

DIAMOND JOURNAL



Fall 2008

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Acknowledgements

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

The photographs on the front and back covers were taken in the college's fabulous cactus garden.

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

Editor

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The Scope of *Diamond Journal*

Diamond Journal specializes in publishing works of nonfiction that take the form of personal narrative. The two types of writing that most commonly appear in these pages are the personal narrative and the personal narrative essay. A personal narrative is an autobiographical story about a specific incident or series of related incidents in a writer's life which reveal conflict and often growth in the writer's character. Personal narrative may be defined as a true account of personal experience. Rather than "autobiography," which implies a rather comprehensive account of one's life, the term "memoir" might more suitably describe this type of narration. The writer of this genre, who must inevitably be highly selective in choosing details to share with the reader, strives to draw the reader as fully as possible into an experience that is largely communicated through creative use of the following:

- Effective pacing and blending of summary and scene,
- Sharp, believable dialogue,
- Distinctive characterization that "brings characters to life,"
- A palpable setting (time, place, even atmosphere, and the details to give them meaning) that places the reader in the world of the story,
- Action verbs and concrete nouns that show instead of tell,
- An organizational structure and focus that help the reader stay with the story all the way to the end (usually, but not always, chronological).

In the personal narrative essay, experiences taken from one's life are connected to an idea. Because a personal essay may be more idea-driven than story-driven, however, storytelling techniques used in personal narrative may be somewhat less prevalent than in the personal narrative. Occasionally, a good bit of research from secondary sources may be incorporated into a personal narrative essay in order to explore the subject more fully. Such essays, with their scholarly elements of textual citation and bibliography, are often identified as personal critical essays.

The common thread in all the types of narrative writing mentioned here is, of course, the word "personal." Sharing personal stories is one of the oldest, most valued rituals of our species. Taken as a whole, these stories celebrate the diversity of our students at Kapi'olani Community College. They also reaffirm our common connection with any brave, thoughtful person anywhere, anytime who has taken the time to tell a story worth sharing.

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Diamond Journal, a publication of the Board of Student Publications (BOSP) at the University of Hawaii at Kapi‘olani Community College, is produced once each semester. Funding for BOSP is provided by student fees. The written works included in *Diamond Journal* reflect the experiences, opinions, and views of their authors, not those of the BOSP, journal editors, advisors, or staff. Authors are solely responsible for the content of each submission. While *Diamond Journal* invites all submissions, selection for publication is entirely at the discretion of the editors, who also reserve the right to edit for grammar, punctuation, and length.

The Face of Death

Andrew Adezio

I remember that night clearly, the night I looked death in the face. It was July in New Jersey, so humid I felt like I was swimming through the air. The hot moist air penetrated everything; it was the night my life changed.

I had recently graduated from high school and was enjoying my carefree summer of freedom. Like most young men, I spent most of my time in my car. I was at that age where I was trapped between two worlds: too old stay at home, too cool to spend time with my family and too young to move out. My haven was my car. As for most guys my age, my car was a projection of my soul and I lovingly took care of it. I lavished it with the finest products: striking chrome rims, and a system with bass that would shake a pedestrian to his or her core when I passed by. Looking back now it is probably that old primate behavior; like a gorilla, teenage males try to make as much noise as possible to scare away their competitors. That car meant everything to me. I worked just to buy that car, pay the insurance and fix it up.

That night I was hanging out with my friends. Vic, my best friend, who was a year younger than me, was half Nicaraguan and half Puerto Rican and looked a lot like those Spanish depictions of Jesus, minus the mustache and goatee. I also picked up Chris, my tiny little Puerto Rican friend who was about 4 feet tall, and Travis, a skinny African-American kid I had known since elementary school, a great friend with whom I spent most of my time. We were dressed in what was the style back then, wearing pants that were so big all four of us could fit in one pair, and XXL white t-shirts when medium was my actual size.

We didn't have anything in particular to do that night, but when I was a teenager, somehow even just standing around with my friends felt like I was doing something. We decided to meet up with some more friends in front of this girl Tara's house and do nothing together. Tara's house was in my town, Pennsauken, a typical New Jersey suburb known mostly for being right across the bridge from Philadelphia. However, Tara's house was on the outskirts of Camden, America's best kept secret. It has the dubious distinction of having the number one murder rate in the nation for the past three years and many odd years before that. The entire city is a black hole. It envelops and devours all light and hope, its cold dark tendrils ever reaching for more prey. I grew up next to this place, always entering it for work and with friends, even though people have been shot there for simply being my race and entering the inner sanctions of this hell. Having constantly spent time coming in and out, I believed myself immune to its effects, and at that age aren't we all invincible? I was wrong.

We arrived at the house early, around seven o'clock in the evening when it was still light. The bright orange sun gently caressed the clouds, creating a kaleidoscope of colors. We began the endless deliberations about what to do that night (or basically where we could get away with drinking). By eight o'clock nothing was decided and my friend Jesse was getting off work, so I decided to pick him up. Little did I know a predator already had me in his sights, circling, ready to pounce.

We returned shortly after picking Jesse up and he joined the throng of people in front of the house. Vic, Chris, Travis and I stayed in the car and were listening to music, absorbing the crisp, refreshingly cool air of the air conditioner. We sat in our own little reality in my personal haven, just listening to the music. I saw a large African-American man walking up the street; he was wearing a large down feather coat. I thought it was really odd he was wearing such a coat in this suffocating humidity; he walked directly up to my car door, as if being drawn towards it like a magnet. Up close he looked like a chubby Method man, the rap artist.

Tap, Tap, Tap... he knocked on the window.

"Open the door," he said.

"What?" I responded.

Calmly he repeated, "Open the door."

"NO! Who the FUCK are you," I fired back at him. At this time I noticed one of his hands was hidden in the deep expanses of his billowing fluffy coat.

"OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR NOW!" he blasted, as he slid the gun from depths of his coat out. By some cruel twist of fate, I had left my window open a small crack as I was talking to someone earlier--just a small crack, too small for him to fit his arm through, but large enough for him to fit the barrel of his gun through and place it firmly against the side of my head.

The cold lifeless contact of the metal pushed hard against my skull. At this moment, Chris and Travis, who were in the back seat, vanished as they ran away clear from the scene never looking back. Vic sprang out of the front seat and started to run. All the people standing in front of the house ran inside leaving me all alone. For me, all time stopped, the universe around me faded, and all that existed in my reality was the endless silent connection between the barrel of the gun and me. I was not scared. I did not even remember what fear was. There was merely the fact that there was a gun pressed deeply into my skull.

The only thing separating me and the cold embrace of death was a slim piece of metal where the man's finger lay.

I had parked in between two cars so tightly I could not pull out if I wanted to. So I took my only option; I slowly, decisively put my hands up, signaling submission and then I undid the seat belt I was wearing in what seemed like several eternities, took the cell phone out of my pocket and faced the barrel of the gun.

I was literally staring down the barrel of a gun. The gun had a long cylindrical barrel, which looked like a modified silencer. The silencer meant that in no uncertain terms he was prepared to kill, not to just scare me, because he took that extra step to ensure no one would hear the fatal gunshot. I intently stared down the barrel. It seemed like an endless vortex of black so dark it was impenetrable. He then pushed the gun hard in between my eyes. I reached for my cell phone, dialed 911 and slowly raised it to my ear as he pulled back to allow me to exit the car. He grabbed me and jammed the gun as hard as he could into my back. Vic, having had a change of heart, had come back to stand only ten feet away from me and my merciless attacker.

"Hello, this is 911 emergency hotline," the operator said.

"Someone is carjacking me right now," I calmly explained.

"He has a gun pushing into my back right now," I said as with a forced casual tone, trying not to alarm my attacker.

"Where are you located?" asked the operator.

I explained where I was and she said she would send someone right away. The whole time my attacker had his gun intensely pressed into my back with crushing force. He seemed alike he was going through an internal crisis, trying to decide whether or not to kill me now that the police were coming and my friend had returned as a witness. Finally, my attacker jabbed the sharp rim of the barrel striking it in my back then jumped in the car. For a time, he could not figure out the manual transmission. Then he sped off with my personal haven.

The police that the operator said she would send right away arrived promptly about three hours later even though the house was only a five-minute drive from a station filled with police officers. Even my brother arrived before them. It was in that moment that all my trust in the police evaporated. When they arrived, they questioned me as if I was a criminal, implying that I was probably selling drugs and had brought this upon myself. The empty

void left from my evaporated trust in them was now filled with disgust and contempt. I was the victim and had done nothing wrong. I to this day do not trust the police.

When they found my car a few weeks later, it was stripped bare. This was oppressively crushing to my soul. It was like looking at the skeleton of my best friend that had been torn to pieces by a vicious predator that left only the occasional fleshy piece hanging on the gnawed bones.

I thought endlessly about what happened to me for the next few weeks. It showed me who my true friends were. How could I truly call a person my friend when that person left me to die alone? I thought hard about what possessions meant to me. Sure, my car was very important to me, but what does a possession mean if I was not there to own it? Did I invite such tragedy upon myself by being so flashy with my belongings? This event changed my way of life forever. I became disheartened with possessions and focused more on just living and enjoying what time I had here left on earth. I cut off ties with all of my friends except Vic and decided to change my way of life. I do not regret it happening. If it had not happened, I might not have made other decisions that brought me to where I am today. I will always remember that night, the night I looked death in the face.

Ashes

Amanda Affonso

The crisp coolness of the night air filled my lungs, sending goose bumps up and down my arms. It was the night before third quarter would start and winter break would be over. I dreaded waking up so early. The New Year had just arrived and here I was, reluctantly packing my books for school while everyone else was still in celebration mode. My grades were good and school was back in session. It looked like it was going to be a good year. I never suspected that on Sunday, January 5th, my world would collapse into a pile of ashes.

I lived in a four bedroom, two bath house with two large living rooms that rested on a half acre lot right on the water in a prime location in Kailua. My mother hosted many holiday events there, but Christmas was her favorite. The day after Thanksgiving was the day we always got our tree. The smell of the pine needles filled our home; the aroma crept in to every room as if to say that Christmas day would be here soon. The tree was decorated with exquisite ribbons and ornaments like one out of a Martha Stewart magazine. My mother was an artist and the tree was her canvas.

On Sunday, before leaving for work, my mother left instructions that the tree had to be taken down (a sign that Christmas was officially over). The ornaments were carefully wrapped in at least three sheets of tissue, ensuring that they would not break. The bows were placed in their transparent plastic container, still sparkling with gold as a reminder that Christmas would soon be here again. I opened the door to the craft closet where the ornaments and ribbons were stored and I felt an overwhelming emptiness, as if I had lost something of value in my life. I returned to the living room and found my sister examining the bottom of the tree, feeling for water. The pine needles had lost their vibrant hunter green color. They were completely dry, their tips faded from pale green to dull brown, but the tree amazingly kept its tantalizing smell.

The faint black outline of thin mosquitoes flew around the room. No one knew how they got into the house. My brother knelt down to light a citronella which happened to be right next to the pale green tree. As the match head went from black, to yellow, then to red, a flame broke out. As he was bending down, one of the pine needle branches accidentally caught on fire and quickly spread to the top of the tree. My sister pulled out from beneath the tree as my brother pushed the tree down to the tiled kitchen floor. I stood paralyzed in the far side of the living room, my heart pounding with fear. All I could do was stare at the fire climbing to ceiling, trying to consume the house. My brother and sister were trying to put the fire out with mixing bowls filled with water. I stood there watching, thinking that

they would eventually put the fire out. For a second I thought that it was all a part of my imagination. I came back to reality and ran out of the house, leaving my brother and sister behind to fight the fire.

I had a selfish moment; I was only concerned with my own life and no one else's and I felt ashamed. I looked to see the fire peer out of the roof on the far right side of the house, where my brother and sister had been battling the fire in the kitchen. The fire grew and a thick blanket of smoke filled the house; nothing was visible. I called the police but they put me on hold for a minute that felt like two hours. I heard the voices of my brother and sister, but couldn't see them. The operator returned as my sister emerged from the left side of the house, crying like a baby, still clutching her mixing bowl. As I saw her become hysterical, I yelled to the operator, "FIRE! 788 Mokapu Road! FIRE!" I repeated the address over and over again.

Three minutes had passed since my call to 911 and no one had come to help us. As I stood on the long grey concrete driveway, no one came. I could see the fire station from where I stood; there were no bells, no sirens, no lights, just the crackling of the fire behind me.

Five minutes had passed and help finally arrived; by now the whole house was engulfed in flames. As I looked around, I saw that the entire neighborhood was out; the road was filled and the police had blocked off traffic. Neighbors came out that I had never met before. They brought snacks with them to eat while they watched my childhood home go up in flames as it were some kind of Fourth of July fireworks show. It was too painful. I tried not to look at the house.

When ten minutes had passed, my mother arrived home to nothing, just her children and gave us the longest hugs we had ever had. My father arrived and started yelling at us, calling us stupid in front of all of our neighbors, giving them another show to watch. He hadn't lived in that house for years; he hadn't lost anything; we were the ones who had lost everything. We ignored him. By nine o'clock the fire was out and the neighbors returned to their intact homes, grateful that it was our home and not theirs.

We returned the next day and there was an overwhelming smell of charred wood. There were mounds of different colored ash: black, charcoal and grey. The colors of the ash determined the spots that the fire had been the strongest. Few things remained. The only part of the house that still stood was the chimney and the foundation, both made of concrete and brick. Of all the things in the house, the one thing that remained intact was the tree stump, the very thing that helped start the fire.

Within ten minutes I had lost everything that had ever mattered to me. In an ironic way, losing everything was a valuable lesson for me. This tragedy taught me and my family not to take anything for granted, to cherish every moment of every day and to cherish each other. The burning of my childhood home forced me to leave my adolescence behind and rise above the destruction to look forward to what is to come with each new day.

As My Life Turned

Tiffany K. Aho

I never thought anything could hurt as much as losing my son. Having a baby was something I thought would give me the opportunity to start something good in my life. It would give me the opportunity to want more for myself. Instead, losing him changed my life in so many other ways. In the end, I knew losing my baby was for the better. It would end up being a life changing experience.

I was seventeen when I found out I was pregnant and eighteen when I lost him. Pregnancy was something I thought I would hold off for a few years. Being in high school, I knew I didn't want to be another teenager getting pregnant, but in my gut, I knew I was about to raise the statistic a little bit higher. It was my senior year in high school with just a few more graduation rehearsals. I didn't know it yet, but things were about to get difficult.

I was just getting home after a long day of rehearsals. I decided to take my brother to the manapua truck downstairs. Standing in the scorching hot sun, ordering some food, I felt like I was about to faint. I was blinded for some reason. My eyes felt as if they were rolling to the back of my head, but I took the chance of walking up the stairs. I opened my eyes as I reached the third floor. I plopped myself down on the bed, dripping with sweat, even though the fan was pointed directly on me. It was the first sign, but I didn't get the hint. With a bowl of hot saimin prepared by grandma, I told myself that it was time for a physical. I thought maybe it was my body being unused to my non active duties now that my sports seasons were over and graduation was approaching.

The next day I was off to my family doctor for a physical. I was so nervous and scared of the idea that maybe I should take a pregnancy test. It seemed to be a good idea, so I did. The results revealed what I was not ready for. The test came out positive. My throat tightened as if it had been taped shut for me. All I could say was, "Okay." I listened to what the doctor had to say about the things I needed to maintain to have a healthy baby. All I could think was, "How am I going to tell my mom?" I was hoping she'd understand because she was in the same predicament when she was sixteen. With an abortion being out of the question, I knew I needed to tell her. It was nine o'clock in the evening and as my mom walked through the door, I knew it was now or never. After I gave her the news, with tears running down my face, she wore a look of disappointment. Her tears followed shortly after mine. She wanted more for me. She wanted me to achieve more. I felt a sense of relief when she said she would support me through every obstacle, every step of the way. After all of the tears and the questions between us, I smiled and prayed everything

would go well. I registered to see my mom's doctor at the Kapi'olani Medical Center.

I knew I was having a boy and everything seemed fine. I was seven and a half months pregnant on my way to my fourth ultrasound. My son's heartbeat was loud and clear, but my doctor told me he wanted to get things straight. He thought my dates might be wrong due to my son being too small for the size I was and how far along he thought I was. He then scheduled me for another appointment. Four days later, on September 2, 2005, the unexpected happened: I was rushed in to give birth. The nurses told me that my son had to get out. His heartbeat was getting slower and slower every minute. They needed to deliver him immediately.

With no choice, I called my family and explained the situation. They cried, all asking if I was alright. I said "yes," but deep in my soul, I really wasn't. They got to the hospital as soon as they could. At that moment, all I wanted was my mom by my side. One by one, my family slowly arrived. Shortly after, I was taken to the emergency room. After putting me to sleep, they were ready to do a DNC. I knew I wasn't going to remember anything about the procedure.

I awoke from my coma of nightmares, trying to find my son. I remember saying to the nurse next to me, "Where is my baby? Give him to me." Without any questions, the nurse rolled my son into my room. I knew I was in for a rude awakening. He looked so bad and so weak. I was no help to him. He looked pale, like there was very little blood circulating through his body. His shallow breaths were so slow; it looked like he was barely breathing. I was his mother and I could not help him. With tubes everywhere and tape on his feet, I knew I was about to lose my baby. Two and a half hours later, he stopped breathing and died in my hand. Weighing three pounds and four ounces, my son was gone. I wanted to know what had happened, so the doctors ran tests. It seemed that my placenta, my water bag, my son and his outer parts were growing, but his inner organs weren't growing as rapidly.

Deeply devastated and hating the situation, my life slowly came into perspective. My son came into my life for many reasons and had left my life for more. He taught me so much about myself and the person I wanted to become. I honestly feel like he made me the person I am today. Thoughts ran through my head asking, "Why me?" I now realize that I am a much better person since it has happened to me. I feel like I have been through the worst. Nothing can hurt me more than what I had already been through. It made me more mature at eighteen than any twenty-four year old.

If my son were here today, there would be things that I would miss out on. I do believe that all things happen for a reason. Maybe he would have gotten sick with something

the Lord knows I would not have been able to handle. Maybe it was an opportunity for my mother to have more kids. A month later, my mom found out she was pregnant. And it was a boy.

In the end, the experience bettered my life in all aspects. It prepared me for everything in life that will one day come. My life is exactly where it should be and I'm achieving more and more everyday with a positive attitude. I am looking forward to pregnancy again, waiting patiently for the right time. Losing my son was a life changing experience that made me a better, more mature, thankful and appreciative person. I was just lucky enough to have received it so early in life. Losing my son taught me what I really should be doing. It taught me to have standards and morals for myself that I definitely share with others. Now that I am aware of the good that can come from damaging situations, I know what to expect, and next time, I'll be ready.

Letting Go

Francis Aurellano

We were both tired from catching up with old friends at last night's party. Alex and I had been surfing everyday the entire week, but because we had been surfing for over six years, our bodies were used to it. The whole coast was pumping a new Northwest groundswell and we both loved surfing places where it was uncrowded. We wanted to go to a spot called Gray Whale's Cove, aka "Nudies" because it is a nude beach. Gray Whale's Cove is a little cove off the coast of California. The beach is about three hundred yards long and only one hundred feet from the cliff to the ocean's swelling seas. Surrounded by dark, sharp, rocky, steep cliffs over half a mile high, it was home to hundreds of pelicans, seagulls, deer and rarely seen puma and coyotes. This was my favorite place to surf. Even when the waves here were flat, I would go to the cove just to relax and fall asleep to the ocean's soft, harmonic sound. When my life was full of stress, this place was my place to escape from it all. I would spend some time alone here to soothe myself.

Looking outside my window, I could see the waves splashing white water in the cool air against the five foot pillar of the local town pier by my house. This meant the waves had to be at least head high to overhead.

As I was driving down the sinuous highway called Devil's Slide, along the coast, my eyes were averted away from the road to the waves down the cliff, seeing what looked like perfect sets with at least six to eight waves in a set. The cold ocean's surface looked like an oil spill because of the lack of any wind.

"Check that out!"

"Whooooooooaaaaa!" caught in a choke, taking it all in. "Dude I'm so psyched right now!"

"Me too. It looks perfect out there."

It was in my eyes. The waves were about a solid six to eight feet with the occasional ten foot wave passing through. We hardly ever saw days like these. Only on a rare three to five days a year would we be lucky enough to be the first ones out to spend time with Mother Ocean.

"No one out too! DUDE, LETS GO!"

"OH, YOU KNOW!"

The sun was beginning to climb over the mile-high cliffs, hitting the morning surf. As we parked on the side, I heard the thunderous, roaring shore break hitting a rock. It was as if I was standing next to a hot rod's starting engine. Every time the wave hit the sand, I could feel the vibration from the ground. The surf was ours but I noticed an old fisherman

sitting in the corner of the cove reading.

"How's that paddle?" Alex said.

"Brah, it took me about twenty minutes just to paddle out. I got so worked on the inside. These waves are big. My heart is still pumping. I'm all jittery. I love this!"

The shore break was churning with sand. Whenever the sets passed, everything would be whitewater where the waves had hit. Sitting side to side, about ten yards away from each other, we both saw a wave that was peaking from the horizon. It looked as if it was trying to sneak up on us.

"OUTSIDE, BRO!"

"I'M GOING LEFT!"

"FINE, I'LL GO RIGHT!"

We both knew we had to make this because it was the biggest wave we had ever seen that day and to screw up would create the "one that got away."

"GO GO GO JUST GOOO!!!"

"OOOHHH!"

I was laughing in pure bliss, "Oh YEAH!" I could hear Alex screaming as he raced for the shoulder.

Coming up the beach, I noticed the old fisherman walking towards us. He had been fishing and reading as he waited for a bite from a fish. In his raggy military vest he said, "That last wave was a big one. I seriously didn't think you guys would make it but you guys split peaks and did it."

I noticed the book he was reading entitled *Eddie Would Go*.

He noticed me looking at his book and said, "If you love surfing, you got to read this book. You will love this. Many lessons are learned from this, kid."

"OK, well good luck on catchin' some. Nice to meet you."

"You too. You guys take it easy."

Right after high school I had split up with my girlfriend. Along with that, I was recovering from a broken radius from a football game. I had plans of going to play football for a nearby junior college and transferring out to a university of my choice. I had set goals and everything had seemed to just fall apart. Things were not going my way. I didn't know what to do after high school. I didn't know what to do to apply for colleges. Many of my friends were getting accepted to universities all around the country and I would be left at

the beach surfing everyday or getting wasted with my friends. I had no goals set in life. I was an unfocused individual.

In actuality, I was a good son brought up by a strong Christian family. I did nothing bad. I did no drugs and barely drank. When the surf was down, I would be alone most of the time always finding something to do at home. This is when I started to get into reading and picked up a copy of *Eddie Would Go*.

Reading was never part of my life. I liked reading war stories from time to time. *Eddie Would Go* was a book I felt like I had a connection to. I felt I could learn something from it that I could practice in my young life.

The book is about Eddie Aikau. He was a well-known and respected lifeguard on the north shore of O'ahu. He put family first in everything he did and was known for his surfing. His surfing showed a fearless character, dropping into the massive waves of Waimea Bay, the place he also patrolled as a lifeguard. He is remembered for trying to save a lost crew in the sea when he volunteered to paddle to Lana'i to save the crew, but was never found after.

I went biking to the pier near my house just to check on the waves and bumped into a slow-walking old fisherman. I noticed his sun wrinkled cheeks under his dark brown eyes. He stood only up to my shoulders as I picked up my bike.

"Sorry uncle, I didn't see you." I recognized his face and said, "Hey, how are you doing? I'm almost done reading the book." I looked into his eyes and I could tell he had experienced a long life. I noticed the faded marine tattoo on his arm and I thought he must've been in at least one big war of the U.S.

"Oh really, such a good book. It changed the way I look at life. I learned a lesson. Fix things in your life. Get your priorities straight. Get things straight before you help another person out with their life. If you want to do things in your life, just go do it! Dare yourself. Your only nemesis is yourself. Don't worry about the future. Let everything fall in place. Remember, Eddie would go! Now I gotta go. See you around, kid."

After this he said he had to go make dinner for his wife and daughter. He was a man of few words but I knew I would see him again. I repeated to myself what he said and it stuck in my head. I was doing things in my life. I was more motivated. I was currently enrolled in a massage school. I was doing Bikram yoga for flexibility and exercise. I was meditating everyday to clear my head. I felt like I was a new person. I was rejuvenated, living life one moment at a time, and going along with the flow.

I guess this was my time for a jump start. I just got accepted into Kapi'olani Community College on the island of O'ahu. Letting go of home of twenty years would be

hard enough. I would be leaving my family, my buds, and surfing the breaks around my town. I knew this was a blessing. I couldn't screw up. For months, I was feeling hesitant. I kept wondering what was I getting myself into. There were countless times in my life where I had to let go. For football, I was a senior captain and made no decision to never back down against anyone. My team was my family of thirty-eight brothers. I had to let go of feelings and tell someone how I felt. Now I was leaving overseas with my bro Alex. I was still nervous but was anticipating going with the unknown.

After reading *Eddie Would Go*, I learned taking that first step has always been hard for me. I had always been a hesitant and cautious person. Learning from numerous experiences always pushed me to take the next step. The next step may not always be good. Something bad may happen and cause you to start all over.

From reading I can learn many things. I can learn life lessons, learning about one's life or even learning about different places in the world. Letting go and inspiration was my learning experience in *Eddie Would Go*. After reading that book, I now read more than I used to. I see reading as a medium that helps me to imagine, daydream, and explore my creative side.

Parents' Divorce

Becky Correa

My parents married two years after my mom gave birth to me. My dad was 23 and my mom was 21. They were together all throughout high school. They had two boys before me. We were one happy family until my parents started fighting, which caused my dad to have an alcohol problem. That is when everything went downhill. My parents' divorce was one of the hardest experiences for my two older brothers and me. I was four years old when it happened. I wasn't old enough to understand everything that was going on, but I could tell that everything wasn't all right. It was a hard time for all of us to deal with.

Everything started when we moved out of our house with my dad. We couldn't see or talk to my mom because if we did, my dad would get angry with us, and he would whack us with a wooden stick or, in other words, give us "dirty lickins." The only times I would see my mom was when we went to court. I always hated going to court because I only remember my parents arguing with each other about who was going to have custody of us. I remember my mom always trying her very best to convince the judge to give her full custody of us, but my mom's plea wasn't good enough. Therefore, we were forced to live with my dad.

Living with my dad was different and scary. He was very abusive to us, especially to my older brother. Every time we did something wrong, we would always get slaps from our dad. Our father would go out and drink with his friends and leave us home by ourselves almost every night. I never really liked living with my dad because he was always in a bad mood and he had a short temper. Overall, he just wasn't there for me like my mom was for me. He chased away my mom and told her things that were very hurtful. I loved my dad very much, but I didn't like how he changed and most of all, I didn't like the way he treated my mom.

When I turned five, I went to school with my brothers. One day we were walking home when we decided we wanted to visit our mom. We went over to her house and stayed for a little while because she lived only a couple blocks away from us. After we walked to our dad's house, he got really mad at us because he knew we went to our mom's house. He yelled, "Why did you go over there today?" His frog eyes were ready to fall out because they were so big with fury. My brothers and I were speechless. We didn't want to say anything to make him lose it. Walking to my room, I could just feel the wooden stick hitting my buttocks already.

Even though we would get scolded for going to our mom's house, that never stopped us from visiting her almost everyday. My dad would yell at us all the time because he knew we were going to her house. Finally he had enough, so we packed up again and moved to

Hilo. I missed my mom so much because I never got to see her as much anymore.

My mom would try everything and anything to get a hold of us. She would call us on the phone, and my dad would come on and would threaten her, yelling, "They're my kids, not yours! If you don't stop calling, you'll never see them again!" Then he would hang up the phone. I had never seen my dad so angry. My brothers and I would always stay in the room comforting each other.

I remember my oldest brother constantly whispering in my ear, telling me, "It's going to be okay," with a soft and calm voice to ease my pain away. My brother's words always made me feel better, but that still never stopped me from crying myself to sleep.

After a year, my dad remarried again, and another year after that, my step-mom gave birth to my little sister. Those years living with my dad were horrible because we never got to see my mom. My dad even tried to replace my mom with his new wife. What was worse, we were forced to call my step-mom, "Mom." It was really hard to do that because I never really knew her that well.

For about another year, my dad and step-mom were fighting all the time, and he couldn't handle supporting all three of us plus another baby. My step-mom didn't even want us living with them because they were struggling financially. My mom found out what was happening in our family, so she took my dad back to court hoping to finally get custody of us. I was 7 years old at the time when everything started straightening up. My mom ended up making a good life for herself with a steady job and a roof over her head, which in the end helped her to get custody of us.

From then until now, we have lived with my mom. She married her husband, who is my step-dad now, but he's not only that. My step-dad supports me financially and he makes my mom really happy. My dad finally realized how horrible he was acting and realized how it didn't help him in life, so he straightened out and stopped drinking. He also started going to church, so that changed his life dramatically. He is happily married again and he keeps in contact with my brothers and me. He even talks to my mom and comes over to visit us. I never would have wanted my parents to get a divorce, but in the end it worked out to everybody's benefit.

My Aunty, A Strong Woman

Melissa Diaz

Weightlifters Jill Mills and Becca Swanson are two of the strongest women in the world, but my definition of strong is not being able to lift a lot of weight. My aunt is one of the strongest women I know. Her real name is Sandra Rodriguez, but everyone knows her as Mune. When she was a baby, my *abuelito* used to call her *La Muneca*, which means doll. The name just stuck with her, but got shortened to Mune.

My aunt was born on May 2, 1978 in San Diego, California. She is the youngest of seven children. Now 28 years old, she has a husband named James. Together they have a two year old daughter and a son on the way. She enjoys going to USC football games, watching the Food Network channel, listening to music, dancing, and of course, spending time with her family.

The reason I chose to interview my aunt is because she has had a big influence on me. She survived a very poor and stressful childhood, but she made it through all her hardships and struggles, graduated from the University of Southern California, and became an occupational therapist.

Growing up was not easy for my aunt. Middle school was the worst two years of her life. Having little money, my aunt was unable to buy the cool clothes. She had to wear hand-me-downs along with glasses and braces, and being a shy girl didn't allow her to make any friends. Every Monday was a struggle for her to get up and go to school. But she knew that high school would be better and college would be even better than that. So she studied hard, just ignored all the teasing and criticism, and got through it.

One of the best memories in my aunt's life was the day she got her drivers' license and her acceptance letter to USC because she got them both in the same day. After school, she went to take her driving test. Taking the test and then passing it, she was thrilled. When she got home, her acceptance letter had arrived and she felt like she was walking on air. "It was a really good day," my aunty said. She got on the phone and called everyone she knew and told them about her day. She knew that getting her license and being accepted to USC meant freedom and opportunity. She knew that she was on her way to reaching the stars.

College was like a rollercoaster for my aunt. She had her ups and downs. The fun times were mostly when the girls got together and reminisced. They drank and ate pizza into the wee hours of the morning. She said, "College was a blast."

An involved student, she was a color guard for the USC Trojan Marching Band. She

was the founder of a multicultural sorority named Sigma Lambda Gamma, but college was not all fun and games. She did have her struggles. After Christmas break of her freshmen year, she returned to her dorms to find herself stuck with three roommates who needed her to be the mother of the house. They drank, did drugs, never cleaned up, and ate her food. Since she needed to focus on what was best for her at the time, she moved to another floor with different roommates. It was a difficult time. She didn't have football or band to distract her since the season was over, and she also had a limited support group. This was a rough time for her, but she pulled through it.

After college, she had a rough time during one of her internships to get her license to be an occupational therapist. She was living alone in an apartment in Fullerton, Orange County. Most of her friends were at least 40 minutes away. And her boyfriend (now husband) James, had just moved back to San Diego. The internship was very unsupportive. The workers and supervisor had a sink or swim attitude with her. The supervisors always shrugged their shoulders and threw questions back in her face. They did not give her any specific training or direction on how to work with the belligerent and disrespectful teenagers. There was no disciplinary system to regulate their behavior. As an intern, she was just put in the room with no knowledge of dealing with gang life or drugs. The supervisor expected her to know how to handle gang bangers, criminals, and drug abusers when her education was not specifically about this environment. She felt that they stereotyped her because she was Mexican. They thought she was familiar with this lifestyle and the kids could relate to her. The teenagers related even less to her because she was Mexican, but could not speak Spanish. She cried almost every day. So she quit and waited for her next internship to start. Completing the next internship allowed her to graduate in 2001 and become an occupational therapist.

My aunt now works with students between the ages of three to twenty-one in two different school districts in San Diego County. Working with mostly special education students, she said, "There are perks and disadvantages to my job." One of the school districts she is in is very stressful. The parents she has to deal with are so demanding, unrealistic, and litigious. But she loves working with the kids. It's just the paperwork, meetings and office politics that are not fun.

My aunt gave me this advice: "Once you earn your degree, no one can take that away from you. No one can take away the knowledge, worldly experience or diploma you've earned. A house can burn down, money can be spent, food can go bad, and your freedom can be taken away. But nobody can take that diploma away. So stick with it. It will be over before you know it, and have fun." She really made me see that anyone can graduate from college. As long as I try hard and set my mind to it, I can do it. If ever I need advice or just someone to talk to, I know that I can call her. She not only influences me,

but she also motivates me. I just hope that one day I can be as educated and satisfied with my life as she is.

Fear Can Be Strength

James Frizell

Fear controls many aspects of our lives. From the people we want to ask out on a date to the activities we are just not big enough to participate in. If I was afraid of flying, how would I broaden my horizon on other cultures and lifestyles? If I was embarrassed to ask questions in class, how would I ever get the right answer? Fear can be viewed as a mild handicap for some or an unbreakable barricade for others. However, when we are liberated from our own fears, then and only then, will others be liberated too.

I awoke to a bright, sunny Saturday morning. I thought to myself that no other child in the world had to wake up this early, unless they planned to watch renowned Saturday morning cartoons. At the age of eight, there were only two things that existed in my world: G.I. Joe and McDonald's. Despite the time, I reluctantly crawled out of bed and donned my worn blue jeans and slightly stained grey collared shirt. I was heading to a ranch in the deserted back-roads of Waimanalo to help my mom with a catering job. My mother owned a restaurant and karaoke bar at the Waimanalo Shopping Center. We catered events on weekends, with a variety food and a fully stocked bar that could satisfy the worst alcoholic. I was more than happy to be her sweatshop worker. On this unforgettable Saturday there were three hundred people attending this extravagant birthday party, with a live band and mouth-watering food.

As we arrived at the ranch, I couldn't recognize if we were still in Hawaii or not. The pine trees were thirty feet high and there were vast acres of land to roam around on. The ranch seemed more like an animal fair than a western ranch. There were horses galloping around in their picket fenced homes. The faithful dogs led the guests to the party, beseeching them for table scraps. The cats lazily lounged on anything that was nailed down. Chickens wandered aimlessly through the grass foraging for crumbs. Children in their bathing suits were herded by their parents and carried toward the party.

The event was held in an enormous log cabin with no walls. The country music echoed and bounced off the high ceilings. I began to help my mom unload our rusted '87 Toyota Starlet. Our portable bar was almost ready for business. I just needed to unload the ice out of the red Igloo coolers and into the bar. The Budweiser and Coors Light bottles were chilling in the sink, lounging in their ice cold bath. Each bottle of distilled beverage required a spigot to ensure a perfect pour of its valuable liquid contents. With the bar set and ready for the guests, there was nothing left for me to do. I was only in the third grade, so I wasn't allowed to serve the alcoholic beverages.

With boredom setting in, I begged my mom to allow me to go and visit the pool we saw when we arrived at the ranch. My mom could not resist my Bambi eyes. Eventually she gave in to my begging and I bolted to the pool. The kids at the pool were so loud that they drowned out the music from the band. The splashing in the pool gave the effect of a whirling Jacuzzi. Waves drenched each side of the pool and steam wafted in the air due to the radiant heat. With each splash from the human cannonballs, I wanted to feel the embrace of the cool water. Despite the fact that I did not know how to swim, I didn't hesitate to refresh myself in the water.

I took my Nikes off and placed them on the side so they wouldn't get wet. With my blue jeans and grey shirt on, I slowly walked down the steps into the shallow end of the pool. The motion of the pool water made me queasy. My clothes began to give me an uncomfortable bear hug. I looked through the splashing water to see only one adult near the area, sitting in the lifeguard stand holding a Coors Light in one hand and a Marlboro in the other. He resembled one of the musicians on stage playing in front of all the intoxicated parents. Without hesitation, I decided to walk further into the pool, or until my feet could not touch the bottom. I had been in the ocean before, so I thought a few man-made waves and a square like ocean could not be that dangerous. I kept walking, until I was on my tip-toes. Suddenly the smell of chlorine was shoved down my throat. I reached toward the sky, as if there was a hand to help pull me from the water. The weight of my clothes was overwhelming. I could not keep my head above the surface. Soon I could hear the hollow echo of noise from beneath the surface. I looked up to see white wash from the kicking children and could see the blue colors of the sky. I fought and fought for air. The more I struggled the less air I inhaled. My heart felt as if it would burst out of my chest. Faster and faster, I could hear my heart beating. Slowly I became weary and soon light became dark.

I could not describe what I saw while I was unconscious, but it was extremely bright when they resuscitated me. Many strange faces crowded over me and asked me question after question. As my chest burned and I threw up buckets of water, I could see through the crowd that the sun was peering around the clouds.

Everything happened in a matter of seconds, but the effect of almost drowning remained with me until I was ten years old. For the first year after the incident, I would never go near a pool or the ocean. With a little nagging from my determined and stubborn mother, I eventually got into the water. She bribed me with double cheeseburgers and an ice cream sundae from McDonald's to join a swim team. Getting into the water was not hard. The hard part was letting go of the wall. I would get extremely nervous when I could not touch or see the bottom. During the first couple of practices, I stayed in the shallow end. Each time I stuck my head under the water, I was reminded of the eerie event. Flashbacks forced me to hum my favorite songs. Humming gave me comfort and drowned out the

empty sounds underwater. With the help of my mom and the swim team, I hummed my way to learning how to swim. I fought with myself every day to practice controlling my worries and fear until I didn't think about it anymore. I'm very thankful for my mom's perseverance to make me a stronger person and swimmer.

I eventually overcame my fear of the water. I became a ranked state swimmer and am now licensed to teach S.C.U.B.A. diving through the Professional Association of Diving Instructors as a Dive Master. I love the water now and feel like an agile fish when I swim.

We should all take what scares us most and learn from it. The knowledge of becoming strong from a weakness is empowering. We stop ourselves from being strong. Next time, take a chance and ask that gorgeous girl or handsome guy out for lunch. Forget what other students think; ask that ridiculous question and find the answers that we are all looking for. It is a great challenge to conquer all our fears, but each step we take brings us closer and creates a path for others to follow.

Working at the Nursing Center

Sunny Ho

A few years ago, one of my best friends told me about being a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) and taking care of elders who cannot stay at home with their families. Some of the duties include changing diapers and bathing the elders. I told her that I couldn't do it, especially not changing diapers. That was really out of the question. I didn't even have a child, and I didn't know how to do it. I thought that I would never, ever have to do it. In January of 2006, I was listening to the radio and they were talking about CNAs, as well as the value of the job and a description about it. They talked about the shortage of Korean speaking CNAs in the Korean community. It touched my heart. The next day, I went to the training school without any hesitation and I signed up for the eight-week course. After I finished training, I passed the exam successfully. While I was on clinical rotation, I felt that this was what I really have to do, something for my community and for myself. I submitted my resume to a few places, and all the nursing centers wanted to give me the position even without any experience.

Just before I decided to work at the Hale Nani Nursing Center & Rehab, I was confused and nervous about being a CNA and wasn't sure about my decision. I talked with my friend, who has working there, and she gave me the strength to move forward. After the orientation, on my first day on the floor with my job-training partner, I almost walked out on the job. I felt as if I were on a different planet. Patients looked gloomy, and their eyes had no focus, and the smell from the floor was terrible. It made me nauseated. While I helped my partner to change diapers and give baths to the patients, my mind went to different places and I wanted to ignore it. During my break, I prayed to God to give me the strength to stay on the job and to take away my fears. I couldn't eat anything at work for about a month. A couple of months after working there, I began to feel comfortable around the elders. I changed diapers, and it did not bother me as much anymore. Even right after it, I could eat.

Since working at the nursing center, I have changed my views and goals in my life. The first time I was confronted with the death of a patient, I had to clean the body and wrap it with a plastic bag. I put the tag on it and took it down to the chapel. I was so sad to say goodbye, and it made me cry all night. I learned that materialistic things and values are not important to me, and to be thankful for what I have. After one year of working at the Hale Nani Nursing Center, my perception of elderly people has changed. They have taught me so much about love and life with their experiences and wisdom. It has been very valuable to me. I have taken care of them physically, but they have taken care of me spiritually.

Because of my experience working at the nursing center, it changed my career. I was a full-time real estate agent, but now the CNA position is my full-time job. I decided to open up a care home to take better care of patients. I couldn't take care of all of patients while working at the nursing center. After opening up my care home, I have been able to share more love, pay more attention, and give individual schedules for each one of them so that it feels more like a home. They have taught me to be humble and to be thankful for small things. They have also taught me to love my family more and to try very hard not to waste my life.

I want to become a RN to be more knowledgeable and to take better care of my patients. At my age, it's not easy for me to study, work, and do housework together, but I don't want to give up. One of my patients told me with a big warm smile, "Sunny, someday somebody will really take good care of you because you love me and take good care of me like your own mother." It touched my heart and keeps me moving forward.

The Doomed Flight

Elizabeth Howanic

The trip started as any normal journey to the east coast. First, we would catch a long flight from Maui to Texas. Then in Texas, we would make our way to the next gate to board the next plane that would take us to our final destination, Newark, New Jersey. Unfortunately this trip would not be for a vacation; we were going back to the east coast for my grandfather's funeral. Little did we know that the flight from Texas to New Jersey would not be pleasurable. This flight would change my willingness to fly forever.

With the phone call from my mom came panic and a scramble to try and make it back to the east coast in time for my brother and me to say goodbye to my grandpa before he passed away. My dad made the reservations and we were leaving the next day. Unfortunately, we did not make it in time to say goodbye and got another call from my mom just as we were boarding the flight from Maui to Texas. "He's gone" she said. With that, the tears started flowing and the comforting began between my brother and me. As we boarded the plane, we knew the flight would be somber.

After the almost five hour flight, we finally landed in Texas. It was close to five in the morning. The airport was empty. My brother and I were both exhausted from the flight and the news we received from our mom before we left. We were also hungry, so on the way to the gate we stopped to pick up a smoothie.

As we approached the gate, we could hear the usual announcements. We took a seat and waited for our row to be called. Luckily our row was the second to the last one on the plane, and we boarded first. My brother and I joked with my dad about how wonderful our seats were and if there was an emergency we would be the first ones off the plane because we were right next to the exit. Once everyone got settled for yet another five hour flight, we were off. I decided that I wanted to try and get some sleep on the flight, so I got comfortable and before I knew it I was asleep.

When I woke up, we were close to New Jersey and there was about an hour to landing. Looking to both sides of me, I saw my brother and dad still asleep. I did not want to wake them. Before I knew it, the pilot made the announcement that we would be landing shortly. This woke my dad up, but my brother was sound asleep next to me. While the flight attendants walked through the aisles to collect trash, the pilot came on again and said they were having trouble getting the landing gear to come down. He said they were going to try and shake it out. I asked my dad if I should wake my brother and he told me to make sure his seat belt was on and let him sleep. I complied with his request.

The next thing we felt was the plane going right and left and up and down. I don't get motion sickness but after the constant up and down, right and left motion I felt a little sick. My brother, however, slept through this. Soon the pilot came back over the P.A. system and told us the landing gear was still stuck. He said the only way to land the plane was on its nose.

Right after the announcement you could see and hear the panic throughout the plane. Flight attendants educated us on where our nearest exit was. Luckily our seats were directly across from the exit. They also demonstrated the emergency landing position which would have to be performed when we were close to "landing." I looked to my dad and he told me not to worry, everything would be fine. His words were reassuring but I was still really nervous. The flight attendants came by and told us that my brother should be awake. I woke him and he dazedly asked what was going on. I filled him in on the problem and fear came over his face. I put on a brave face and told him everything would be fine and taught him the position we were supposed to take. My dad told my brother and me to get off the plane fast. He would block the aisle and we were to run once we were on land. "Get off the plane and get as far away from it as possible," he said. My brother and I nodded our heads in agreement with his directions. We did not ask questions; we did not have to.

As the landing time got closer, everyone became a little more on edge. One of the flight attendants was seated across from us. You could tell she was just as nervous as the rest of us even though she told us everything would be fine. To prepare for the landing, the gas tank on the plane was emptied over the ocean. While this was happening, I looked over at the "brave" flight attendant and saw her praying. There were also tears running down her face. I was filled with so much confidence when I saw this. The pilot came on and said it was time to touch ground. I took a deep breath and eased into the emergency landing position.

The landing was like any other before we were supposed to touch down. As soon as the nose hit the pavement, I looked over at my brother. He looked at me and asked "Is that it?" The screech of metal against pavement came next as I responded to my brother's question. "I guess not," I said. When our plane stopped sliding, it was sprayed with foam that would prevent a fire. The electricity and air conditioning were also cut off.

As we waited for instructions on what to do next, my dad made sure my brother and I were okay and kissed us each on the head. After what seemed like forever, we were let off the plane and escorted onto waiting shuttles to take us from the plane to the terminal. As we drove away from the crashed plane, I looked back and realized just how lucky we were. I called my mom and filled her in on what had just happened. At first she didn't believe my brother and me, but when my dad talked to her, she knew it was no joke.

When we reached the terminal, we were escorted through the back of the airport. It was not until we got to the waiting busses in the front of the airport that we found out we were in New York City. They had diverted the plane to JFK airport because it would be easier to land there. The busses took us from New York into New Jersey and dropped us off at the Newark airport. When we got there, we met up with my mom, who was extremely relieved to see us.

This event will always stay with me. I cannot get on a plane now without triple checking where the nearest exits are. I get extremely nervous when the pilot makes the announcement we are going to be landing thinking something bad is going to happen. Luckily everyone was okay on the doomed flight from Texas to New York, but I no longer take any flight for granted.

Almost Without Hope

Justine Ige

"Mom, when are you coming home? Tomorrow is Christmas Eve," I questioned with anticipation over the phone.

"I don't know yet. Hopefully before Christmas," my mom said trying to make me feel better.

My parents had been on O'ahu for 3 weeks, due to birth complications with my sister, Hope. It was the Christmas season of 1994, and I was 9 years old. My older brother was 12. We were both staying at my Auntie Gina and Uncle Rodney's house. With everything that seemed to be happening with my newly born sister, I knew it was not going to be a picture perfect Christmas.

I was sitting at the kitchen table eating my dinner, waiting for my aunt to get off the phone with my parents. I sat there confused as I tried to listen and understand what they were saying. There was a gut feeling I had that was not good. The tone of my aunt's voice was what was making me worry. She was very quiet, asked many questions, and didn't smile. My body became hot and sweaty. I was desperate to know what was happening. I needed to know what was happening. I began to tap on the table so I wouldn't get frustrated. Finally, my aunt got off the phone, walked over to the kitchen table, and sat down to eat her dinner.

"Auntie Gina, why is it taking my parents so long to come home with Hope?" There was a sad curiosity in my voice as I asked my aunt.

"Your sister was born too early. She's a premature baby."

I knew my aunt was trying to remain calm, but her soft tone gave away an uncertainty. Confused, I questioned, "Why is she a premature baby?"

"Because your sister was born too early, her lungs didn't fully develop. We don't know if she is going to live yet."

I sat at the dinner table, my mind racing with bad thoughts. There were more negative feelings than positive. My mind felt overwhelmed with all sorts of emotions.

It went from being angry, then miserable, and finally hopeless in less than five minutes. There was no way I could control these emotions. I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs. Quickly as I could, to try to get these thoughts out of my mind, I put my dishes away and went into the living room to watch television with my cousin, Andrea.

Sitting on the cold floor, I stuck my knees under my pajama shirt, sat there and just daydreamed. I imagined myself playing with my sister, walking her to school, and hugging her when she cried. My tears slowly ran down my cold cheeks as I replayed my conversation with my aunt in my head. My hands began to sweat as I focused on holding the tears back. I felt like a rain cloud ready to burst. It was no use; my tears streamed down my face. All the emotions I tried to conceal were finding their way out. Ashamed of my tears, I stood up and dashed out of the room.

I climbed into my cousin's bed and buried myself in his Ninja Turtle bed sheets. Being around anybody or talking to anyone was the last thing I wanted to do. Quickly, I pulled the sheets over my head, curled into a ball, and shut my eyes. How could this be happening? This felt so unfair. Babies did not die. My sister must stay alive. At first, I had thought no presents and no Christmas tree were unfair, but realizing my sister might possibly die made life unfair. My heavy heart made my body weak. Tired and worn out, I fell asleep.

I woke up to the sound of the toilet flushing and the smell of bacon. My eyes felt like balloons because they had swelled up from crying. Carefully, I got out of bed and started getting ready for school. Sliding into my overalls, I stuffed my books in my backpack and walked to school. Everybody talked about opening presents and having family dinners at school, but I ignored them. Receiving presents or having a Christmas tree became the farthest thing on my mind. My sister's health was my only concern.

Two o' clock finally came, and the classroom became chaotic as the students clamored to put their chairs away. I got my stuff together and walked to the library to meet my brother. We both walked to my aunt's house under the blazing hot sun. As we approached the garage, I heard my aunt yelling for us, "Josh, Justine! Hurry! I need to tell you something!" We ran into the house and dropped our bags on the floor. "Your sister is okay!! Your parents are coming home this afternoon," my aunt breathed with relief.

I couldn't contain myself. I jumped in the air and waved my arms around. Trying to stay still and listen to my aunt made my insides go crazy. My heart was jumping every time it beat. I began to prepare myself to be a good sister. I imagined changing her diaper, feeding her baby food, and helping her take a bath. I could already smell the Johnson's baby bath soap. There was a tingling feeling throughout my body.

The hour we waited for my mom and dad's plane to arrive home felt like a year. I sat down staring at the clock, watching every minute go by. Finally, it was time to head to the airport. I had bubbles in stomach. When we got to the airport, I saw my parents on the side of the road with my sister. The car stopped, and I ran out to peek at her. Hope was very tiny, and she had soft, black, spiky hair. I could smell baby powder all over her. She really looked like my cabbage patch doll except my doll was a bit darker. On the drive home, I sat next to my mom who held my sister. I couldn't stop staring at her. Already, I wanted to teach her how to say my name. I held on to Hope's small little feet to keep her feet warm. I wanted soft skin like Hope. We parked outside of our house, grabbed our stuff, and walked up the stairs. My dad opened the door, and there stood my family. The whole clan -my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandma- had come to welcome Hope home. My family shouted, "SURPRISE, WELCOME HOME, HOPE!" They had even bought us a small Christmas tree and presents! It was the best Christmas ever. We had dinner together, opened presents together, and adored my sister Hope together. It turned out to be a Christmas I will always remember.

My sister Hope's homecoming taught me that Christmas is not about how many presents I have or beautiful Christmas trees. It is not about me or what I want. Christmas isn't even about what I can give to others. Christmas is a time to enjoy life's blessings. The season reminds us to appreciate our family and friends and celebrate the love we share. For me Christmas will always be a gift of Hope.

The True San Francisco That Opened My Eyes

Shawna Kipi

It was a little more than a year and a half ago when I took my second trip to San Francisco. I arrived and stayed with my friend in her dorm at the University of San Francisco. It was a beautiful city and I absolutely loved it. Walking from the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (the B.A.R.T.) to the school campus was breath taking. I loved the cold crisp air and the beautiful legendary Golden Gate Park which was located right across campus. During my trips to San Francisco, I usually hung out on the university campus with my friends.

One particular morning I woke up to a loud knocking on the dorm room door. Since I was sleeping on the floor, I was the closest to the door. I opened the door to find my good friend Taylor standing in the doorway. He wanted to know if I wanted to go with him to a conference that their school was having about animal rights. A couple of my friends and I decided to attend. We walked through this long, tall, white hallway and then we went through these big wooden doors which were at the end of the hallway. I remember being surprised at the number of people that were there; the conference was in a huge room and it was completely full of people. We sat in the back of the room and listened closely to all of these people giving speeches about animal rights, meat factories, and animal products including fur and leather goods.

At the time, I was a meat eater, I loved steak, chicken, mandoo, spicy pork and many other types of meat dishes. I also had many leather and fur goods; I had countless name brand purses that were made out of leather and fur. Although I ate meat and I had both fur and leather goods, I found all of the information very interesting. I couldn't help but try to listen and take in everything that they were saying. All of a sudden one of the main speakers turned off the big lights and rolled out two big screens on each side of the room. Then a video started. It was called "Meet your Meat," and I will never forget that video, which was made by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals Corporation (P.E.T.A.) about how the meat that we eat is processed.

I remember watching the video and feeling disgusted with myself. I couldn't believe the things that they were showing. On the screen, were images of cows hanging upside down by their feet, chickens living in conditions that I never thought any living thing would be able to survive in, and cows being beaten by sticks, poles, fists, and then getting their necks cut open. They showed the very inhuman way that innocent farm animals were being treated and killed.

They also showed a part about animals being killed for their fur and skin. This part of the video, which showed animals such as rabbits and foxes, was the most shocking and disturbing. They would cut around their paws and take a tool and basically rip off their skin. The animal would then collapse, and the people would continue to beat the animal to death. I honestly never thought about the way animals lived in slaughter farms or the way that they were killed. I just thought of meat as food and nothing else, but this video opened my eyes. It disgusted me, and although I didn't want to continue watching the gruesome video, I couldn't take my eyes off of the screen.

After the conference while my friends and I were walking outside of the hall, I noticed a group of people handing out booklets on animal rights information. As we were leaving, I decided to grab one. I began to read and take in all of the information. It shocked me that the way that the animals were being treated was a normal everyday thing for so many meat factories. It made me very sad to realize that I've been supporting these ways of mistreating animals by eating meat and buying these products.

At first I thought that it was going to be hard for me to find places to eat that have foods that don't have any type of animal products in them. But, surprisingly, it wasn't, at least not in San Francisco. Since the city is very diverse and is known for the very hippy peaceful earth culture, it was very easy to find many places that served vegan foods.

During the rest of my stay in San Francisco, I was introduced to many new types of foods, including many soy based foods, such as crispy vegetable pakoras, and many different types of vegetable pastas. I also was introduced to a whole new type of lifestyle. Since I became a vegetarian, my normal everyday life has changed completely. Before, it was very easy for me to be able to go to restaurants and eat, but now I can hardly do that. Many restaurants, although they offer vegetarian dishes, use the same oils that they use to cook their meats, and they usually use some type of meat stock in order to season many foods. I learned a lot of information that I never knew before; I learned a lot about myself and about how things that I do affects other living beings in the world. It was only my day of my visit to San Francisco when I decided that, from that day on, I was no longer going to eat meat and support fur and leather products.

It's very funny that I became a vegetarian in San Francisco because, little did I know, San Francisco was actually named after a saint of animals. The city's name actually comes from a Saint whose "original name was Giovanni Francesco Bernardone. He then became Saint Francis of Assisi. He was known as the patron saint of animals, birds, and the environment" (Hesburgh). I feel I have a deep connection with the city of San Francisco due to the city's name. I believe just like Saint Francis that every living thing should be cherished and cared for, not killed. Every time I return to the city, I think about how my life

changed for the better while I was in Saint Francis's city.

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Fruits of Labor

Edmund Li

In life, things can get very hard sometimes. There can come a time when you are unsure of everything in general. But no matter what, you need to enjoy everyday because one day something may happen to prevent you from doing the things you always wanted to do. Instead of sitting around waiting for things to get better, you need to get up and take action to get what you want or change something in your life you may not be satisfied with. It may have been a blessing in disguise, but it certainly felt like hell when it all started in October 2004. After getting out of a harsh relationship, I had a major falling out with another friend of mine that I deeply cared about. We were both left with sour feelings. I was quite devastated and went into a depression. Then I found out Kakaako Boxing gym, which had become like a second home to me for the years I spent there, was going to close down. The owner was a sweet, generous, elderly man who freely gave without ever asking for anything in return. He let me and other youths who didn't have much use his gym, equipment, and he shared his expertise of the pugilistic art with us. I even had my own locker, couch, and shower to use. He never asked more of me than to just train my hardest and never give up. But this was all going to end, and I was quite lost.

I had one strong passion for a sport called mixed martial arts. It is also called no-holds barred, ultimate fighting, pankration, vale tudo, and MMA. It combines boxing, wrestling, kickboxing, judo, and jiu-jitsu into a single sport by eliminating a vast number of rules, thus allowing practitioners of all martial arts to compete. Although it looks really violent, serious injuries are rare when two well-trained fighters compete. With that said, it is also not for the faint of heart. Blood, broken limbs, and knockouts occur. Punches, kicks, knees, chokeholds, joint locks, and hitting a downed fighter are all fair game. I believe it is the purest of all sports.

One day, I was browsing the Internet on a local website and I saw an ad that said, "fighters wanted." I immediately contacted the promoter and was matched up. I was determined to walk out with a win this time around. The last time I fought this type of competition, I got smoked. I took punches and kicks to the face, and my eye was slightly damaged. After absorbing the punishment, I was choked to the brink of unconsciousness.

I had no gym or trainers to work with, I was depressed, and I had this fight was scheduled to be on March 25, 2005, less than three months away. I knew what I had to do and sucked up my pride. The following week, I took three months off my job which I really loved and went back to my wrestling team at school. I did not like wrestling for school because it took up way too much time and I never really got on the coaches' good side. I

also had few friends on the team.

During this time, I would work at a pre-school right after school. The job was a joy to me as I adored all the kids in my class and treated them as if they were my own blood. My co-workers there also looked up at me with smiles and respect. In other words, I was well liked there. Anyways, this was also going to be halted for a while as I marched right back to my wrestling team that was entirely out of my comfort zone. The coaches didn't really like me but they accepted me back. I felt like an oddball on the team. I knew some of my teammates didn't like me, as I would hear about how they would talk to each other behind my back. But I knew what I needed to do to reach my goal. Wrestling was an important part of the sport and also my weak point as a fighter. Nothing would improve my wrestling skills as well as going back to the team.

As January and February went by, wrestling was hard enough. Right after school, we would need to go straight to the weight room for an hour of strength training. Then we would need to go for a mile run. This was merely warm-up. At about 4:30, we would sprint for nearly an hour, with our coaches barking at us how weak and pathetic we were. We would practice hard, fast, and long. We usually ended around 6:30-7 pm. This went on everyday that in turn, presented another problem. My strong point is my striking skills. Primarily, I am a hybrid boxer/kickboxer. With my wrestling schedule, my striking was bound to get rusty. I decided to purchase a CD set designed for fighters who had no training partners to train with. With that, I would make it to the YMCA after wrestling practice around 7:00 pm. There, I would hone my striking skills by practicing to hit with fists, feet, knees, and elbows, all with vicious speed, power, and rhythm. I would then continue to run and swim till I felt like puking. I would make it back home at around 10:00 pm. This went on for two and a half long, lonely months. I remember being told that champions work and sweat their asses off even when no one is watching so that one day everyone will notice their fruits of labor.

I soon got a call from one of my old coaches that they had gotten hold of another gym that we could use. It wasn't ours to freely use everything. I could go in twice a week to get my sparring in. Nothing prepares you for a fight as sparring will. It simulates real fight situations and trains you for crucial responses that need to become instinctive.

It was all extremely hard work, training six hours a day after school. But to me, this was what I loved to do and it was all worth it. As the month of February quickly came, I was left with a hard decision to make. Although my boxing coaches were now available to me again and it would have been more beneficial for me to leave my wrestling team for my own selfish reasons, I decided to stay on the team.

I finished with a record of twenty-four wins and two losses that season. I ended February with two kickboxing wins and one loss along with an extra boxing fight that ended in a draw. I had gained quite some experience in an extremely short amount of time. I had a little less than a month left for my big fight. I was well prepared with my wrestling and stand-up striking skills. But when I found out more about my opponent, I was in for a wake up call. I had neglected one thing. I couldn't fight too well on the ground. My wrestling could allow me to take my opponent down to the ground but that was where he was most dangerous. I discovered he was a skilled submission grappler that trained in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and who took his fights to the ground. There, he used his slick technique to force his opponent to give up by choking them to effectively cut off air or blood supply to the brain, or he would snatch onto a limb and force it to hyperextend to a snapping point. I decided my best strategy would be to use my wrestling skills to stop him from taking the fight to the ground so I could punish him while we were standing.

The days went by quickly as spring break started and I had to go to the official weigh-ins. We were going to fight at a limit of 143 lbs. My scale at home read ten lbs. under the actual weight. I ate a lot to bulk up. Then I found out that, in my attempt to bulk up, I had mistakenly eaten myself to a weight over the fight limit due to the faulty scale at home. I had six hours to shed off ten pounds. I wore four layers of clothing covered with a sweater and ran until I sweated off seven pounds. The remaining three, I went into a steam room and sat in it till those sweated off too. I weighed in at 141 lbs. at the official press conference.

The day of March 25, 2005 finally came, the day where I would be considered just a fighter on his own who lost to the fighters coming out of the more popular gyms or I would be known as this guy who came out of nowhere to upset these guys. It was at the nicest venue I ever fought at. Here I was, at the Blaisdell Arena about to fight in front of over a thousand people. My longtime friend and training partner, Ryan accompanied me. He would be my corner man. My time to fight came, as I was second on the card. I heard my entrance music blaring across the arena. I came out to "Heaven" by Los Lonely Boys because the music helped me calm down. I made my way out to the ring and saw my opponent. As the referee gave us our instructions, I stared him down and saw both confidence and fear in his eyes. He looked the part of a real fighter and I knew his mentality would be hard to break.

As soon as the fight started, he launched a round kick at my knee that connected. I had been kicked a lot harder than that before so I shrugged it off. He threw another kick, but this time I caught his leg and smashed my fists into his face using rapid punch combinations. He had blood all over his face and it had splattered on me. By now, I had so much adrenaline surging through me that I could no longer feel my four year old back injury in which I tore

several muscles. Nor could I feel my dislocated knee I sustained a month ago. I rushed in aggressively as he attempted to kick me again and this time, I caught his leg, held it up in the air and caught him with three straight rights. His body violently collapsed to the canvas and he lay on his back, face bloody and all. As I prepared to attack and pound his fallen body, he sprang up and tackled me, lassoing my legs in an attempt to bring the fight to his domain. I was cornered, but I bounced off the ropes and sprawled, under hooked an arm and reversed him. I was now mounted on top of him in an advantageous position. He turned over and I took his back and secured his neck for a choke. I was very surprised I was doing this well on the ground with him, as this was his strong point and my weak. As I attempted to strangle the life out of him, I made a crucial mistake that nearly cost me the fight. I crossed my feet. When you have somebody's back, you hook their legs to secure position but you never ever cross your own two feet together. His dangerous skill of submission holds came into play as he triangled my crossed feet together with his own legs. I felt sharp pain surging through my ankles and I thought they were going to snap off their sockets anytime now, but giving up was just unacceptable. As a minute (which feels like forever during a fight) went by, I took the pain and never showed any sign of it. I decided to loosen my choke to let him think he was going to get out. This was my bait to get him to let go of my ankles. He took it and escaped the chokehold I had him in. In turn, this forced him to release my ankles. He took top position on me as I attempted to kick his hips off and away from me so he wouldn't have any control on me. The round ended and I went back to my corner. As the next round started, I took the advice of my corner men and did everything as planned. I did not let the fight hit the ground again and punished him dearly for nearly breaking two very important limbs of mine by employing my superior kickboxing skills.

We stood in the center of the ring, both of us throwing our fists at each other. He was forced to abandon his own game plan and play into mine. Of course, I got the better of nearly every punch exchange. He desperately rushed at me trying to grapple with me but I took a half step back and landed six consecutive punches to his face in less than two seconds. He crumpled to the canvas but instead of going after him, I stood over him and taunted him, motioning for him to get up so I could beat on him some more. He got back up on his feet like a warrior and I cornered him and launched quick and powerful combinations on him using both kicks and punches. At one point, he grabbed my head and tried to pull it down into his knee strikes. One knee strike of his smacked right into my eye but it didn't really bother me. I pulled away and launched a series of punches again as he desperately tried to tackle me. I quickly sprawled on him and foiled his attempt. I could hear someone in the crowd, probably one of his supporters scream out loud, "oh my God!" I continued to beat on him with my fists, feet, and knees until the bell sounded. The fight was over and with no doubt I got the unanimous decision. I heard the announcer shout my name as the winner. I stood in the center of the ring, drenched in blood that was not mine with hand raised in victory while being surrounded by cameras, screaming fans, and

friends. Emotionally, I was relieved, happy, and I felt admired by these people who didn't even know me. There was no other feeling like this. My hard work had paid off.

This fight put me on the map. Most of the major fight circuits now recognized my name as a valid threat to their fighters. During these past few months, despite all the pain, hardships, and setbacks, I never gave up because I knew what I wanted and believed in it. I learned to appreciate a hard work ethic that I had gained firsthand from personal experience.

Change

Joey Madriaga

One summer evening before my fifth grade year, my sister and I sat down for dinner in our church clothes. We were laughing and chewing loudly. Our mom was in a good mood, so I took a risk and asked her if we could have turtle soup sometime. A few days before, I had watched an old television program in which a Polynesian tribe killed a large turtle, gutted it, and then stewed it over on open fire. I asked my mom again, and she laughed like I was crazy. She stood in front of the sink, her arms filled with suds, face glistening from the heat.

"In the Philippines," she said while stuffing the sink with greased covered pans, "when I was your age, we had turtle soup, turtle eggs, and turtle shells if you wanted." Drying her hands on her apron, she began to tell us about her father and uncle, two fine carpenters who loved turtle eggs for breakfast and turtle soup on Sunday mornings.

"In those days you could buy turtle eggs in the market, or even get some from the beach . . . if you knew where to find them." She sat next to us at the dinner table and brushed the loose strands of hair away from her face and back into the bun in her hair as she continued.

"My father and uncle had their wood furnishing business right there in our own home. People would come and go all day, delivering materials, picking up finished goods, ordering dining room tables. It was how we made our living. People could trust our work, and demand was never low. Turtle soup, basted in a sugary sauce, was one of the few smells that could cut through the prominent odor of wood shavings and uncut blocks of trees. My father's business was his life. Things were better then." My sister sipped her juice without interest, but I quickly asked, "What do you mean 'things were better then'?"

"Everything!" My mom answered in a reminiscent tone. "Life, the value of fine workmanship, food, health. Everything was better then. In those days my father and uncle could take an order for an entire living room set or bedroom set, and they would deliver as promised. You spoke directly to the man who would make your chairs, your bed, and your dining table. Who does that kind of work now? It seemed like over night, the big companies came in and took the business away from us. The very livelihoods of many families were bought out by companies who could make more goods in less time and for less money."

Suddenly interested, my sister asked, "Is that why you and Auntie Crising left the Philippines?"

“More or less,” shrugged my mother.

“My father and uncle could not afford to keep their business going; demand had declined in favor of the faster, cheaper goods. They sold what they had and went to work for a second rate furnishing factory where they assembled chair legs. We just could not make enough with the big companies in town.”

Her face turned tender, and she looked as though something very important in her life had passed. She patted her hands together lightly as if she had rope burns. Then she turned to me and said, “If you want turtle, you’re about 25 years too late.”

“Oh yeah,” my older sister smartly added, “Isn’t it against the law to take turtle eggs from the beach and eat turtles for food now?”

“It didn’t used to be.” My mother smiled. “You used to be able to purchase turtle eggs. It was getting slightly more expensive each year, but at least you could still get them. Today, nobody will sell you anything turtle related in the open. Everything has changed, even in the old country.”

I couldn’t help but feel sorry for all the things that would never again be as they once were. My mother was from a time when you could live off the goods you produced and eat from the bounty of nature. All that had changed for the purpose of big businesses, for the advancement of the environment, and for the good of all people. I wondered, however, “For the good of which people?” The change was certainly not good for my mother, not for her family and all of their people. What about the trees used for furniture, and the turtles, are they much better now? Who decided this was the way things should be anyway?

“It’s still light out; you go now,” My mother said. “Later you’ll bug me to let you stay out longer.”

I downed my juice and went outside to the front yard. No one was around; the day had cooled, and a breeze rustled the trees.

The Possessed Classroom

Quynh Nguyen

It's been over 20 years now, but I still remember every detail of this story. When I was seven years old, I loved drawing very much. It was the first time I was presented with a box of watercolor paints from my mother. It was the most beautiful splendid color box I had ever seen before. I imagined that in the future I would become an internationally famous painter. Every day, I lay on the floor drawing and painting many pictures. My father also framed them and has kept them in our family home even now.

My mom noticed my aptitude and passion in Art, so she enrolled me in an art course at the Tan Binh Culture Children 's House, in the Tan Binh District of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It was not far away from my house. Thus I was extremely eager to learn painting. My first impression of this school was that it seemed very ancient and too silent. I didn't know how to express my feeling when I came into the school. Maybe it felt cold. But I couldn't deny that this school was convenient and modern with many kinds of nice colors for me to paint my lovely pictures.

My class began at 7:30 p.m. and it finished at 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday every week I spent one and a half hours at school doing many activities such as drawing, singing and discussing about art. It was very interesting. When I had completed my pictures, I had to wait about 15-20 minutes for them to dry, and then I rolled them up and tied them with a strand of yarn.

One day, after class, there were only two children waiting for the pictures to dry: myself and a friend of mine, named Ngoc. She was one of my closest friends. She had a big beautiful smile. That was one of my favorite things about her. We had hung our pictures out everywhere, so she waited with me. Suddenly, I heard a giggle, not loud but also not small.

It repeated again.

I thought Ngoc was laughing at my picture. Actually, my teacher had complimented my work, so I was very proud of it. When I heard the soft laughter, I asked uncertainly, "Isn't it nice? Why are you laughing at my picture?"

Ngoc answered with surprise, "I am not laughing at you; I thought you were the one who giggled. Isn't that right?"

I looked around with a suspicious angry expression on my face because I firmly believed that someone had played a trick on us. Immediately, I checked at all the windows and the classroom door to find the culprit, but I found nothing. So I ran into the hall to make sure that this situation was just a joke; still I saw nobody. Then I observed that my

classroom was the only one with a light on all down the hall. I shivered and came back to pick up my pictures. When I entered the classroom, I saw Ngoc's face. It expressed a terrible dread I had never seen before.

The giggle repeated again

I was filled with terror and asked her in a whisper:

"Did you hear it?"

Then she nodded. Ngoc and I ran out of the classroom. We screamed in panic like we thought we had only minutes to live. While we were fleeing, we ran into my teacher, Mrs. Hanh. She asked us with surprise, "What's wrong with you two?"

So we told her what had happened in the classroom. Ngoc was crying and explaining that while I was out of classroom looking for a prankster, she had seen the face of a girl outside the window smiling. The next day I changed to another class, and Ngoc lost interest in drawing and didn't want to study anymore. However we remained friends. I continued studying drawing and painting for four more months. After that, I became busy with much homework at school and I couldn't keep up with my hobby anymore.

While I was studying at this school, I heard a lot of gossip and many rumors about the old classroom at the top of the school.

For example, "In 1981, at the Tan Binh Culture Children's House, a serious event occurred scaring many parents; they didn't want their children to study at this school anymore. A six year old little girl had disappeared mysteriously when she was playing hide and seek with her five friends. According to a boy who had joined in the game in that day, "When the game started, everybody scattered in disorder to find a hiding place. I saw Phuong run to "the forbidden exit." I tried to prevent her but she didn't hear me."

People searched for her everywhere, but they couldn't find any trace. She was like water that had evaporated in the sunshine. Many gossips discussed the missing girl. Someone said the girl had been kidnapped, and others said a ghost was the reason. Nobody knew what had happened to that poor girl and the story faded after years of neglect.

One thing I want to mention to you is what "the forbidden exit" is. This nickname comes from another odd story:

"In 1977, this house was one of the most famous and most sumptuous mansions in Saigon, the old name of Ho Chi Minh City. Most Saigonese do not like to call it Ho Chi Minh City; they still use the name "Saigon," the name before the Vietnam War.

Anyway, the host was a high dignitary and he often organized many luxurious parties. His wife was a kind and exquisitely elegant woman who was great at managing all the housework; and she loved him very much. But the frivolous nature of this man never

changed. Therefore, the husband married a prostitute as his second wife. This hooker had an wicked mind; she perverted the indifferent cruel husband, dislodging his main wife. Finally he decided to lock the main wife in a room at the top of the house.

Everyday, a meal would be given at lunch and dinner to her by a maid. Inside the small room, it was very cold, but this pathetic woman was dressed in only a light thin blouse. Sometimes, she was sound asleep in a chair next to the window. Sometimes she cried bitterly or sighed quietly.

Finally, she couldn't bear it any more, so she decided to kill herself by hanging. Nobody knew about that because the meal was given regularly everyday and when the maid collected the dirty bowl, it was empty as if someone had eaten it, so nobody realized that she had died. Actually, the mice living in this garret had eaten her meal on the sly.

Unfortunately, the smell of death did not alert anyone because not far away from this house, there was a new slaughter-house, so people in this area were familiar with those stinking odors. Her piteous body had been hanging downwards loosely near the window for about three days.

But, one day, the rope around her neck snapped and at the same time, on one side of the window a strong wind hit her body and knocked it out of the window. At once it fell down. Coincidentally, the window of the downstairs room was open. This was also the room of the newly married couple of this house. Her body fell inside, right down on the bed between the villainous couple who were sleeping there. The dead body of the wife was immovable, stiff and smelly with no-spirit eyes. Her toes had been bitten completely into ruins by many gluttonous mice. Many toes had gone to pieces, some of those were still bleeding, and another was blackened and couldn't be identified. On her hands, all her nails were worn flat; their blood had clotted disgustingly.

A dead body was lying on the bed when her husband and the second wife woke up and they screamed in panic. On the day after, she was buried in silence. Later, it was rumored that the husband became bankrupt and his second wife departed. Nobody ever saw her again.

When observing the garret where the wife had hung herself, you could imagine that horrifying spectacle. On the floor and the wall, there were a lot of long scratches with blood which explained why all her nails were so blunt. Right under the place where the body had hung, there were many blood drips and the sentence, "I will come back" was written in coagulated blood.

I remember one time, I had a conversation with two teachers, and they talked about the classroom at the top of the house. One teacher, Mrs Nga, said, "Occasionally, I heard a giggle in that classroom, but it was very small, like it was reverberating from somewhere."

And another teacher, Mrs. Hanh, who was the same teacher who talked with me the day my friend and I had run into her at the hall, replied normally, "Oh gee! I got used to these giggles when I taught in that classroom, so I felt it was not important."

Many years later, I heard that Mrs. Nga had become crazy and her mind was not stable. Somebody had told me that my old class at the top of this school was exactly the room of the newly married couple in the second story I have told you. After going bankrupt, the husband had to sell this house to earn money to pay for his debts. As a result, this house became the Tan Binh Culture Children 's House.

In 1987, there was still a "forbidden exit," one way to the garret where the husband had locked his wife in. Shortly after the little girl vanished in 1981, the principle closed off the exit in order to prevent curious people from coming there and to attract more sponsors so as to have more money for school repairs. Therefore at the time I was studying, there was no exit. The authorities had covered the door of the exit and sealed it more than usual. Why could my friend and I hear that giggle from nowhere? Could it be that the giggle came from the missing girl in the past? Many, many questions about this school came up in my head but no answers were given to me.

After twenty years, I have grown up, but I still remember and feel haunted by that story. I believe that ghosts exist and the afterlife is true, although science has not explained these phenomena clearly yet!

What Really Matters

Jordan Pacheco

“Wake up Jordan!” the voice said. “Jordan! Wake up!” beckoned the voice again, this time with a more commanding tone. “Huh? What?” I replied as I snapped up out of my deep slumber, expecting to see an asteroid or some kind of natural disaster outside my window. I quickly scanned the dark room, the only source of light coming from the digital clock, searching for the source of my awakening. It was my wife, who had once again taken all the covers, wrapped up like a burrito. “Baby’s crying,” she muttered as she headed back to Dreamland. “Man, I bet she’s warm,” I thought to myself.

All of a sudden I was surprised by the icy chill in the room, and I wondered how long it would have been before the cold had woken me up had it not been for my wife. In the background I heard my baby daughter crying her usual faint, gentle cry. “Not bad,” I thought as I stumbled my way out of our bedroom to my daughter’s room, quickly stealing a glance at the clock on my way out. Since my daughter’s birth, I was averaging about two hours of straight sleep. By some miracle I had made it all the way to 3:27 a.m.

As I headed down the dark hallway, accompanied only by the chill in the air and the steady cries of my daughter, I recalled the night’s seemingly endless series of random and meaningless dreams. Of all of my dreams, the one I was having that night was THE dream, the one where I was driving the number six Gummy Bear car and I was finally going to win one. For an entire month my hopes were crushed race after race by countless drivers. Finally, this was my race. It was my time to shine in the sun with the champagne bottles and the bikini clad models. It was my time to take the drive down Victory Lane while Gummy Bears rained from the sky as a symbol of my defiant triumph! And I didn’t get to finish. My wife made sure of that.

Furthering the nonsense, I began to question whether I would be disqualified for not finishing the race. “No matter,” I thought as I vigorously shook my head to work out what was left of the fantasy I had in my mind, finally making it back to reality which lay in a crib in my daughter’s room. I turned on my automatic pilot light. I picked my daughter up in my arms and began to rock her for what I figured to be about the 500th time. As she stretched out in her usual fashion, I began to wonder how many bottles I had made for her, how many of her diapers I had changed, and how many hours of sleep I had lost because of her.

Ever since I was in high school, I had wanted to be a father. And here I was, seven months into it, a rookie for sure. The excitement of a new baby was overtaken by the

reality of it all a lot sooner than I had expected. I began to question all the things that were supposed to make sense. I woke up every two hours every single night to either change a diaper or make a bottle for my daughter. On nights that she was really inconsolable, I'd have to turn on the dryer and just sit her on it, which would usually make me fall asleep before her. I thought to myself, "It does have to get better than this, doesn't it?" I had a ton of thoughts running through my head, like falling asleep at work AGAIN. Then out of nowhere came the question: "Am I even ready to be a father?" Wow. I felt like I had just been hit by a bus and then backed over by another one. It was the one question I never really asked. I mean, sure it had been a dream of mine, but what did it really mean? What did it take to do this 24 hours a day, seven days a week? I am sure that I did not have a clue when my wife gave birth to my daughter and I'm sure I didn't have a clue as I rocked my baby in my arms at that moment either.

As I continued to try to console my now screaming daughter in her room, I began flashing back to some of the memories my wife and I had made there. I gazed into the corner, facing the window, remembering almost a year back, my very pregnant wife standing there and smiling with a glob of yellow latex paint on her face, armed with a paint roller in one hand and a doughnut in the other. I thought to myself, "Man, those were the times." Those were the times when we could actually do normal things like get some sleep or go see a movie whenever we wanted to. Those were the times when we were free...when we lived.

After hour three of trying to console my daughter, I stop asking myself questions like, "She can't cry forever, can she?" Her crying finally began to take on less of the fevered pitch that bounced off the drywall throughout the early morning which was quickly becoming dawn. "Don't lose your cool, man," I thought as I attempted to console myself.

Three nights in a row with no sleep. What was I doing it for? Then it happened. She stopped crying. I had to examine her to make sure she was alright. It was so unusual for her to just stop crying so suddenly. As I lowered my head to hers, she looked at me and simply said, "Dada." I was floored. Every skeptical question I had asked myself that night was answered; every doubt in my mind was obliterated with that one simple word. Fighting back my tears, I kissed her lightly on the cheek as she finally fell asleep. "Finally," I thought. "Now I am a father."

A Reverie: Pleasure of Art

Ikumi Tohyama

At high noon on a hot day in autumn, I got off a Honolulu City bus. The bright sunlight made my head spin. I came to a white stone, walled building, the Honolulu Academy of Arts. I climbed up three steps and went through the admissions gate after paying five dollars. Then I moved through a dim passage. Coming out of the passage, I saw a well kept courtyard with a white stone stage, but I had no idea how I had moved around the building. I did not research the works of art that were displayed in this museum, and I did not expect to see any master pieces. I just wanted to enjoy a holiday. A guard had given me a map, but I did not want to read it. I just pulled open a black door without any plans.

As I entered the room, Japanese art burst into view. I thought this genre was a nice way to start to enjoy the art in this building. The room had white walls. It was well lit and a little cool in temperature to preserve the art. I found a small alcove in the back of a glass case and I went into that exhibition space. Then I discovered a well remembered Japanese style picture. The woman was blowing a glass pipe. It was a famous picture by Kitagawa Utamaro. The white paper gave the title of the color, wood block printed picture as, "Young Woman Blowing Glass Pipe," from the series, "Ten Types in the Physiognomy Study of a Woman." I was surprised that such a famous picture was there. I remembered that I had seen it in a textbook on Japanese history when I was a high school student. The woman had long slitted eyes and her expression seemed to be comfortable. Her skin looked white and smooth. The woman put the glass pipe to her mouth elegantly and softly. The woman's voluminous hair was done up gracefully and was decorated with gorgeous hairpins and ribbons. The print of her kimono, which was a moss green color, had a unique pattern. I remained in front of the picture for a while. I was impressed because I could see the real picture rather than a printed image in a book. As I moved away from the space, I felt joy due to the unexpected meeting of this familiar beauty.

I was unaware of the passage of time as I moved from room to room. I was tired of the immense collection of medieval Christian art and the smell of preservatives stung my nose. I kept walking and came to a room with dark lighting. I realized that this room was for modern art after I saw several of the works in this collection. Looking about, I saw a big picture that was familiar. An oil painting smell assailed my nostrils, but I did not worry about it. It was one of the "Water Lilies" of Claude Monet, who was an impressionist painter in France. Water lilies were floating on the surface of the water and it reflected mixed pale violet and dim pink light. The picture showed a moment of the scene and I could not guess whether it was morning or twilight. When I studied the picture at closer range, I could not see what it was, I could only see dabs of color that were painted roughly on the canvas.

The surface of the paint had irregular cloth patterns and I could not imagine from close up that the picture showed a beautiful scene. Once I looked at it from a distance, I could see yellow, orange and red flowers and the leaves on the surface of the water which reflected innumerable colors of lights. As I moved from the picture, I thought that light could be one of the themes that painters tried to describe exactly as they saw it.

After leaving the gallery and returning to the lobby, I took an old fashioned elevator. The walls and floor were black and it clattered along. I went to the second floor and I put my hand on the knob which was made from thin black iron. The moment I entered the room, a pungent smell assailed my nostrils and I lifted my head to find the source of the odor. I realized that the room was for Islamic arts and there were many ceramics. I found some tile art that excited me and I soon forgot to wonder about the source of the odor. The geometrical figures of the tiles made me imagine the historical fact that people developed geometry in the ancient Middle East. I was particularly attracted to some blue tiles that were comparatively older than the other ceramic arts. One of the pieces arranged tiles into the shape of a lustrous star and a turquoise cross. The lustrous star shaped tiles were painted with some vines in brown, but the background was entirely colored with azure and turquoise blue. The arrangement of the tiles and the patterns on the tiles were symmetrical, and I felt the aesthetic sense of these ancient people.

Ceramics are a great art because the color comes from the chemistry between the glaze and the temperature of the kiln. The blue was like clear sky and similar to a tear drop of pure grief. I remembered that there have been a lot of conflicts in the Middle East. I had heard the important heritage in Afghanistan was ruined because of random air raids. In contrast, at this peaceful museum, we can see many works of art which are kept in a safe place from one generation to the next and passed down from one group of people to another. I could not imagine that people could be cruel if they were surrounded by pieces of such beauty as these azure tiles. Beauty and a sense of artistry are beyond our common senses so art should be passed down to later generations and shared with people of other cultures. I imagined the people who had made this incredibly beautiful and peaceful sky blue world. I kept standing there in a daze, staring at the blue pieces for a while.

Finally, I exited the museum after buying a post card in the gift shop that had a piece by Henri Matisse printed on it. I walked down from the entrance of the white walled building to catch a bus. The city was usual and I breathed deeply. The green of the grass in the nearby parking lot was dazzling.

Sunday in Tonga

Palu Uhatahi

It was Sunday in Tonga, in my hometown, Veitongo. Early in the morning about 6 a.m., my mother woke me up along with my six brothers and two sisters. It was still dark outside and it was still cold. A perfect time to sleep. But, everyone had to wake up because it was Sunday and if you didn't, my mother wouldn't just wake you, it would be the help of her broom that would wake you up! In the street you rarely saw vehicles. Stores, factories, and offices were not open, except for the bread shops, the hospital, and the police station. If you plan to make a flight on a Sunday, I'm sorry, but there's no flight on Sunday. The only thing that you can see in the morning is smoke of the 'umu or ground ovens. The only sounds are the noise of people cutting wood and the lamb or chicken being chopped.

Everyone in my family knew what they should do. The boys had already prepared the wood, food, and taro leaves on Saturday. Then, the next morning they would light up the 'umu using dry wood. The 'umu was a hole in the ground located away from the house, which was one meter deep and one meter wide. Two sisters and I with my mother were preparing the *lu sipi*, the number one among all Tongan food. We made it from about 10 taro leaves. Inside the taro leaves we put chopped lamb (*sipi*). Then we added half a cup of coconut milk and some onions. Next, we wrapped the *lu sipi* with banana leaf, but first the banana leaf had to be *angaki* or put in the steam of the 'umu so that the leaves turned from deep green into light green and they would bend easily when wrapped with *lu sipi* or other food. We took the rib out of each leaf and used it as a knot to hold the whole piece of *lu sipi*. This kind of wrap helps to lend a subtle aroma and taste to the *lu sipi*. We ended up making 18 *lu sipi* with 15 pieces of meat each. In the meantime, the two naughty younger brothers were busy peeling the manioke or tapioca while the 4 elder brothers, full of muscles and all 7 feet tall, were putting stones in the top of the 'umu. After 15 minutes the rocks turned to white, which meant it was time to *ta'o* (bake).

To prepare the 'umu, the boys took out the large pieces of firewood and left the hot white rocks. First, the boys spread the hot rocks in the bottom of the 'umu. Then the first layer was covered with the manioke, and next the *lu sipi* was placed on the top. Everyone, had to be cautious because the 'umu was so damn hot and if anyone missed one step he would step on the hot rocks and you'd never imagine how the rest would stand and laugh at you while you jumped around like a bouncing ball. But finally it was time to cover the 'umu. First the boys put in some *feta'aki* which are cut pieces of wood 6 meters long. They spread these across the 'umu and then on top of it they put banana leaves. Last they covered the 'umu with thick unused blankets and thick plastic bags then finally covered the whole thing with soil. They kept doing that until there wasn't any more smoke coming out of the

‘umu, to keep the steam inside to help the food cook. While the boys were putting the food into the ‘umu to bake, I ironed all of our clothes for church and my two younger sisters bathed.

When food was prepared, it was time for the boys to get ready for church. At twelve past seven the girls were ready to go to Sunday school that would start at 8:30. We belonged to the Free Church of Tonga, which was the first Tongan Church until John Wesley established the Methodists. The young girls were looking gorgeous in their Tongan puletaha (suits) designed with Tongan kupesi (designs) in brown. They were long dresses up to the top of their knees with a lavalava made from the same fabric, which they wore inside the long dress. My two younger brothers also wore shirts made from the same fabric as my younger sister’s tupenu with lavalava made from thick black fabric but it only came up to the lower part of their knees. My older brothers wore black tupenu, like my younger brothers and also down to their knees, but with different aloha shirts which are blue, black, red, brown and dark blue. The boys all wore slippers, while the younger two girls wore high-heeled slippers with the heels in glass. I hoped they wouldn’t trip.

Ding! Dong! Ding! Dong! That was our church sounding the first bell at 8:30 a.m sharp for Sunday school. The younger girls walked out of the house with their tick! tick! heel noises and the glittering silver clips on their straight long hair. The children really loved their puletaha outfits made just for Sunday by our mother, even the two naughty boys. The older brothers, as always, wore their traditional wraps (like a plain sarong) made from woven leaves tied at the waist, as a traditional way of respecting the higher ranks and on Sunday to show respect for our God, Jesus Christ. After getting all dressed up, my older brothers also went on their way to church, which was just four houses to the front of our house.

By 8:30 a.m, only my mother and I were left at home. I took my bath for about 10 minutes. By the time I got out, my mother was ready to go. She wore her new Sunday best that was a long hand made cream dress worn inside a white tupenu. She made it by herself along with the children’s puletaha and shirts. Well, she looked very nice in it but if it was for me, I’m telling you I would rather have stayed than gone to church, because the truth is, I hate cream! I prefer bright or dark colors. Anyway, this time she did not wear a ta’ovala but a hat, which our church preachers’ wives wore, or any wife whose husband had a role in the church. My mother had that honor because my Dad had been our church door guard when he was in Tonga. He used to sit beside the door, watch the church members, and stop the kids from playing while church was in service but he’s now in Hawaii. All of the adult women wore a kind of belt with long fringes all around. It can be made from pandanus leaves, coconut shell or sea shells. For that Sunday, I chose to wear my coconut shell ta’ovala together with my red puletaha decorated with yellow hibiscus along the edge

of the tupenu and along the curved neck of the dress. I also bundled up my hair and put a small yellow fake hibiscus on the left side. I wore backed slippers with heels that were not too high because I hate high heels. The last thing I put on before I exited our door was my apple secret garden body spray which I really loved. It smelled so fine and sometimes I felt like tasting it just because it smelled so sweet, just like apple.

At 15 minutes to 10, I was ready to go. I could hear the up and down notes of the hymn from my house. As I was on my way, I could see villagers straggling to church. Those who had hangovers from last night or kids and grannies were slowing making their way. Some were riding in their cars or vans while most of them walked. I finally reached church, entered the door during the worship hymn, and in about 5 minutes the church was filled with around 100 people. I sat in the back of the choir as the worship singing continued. Then at 10 o'clock, the second bell rang to announce that the service was about to start. We usually started with a hymn chosen by the preacher of the day. Our Head Preacher is called a Setuata.

The atmosphere was very warm because of the crowd, but I felt like the Holy Spirit was filling up the house. After the first hymn, the preacher prayed, thanking God for life and praying for those who couldn't make it to church because they were sick or just lazy and not forgetting those who were in the hospital and the hungry. This lasted about 5 minutes. Then after the opening prayer, the Lord's Prayer was sung by everyone. Then he read his first sermon, which is usually from the Old Testament. He used Psalm 23 which was about King David's prayer for protection. Right after the first sermon, the choir sang an old anthem that I had heard a thousand times, so it made me get sleepy immediately. The second sermon was taken from the New Testament from one of the four Apostles' books, which was Mathew 5, a story of Jesus preaching at the Galilee Sea. Inside the church, everyone seemed so tense; they were very uptight and concentrated on the preacher. I don't know whether they were shocked, or they were just looking at him, but their thoughts were actually on their 'umus. The preacher emphasized the importance of seeking God's help in time of difficulties. That was the only thing I remembered about the preacher's words when I suddenly realized that we had gotten to the last hymn which is just after the discussing of the first and second sermons. Eventually, the preacher said "In the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, may He be with us all, from now and forever. Amen."

After one hour of service, everyone got up and hurried toward the door, while the preachers and their wives gathered in the front to shake their hands before they could leave. Outside I saw my friends who were passing in their van. They waved and I waved back while I was walking towards my brothers and sisters who were waiting in the church yard outside the fence. We were making jokes about each other and teasing the younger girls about their glass heels all the way home. The boys went to their room and changed, and we girls went

to our room and changed. Then the boys went outside to fuke (uncover) our 'umu. Even while we were still inside the house, we could smell the food from our neighbours 'umu brought by the steam. Ummm! So delicious! I couldn't stop swallowing my saliva. The boys uncovered the 'umu, and took off all the blankets and the feta'aki. Inside the manioke was fully cooked and some were actually over cooked, and had turned black. However, the lu sipi smelled fantastic and the steam of the 'umu was still hot. The boys put the manioke in a big aluminum bowl, and the lu in two aluminum bowls. When we went into the house, mother was already back from church and had lined up the table with plates, spoon, forks, salt, and we did not forget the cooled coconut drink. We all sat down. Mother served the food, giving each person one lu sipi and one serving of manioke. Everyone could hardly wait to eat their lu sipi, especially the muscle men. After mother finished serving, she sat down and said our eating prayer. Then we started. No one talked; we were all busy with our lu sipi until I fake choked. Then, everyone looked at me and laughed while I started to smile and then got back to my lu sipi. After our meal, the girls cleaned the dishes while the boys went off to sleep before getting ready for the last church service of the day, which would be at 4 p.m.

Sunday in Tonga was not only holy, it was a day of family gathering, showing your best style, and feasting. My Dad and I still go to church here in Hawaii, but it's not the same. I miss those days in Tonga.

Goodbye and I Love You

Rosalinda Wong

“R-I-N-G! R-I-N-G!” the loud traditional phone rang. I started to pick up the phone, barely awake. “Hello..?” It was a phone call from my oldest sister in the Philippines.

“How are you? It’s midnight here in the USA.”

“Sorry, to wake you up,” she said and was silent for a moment.

“Gina, um... Papa passed away today of a heart attack.”

At first, I didn’t believe her. “Are you joking? Does Papa want me to come home? Let me speak to him... put him on the phone. Let me talk to Papa!” I realized she couldn’t have possibly joked about something as serious as this. I started to cry, and my chest got so tight that I couldn’t breathe. My voice was trembling. I was weak and unsteady on my feet. Throughout the whole night, I couldn’t sleep. All I did was cry.

I recalled back on April 29, 1991. I was 23 years old when my father took my brothers and me to the International Airport in Manila. I was excited about going to the United States of America, the country of freedom and prosperity. In our family, it was not customary to hug each other or say “I love you.” When I heard the announcement to board the airplane, I told my family “OK! Bye.” Walking away from my family, I wondered when I would see them again. I never thought I would never see my father again.

It was so hard to believe that one year after I arrived in America, my father had passed away. He was only 56 years old. He stood 5’8 tall, with a medium build and dark skin. Whenever I see Samuel Jackson on TV or in a movie, he reminds me of my father. My father was outgoing and enjoyed playing Mahjong for fun. He was family oriented and conservative. He always made sure we had enough food to eat before he ate. I learned that he might have had cirrhosis of the liver, but he died of a heart attack. He might have had a better chance if he had been properly treated medically. However, since a doctor and the medicine necessary for any treatment cost an arm and a leg, he went untreated due to the fact that he had no health insurance.

The following morning, I frantically went to the nearest travel agency. I got a ticket for a flight to fly back to my homeland that very afternoon. Throughout my flight, I was crying. My eyes were red and they felt like they were burning. When I arrived at the airport, there were many people welcoming their relatives and greeting them. I scanned the

crowd for familiar faces outside of the airport. I looked for my family, especially for my father, to welcome back his beloved daughter even though I knew he was not around any longer. I waited two hours for my family, but I never saw them. Then I remembered that they didn't know I was coming that day. Feeling foolish, I called a taxi to take me home.

When I arrived at the front of my parents' house, I could see our neighbors in the house. They were surprised at how quickly I had returned home from America. I heard them say, "Gina is home." Looking at my parents' house, I felt like my heart had been pierced with a knife. I started screaming, with tears streaming down my face. The ambiance of the living room was like a funeral home. The coffin lay in our living room.

Wreaths of flowers and candles were on the exterior of the casket. I could even smell the scent of the plumeria flowers and the burning vanilla candles from outside the house. My mother, wearing black pants and a white embroidered blouse, stood next to the casket watching me cry and asked my siblings to help me into the house. I was frozen. I couldn't move or walk after what I saw. "This is not real!" I cried.

The expression on my mother's face was sad, and I could see her brown eyes filled with tears. Though she was saddened by her loss, she was happy to see me, as I had not seen my mother for three years. I glanced down at my father. At one time my father was an agnostic. However, when he took his last breath, he was holding a crucifix that my mother had given him. Eventually, when he was dying, he accepted God back into his life. His face appeared pale, yet so peaceful. The pain, sorrow and sacrifices he had endured for my mother and seven children were not visible.

Since my father's death, I now realize I should never take my loved ones for granted. My father is gone forever. I will never touch, hug, or talk to him again, except in my dreams and memories. If I could turn back time to the day when he dropped me off at the airport, I would embrace him and say, "Goodbye" and "I love you forever." I learned that we should express our love for each other and take care of each other because we never know when our time is going to come.



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