had not seen a penny from our investment. There were many, many heartbroken people and families. How could anybody deceive so many people this way? He knew our situations. He knew that my husband was working two jobs to support our family. He said he wanted to help us because he wanted to see families having more quality times together. I was more angry and disappointed at myself for believing in all of his lies. I deeply regret not getting out of this phony business earlier. How could I have been so stupid? Why didn't we heed the signs along the way?

It has been over two years since we made that painful and costly mistake. John



Doe's trial date was moved back three times, but eventually he went to trial and was convicted. We still feel the deep pain of regret as we write out our monthly check to the bank, and as long as I live, I never want to make another such mistake. This was definitely a hard lesson for us to learn. We should have asked to see some solid proof and asked to speak to those people who had already made some money. As soon as we found out that the business was not even fully developed, we should have asked for our money back and gotten out. Pretending to really care for all of us who were already struggling to meet basic needs, and putting on the disguise of humility and compassion, John Doe the wolf robbed hundreds of people of their hard-earned money. He took advantage and betrayed the hearts of kind and trusting people and made us become untrusting and suspicious of people. Will we ever get our money back? I hope and pray so. In the meantime, be aware that the wolves are out there.

## **Maid in Hawaii**

Sahara Grace Uy

When I was a young girl growing up in the Philippines, I had two maids and my aunties to take care of me. We lived in a two-story, Chinese style house. The bottom level was our house, and the upper level was for rent. Life was easygoing and carefree. My two older brothers also had their own maids and share of aunties and uncles to take care of their every need. Every morning I would wake up and smell hot dogs, pandesal, garlic fried rice and Ovaltine coming from the kitchen. Before I could even get out of bed, one of my maids would pick me up and take me to the bathroom, where my bath was waiting for me. She would brush my teeth, comb my hair, bathe me and clothe me. Life was so easy then. I don't remember ever having to pick up a spoon or fork to feed myself. Honestly, I would have to tell them that I wanted to feed myself for them not to feed me. This type of lifestyle was and still is very common in the Philippines.

I don't think I was spoiled when I was growing up. My mom didn't have the time or energy to take care of the three of us. She was making all the money with her hobby shop to support our growing family. My mom also had her own maid, who would double as one of my maids. It's just a way Filipinos can help out other Filipinos. And it's not like these people were our slaves. They were getting paid monthly and enjoyed working for my mom. I even remember days when they would ask my mom if they could bring me home with them during their vacation. I guess they really enjoyed taking care of me. Sometimes, I'd be gone for weeks. And even though they were on their vacation, they'd still take care of me. My new family made my life so easy. They would never even let my clothes get all sweaty. Can you believe that they'd follow me around with a facecloth soaked in baby cologne?

One day my dad, who's in the Navy, found out he was being stationed in Hawaii because the Naval base in Subic was closing down. At first we were all excited. I told all my maids and friends that I was going to learn how to dance hula, and that my skin would turn white and my hair blonde. And as far as we knew, only rich people could afford to live in "America." So we really had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. We weren't preparing for a big change. Little did we know, life was going to be different in Hawaii.

Before we moved to Hawaii, my mom had to explain to the maids that my dad didn't have the power or money to bring them with us. The maids didn't have the paperwork that was needed to go with us either, so my mom sent them home one by one. I think she did



that so that it wouldn't be such a drastic change for the three of us. The only people that stayed with us were my two aunties. They were the ones who dropped my mom and me off at the airport.

We moved to Hawaii in 1992. I was only eight years old, and I was accustomed to a certain way of life. My mom told me it was a trap, a reason for her to move and leave her prospering hobby shop. But I just told her I wanted to go. My mom and I arrived a week after my brothers and dad had arrived. At first, I was very excited. All my brothers and I could say was, "Dude, it looks exactly like the picture in the magazines. It smells clean here. Is my hair turning blonde yet?" and other stupid things like that.

We lived in the Pepper Tree apartments near Pearlridge for a month or so. We were slowing getting less excited though. We were living in a small apartment compared to our two-story house in the P.I. Not to mention, my brothers and I had to share one maid, my mom, but she doesn't count. It got frustrating at times. When we finally moved into Aliamanu Military Reservation (AMR), my brothers and I were wishing for a miracle of some sort. We wanted a maid from the P.I. Our parents asked us to do chores around the house. We never had to do chores in the P.I. I thought, who was going to dress me, bathe me, and feed me? I didn't know how to pick out my clothes. I was just learning how to put on my panties on my own and even with that, I needed someone to hold on to for balance. I know this seems stupid and pretty funny. An eight-year-old girl, a third grader, who didn't know how to care for herself. Such responsibilities were new to me. It was then, while trying to put my panties on by myself, that I realized that I had to learn how to care of myself.

As years passed, my brothers and I learned to be independent. I guess we were taking in the "American way of life." It wasn't easy though. My mom had to comb my hair and bathe with me for a couple of months just to help me adjust. And then there were my friends in school too. They didn't know this, but they were teaching me to be on my own. I would hear them talking about how they picked out their own clothes when they went shopping, and how they put their hair up in the morning. I didn't want to be different from them, so by listening I learned how to do things on my own. I remember my parents telling us that we would eventually get used to our new lifestyle, but we would have to work on it. I guess they were right. It wasn't long until we were all doing chores around the house. We took turns washing dishes, setting the table, cleaning the house.

Now that I look back on my childhood years, I realize that it was fun and easy going, but what would have happened to me in the long run if I always had someone else doing everything for me? I wouldn't be the independent person I am today.



## 8 Track Experience

Dustin Watchman

When I was growing up, I moved around the United States a lot. My father was in the military, so we moved about every three years. He had owned many different cars throughout our travels. One car sticks out in my memory more than any of the others because it was such a beautiful piece of machinery.

My family had moved to Illinois, and my father purchased a 1971, metallic blue, white convertible ragtop GTO. I remember when it would come time to go somewhere and my father would walk out to the car, just looking at it up and down like it was a beautiful woman. He would start it up, lift the hood to the engine, and listen to it idle. After the engine had warmed up and all the fluids were dispersed throughout the engine, he would manually rev the engine. As I was sitting in the seat inside the car, I could see and feel the car tremble from side to side as the torque of the engine rocked the body. Once my father was finished with his rituals, he would close the hood with a loud thunderous bang and stroll around the to the drivers' side, running the tips of his fingers along the polished paint on the fender. He appeared to have a look of awe painted on his face every time he was involved with this car. The car was immaculate on the interior as well as the exterior. It was all original with blue leather interior, which seemed to mold to father's body as he sat down in the driver's seat. It also had a big block engine full of raw, uninhibited power that would push you further back into your seat when the gas peddle was pushed all the way to the floor. A single white pinstripe running down the length of the car on each side gave it that added touch of elegance, not to be overtaken by its sheer power. The GTO even had the original 8 track stereo in the dash. I could see it in my fathers' eyes as he would turn the knob, trying to pick up and radio station that he could, that the radio - along with every other big and small detail of the car - added to its character. Watching my father drive this car, this machine, I could tell that he knew he had something special and he knew exactly what it was.

I will always remember this car for its pristine beauty, incredible power on the asphalt, and the 8 track stereo in the dash. The way that it made my father like a child opening a new matchbox car for Christmas will never be forgotten. No other car is even close to being as beautiful as the 1971 GTO.



## Realization

Tak Ping Wong

I will never forget that dreadful rainy Saturday afternoon in 1990. That day four strangers, my parent's lawyers and two social workers, stepped into our house and entered our lives. After brief introductions, our parents were asked to stay in separate rooms, while the two social workers talked to my sister and me. They said, "We are social workers. We are here because your parents will no longer live together, and we want to know who you want to live with from now on. We also need to know how your mom and dad treat you."

At the mention of divorce, my sister burst into tears. The social workers and I tried to comfort her. I've always been the stronger one, but I can only keep my strong face forward for so long. I had to rest. I leaned towards my sister and rested on her shoulders. I closed my eyes and tried to rest, but her crying voice echoed loudly in my ears. The rise in volume of her crying reminded me of something. I thought I heard them yelling again.

They're yelling again.

I can hear them barking at each other; even with the two locked bedroom doors, I can hear them; I can hear them clearly. Why are they always yelling? Why must they yell? Why can't they just communicate like my sister and me, softly and civilly. I bet not many parents are like my parents. I bet my parents are the only ones who yell; and if other parents have arguments, I bet it doesn't happen every night.

This turmoil is so irritating. How many more nights will be like this? I want things to be back to normal; I really want a normal family. I want their voices to disappear. I want to disappear.

"I want to disappear. I want to be anywhere but here. I want to disappear. I want to be anywhere but here," I kept repeating to myself while hiding in safety beneath the thick layers of my comforter, as if I'm Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz and by repeating my dream, it would come true.

It doesn't work. I hear the anger rising in her voice once more.

"No, I want my job. I want to earn some saving money."



"We have money. I earn money. We get money from rent. What more do you want? Why can't you ever be satisfied?"

"I don't want to be controlled anymore. I want to have my own job and earn my own money. I want my own savings account. I want to make my own decisions. I don't want you controlling every move I make. I have enough of that already. You think you can mold me into a little obedient Chinese wife? You wish! I hate it when people are trying to control me, and that's exactly what you're doing. Doing what I hate most."

"Fine, if you must have a job, I'll let you. But find another job. I don't like your boss; he looks at you funny. I've been asking around for jobs, and I've found one in Dillingham that is owned by my friend's family. Tomorrow, I'll take a day off and go with you to quit your job and help you check into the new one."

"No, I don't want a new job. I'm comfortable and happy where I'm working. I don't want things to be changed, and I'm definitely not going to have you move me around like a chess piece just because you don't like my boss. I like my job, and I'm going to keep it. There's no need to say anymore; I've decided."

It went on like that each night. I knew something bad was bound to happen; it was just a matter of time. When the strangers turned up at last, I was actually relieved. I felt emotionally drained, but I was also looking forward to the prospect of finally ending the nightmares and turning everything back to normal.

My sister did not feel the same way. Unlike me, she had no idea what was happening until the social workers spoke to us. She was ignorant of the issues that lay beneath all the colorful settings and faces put forward to us. The divorce was a real shocker for her.

I understand that the divorce was a rather big surprise, but why cry over a surprise? I did not understand a bit about divorce, except that my parents will no longer live together. But why would Mandy cry for that? What's so sad about that? We will still see both of our parents. And on second thought, it would be better. I mean, we wouldn't have to suffer from their late-night arguments. Plus, wouldn't we be more cherished and spoiled since our parents won't be able to see us as often? We should be happy, celebrating, not crying.

I mean, think of all the possibilities. The endless toy shopping at Toys R' Us, the yummy food my mom would make especially for us when we see her, the pool parties, the continuous love instead of endless hours of lectures and occasional punishments. What a great life that'll be.



Actually, now that I think about it, I really want my parents to get a divorce. It would be good for all parties: for my sister and me, and for my parents. After all, they would no longer have to endure each other; they'll both be happy. And as for my sister and I, we'll be having a better life than now- I'm sure. Stupid Mandy. What a dummy to not see all these great things installed for us in the future if our parents divorce. I really have to talk to her about this so that she would realize how wonderful a divorce would be.

Both my sister and I decided to live with our dad. Why? Our reason was simple. Our mother was the one who punished and lectured. Obviously, any kid with brains would pick a parent who would just stand behind and not yell or hit you when you do something wrong. Anyone in our position would have done the same, I'm sure.

After telling the social workers we wanted to live with our dad, they told us to go into the room where my dad and aunt Grace (dad's youngest sister) were staying while we were talking. Once we walked into the room, I began to feel the pressure involved in a divorce.

"What did they say?"

"What did they ask you to do?"

"Did you tell them you wanted to live with your dad and not with your mom?"

"Did you?"

"Answer me!"

I felt small. I thought I shrank as my aunt and dad bombarded us with questions left and right. Did I do something wrong? What have we ever done to deserve this kind of treatment? Are we criminals who are on trial? It's not our fault they're having a divorce. Why must we get punished? I wasn't the one yelling at night, I wasn't the one who wanted to earn "extra saving money," and I was not the one who wanted someone to get a new job. I didn't do anything! We didn't do anything but try to be good and to be quiet. We kept out of their way, and it's not our fault for what has happened. I hate this! I hate them! I want this to end now, right now. They should just get a divorce right now, today. I don't want to see them, any of them, ever again.

It's now the summer of 2002. The things I've said before occurred twelve years ago, when the divorce wasn't fully carried out yet- when I still had both of my parents with



me under one roof. Back then, I did not understand divorce enough to think correctly. I thought divorce was simply to have my parents separated and that I would only get to see one parent at a time. I didn't know all the other things involved in a divorce. I was wrong about the endless shopping sprees we'd have at Toys R' Us. I was also wrong about the continuous love and the ending of lectures and punishment. Things did not get better for my sister and me.

The day the divorce was carried out and my mom left our home, I felt very lonely. The house felt very empty. We were all very quiet that day. We felt lost, like something was out of place or something was not right. It wasn't right; we had lost our mom. That night, I cried and did not eat. This went on for the first couple of days. I thought it wouldn't be a big deal. I thought a divorce would not mean much of anything except that I would be seeing my parents separately and that I would no longer have to endure the endless yelling and arguments.

I hadn't realized all the other factors involved in a divorce. I never thought of my parents remarrying, getting pregnant, and forming a totally new and separate family away from me. I thought I'd always be my mother's favorite and youngest child. I was wrong.

Four years after the divorce, my mom remarried. I didn't expect that to happen. I never once thought of either one of my parents remarrying and forming his/her own separate family. I couldn't believe it. I thought no one could ever take my place and that I would be forever cherished. Not once, not for one minute, had I thought of having a future competition come my way. Not once had I thought of the jealousy I might have from my mother's second marriage and her pregnancy. I was downright mad and jealous. What right do these people have to take my mommy away from me, to split her attention away from me?!

After her second marriage, my dad became more bitter. He, too, was jealous. He thought she'd have a miserable life without him to guide her in America (because he knew English, and she didn't). He was wrong; we were both dead wrong. He continuously tried to put pressure on my sister and me to make my mom's life a living hell. He asked for child support. He snapped at her for simple things we had done wrong (just to have an excuse to yell at her). He would do anything to make my mom feel bad for wanting to leave our family. My sister and I became afraid of him. We were afraid to say the wrong thing, to accidentally push the flashing red button. His temper got worse, and he no longer stood in the shadows of our mom when she used to hit us. He became her. He would use clothes hangers, bamboo sticks to hit us - sometimes even a slap in the face or a small punch on the arm. He was no longer "Mr. Nice Guy."



It's not only the physical factors that irk me, it's the mental games my dad and his relatives play on my sister and me. They always talk crap about my mother in front of my face. They tell me lies about my mother. They spread nasty rumors (making my mom's name extremely famous in China Town at one time), and they always try to turn me away from my mother. These people! I can't tolerate them. Half of them don't even know the whole story and they're trying to influence me and screw up my mind! Relatives are supposed to help their own people out when they're in a difficult situation. What happened to the help I needed? These people, my dad and his stupid family, just don't seem to understand what we're enduring. That doesn't help to make things easier for us. They, especially my dad, constantly brings back the past, and nags and nags. The divorce impacted him greatly. Time stopped for him; his life stopped. We all moved on, except for him. He always complains about the past. Sometimes, I feel sorry for him. But who is to feel sorry for me, for my sister?

For my dad, time stopped in 1990, and it will never move again. My mom will forever feel bad for leaving my sister and me behind when we needed her most. For my sister, who had always been a very shy and "inner" child, the divorce has, unfortunately, made her even shyer and scared of the world around her. My parents divorce has also changed my life around. The divorce forced me to learn to take care of myself at the age of five, to pick my outfits for school, to bathe myself, to cut oranges, and to be the "in-between" person for my dad and mom. The divorce took my childhood away. Sure, I learned to be responsible at a young age, but I also lost my childhood. The single most important thing one can have or will ever have.

But that's the past, and I try not to dwell on the bad things as much as my dad. I don't want to be stuck in time. I'm almost eighteen now, and soon, I'll be out of here. Maybe then, things will be better for me. At least I know I won't be sandwiched between my mom and dad. But it's really hard to say. Sometimes, we think life would be easier on the other side of the ocean, but when we get there, does it really get any better? There are nights when I'll stay up for hours, wondering if my family had not moved to America, would everything be all right? Would we be happier? And if I lived with my mom, and my sister lived with my dad, then both of our parents might have gotten back together eventually. Maybe then, things would be better. But who knows? Don't we always think the grass is greener on the other side? But when we get there, would we like it? I surely didn't like the grass on the other side before. Would I like the grass on the other side this time? I really don't know. I guess I'll just have to see.