

# **DIAMOND JOURNAL**



**Fall 2006**

# DIAMOND JOURNAL

Published by The Board of Student Publications  
University of Hawai'i - Kapi'olani Community College

*Fall 2006*

## 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, including: Jill Abbott, Francisco Acoba, Jane Calfee, Kathy Chang, Leigh Dooley, Tom Gullikson, Mavis Hara, Gail Harada, Krista Hiser, Tiffany Ing, Raffaella Negretti-Holland, Susan Inouye, Lisa Kanae, Davin Kubota, Gunnell Lamb-Tamura, Judith Kirkpatrick, Kristen Kelly Lau, Mark Lawhorn, Phoenix Lundstrom, Dustin McDunn, Dawn Oshiro, Catherine Primavera, William Reisner, James Robinson, Nani Ross, James Shimabukuro, Carolyn Skinner, Kristine Korey Smith, Reid Sunahara, Lee Tonouchi, and Michael Tsai.

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

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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 explore conflict and often reveal 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.

## **If You Love Me**

### **Anonymous**

“We have one month left together. Don’t you want to try just once?” He whispered ever so softly.

The room fell to silence, so quiet you could actually hear my heart beating. Or at least I could hear it. I was at a loss of words. I was getting angry and ready to walk out. It felt like my whole body was tingling with rage. I was ready to attack and scream, yet something inside me did not let my anger show.

While looking down and shaking my head, I said, “No...”

“Why not?!” I felt his tension rising.

“I am just not ready.” My lips started to tremble, eyes filling up, ready to burst.

“Ugggh!”

Another long silence came about. I did it again - I made him angry. Why must he do this? He is stupid. He is like an energizer bunny, he just never stops. He just doesn’t understand. I know what I must do; I must leave him...

“But...” He went silent, grabbing my hand and staring me straight in the eyes. It was such a soft warm look. “If you love me...then why don’t you want to do this?”

It was four years ago when my best friend introduced me to Stephen (now my ex-boyfriend). Since the first day we met, there was chemistry. We talked on the phone every night into the wee hours. Our friendship began to grow, and later it turned into a relationship. He looked like your average guy: about 5’9”, brown eyes, black/brown hair (spiked up), and an athletic build. But something about him attracted me to him (not saying look-wise). Maybe it was his smile; his smile was like the sun, warming me up on a cold windy day. His eyes put me at ease, because it was so soft and gentle. Or maybe it was the way he used to hug me, giving me security, like nothing could harm me in any way.

Everything seemed so right and perfect; he seemed perfect. Stephen would randomly give me flowers for any old reason, and write me these adorable letters. He even once wrote a poem for me. We would go out to eat dinner, watch movies, go bowling, or what not. He was always opening the door for me and making sure everything was okay. Sometimes Stephen would take me to Blow Hole to look at the stars when I was feeling sad. He would call me all the time even if it was for a minute just to say hi and check on how my day was going. In other words, he treated me like a princess. But then I started to

see the tables turn. He started to get touchy, making me feel uncomfortable. We started to go out less; going to his house more often. One night sex came up in the conversation. It took me by surprise.

“Sweetie...Do you think we will ever get more intimate? I mean like...have sex?” he said to me with a serious face.

Backing away from him, I replied, “No. I haven’t thought about that, and I wasn’t planning to have sex. I want to wait.”

“Wait for what?” His words were getting stern.

“I am waiting for the perfect person, and the perfect time. I mean I wanted to wait until I got married, that is when I know for sure he is the one.”

“But don’t you trust me? Don’t I treat you good?”

“Yes,” I said looking down at my hands, fidgeting with my shirt.

“Then I don’t see why not!”

My tensions were rising, and my heart began to sink. Stephen, who I thought I knew, was becoming someone I didn’t know. “I just don’t feel its right. Let’s not talk about this anymore.” I got up and walked into the living to watch TV, escaping from this conversation.

After that night, every time we hung out together, sex became the topic of the night. I was beginning to get stressed out. I could not handle it anymore, so in the middle of my freshman year we broke up. Between my sophomore and junior year, Stephen and I had been on and off. It was the usual. He would be sweet and kind the first few weeks and then he went back to his normal self, pressuring me to have sex. But between those two years of my life, something happened. I was beginning to feel something more than like. Or maybe I was just naïve, but you could say that I was starting to love him. I mean even though he treated me the way he did, through all these years that I’ve known him, he became one of my best friends, my backbone. And every time we broke up, I was just miserable, and I didn’t feel like going out. But why would such a person have feelings for a sleazy guy like him? But the summer before my senior year we got back together. He was so sweet and nice, it was just like how we met the first time.

It was a month before he was to leave for college, and I had this gut feeling that



Stephen would bring up the topic one more time; boy was I right. For some reason this time, it would be a whole different story.

One night he took me to dinner to Assagio's. It was a really nice dinner, a very nice and quiet setting. After dinner we were going to rent a movie and go back to his house. When we got to his house, he told me to wait in the car. That is when I knew something was up. My heart started racing, it almost felt as if someone was playing the drums on my heart. I took deep breaths, one after another, but still my heart continued to beat faster. It seemed like I was waiting for a whole day when Stephen finally came back. As he lead me to his room, my heart started to beat a million times faster. When he opened the door to his room, my heart sank. He had candles lit everywhere, and music was playing. It was so romantic, yet I couldn't even breathe. Although I was touched, I was petrified at the same time. I was not ready for any of this. After he closed the door, he sat down on his bed. He grabbed my hand with such a gentle touch.

"We have one month left together. Don't you want to try just once?" he whispered ever so softly, pulling me down next to him.

The room fell to silence. My heart beating faster, tension was rising. I wanted to attack, scream and shout, yet something inside me did not do it.

While looking down and shaking my head, I said, "No." So soft not even a mouse could even hear me.

Getting closer to me, his grip started to get harder, hurting just a little bit. "Why not?!" His tension was rising.

"I am just not ready." My lips started to tremble; eyes filling up, ready to burst.

"Uughh!" He stood up, pacing the room back and forth; grunt after grunt. Another long silence came about. I did it again - I made him angry. Why must he do this? He is so selfish; all he ever thinks about is himself and his needs. Or was it the other way around? Was I being selfish? I sat there thinking awhile, but I knew in the end what I must do; I must leave him.

He sat down again. He grabbed my hand. "But..." With a soft touch, he took hold of my face, and turned it towards him. Staring me straight in the eye; it was such a soft warm look, putting me at ease. "If you love me...then why don't you want to do this?"

That's when it hit me. Something about those last words he said stuck on to me.

Never has he said this, yet something about it made me think. If I love him, then what am I so scared about? I do love, with all my heart! He means everything to me. And if I love him, shouldn't he be the perfect person and this the perfect time, when he set all this up just for me? I finally gave in; we had sex. After what I thought was long, it was finally over. Right after he took me home, I got into bed and I started to cry. I didn't know why, but I couldn't stop crying. I regret everything I did, everything that happened. It wasn't something special, it didn't feel like I loved him more now that we'd done it. I knew I should have waited; I just wasn't ready for sex.

## Minimum Wage

Carly Arakawa

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

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

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

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

As I got ready for my first day of work I could feel my heart pounding as if I had just ran a marathon. *Thud. Thud. Thud.* My stomach felt like a tidal wave rising back and

forth. I kept on taking deep breaths as if my life depended on it. I looked into the mirror and gave myself a once-over look. My deep, rich blue shirt hung loosely off my shoulders as if it were a bathrobe. My baggy, black slacks added ten pounds to my body frame. *What a great image to start my first day on the job.* “Carly, let’s go now! You should get there early for your first day,” my mom yelled from upstairs. “Coming,” I yelled equally as loud as I slipped on my stiff, brand new black hat.

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

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

“You’ll be training in grill. You know, learning how to cook meat,” Sanford said while pointing towards the kitchen area. I nodded. *It can’t be that hard to cook meat, right? I cook Hamburger Helper all the time.* He began, “Okay, there are two types of hamburger meat. One type is 10 to 1 and the other is 4 to 1. It’s called 10 to 1 because there are ten hamburger patties equal to a pound. Just like the 10 to 1 patties there are four 4 to 1 hamburgers to a pound. Therefore, the 10 to 1 meat is used in smaller sandwiches like the cheeseburger and stuff. And the bigger meat, 4 to 1, is used for sandwiches like the Quarter Pounder with Cheese, okay?” I nodded again. *God, this grill area is so hot. How can they stand to work in this heat!* So he continued, “You cook in amounts according to how busy we are. The maximum amount you’re allowed to cook at a time is nine for 10 to 1 and six for 4 to 1. You lay the meat down in an assigned order on the grill then press the black button here to close the upper platen on the grill to cook the meat.” *Wait a minute? Huh?!* “Can you please repeat the last part?” I mustered as my first words ever spoken. Sanford laughed, “Don’t worry. You’ll get the hang of it sooner or later.” Sanford then demonstrated the complicated process of cooking the meat. “Okay, watch now,” he said while looking at me to make sure he had my full attention, “you lay the hamburger meat in a row of three

## *Minimum Wage*

from front to back. Then push the black button. When the top of the grill comes up you then salt the meat in an 'S' shape motion and pull the meat off in threes using a metal scraper and a rubber spatula. Then put the meat in a tray that goes into the meat cabinet. Push the timer so you know when the meat expires. Okay?"

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

"Minimum wage my ass," I said loud enough for only my necklace to hear.

## **Water from a Well**

**Melissa M. Fernandez**

When I was fourteen years old, I thought that I was going to die. My fear was based on an illness that came upon me suddenly—so suddenly that I was completely unprepared for it. Since I was normally healthy as a horse, the fever that overcame me in the jungles of the Philippines had produced in me a sensation of impending death.

My mother and I were alone that time in the half-built house that my father had constructed on a sparsely inhabited island in the Philippines. It stood on the top of a hill overlooking former rice lands, solidly built but lacking running water and window panes. In fact, my father was on a trip buying cement and raw building materials to complete his dream and had taken my older brother with him. This arrangement left me and my mother to each other's company.

Of course, that was not to my liking.

Being fourteen was a time when being rebellious was the foundation of my being. I fought constantly with my parents, whether it be about the outdoor temperature or whether I should have cut my hair differently. Our disagreements ranged from ridiculous to monumental, and through it all I always thought that I was right. In those days, I often saw my mother frowning at me, incomprehension wrinkling her brow, as she explained why certain actions should not be taken. I would yell back and she would become resigned, throwing her hands into the air – her gesture of utter disbelief. As a consequence, the announcement of our migration from Alabama to my parents' homeland enraged me and caused the gap between us to widen further.

“Why are we moving? This doesn't make any sense!” I threw my clothes into my luggage furiously and stalked my empty room looking for others. The movers had left and we were in the last days of our exodus. I began the argument with my mother that morning over something that I don't even remember. Maybe I was venting my frustration. My mother stood in the doorway, her arms folded, and watched me rant impassively. After the first initial outburst, she just became quiet. The silence between us began to thicken and finally congeal when I dared to turn and face her.

“I hope you don't think,” she said slowly, as if explaining to a small child, “that us moving has nothing to do with you or your behavior – because it does. If you hadn't started getting in so much trouble –“

“Why don't you just leave me alone?!” I screamed.

Her brown eyes softened slightly, losing their steely edges, and she looked away

suddenly. Her eyes fell on the family picture taken last Christmas lying on top of a pile of clothes. It was taken Christmas morning and we had posed against the backdrop of our tree, huge grins plastering our faces. A frisson of guilt edged through my turmoil of emotions. Would we ever be that happy again? Would I?

“One of these days,” she whispered, “You’ll understand why we have to go and what this will do for you.”

My whirlwind of anger once again roared to life and snuffed out the tiny flame of shame. Would she never cease persecuting me?

I slammed the door shut on my way out.

My mother and I didn’t speak for two weeks and, despite my protests, we ended up moving.

I made no excuses for who I was. Youth is a dangerous, uncharted territory. One misstep and your entire life could be affected. I was a pioneer setting on unfamiliar grounds and I viewed my mother as the matriarch of the natives who would jeopardize my venture.

However, we tried hard to be civil. When my brother and father departed, we kept our sanity by staying on opposite sides of the house and doing our chores with fanatical focus. In the early morning hours, my mother would cook in the primitive kitchen and sweep the crumbling steps leading up the hill to the door of the house. I would check the level of water in the barrels to ensure that we would have enough to last us through the day until my cousin, Robert, could stop by and haul more water from the well at the foot of the hill. We ate our meals in silence. Then it was washing the clothes by hand or feeding the dogs or just reading a book.

My father and brother were gone only three days when the fever started.

I had woken that morning with a pounding headache, barely able to open my eyes. When I did, the sunlight shining through the square cut windows only intensified the pounding. I forced myself out of bed and padded to the kitchen, hoping against hope that we had at least Tylenol left in the bottle. The room was tilting from side to side as I walked and I paused several times to grasp the wall and shake my head. Unfortunately, all that shaking did was further worsen the ache.

In the kitchen, I reached for the Tylenol on top of the refrigerator and fumbled at the

cap.

“Damn. Empty,” I muttered, and threw it on the floor.

The soft clatter it made was the only sound in the house. I couldn’t hear my mother sweeping the steps. It was strangely silent.

“Mom?”

Even the sound of my own voice made me wince. I made my way laboriously to her bedroom, my fingertips trailing down the hallway walls for support.

“Mom?” I knocked on the door and pushed it open.

“I’m in here.” My mother was sitting on the edge of her unmade bed, her normally tanned skin a waxy pale and her eyes glaring red. The sight of her shocked me but the sight of the unmade bed shocked me even further. My mother never left a bed unmade for longer than ten minutes upon waking. She claimed that it was only an invite for bugs to join you under the covers.

“Lis, are you ok?” she asked with some alarm. She rose from the bed rather unsteadily as I leaned against the door frame, fighting sudden wave and wave of nausea. The last time I felt this bad was when I snuck a bottle of Crown Royal out of my parents’ liquor cabinet, guzzled two shots of it, and threw up tremendously on the floor of my closet, vowing never to drink again. No, wait. This was much worse.

Those memories swam in and out of my mind when I felt my mother’s hand on my forehead, the age old way of checking for fever.

“You’re burning up!” she exclaimed.

“You don’t look so good either,” I said rather waspishly.

She chose to ignore my tone and instead put her arm around my shoulders to lead me to her bed. I felt a strange pang as she embraced me; it had been so long since my mother and I had any sort of physical contact. For one fleeting moment, I leaned against my mother’s tiny form. A dozen images flashed through my mind: my mother baking cookies with me in the kitchen, picking me up after I fell off my bike and burst into hysterical tears, braiding my hair for my first day in school while I giggled excitedly in front of the mirror. Laughing with me, hugging me, kissing my tears away – hundreds of memories that brought feelings of warmth and security. In those seconds, I reveled in the peace that brief



contact gave me – until my bull-headed nature once more asserted itself.

“I could walk...” I protested feebly.

“Don’t be stupid.” Though her words were stern, her touch was not, and I felt an unfamiliar stab of loss as she placed me gently into her bed.

It was a relief to place my reeling head onto the pillow and close my eyes against the early morning sun. I began to fall into a soft blackness. Dimly, I could hear my mother bustling around the room, picking up the phone and dialing, her gasp of disappointment upon realizing that the electricity and phone lines were down once again for the month.

“What’s wrong with us?” Even my own dreamy voice sounded as if it were coming from a far distance. Questions floated gently through my mind like a child’s balloons. Were we sick with an incurable jungle illness? Was it from the chicken that we ate yesterday? Were we going to die?

“I don’t know. It could be the flu that’s been going around. But the phone isn’t working, so I can’t even reach your dad or your auntie.”

She sounded on the verge of tears. I cracked an eye open cautiously and saw the worry spread across her pale face. She winced suddenly and pressed a trembling hand to her temple. I realized then that she must feel as bad as I did.

“Don’t worry, mom...I’ll just sleep it off...”

“Listen to me, Lisa!” The urgency in her voice made me look at her sharply through my hazy vision. “We have to get your fever down. This is the hottest you’ve ever been and we don’t have any medicine here. There is no hospital on the island. We don’t even have any water!”

“Oh yeah, Robert never did come by yesterday.....” Somehow, the absence of water did not seem to bother me. We were on an island surrounded by water anyway, weren’t we?

“We have to bring your fever down,” my mother finished wearily.

My last clear image was of the clock on her bed stand: 07:58. Then my eyes shut and I drifted in and out of consciousness. I had a strange dream that I was being chased by pigs in a circus. First the pigs were trotting obediently behind the ringmaster; all of a

sudden, they stood on hind legs and wore butchers' coveralls. They zeroed in on me sitting with the audience and I threw my popcorn down and ran for the hills. My eyes snapped open just when they grabbed me by the hair and began to squeal. What a strange dream. It might have only been moments I was asleep, but it felt like eons. I turned my head painfully to the left. 08:30. I sighed and was about to surrender again to the darkness when a movement outside of the window caught my eye.

If I had the strength, I would have rubbed my eyes because I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

My mother was at the bottom of the hill, turning the crank of the well with great effort, the strain obvious on her sickly face. When the bucket came up, she grasped at it with shaking hands and poured it into the gallon containers at each end of a wooden pole. After several minutes, she settled the bucket back into the well and sagged against the stone frame.

"Mom..." I moaned. I could only watch helplessly as she fell to her knees and lifted the pole across her shoulders. She took a deep breath and stood, the muscles in her petite frame straining, the cords in her neck standing out. Inch by inch, she carried the containers of water balanced across her shoulder blades through the grass and to the crumbling steps.

Step by step she climbed that day. And I watched in a haze of confusion and fear, wanting to help, wanting to beg her to stop but doing neither.

It was at that moment, watching my tiny mother edge her way up the slope, when I realized what true strength meant. A tear rolled down my heated cheek as I watched her and a pain greater than the physical squeezed at my heart.

I closed my lids against the sight and only woke when I felt my mother's hand once more on my brow. She moved the wet sponge down my face and neck, squeezing the cool water on my flushed skin.

"I think the fever broke," she said softly, and I had opened my eyes and smiled at her. She smiled right back with all the love portrayed in her dark eyes; it overcame the exhaustion that ringed them.

I look back on that moment when I watched her carrying the water up the hill. In my gentle, diminutive mother, I glimpsed a steel core of strength and courage that inspires me to this day. It was a frozen snapshot in time, but it changed my perspective forever.

## Identical Sublimity

Kendall Fick

We'd been in the air for just over nine hours, and I was in pain. Nothing too horrible, really, just some stomach cramps. But they were of a fairly intense, jabbing nature. And they had lasted now for a good two hours without any alleviation. What had I eaten? Apart from airline peanuts, nothing since a chicken sandwich from the Seattle airport that I would charitably call bland. Maybe this didn't have to do with food—at least, not entirely. This was a red-eye flight, after all, and I can never get to sleep on planes. So I was tired, and more than anything else, anxious. For we were soon to touch down in Europe, which I'd been dreaming of visiting since I was a wee lad. I'd guess the combination of empty belly, sleep deprivation, and nerves was expressing itself rather toxically at that point. Still, nothing could diminish my excitement. I clutched the armrests and breathed deeply. Images of towering cathedrals, centuries-old bridges, and other architectural marvels I had glimpsed in books filled my head.

Of course, Josh was asleep, the bastard. How could anyone sleep sitting up, especially when there was so much to *think* about? I began to contemplate lodgings for the upcoming evening in Amsterdam. A few friends who had been on hostelling tours assured me I needn't worry: hostels were ubiquitous throughout western Europe, and there would be no problem, provided there were still beds available when we checked in. Hmm. We weren't due to arrive at Amsterdam's Centraal Station (that's how it's spelled, I swear) until after 6pm. Would that be early enough to score a couple of cots? A bunk? Perhaps we should have planned a *bit* more thoroughly for the first evening; maybe we should have made reservations somewhere. Oh well, nothing to do now but wait and see. For the love of everything holy, how much longer was this flight going to last?

A bit longer, as it turned out. We overshot our scheduled arrival time by 45 minutes or so, on account of the heavy air traffic at London's Heathrow Airport. The pilot had to fly in circles while waiting for landing clearance. Each time we looped around, I was sure I was about to hurl. Somehow, I avoided doing that, though my insides were tied in knots. At long last, Josh and I found ourselves in the middle of the busiest airport we'd ever seen, weighed down with large backpacks, and looking just like the bedraggled and scruffy American boys we were. If I had any illusions about keeping our status as foreigners under wraps, they were dispelled by my first exchange with a Londoner (though I wouldn't realize it for a few minutes). I still smoked cigarettes at that time, and I needed one then more than ever, so I proceeded to the passport-stamping line, in order to gain access to the outside world. "I see you're continuing on to Amsterdam; what's the reason for going outside here?" wondered Stamper. "I, uh, need a smoke," I said with some embarrassment. Stamper snickered, stamped, and waved me on without another word. I did enjoy that cigarette, standing just outside the airport doors, as I watched people whiz about in cars of a style I'd never seen before, and with the driver on the right—weird! Upon return to the

indoors, I noticed that someone was smoking, sitting right at a departure gate. Hey, wait... *lots* of people were smoking inside. That's when it occurred to me: "This is LONDON. *Everybody* smokes here!" (That's an exaggeration, but only slight.) No wonder Stamper had snickered: "Silly American boy!" was the translation. At least my stomach felt better...

Fast-forward a couple of hours, and Josh and I stumble out of a packed train at Centraal Station. Nothing is visible at first, apart from stairs, and lockers, and hundreds of bobbing heads in front of us, making their way to the street. I have to use the bathroom, but no sign indicating such a thing appears. There are signs for something called a "WC," and I investigate. Hm, seems rather bathroom-like. It will certainly meet my present needs. Later I will discover that WC stands for "wash closet," a term I find amusing. Not as amusing, however, as the word "bathroom" strikes the Dutch: in a day or so, Josh will make the mistake of asking a hostel clerk where the bathroom is. Rather than answer, this guy rolls his eyes, looks at his buddy with exasperation, and wonders aloud WHY us wacky Americans insist on calling it a bathroom, despite the fact that it very often does not contain a bath. Well, valid point, I suppose. "Where is the toilet, please" are apparently the proper words to use when requesting this information.

Anyway, after finishing up at this "WC," Josh and I find ourselves standing in front of Centraal Station at sunset, confronted by a panoramic view of incredible sights. The buildings are unlike any I've seen in person, constructed of materials like brown brick. And they are situated on the banks of canals, upon which sail dozens of tour boats. Before we can get closer to the canals for a good look, we have to cross the street, which is a daunting prospect. In chaotic fashion and from seemingly every direction, cars, trolleys, trams, and bikes by the hundred zip past us. I have never seen so many bicycles, and just as I realize this I see an area off to the side of the train station designated for parking bikes, and my jaw hits the ground. There are maybe ten long rows, each of which contains ...oh I dunno, 200 or 300 bikes. They are jammed into each other and piled on top of each other, and I wonder how anyone ever finds theirs.

The search for accommodations commences. We are tired and hungry, and the first two hostels we try are full up. Immediately, we opt to give ourselves a break and spring for an inexpensive hotel room. And yet, hotel rooms of the inexpensive variety are also apparently few and far between. But we eventually chance upon a pub with a wooden sign proclaiming rooms available. *Whew*. We negotiate with a friendly, chatty barkeep, and after laying down more money than we should (200 guilders, or roughly \$100 in U.S. currency) he leads us to and directs us up a staircase so steep and narrow that I'm not sure if my backpack will fit. We deposit our belongings in a charming room with a curtained window overlooking backstreets that are very quiet with vehicular traffic compared to the

main drag in front of the train station. But there are plenty of folks ambling about, and Josh and I can't wait to join them. Off we go...

Amsterdam is a unique place. Most folks are probably aware that there is a political tolerance there of "soft" drugs and prostitution: not "legal," but "officially tolerated." The former, specifically marijuana and hashish, are available in any of 300 or so "coffeeshops" (which is the only acceptable term to use). There are many varieties of these substances, and the kinds for sale at any given coffeeshop are delineated by a menu, which is just like any restaurant menu with the exception that "Kona Gold" and "Seattle Skunk" are offered instead of key lime pie and steak tartar. I'll not delve into my experiences, except to say that "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

Much of the food there leaves a lot to be desired. One memorable exception is at a restaurant we come across, intriguingly called "U Prince." Hey, as far as I'm concerned, you can call your restaurant anything you want, provided you've got the goods. And this place has got the goods. I'll never forget the meal I had there, though I made sure to write down what I eat, just in case: chicken breast baked with garlic and coriander "gently stuffed" under the skin, with au gratin potatoes and spiced carrots. That is the very description written in the menu. Sounds rather simple, really, but after a few days of mediocre vittles and anticipation of same, this food is a revelation. Apart from coriander and "spiced" carrots, I'm very familiar with each of those three foods, and each of them is better than I have ever tasted in my entire life. Involuntarily, I close my eyes and let a dozen or two "MMMM"s escape my lips, as each new bite perfectly complements and expands upon the previous bite. Incidentally, Josh has ordered the same thing, and his reaction is only marginally less enthusiastic than my own.

There is clearly nothing to do but return the next day for a repeat. We do, and again it is delicious, but something is missing this time: surprise. On this occasion we know exactly what to expect, and indeed, the meal is identical to last night's. It is thoroughly enjoyable, and yet we leave the restaurant just a touch... disappointed. Let this be a lesson to us, delivered in an extremely gentle manner, all things considered: the sudden shock of perfection (or divinity or...), when one least expects it, is a sublime and fleeting experience, and the attempt to recapture it *exactly* as it was before—while understandable and perhaps even inevitable—is indicative of a deep-seated human desire to hold on, hold on, hold on to what is loved and familiar in the face of a constantly changing, fleeting world.

## **Reel Love**

### **Kendall Fick**

“I’ve never had a job that did not directly involve film.”

These words have just escaped the lips of one Marc Reikerk, and I am stunned. Marc and I are about an hour into our chat about movies and the role they have played in his life. I’ve known Marc for about two years, and it’s been clear from day one that he’s a film “buff.” We are co-workers at a record and video store in Kahala. I have spent a few years working at various video stores and have a passable knowledge of film myself, and so the conversation at work between Marc and me thus naturally tends to revolve around film. As we make our way up and down the aisles, stocking shelves and perusing the plot synopses detailed on the backs of 20,000 or so distinct DVD titles, one of us will frequently approach the other and ask, “Seen this one?” Much more often than not, Marc has indeed seen this one. And that one, and even *that* one. So I know he’s a film buff, and I even know a good deal about his background. Still, I am speechless after his declaration about jobs, because Mark is in his 50s.

“Never?!?” I manage to blurt out after staring at him for a few seconds, wide-eyed.

“Well, let’s see...” Marc casts his gaze upward and strokes his chin. He smiles and says, “I may have washed someone’s car once.”

At a local independent high school, Marc’s extracurricular activities were twofold: first, he passed many, many hours at nearby Ideal Pictures, a film library and rental agency geared in large part toward providing educational films for local schools; second, he founded the state’s only high school film society, modeled after the college film societies which had begun sprouting up on campuses nationwide—UH included—as a means of spotlighting obscure films which may have had limited box office appeal. The societies were part and parcel of the burgeoning 60s counterculture. More specifically, says Marc, these societies were “a response to the ‘French New Wave’ of cinema, which began in the late 1950s. French directors such as Godard and Truffaut, who had started out as film critics, decided that it was time to make films which broke with long-standing Hollywood tradition.” In other words, it was time to inject art and experimentation into a largely artless medium. So Marc would collect donations from members and rent films from Ideal Pictures at \$25 per reel. He mainly selected films that were not given wide exposure at local theaters, but there was “always room for Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Humphrey Bogart, and Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers” flicks—films of great artistic merit which had also managed to generate large box office revenues.



Upon graduation from high school, Marc landed a job at his beloved Ideal Pictures, where everyone already knew him well and was impressed with his expansive (almost encyclopedic) knowledge of the film art and its history. When asked what his job entailed, Marc states, “Well, I operated the machine you see in the corner there, for one thing.” I had noticed the machine he was now referring to when I first entered his home, but my attention had immediately been diverted by something else: shelf after shelf after shelf packed with *thousands* of DVDs, laserdiscs, and reels. But now I set my eyes upon the machine and give Marc a “may I?” look. “Oh, sure, check it out,” he replies. I amble over to it. It’s about the size of a teacher’s desk in an elementary school classroom. I notice a small placard affixed to its upper left side, engraved with the following letters: “INSPECT-O-FILM.” This inscription, coupled with the olive-green hue of the metal which comprises the body of the machine, makes me smile. Here is an artifact several decades old which had clearly been intended to appear futuristic at the time of its creation. It reminds me of the clunky, boxy, square-mouthed metallic creature I see on a ‘50s movie poster adorning Marc’s wall (one of dozens), with a printed caption screaming, “WHEN ROBOTS ATTACK!”

“Inspect-o-film?” I say, smiling at Marc.

“Yep; it’s just what you would think—you attach a reel to that prong on the left and wrap the film around the prong on the right, flip the switch, and it checks for any physical damage to the film.”

“Did you buy it from Ideal Pictures?”

“No. Ideal went out of business after I’d been there about eight years. The company was a subsidiary of Royal Pictures, which at the time was the only real competition for Consolidated Entertainment. Consolidated went on to dominate the local film market, and Royal Pictures—including Ideal—was forced to shut down. At that time, the Honolulu Academy of Arts purchased the machine for their theater, and that is coincidentally where I wound up working after a bit. To cut a long story short, the Academy outgrew their need for the machine as other film formats became predominant, and they gave it to me. So it’s now part of my collection of film paraphernalia, and a nostalgic reminder of my own early days working with film.”

“So, what did you do after Ideal went out of business?”

“Well, I immediately began looking for another film-related job, and in the evenings I would often host showings here at the house, as well as at locations around town. I had purchased a projector for about \$500 or so. I showed movies for the love of it, but people always filled my donation jar, which was a nice way to earn a bit of cash. But not much.

That's when a friend from Ideal told me that the Academy of Arts was looking for a theater manager. That worked out splendidly. I did all the programming; I had complete autonomy. I had a ball, running Bogart and Astaire/Rogers retrospectives, anything I deemed suitable. It was up to me."

"How long did you stay at the Academy?"

About seven years. During my tenure there I met a few people from other parts of the globe who were heavily involved with film. One of them was William Everson, a professor at New York University film school. The guy was a legend—Martin Scorsese was a student of his. He visited Hawaii pretty often and I got to know him well enough that I was comfortable with allowing him to stay with me whenever he was in town. He spoke of New York a lot and tried to persuade me to move there, since after all, it *is* the place to be if you're serious about film. Eventually he said he had a vacancy in a room of his Manhattan apartment, and would I care to occupy it? At that time, staff at the Academy had been reduced to the extent that I was doing the work of a few people—not just programming, but selling tickets, etcetera. I was a bit fed up, and decided I couldn't pass up a chance to live in New York City. So I did!"

"I'm envious! But why are you back?"

"Well, New York was great in some ways, but overall it was a bit much for me. My temperament isn't really suited to such a frantic urban environment."

"How long were you there?"

"Two years or so. I attended NYU and furthered my education immeasurably with Professor Everson. And I had access to his film collection, which was one of the largest in the country. Reels stacked floor to ceiling everywhere. Anyway, after a while I began to pine for the relaxed pace of life in Hawaii, and I hatched a plan with a friend to open a video store here that would also function as a small theater. And thus came into being Cinema Memories. Which was wonderful and fulfilled all of my dreams, for a few years. But then my friend, the co-founder, and I had a falling out over financial matters. I sold him my share of Cinema Memories and got out. I would suggest that no one go into business with a friend unless they are prepared to lose that friendship."

"Yikes. Sorry to hear that."

"Hey, life goes on. I subsequently got a job teaching film at my old alma mater, and I'm still doing that; it's been fantastic. And, of course, working part-time at the video store



allows me to feed my habit.”

Mark smiles and gestures at his shelves crammed with DVDs. I know exactly what he means; our substantial employee discount ensures that a good chunk of my paycheck goes right back to the store.

“So let me ask you this, by way of closing. Why do you love film?”

“Hmm. My earliest memories are of movies. As a very small boy, I remember watching Laurel and Hardy and the Three Stooges with my father, and just loving it. It was a powerful bonding experience, one that remains with me still. As I got older, I watched the Alfred Hitchcock show on TV, which instilled in me a real fascination with the man himself. I wanted to know what made him tick, and I devoured all of his films, which I still consider to be some of the finest ever made. I was taken with the idea of the film director as auteur. Filmmaking is an art, an expression of human creativity and ingenuity. And at its best it can even be an agent of social change.”

(Note: The fictitious name “Marc Reikerk” and the enterprise called “Cinema Memories” have been used to give the interviewee for this piece a measure of anonymity.)

## **Interview With Grandma**

### **Jian Cheng Gu**

Sunday morning, I got up at around 10 a.m. Brushing my teeth and washing my face, I was really in good mood. The sun was above all of us, working hard to illuminate the land. The time zone between Hawaii and China was 18 hours difference. Was it unclear? For example, if it was at 8 a.m. at Monday morning in China, the time of Hawaii would be 2 p.m. on Sunday. So my grandma was in her dream now. I did not want to bother her so early like that. Today I would have a phone interview with her, but I did not know what she would be talking with me. I just told her 3 days ago that I wanted to interview with her about her past experience of anything.

I turned on my computer and played with it until 2 p.m. which was 8 a.m. in China. My grandma should have woken up already, I believed. I put on my bluetooth headset, launched Word and made a phone call to my grandma. "Hello, good morning," my grandma said. I replied, "Hey, my dear grandma. This is your grandson, Jian. Are you ready for the talk?" She said, "Okay, I would talk to you about the event of Japanese armies invading our country around 66 years ago." In fact, when I was a child, my grandma once briefly mentioned that to me. But I did not pay much attention about it. I learned from school that there were lots of Chinese killed by Japanese armies. I said, "There must be something really terrible about the events, right?" My grandma angrily said, "Absolutely." "All right, grandma, now I just want to be your audience and I will record whatever you say. You can start now," I said slowly.

It was silent for awhile over the phone. Then my grandma said, "I remember that when I was 12 years old, Japanese armies were invading our country. They killed a lot of Chinese people. At that time, our family was living in a village far from cities. So we were temporarily safe. However, the people in the village said that the Japanese coming here was a matter of time. We needed to find some places to hide before they arrived. I was really scared because I had never seen people being killed and did not want to see. I was only 12 years old."

I interrupted and loudly asked, "Grandma, our family lived in a village before?" She said, "Yes, our family lived there until your father was born." "I thought our house is also located in the city. And I remember you said the village people wanted to find some places to hide. Did they make it?" I asked my grandma. She said, "Eventually we made it but before that, there was a story." "What was that?" I eagerly asked.

My grandma did not reply immediately. Rather, she told me she wanted to drink some water before going into that story. Of course, I said okay. I thought what I was going to hear was something really terrible, so she needed a break. During her break, I managed what I just heard from my grandma and typed it on the computer. A voice came from my handset saying, "I am ready." I said, "Grandma, is that story horrible?" Her voice

changed a little bit. She said, "Listen to me, okay?" "Sure," I replied.

"We all knew that the Japanese were invading all cities nearby the seashore and marching into inner cities and villages. So we had to go as early as possible. The people in the village gathered and had a serious meeting on which they discussed how to prepare food and water and then run away. I was small and only thing I could do was to stand quietly beside those adults watching how they wanted to do. However, I heard that at this time, our village did not have too much food but water was sufficient. The closest city was occupied by the Japanese, so we could not go there for food. One man urgently asked what we were going to do. And other people were silent as though they were thinking how to get food. I saw there was almost no hope for us. I thought in my mind, maybe I would die this time."

I interrupted by saying, "You want to take a break, grandma?" She softly replied, "No, I want to keep going. I don't quite remember all about that meeting. But I remember at the end, those adults decided to take all livestock such as chickens, ducks and anything that could be eaten and drunk to the mountain and hide there because the Japanese armies were very soon to be here. If they saw us, they would definitely kill us. So once the meeting was finished, everybody spread out and went home preparing everything. I went with my father. Jian, I cannot remember exactly what we took, but food and water must have been taken. The sky was getting darker, but we could not hesitate. Everybody gathered again and went towards the mountain. The leader pointed out that we had to reach there before sunset otherwise we could not find the way because we absolutely could not use torchs. Although I was a little kid, I knew what he meant. Using torchs would attract the Japanese attention." At this moment, my grandma stopped telling the story and said, "Jian, I need to rest for awhile and also to manage how to tell you the last part of our story." "Certainly, my dear," I replied.

Although I could not see my grandma during the interview, I knew she was reluctant to retell what she had experienced during the war along with other village people. That was why she only briefly mentioned that to me when I was small. The reason she shared this story was that I told her this interview was very important to me, her dear grandson. I believed after this time, she would not share it anymore.

The other side of the phone was really silent. I kept typing what I had heard. "Jian, I am okay right now, ready for the story?" "Yeah, grandma, but if you feel uncomfortable, tell me, okay?" I stopped typing and was ready to listen. "Everybody carried food and water. Me too. No matter how young you were, if you could carry, you had to carry at least a little. Boys and girls were crying when we were on the way to the mountain, going through the forest, climbing up the narrow road. It was very difficult for those small kids. I also

wanted to cry but I held it back because I did not want to give more burdens on anybody. The sun almost disappeared. The leader said we had to move fast. I knew that. Everybody knew that. They had done their best already. Carrying much food and water - how fast could it be in such environment? The kids kept crying. Finally, we arrived at a cave in the mountain. All of us went in that cave and some strong men hacked down some branches of the tree to cover up the hole of the cave so that no one could see inside of the cave from outside. We were in a dirty and humid cave. No one knew how long we would stay here. And this cave was located at a place where was hard to be found and we could slightly see our home from this cave. Two days later, our village was smoking. We believed that it was caused by the Japanese. One man was sent to check. He told us the Japanese looked very angry when they searched the empty village and they were not intending to leave right away because they seemed to start searching for us. After that man, no one dared go down to check. We only scouted near the cave to see if the damn enemy came towards us. The time flew. We ran out of food.

"Jian, listen carefully. Whatever I say from now, please calm down when you hear it." I quickly said. "Okay, grandma, but what is it? You are found by the Japanese?" "No, luckily all of us were safe at the end. They never found us. As I told you earlier, we ran out of food. We still would die if no food. So the men went out trying to catch wild animals, but in vain. At the very end, we had no choice but to eat the skin of the trees and the roots as well. I saw people vomiting after eating the skin or roots. Some of them really could not bear to eat that, so they ate grass instead. I did not want to die. I had to eat even though it was extremely hard to swallow. Sorry, Jian, that is enough I think. I have to go." I softly told my grandma, "Yes, I know that was a really terrible event. Thank you very much for being my interviewee and sharing such remarkable events with me. I really appreciate you, grandma. I will talk to you later. Take good care, bye."

My interview with my grandma ends with eating skin of trees, roots, and grass. It is reasonable that she doesn't want to say more. I really find it hard to believe my grandma has ever eaten those, but that is true. It is very bad, but on the other side of coin, they survived after eating that. I also want to appreciate that my grandma and other people were not found by those Japanese; otherwise the result would have been really negative. They would absolutely have been killed, and I would have never existed in this world. By reading the history, the Japanese armies killed countless people when they were invading China. In a city called Nanking, they performed a massacre named Massacre of Nanking, killing almost 300 thousand Chinese civilians. They also used live Chinese people as their exercise targets by thrusting the knife-mounted guns into their bodies. In a contest of killing Chinese babies, whoever won was given a reward of raping a young Chinese woman. I cannot write it anymore.

## **My Second Chance at Life**

**Allison Kimoto**

One bright and beautiful Saturday afternoon during Spring break, when I was around six years old, my two older brothers and I were on our way to my cousin's house in Hawaii Kai. My mom was dropping us off at my cousin Darron's house so that she could get some errands done without dragging us around. We didn't mind because our cousin had a pool.

"We are going to have so much fun swimming in the pool! I'm going to play basketball and see who can dunk the best!" my second oldest brother, Rob, said as we rounded the corner leading to the house. Rob was around 12 years old at the time.

Since I didn't have a pool at my house, it was a real treat to go swimming in my cousin's pool, which we had all to ourselves for that day. As soon as our maroon Caravan pulled into the drive way and parked, the boys were out of the sliding car door and running through the gate of the house.

"Bye! Have fun guys!" my mom yelled.

"Bye mom!" we all yelled while running through the wooden gate of the house

"Ooh...the pool looks so nice right now! It is so hot! Can I go in already?" my brother Rob asked as we ran into the house and greeted my aunty and cousin.

"Yeah, aunty, can we go in already?" my third oldest brother, Rick, who was around 9, asked.

"We have to eat lunch before you guys can go in the pool," my aunty said.

All through our lunch, of hot dogs and potato chips, we could feel the pool calling for us to jump in. The pool looked too perfect because the sun was right above us reflecting off of the bright blue water. The pool was complemented with the green luxurious grass and palm trees surrounding it. It almost looked like a picture of a hotel in a travel book.

While eating lunch, on the lanai, everyone was talking about what pool toy they were going to play with in the pool.

"I got dibs on the basketball," said Rob.

"I got dibs on the floating noodles," said Rick.

“I want the football,” said my cousin.

When lunch was finished, sunscreen was applied in a hurry. The boys still had white streaks of sunscreen on their faces. The calmness of the pool was disrupted by the cannon ball splashes of my brothers and cousin in their brightly colored aloha print swim shorts. At this time, I was taking swimming lessons and I was confident that I could swim with the boys in the deep end. But being the baby of the family as well as the only girl I had to play on the stairs of the shallow end.

“Ooh... It’s cold!” I replied as I dipped into the water with my bright pink one piece bathing suit. A shiver ran through my body. I needed to get use to the temperature change.

While sitting on the steps of the pool with half of my body in the pool and the other half above the water, I could hear the shouts and splashes of the boys in the deep end and I longed to be on that side. It was boring in the shallow end because there was nothing to do. All of the good pool toys were taken already by everyone else. The only toys that were left were a couple of really flat basketballs that didn’t even bounce and some blue kick boards which I was not interested in playing with.

My aunty was not around at the time, she went into the house to do some household chores so I had no one to play with. My older brothers didn’t want to play with their little baby sister in the shallow end when they could play football, Marco Polo and do cannon balls in the deep end. I was so confident that my swimming lessons would pay off because I could float, swim to my teacher, and blow bubbles under water during swimming lessons. I believed that I could swim on my own without holding on to the sides of the pool.

“I’ll show everyone that I can play in the deep end with everyone else,” I said to myself as confidence ran through me.

I grabbed a kick board and walked to the middle of the pool. Clutching the blue kick board and without hesitation, I jumped into the pool. As soon as I hit the water the board flew out from under my body like a rocket shooting to the other end of the pool. Frantically, I tried to tread water but it was not enough to keep my head above the surface. I tried waving my arms in the air and screaming for help but nobody could hear me because my head was already below the water. All I could do was wave my arms in the air and hope that my brothers or my cousin saw this.

My little hands then slowly sank below the surface of the cold water. I was too short to even touch the ground. As I sank deeper into the pool, I could feel the cold water

filling my lungs. At that time, I had almost blacked out from the lack of air and the pressure of the water was unbearable. There must have been five feet between me and the surface of the water and it seemed so far away. I remember the feeling of looking up from the bottom of the pool at the sun and thinking that I was going to die.

Just as I was about to give up and surrender to the water, I hit the surface and took that one big beautiful breath of air. My brother was tippie-toeing at the bottom of the pool with his arms stretched over his head holding me above the water. While at the surface, I panicked and grabbed on to my brother as if he were a life jacket. Rob struggled with all his might to pull us both to the side of the pool where it was safe.

“I can’t breathe. You’re drowning me,” Rob yelled above and below the water.

I had no idea that I was drowning him. All I could think about was getting to the side of the pool where it was safe. I didn’t know that he could not touch the bottom of the pool either.

“Ooh my gosh.....are you okay? What happened,” exclaimed my aunty as she pulled me out of the water.

“Allison was at the bottom of the pool and almost drowned,” Rick explained

I swear I must have thrown up at least a gallon of water. Coughing up all the water in my lungs felt so good. My body was totally exhausted and I could hardly move from the position that I was in, laying on the warm pavement, consumed by shock. Numb with fear, I finally broke down and started crying when I realized what almost happened to me.

“Are you okay?” my aunty said again as she wrapped me in a warm towel that smelled of fabric softener.

“Yes,” I replied.

When my mom came to pick us up from my cousin’s house that day she got the biggest scare of her life. She was more worried than mad. My mother was happy that I was okay and proud of my brother for saving my life. I will never forget the face that she made when she picked us up. I have never seen her make a face like that before. I felt so horrible that scared her that much.

“Thank God that you guys are okay,” my mother said as she hugged us both and helped us into the van.

I don't remember the ride home that day because I was so exhausted that I fell asleep.

I ended up getting pneumonia for the rest of my Spring break, but that was a small price to pay for getting my life back.

After that day, my parents thought that I really needed to learn how to swim. I eventually learned to swim very well and I received my life guard certification. By getting my lifeguard certification I hope to save people the same way that my brother saved me that day during Spring break. My brother, Rob, will always be my hero. I will never forget that he gave me my second chance at life.



## **8 Days in Hell**

**Madeline Mangra**

Did you ever think that taking one gulp of fresh air would give you such an ultimately gratifying sensation and satisfaction? I didn't. Not until I was stuck in the hospital for eight grueling days with a serious disease. Shortly after graduation, I discovered that I had bacterial meningitis. Although it was an excruciating experience, it taught me a number of unforgettable life lessons. I will never take my friends, my family or my physical abilities for granted again.

This past summer, I experienced a life threatening disease called bacterial meningitis. It is so severe that it can kill in mere hours. Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. People who are fortunate enough to recover from it often have after effects such as: memory loss, deafness, epilepsy, seizures, speech problem and loss of sight, to name a few. It was a gruesome experience that I would not wish on anyone.

It was an ordinary Friday evening. My step-mom and I decided that it was a good night for a movie. The day started off great; I got a new haircut, saw some old friends and spent quality time with my step-mom. However, later on into the evening was not as pleasant. In the middle of the night, I started to feel an acute, sharp pain in my collarbone and was unable to move my arm. The more I tried to comfort myself, the worse the pain felt. I began to groan profusely and curl into a tight ball.

My initial reaction was to take some Tylenol and pray for the pain to disappear. The sleep I attempted that night was dreadfully uncomfortable. I moved frantically around in my bed while groaning all through the night. I awoke the next morning in an even worse condition. Not only was I in deep pain, but I became extremely weak and dizzy with pale lips and chronic headaches that felt like a hammer was pounding on my head repeatedly. I went to my dad, holding my paralyzed arm in my other hand and told him that I wanted to go to the doctor. In my seventeen years of living, I had never once asked to go to the doctor, so he knew that something had to be wrong.

"What's wrong? What happened?" he asked with a look of fear in his eyes.

"Just take me to the doctor. PLEASE!"

He immediately grabbed his keys and got ready to go. I was so weak and in so much pain that I couldn't even walk out to our driveway so he had to carry me to the car. Within fifteen minutes, we arrived at Schofield Barracks and waited to be helped. The staff in the emergency room put me on a bed and asked me a series of ridiculous questions to be sure that I was conscious of my surroundings. In a matter of minutes, I found myself begging

for water. The doctors said that I was extremely dehydrated and they needed to run some more tests on me. After all the tests were run, they concluded that I had a UTI (Urinary Track Infection). They gave me some medication and let me rest in the bed until I felt well enough to go home.

About an hour and a half later, I was beginning to feel better and was willing to go home. I still hadn't eaten yet, so my dad picked up a couple of dripping chocolate doughnuts with ice cold milk. Although I was feeling better, I was still in excruciating pain and felt like resting in bed. However, that didn't last long because I started vomiting within the next half hour. There was no stopping it. It was one vomiting session after another, especially if I ate or drank anything.

The rest of the day, I tried to take it easy and relax. Later that night, I was feeling much better and I had high hopes that I was experiencing a mere fluke. My high hopes were shattered like glass on a road because I continued to vomit. The next time around, I didn't make it to the bathroom. My whole bed was soaked. I couldn't eat anything, even though I knew I needed to. All I could do was drink water and even that wouldn't stay down. Although I was still very weak, I managed to put my soaked sheets and comforter on top of the washing machine. I lay back down on my bare mattress. I was too tired to care.

Apparently I did more than just take off my sheets because when I awoke the next day, I was completely naked. My dad was pounding on my door, calling my name, but I was unresponsive. He started to get worried. My step-mom told him to just open the door and check on me to see what was wrong. He opened my door and was shocked to see me naked before him so he immediately slammed it shut.

"What's wrong? Go in there! See what's wrong with her!" my step-mom yelled.

"She's naked," he whispered.

"What?!"

"You go in there. *You're* the woman!"

My step-mom opened the door and was just as shocked as my father. Both my parents knew that I wasn't my normal self. They were scared and they didn't know what to do. My step-mom kept shaking me and asking me what was wrong, but I couldn't speak. She started to dress me, but I was rejecting the clothes due to the fact that I was terribly hot.

My parents grew more worried by the second. By then, my headaches were at their worst. I had no energy to think, talk, or move. They drove me back to Schofield Barracks where I fell unconscious. The doctors still did not know what was wrong with me. They gave me some antibiotics and put me in an ambulance that sped me to Tripler Army Medical Center in less than ten minutes. Before I knew it, I was in the intensive care unit, completely knocked out.

I was clueless as to what the doctors were doing and saying to me. From what I was told, they hopped me from bed to bed and rolled me every which way and all the while, I was unaware of what was happening. They did a spinal tap and removed the liquid to analyze it. "Oh my! This is serious. She's got meningitis," said one of the doctors.

Once they knew what was wrong with me, they took my parents aside and told them that there was a good chance that I could have "expired." But, because the doctors at Schofield had given me the right medication, even though they didn't know what was wrong, they had saved my life. My parents were going out of their wits by then.

Unfortunately, I did not develop an appetite. In fact, I didn't eat for three days. The only thing I consumed was water...and lots of it! I couldn't open my eyes because I was extremely sensitive to light and my headaches were highly active. The only showers I got were wipe downs, which were slightly embarrassing. I couldn't take pain killers, not even Tylenol, so I had to suffer through the pain. Honestly, I felt like I was slowly dying. I felt helpless and was beginning to think that I had to be cursed to be that unlucky.

My parents stuck by me the entire time, even though I was highly contagious. Any visitors that came by had to wear a mask and my family had to take antibiotics immediately.

After the fourth day, I attempted to eat again. They gave me yogurt and I was able to finish half of the container. With each day that passed, I got a little better. I still had difficulties walking, breathing, talking, and simply moving around. Even though I was still ill, they allowed me to move out of intensive care, into my own room. I was dead tired, yet I couldn't sleep. Every waking hour of the day, I had needles poking me in the arms, tests run for blood pressure and sugar, blood being drawn and x-rays taken to check my lungs.

Just as my meningitis was being cured, I developed pneumonia in my right lung, which only added to my long list of ailments. Breathing became more difficult. I couldn't speak for more than three seconds at a time. Everything was a struggle: eating, breathing, sleeping, just moving around in general. Although my headaches were less intense, they were still present.

The eight days that I was in the hospital were complete hell. Everyday, different doctors were in and out, and I began to lose track of who was who. I was hooked up to an IV that beeped every time I moved my arm. Cotton balls were taped to my arms to stop the bleeding from all the blood I had drawn. I had pumps massaging my legs so I wouldn't develop blood clots from lying in bed. I had to wear hospital robes until I could get clothes of my own. I didn't sleep for more than two hours at a time and I must have used the bathroom at least once an hour, thanks to the medication. Every morning nurses would wake me up at 4:30 in the morning to stick me. My veins are small, so they often missed, having to do it over and over again. My eating was still sporadic. I could never complete an entire meal. Before I went in, I weighed nearly 120 pounds. By the time I got out, I weighed 105 pounds.

Aside from the things I just mentioned, having meningitis was a valuable learning experience. It opened my eyes in more ways than I can count. For one thing, it taught me about the things I take for granted and how precious life really was. One day, I could be completely healthy and the next, I could have a disease that could kill me. It taught me just how fortunate I really was to have my parents and the friends that came and visited me everyday. They brought me mountains of flowers, chocolates and candies. They sang to me, made me books, brought me DVDs to watch and catered to my every need. My phone rang off the hook with calls from my family from all over. I had countless prayers from loved ones and people I didn't know. I had never realized how many people care for me. I could easily get tired of the calls and visits from the different doctors, but NEVER of those from my friends and family.

With each day, I was getting better. I was starting to eat regularly, taking actual showers (even though I had to sit on a plastic chair), Brushing my teeth, gradually talking more, and getting some color back in my skin. I'm not saying that I was well because I was still far from it, but emotionally, I was feeling better than ever.

The pneumonia took a large toll on my lungs and I have a superfluous amount of liquid in my body, but I was just happy I was alive. The doctors told me that I was extremely lucky to have made it through without developing any long term after effects of the bacterial meningitis. Although I have develop a slight memory loss, and I can't do many of the things I used to be able to do as well such as: running, swimming or walking without getting tired quickly, I'm back to my old self otherwise.

After I was released, the medication dragged on for another week. I was prohibited from sun exposure and that ruled out the beach for a little while. I still had to practice walking and I basically had to take it easy for the next few weeks. My arms had some trouble straightening out and were covered with bruises that had tiny holes in them.

However, I fully regained my eating habits and I am able to breath just fine. Occasionally I get dizzy and lightheaded when I stand up from sitting or lying down, but it's not as bad as it used to be. Everyone still asks me how I'm doing and showers me with a whole lot of attention. A few weeks later, I was back on my feet preparing to go to Disney World for my graduation present.

Many people think that I had the worst luck getting meningitis. I look at it as if I'm the luckiest person on the planet. I learned valuable lessons such as the importance of friends and family, not to take the functions of my legs and arms for granted, and to live life to its fullest everyday because tomorrow is not guaranteed.

## **Almost Stolen**

**Mary Martin**

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

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

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

For some reason, I am sitting in the back seat of the car on the driver's side. Probably because then I can leave the door open for the cool air and not worry about cars coming by. "Now, I can read my book," I thought at the young age of eight. I am sitting captivated by my book, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, that takes me into the world of a young girl's adventure on a deserted island. My parents' screenplay, "All Hawai'i Stands Together," which they had been working on for years, is sitting on the center console of the car in a square leather case. My mom is planning to make copies of it later today.

The neighborhood is noisy with the chatter of kids playing on the street or in their yards on a sunny day. Cars come and go, dropping people off, stopping for a while or rushing off in a hurry. Dogs bark periodically. I don't hear much of this because the story I

am reading is rambling in my head with great speed.

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

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

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

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

Horrors now creep into my mind. I race from thought to thought of what might have happened if I had been caught in that car. Maybe she would've taken me into a secluded house down a dark hallway. She must have been drugged!! I couldn't see her eyes! The outline of her back, shoulders and her short straggly tangled hair that stood stiffly away from her head etched itself into my mind. I see myself duck-taped in the back seat of the car racing over massive potholes and slippery mud on the road to Polihale, the West side.



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

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

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

My mom asks, now a little frantic, "What lady?"

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

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

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

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



mind. My mom's face remains perplexed and strained.

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

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

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

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

## **Fishing the Perfect Storm with My Brother**

### **Quan Nguyen**

The weatherman on CNN was reporting, “Tropical Storm Charley, with sustained winds of 70 miles an hour, is brewing in the Gulf of Mexico and projected to make landfall tomorrow.” My brother and I were debating whether to go fishing at our favorite spot before the storm hit. The Galveston Fishing Pier is known as the longest pier in Texas, stretching a quarter of a mile into the Gulf with a T-head as long as a football field. Galveston is a small beachfront community on the Gulf of Mexico, 30 minutes southeast of Houston.

Redfish, the prized game fish in Texas and pound for pound one of the most powerful saltwater fish become more active when the water gets rough. Basically, the bigger the waves, the more redfish you will catch. Redfish have beautiful glossy reddish-green scales and almost always have a small black dot near the tail. This dot resembles an eye and acts as a defense mechanism against predators. The record redfish caught on rod and reel was nearly 60 inches long and weighed over 100 pounds, not bad for a fish caught in ten feet of water.

It didn’t take much debating for us to decide to go, even though Charley was approaching. Over the years, we had hooked into many redfish, but never landed any over 20 inches. With a storm approaching, this was our best chance to finally land one.

We considered ourselves “true fisherman”, meaning that we didn’t even have to catch fish on our trips, as long as we had the chance to catch them. It was more the act of fishing, then actually catching them. Our philosophy could best be described by a bumper sticker, “A bad day of fishing is better than a good day working.”

On this particular day, we brought only our light tackle, hoping to catch redfish in the 20-28 inch range. Once redfish get bigger than 28 inches, you are required to attach a special tag to the fish and are only allowed to keep 1 per year because of its reproductive potential.

From a distance, I could see the Galveston Fishing Pier jetting into the ocean, which had a glimmering, golden color from the setting sun. With the pier in sight, the excitement began to build. The smell of salt-air was so refreshing. It made the fast-paced, big city life of Houston seem so far away.

It was a typical August day in Galveston, Texas. The temperature was in the mid 90s and humidity was near 100%. It was so humid that the layer of sweat on the outside of my body could never quite dry up, even with a constant ocean breeze blowing. The shore breaks were not any bigger than usual; you couldn’t even tell that a storm was approaching. The waves had small white caps and were no bigger than 2 to 3 feet. Tropical Storm

Charley seemed like a million miles away.

Dale was working at the pier that day, so we asked him when they would be closing the pier to get ready for the storm. He said, "Well, I suppose we'll stay open until the last person leaves."

He was smoking a cigarette, wearing his usual faded blue jeans and a raggedy Galveston Fishing Pier T-shirt with blood stains from handling bait fish. He always smoked generic cigarettes, probably because he was a chain smoker and didn't want to spend the money on a name brand. Every time we saw him it looked like he had a 5 o'clock shadow, no matter what time of day it was, though this time it happened to be 5 o'clock. My brother and I considered Dale a friend because he would always call and tell us to come down when the fish were biting and when it was slow on the pier, he would tell us great fishing stories from the past. He was in his mid to late 50's, so we treated him like an uncle and he treated us like his favorite nephews.

We pulled our custom-built fishing cart down the length of the pier to the left side of the T-head. The pier had a concrete base and columns, but the deck was made from wood. Every time the wheels on the cart crossed a wood plank, it would make a loud "clunking" noise. The whole way down the length of the pier, I could hear "clunk, clunk, clunk..."

No matter how many times I have fished this pier, I could never get used to the ¼ mile walk to the end of the T-head. It always felt like it was 10 miles long because all the anxiety that was built-up.

Our cart was just a converted wagon, similar to a Red Flyer, with rod holders drilled into the back. There was a place for our tackle box, a cooler for drinks, a cooler for bait and fish, and it could hold 4 fishing rods.

We unloaded and began fishing. Action was very light that day and I started to get bored. I baited some rods with big chunks of cut mullet and placed them in the rod holders on our wagon. I said to my brother, "Keep an eye on the rods; I'm going to Popeye's to pick up dinner."

I remember walking back out to the T-head with the box of chicken and seeing my brother run towards me. He blurted, "We had something big, the rod was bent in a U-shape and the fish pulled the wagon across the pier to the other side. I fought it for about 10 minutes and then the line snapped!" We baited up the rods again and cast them back out.

Our dad had a phrase that he would say in broken English, "When the fish no eat,

we eat. When the fish eat, we no eat.” Which means, if fish are biting you don’t take time to eat, and if they’re not biting, then you can take a break and eat.

It wasn’t long before the silence was broken by the scream of a reel clicker. A clicker is a device on the fishing reel to alert you when there is a fish on your line. To me, there is nothing like the sound of a clicker going off. Fisherman dream about this noise, and I wasn’t any different.

You could see the fish make random jerking motions by the way the rod was flexing. I grabbed the rod and pulled back as hard as I could to set the hook, the fight was on. Surprisingly I did everything right this time. Usually when I hear the clicker going off, I forget everything that I ever knew, and learned about how to land a fish. The noise gets me so excited, I forget everything. It’s like going fishing for the first time and having absolutely no idea what to do. Fishermen refer to this stage of the fight as a “blur” because they forget what to do when the clicker goes off.

The fish made several runs. Every time I thought we were about to net the fish, it took another 50 yards of line. After 20 minutes of battling the fish with our light tackle equipment, it felt like my forearm was going to fall off. The rod was flexing so much that I thought for sure it would snap if the fish did not tire soon. By this time, a crowd of people had gathered to see what all the excitement was about. I was thinking to myself, “Is it a shark? Is it a redfish? The suspense was killing me!”

Finally after one last run, the fish surfaced. My brother yelled, “It’s a big bull redfish!” A redfish is called a “bull” when it is over 28 inches in length. Even though my brother had the drop net ready, I said to him, “Get the net ready!” This is always the tensest part of landing a fish on the Galveston Pier. The pier sits 15 feet above the water and to land a fish, you have to pull the fish into a round 3 foot net and pull it up over the handrail onto the deck.

When it got within range, he dropped the net into the water and I cautiously pulled the exhausted fish in. It took all of our strength just to pull the fish onto the pier. We could tell that it was about 34 inches long because our drop net was 36 inches in diameter and the fish was 2 inches shy of the width of the net. Ed, one of the regulars at the pier said. “Nice fish! That’s a 30 pounder.”

He and his wife fished on the pier almost everyday. They were both in their 40’s and were avid sports fisherman, meaning they knew what techniques to use to catch the most fish. Everyone considered them the pier “experts”. My brother and I called them the “hardcore” fisherman. We used this term to classify people who eat, sleep and drink fish.

This person could fish for 24 hours straight with no sleep and not go home until they have caught a fish. We also put ourselves in this category, but knew they were in a class by themselves.

No matter how hot it was, Ed always wore jeans, a plain white T-shirt, a fishing vest with lures attached to the outside and a baseball cap. He was a skinny, Caucasian man with glasses and skin like leather. I have been fishing at the Galveston Fishing Pier for over 10 years and as many times as I have seen him, I have never seen him or his wife put on sunblock. His wife was a petite Vietnamese lady named Kim, who always wore pajamas and a traditional straw hat. Her skin was dark brown and wrinkled from over exposure to the sun. Because we were Vietnamese too, she was always friendly toward us by offering food or drinks, and even fish on some occasions.

Exhausted, I asked my brother “What do you want to do with it?” He said “Let’s take it home for dad! We finally got our first bull!” I wanted to take a picture with it so I said, “O.K.”

Ed told us, “If you plan on keeping it, make sure you guys tag it.” We put it in the cooler, but it was so long that about 12 inches of the tail was sticking out. “I can’t believe we finally got our first bull!” exclaimed my brother again. “C’mon, let’s get the tag on before we get busted by the game warden,” I told him.

The weather got progressively worse over the next few hours. The wind was howling, wave sets were hitting right below the pier and every so often, a set would clear the hand rails on the pier. You could see the rain approaching in the distance. It was raining so hard, it was coming down in sheets.

Ed’s wife asked “Do you boys have rain gear?” We answered, “No”, so she offered trash bags for us to use as poncho’s, but we figured that there was no way we were going to stay dry even if we had rain gear, so we declined. “We’re going to get soaked anyway,” my brother said. Kim laughed and said “Well, if you change your minds, let me know.”

It started raining so hard that it was like you were sitting in a car in a downpour, but the windshield wipers didn’t work. Periodically we had to wipe the water from our eyes so we could see.

As soon as the rough weather started, the fish began to bite. We started catching sea trout between 12-18 inches one after another, and sometimes two at a time. Without saying a word to each other, we knew that we would stay until sunrise. Fishing like this happens once in a lifetime, not only were we catching fish at will, but we didn’t have to deal with

other people trying to crowd us for our fishing spot.

There were only 4 people left on the pier: me and my brother, and Tommy and Daddy (a father and son duo, who we also considered to be “hardcore” fisherman). They were both wearing yellow slick, rain suits.

From 2AM till dawn, it was non-stop action. We caught a cooler full of sea trout and landed and released at least 50 bull redfish between the two of us. We were in the fishing “zone” for 4 hours.

I remember looking down at Tommy and Daddy on the other side of the T-head and seeing black tip sharks and gafftop catfish (a type of saltwater catfish) flopping around on the pier, ranging from 2 to 4 feet in length. They were catching fish so fast and so often that they didn’t bother to throw them into their cooler.

I woke up the next day not being able to flex my forearm because it was so sore. When Charley finally blew through, we called Dale to get the fishing report on the pier. He said, “The pier is open, but the back-half of the pier was destroyed and washed away in the storm.”

Our friends and family said we were crazy to be fishing that night, but we never looked at it that way. In fact, we joke about how lucky we were to be in the right place at the right time. Of course we were both single back then, and now that we have families of our own, we would be more cautious in our decisions. We have never regretted our decision in going fishing that night and have used the experience to grow closer. At my wedding reception, when asked “What was the most memorable moment with your brother?” He recalled that night, fish for fish. It’s something we can look back at when we are old men and say previous to that day we were “boys fishing” and after that day we were fishermen, fishing “The Perfect Storm.”

## **Writing Contest**

### **Tram Nguyen**

Talent contests in elementary schools are supposed to be a way of discovering pupils' special abilities, but in fact, in Vietnam, they often become adults' ways of using children to satisfy their pride. I learned this the hard way as a child.

It is a tradition in the education system in Vietnam that every year a national talent contest is held for elementary, middle, and high school pupils. It is the time for schools, towns, cities, and provinces to compete for prizes.

It was January 1984. I was 10 years old and in the fifth grade—the last one of elementary school. I was selected to join the writing contest at the town level. My teacher told me to take an extra training class for the contest.

I went to the extra class every afternoon. It was my teacher's house and there were only two of us in the "class." She was the best writing teacher in my school. She always started a session by giving me an assignment to write. Then she read my essay, pointed out my weaknesses, and required me to revise it. One time the assignment was: "Describe one late afternoon when you finished the class." I looked at the window and described the way the late afternoon looked: "It was the winter and the sky was grey." The teacher frowned as she read the line. She said, "No. You can't say that the afternoon looked boring. You have to imagine that it was a sunny day. Always look at things in beautiful ways." I could not write in my voice; I had to write in her voice and I found it more difficult.

The contest day came. There were fifty contestants. They were kids from all the elementary schools in town. The assignment was: "Describe your hometown." Remembering my teacher's lesson, in my essay I made my hometown sound beautiful, although it was dirty and ugly in reality. My hometown was located in the center of a coal mining area. The whole town was always under a dark veil of black dust. When the uncovered trucks loaded with coal powder ran through the town everyday, they created black clouds of coal dust in the streets. There was a river and it was horrifically polluted. People used it as a bath, a source of cooking water, and a toilet. There was a forest with massive scars resulting from unregulated cutting and burning of trees. But in my essay, I said, "We have a green forest where birds compete in the beauty of their songs and a fresh river where countless fish dance and chase each other. We have coal mines, from which every day the trucks carry black gold to all the parts of the country." I got a good score for the essay. I found that the "secret" to winning in writing was the ability of lying, or of creating a world away from reality.

There was another round at town level and one at provincial level. I went through both of them and was among three kids who were selected to proceed to the next level. We



were told that we had to go to the province center for an intensive training program as the preparation for the final round—the national.

In my school, in a weekly assembly, the dean mentioned my name several times as a pride of the school. At home, my neighbors cheered. My parents were proud. But inside, I felt like a fraud for not writing in my own voice.

The training center was one hour by car from my hometown, and it was a complex of three row houses which made a U shape. It was called “The Training Center for Talented Pupils.” Here I saw teams for other subjects like math, Russian language, and physics. They belonged to the fifth, ninth, and twelfth grades. Each team consisted of between three and ten pupils. My fifth grade writing team consisted of five kids; three were from my town and two were from two other towns. We were pampered by two women who took care of our food everyday. One of them woke us up at 6:30 every morning and had hot breakfast ready for us. That might not sound impressive now, but back then there was great hunger in Vietnam and children who had any breakfast at all were considered fortunate. My team studied nothing but writing everyday from 7:30am to 4:30pm, six days a week. We had four teachers. We wrote at least two in-class essays per day. We did not like the strenuous part of the program, but we liked the food part of it. We had meat, fish or eggs in our meals everyday, something we would have once or twice a month only at home because there was a famine in Vietnam at the time.

The head of the center occasionally visited my team. He stressed, “Last year we got only a bronze medal for the fifth grade writing contest. This year we have to get more and higher prizes. You are the hope of our province. Bring pride to our province! We are behind you!”

The program lasted for two months. The day before the final contest, we were moved to a guest house by a beach, which was about ten kilometers from the training center. It was the end of April; the weather was mildly cold. There were no tourists, so the beach was clean and quiet. We had good food, nice rooms and excellent views of the ocean.

The contest was in the morning and ended by lunch time. When we got out of the school where the contest took place, I saw some adults and cars from other towns. They were picking up pupils of other teams. Two members of my team were being picked up. There was nobody from Campha for the three of us.

We waited in the front of the school for two hours and did not see anybody from our town’s education department. We walked back to the guest house. It was locked; nobody

was there. We walked back and forth in the street where the guest house was located. The street was almost empty; there were few cars and bicycles. We were scared as it got later and later. Hien, the smallest girl of the three, started to cry. Ngan, the other girl, and I wanted to join her, but we thought we were bigger than her so we had to be stronger; we must not cry. We were all very hungry. We did not have lunch. We realized that the contest was over and we were of no use anymore. We missed our families and friends so much.

We did not know how to contact our teachers in the training center; they seemed to be too far and strange to us now. Neither did we know where the post office was. None of us even sent a letter before. We did not know how to contact our parents. There were no telephones in Vietnam back then. By five o'clock, a thin and short woman on a bicycle stopped by us and asked us what we were waiting for. We told her the story and she said she heard of the program we were in and would take us to her house for the night. She made three bicycle trips to take all of us.

Her house was a tiny apartment in a very old building covered with dark green fungi and mushrooms. She cooked dinner for us that consisted of only rice and vegetables, but we ate it as if we never ate before. The woman was too poor to buy us bus tickets. She wrote a letter to our parents. We were missing for five days.

I ranked eighth at the national contest. Although I did not receive a prize, my essay was marked as an "achievement" of my school, my town and the province. Having a shiny achievement list was a desire of all schools and education departments of all levels. The number of pupils who joined talent contests was the basis of judging education quality in Vietnam.

It was May when I returned to my school and the school year was ending. I did not understand what the teachers were saying in all of the classes except the writing one. I did not know what to do in the tests. I had not been in school for two months. I was lost in classes. I found many large, empty holes in my understanding of almost every subject I was taking, and I did not have the time to fill them. I felt like I was drowning. I cried, "Mom, dad, teachers, school, town, province - please save me!"

I had no doubt that my result of that school year would be a shameful one, but it was the opposite. I was surprised to find that my average score was above 8 (the maximum score was 10). My teachers not only gave me high scores for the tests I did not know how to do, but they also gave me high scores for the tests I never did. They tried to make me sound like I was good at all subjects. They wanted to put my name on the school's "achievement list" as an "excellent pupil." "Excellent pupil" must not have any bad scores!

I felt ashamed. My teachers and school started to look different to me. Education – the value they represented – got dimmed in me. I deeply regretted that I joined the contest. It was a trap for me. I entered full of hope that my desire to achieve was the subject of the attention and I left knowing that it only turned me into an object of exploitation.

## **My Trip To Samoa: The Chicken Episode**

**Jay Sapolu**

When I was nine, Mom and Dad sent me back to Samoa for my summer vacation. I recall feeling that the trip was a punishment of some sort. Perhaps my parents wanted to teach me to be more appreciative of the things that I had. In my youthful mind, I thought of all the things that Samoa didn't have, like televisions, grocery stores, and swimming pools. Though I had grumbled at the start of my trip, by the end of that summer I had an adventure filled experience and acquired many unforgettable moments.

The moment that is most vivid in my mind is the day of the "chicken episode." On that particular day, I went to my mother's village in Aufaga. It was an hour bus trip away from my father's village in Tuamua where I had spent most of my vacation staying with my paternal Grandparents.

My Grandparents lived in a large "fale palagi," an English house. Since Grandpa was the village Pastor, the meals were brought daily by different families who also had their daughters serve the meals. Grandma had wanted me to learn from those daughters. I had learned the routine of chores to do, but the Christian living they had illustrated was almost too much for my young soul to handle. When I had received the news that I would be visiting my mother's village, I had felt a bit relieved and excited to be going somewhere different.

I remember that my Uncle, Mom's brother, came early that fateful morning to get me. The sun was just peeking out from the horizon and the roosters were crowing. Uncle did not have a car to drive but had come by bus. My first impression of Uncle was that he seemed like a humble and orderly man. When he spoke, I could barely hear him. I can't recall him saying much to me. Uncle was tall and skinny and had a nicely trimmed mustache. He was not dressed in the traditional Samoan garments such as an "ie lavalava", a wrap around; instead he had on tattered dress pants and a checkered flannel shirt that was neatly tucked.

I wasn't afraid to go with Uncle. I had my things already packed in my little brown knapsack. I wore a tan colored skirt and a white top. I had kissed my Grandparents good-bye and skipped out the door to begin my journey to Mom's village.

To catch the bus, Uncle and I had to walk across the grassy lawn to get to the roadside. I noticed the brown leaves that had fallen from Grandma's breadfruit trees. They were scattered on the lawn. I silently thought of how Grandma had me pick them from off the ground every morning since the start of my vacation. I remember that I was happy that I didn't have to pick any leaves that morning.

The buses in Samoa were old beaten up yellow school buses. There were no bus stop signs to be found on the island, one needed only to hail the bus like we hail taxicabs in America. The bus that Uncle had hailed for us to catch was full of people, chickens and luggage. The passengers didn't look too thrilled that we were going to get on. Nevertheless, Uncle had maneuvered his lanky body against the bodies of other passengers and with my hand in his bony hand we moved along the crowded bus and found a seat atop bags of grain. Sardines are better packed in their cans than we were in that bus.

When we got to an area just outside of mother's village, Uncle pounded on the wall of the bus to signal the driver to stop. We got off and walked the rest of the way to the village. I was to stay with my Uncle and Aunt who lived about two miles away from where the bus had let us out. The walk seemed to take forever. I remember that Uncle kept silent for most of the way except to introduce me to the villagers who had come out to gawk at me.

We had walked up and down several hills to get to my Uncle and Aunt's place. Uncle had pointed up to a brown hut up on the hillside. The thatches on the roof of the hut were still wet from the morning dew. I could see a middle-aged woman waving to us from within the hut. Her features were comforting; she looked just like my mother. I knew right away that the woman must be my Aunt and that the hut was the place I would be staying in for the duration of my visit. It would be my first time sleeping in a hut. I wanted to cry but I was consumed with the pain of having been cramped in the bus earlier and from walking 2 miles. I was so tired and hungry.

After climbing the hill to get to my relatives' hut, my Aunt had hugged and kissed me and had asked me how my family back home was faring. I surveyed the hut and I remember that there were no furniture to sit on, only rows of woven mats on the dusty ground. I sat on the mat like an Indian in a teepee and gave Aunt an update of my family. I started to cry at the thought of my parents. My relatives tried to console me.

"E te fia ai?" Aunt asked me if I was hungry. She didn't have to ask me twice. The mention of food quickly consoled me.

Unable to stop myself from whimpering, I nodded in response to her question.

"Kalepo! Sau e pu'e mai se moa e fai ai se mea ai' mo si teine!" She screamed at the top of her lungs for my cousin to come and fetch me a chicken to eat. I knew what she said but did not know what she meant.

My cousin Kalepo came and kissed me on my cheek then quickly went to do my

Aunt's bidding. Cousin was tall and lanky like Uncle. He wore a flowery printed "ie lavalava" and no t-shirt. After a few minutes had passed, my Aunt grew impatient.

"Fa'avave!!" Hurry up! She said.

Cousin appeared moments later with a live chicken squirming in his arms. I was not quite sure what he planned on doing with the poor nervous chicken. Still, I sat patiently awaiting for my food to arrive. Next thing that happened would stay imprinted in my memory forever. Cousin put the head of the chicken against the edge of a large rock. I remember that I was sitting so close to the chicken that I could see it desperately blinking. My cousin had a sharp machete in his free hand. As he lifted the knife up, it dawned on me what he was going to do. With precise aim, Cousin chopped the bird's head off. I screamed mine off as well.

"Oka!" What the heck! Aunt exclaimed at my insane reaction.

I don't recall exactly what had happened after the bird's head was chopped; I assume that after plucking and cleaning the dead chicken, Aunt had made chicken soup. I do remember that she had served me a steaming bowl of chopped chicken pieces bobbing in broth. My senses must have been so traumatized, for I can't remember how it smelled. I could not eat the soup that my relatives had so painstakingly made for me. I recall hearing Cousin mumbling a complaint from outside of the hut. I could tell that Aunt was disappointed and maybe insulted by my refusal to eat what had probably been their best chicken. Something in me told me that I had shamed my family for being a coward. Thankfully, Uncle broke the silence of the hut by offering me a can of tuna. I ate the entire contents of the can and managed to give my relatives a smile. They all laughed at my silly behavior towards the incident with the chicken. I knew that I would hear of it from my mother.

I believe that the valuable lessons that I learned on that day with my relatives in Samoa changed my life for the better. I learned that I lived a very sheltered life in America and I realized the reason my parents migrated out of Samoa. They wanted a better life for my siblings and me. I think the harshest lesson that I learned was that animals like chickens have to be killed for consumption. Though the incident happened so many years ago, the chicken episode reminds me why I should appreciate the meals that I eat.

Till this day, Mom still reminds me of the "chicken episode."

## **My Angels of Friendship**

**Rio Sobala**

At the age of 20, I was the perfect example of the stereotypical “bad boy.” I had no concept of right or wrong and the only rules I knew how to follow were my own. I knew what I wanted and how to go about getting it. That was all that mattered to me. What little conscience I did have, I kept hidden, locked deep inside myself. I didn’t allow myself to care about the people I burned if it meant getting what I wanted when I wanted it.

I never stayed in any one place for longer than two years while growing up. My family bounced around California from city to city during all of my childhood, adolescent, and teenage years. Throughout those years, whenever I would form solid friendships, they were destined to be torn apart within a year or two. For this reason I stopped allowing myself to bond emotionally with individuals who probably would have turned into really good friends.

During this period of my life, I was rippin’ and runnin’. I would do whatever it took to make money. I did drugs, sold drugs, and ran every kind of con or scam I could think of. If the money was good, the risk wasn’t too great, and there was no way a trail would lead to me, I was ready and willing. It was a fast, crazy, exciting life and I loved it. Or at least I thought I did at the time.

One day, my girlfriend at the time, Michelle, introduced me to some guys she had met. It seemed to her that we had similar business interests which also coincided with how we liked to spend our free time. She brought me to their high rise apartment in downtown San Jose. The apartment was plush. It sported black leather couches, multiple computers, and a big screen television with a great surround sound system. It had all the amenities which also included a spectacular view of the foothills to the east. It was the perfect bachelor pad. It all gave me a solid first impression.

I was introduced to three guys, who were all Filipino and about my age. They dressed nicely and carried themselves with class. Randy was the stockiest of the three, Rob was a little skinnier, and Nino a little shorter. I could tell that these guys had their lives together and were making it. I found out that they threw Hip Hop parties as well as raves. I loved raves. It was hard to believe that they partied like I did. That was our initial connection. I wondered how they managed to find a balance living this crazy lifestyle. Maybe I could learn to live life that way too.

I went to their next rave called Ex-Why-Zzz at the Cow Palace in South San Francisco. They put me on the V.I.P. list which took care of the \$20 cover charge as well as the hour long wait in line. The Cow Palace was huge. It was roughly 50,000 square feet of raw dance floor. There were speakers stacked 15 feet long by 20 feet high in 8 places around the room. The lighting system was so intense and elaborate that it was able to make



me feel as if I was in another world. There were at least 20 track spots, lasers, strobes, and projectors. It seemed almost ethereal.

I saw my three new friends inside, and they started introducing me to a lot of different people, most of whom were beautiful women. At this time, I was really trying to figure out what their motives were, what they wanted from me. In my world, nobody gave me anything without wanting something in return. I couldn't yet figure out their angle, so I stayed ever vigilant in watching for the signs that would tell me what they were up to, and how I needed to go about watching my own back.

After the rave at about 7 o'clock in the morning, we all went back to the bachelor pad to wind down and indulge in some more extracurricular activities. It was a great morning. We were all nice and high, the sunrise was gorgeous, and I was in the company of what seemed like really cool people.

Later that morning Nino and Randy asked for some help tidying up the apartment. Of course I was more than willing. As I was cleaning I ran across a stack of cards, credit and such. That's when I had one of my grand ideas. I still didn't know exactly what it was that they were up to or what it was that they wanted from me. But now it was ok, I had an insurance policy. When the time came that they tried to get over on me, they had another thing coming.

To my dismay, that day never came. We continued to hang out all the time for the following 2-3 months. They became like family to me, we all did everything together. We worked hard together throwing raves and other parties. We went out to clubs and restaurants. We all grew close and really cared about one another. Through it all we got high together, constantly.

The circle of friends surrounding these three individuals was so tight. They were a family and they had let me in. How or why I didn't know. I really couldn't understand it, being how I had never had a circle of real friends before in my life that cared about me and not what I had or what I could give them. It felt wonderful. I had finally found a place with people I fit in with and felt comfortable and loved. It was an amazing feeling, a feeling I will never forget.

Just when things were going so well, an unfortunate situation presented itself in my life. It was about 2:30 a.m., in the middle of what was to be a 9-day long storm. It was pouring down rain as badly as I had ever seen it in San Jose. I was on my way home in my lowered Mustang 5.0 when I flew through a puddle that was about 15 feet long and at least 6 inches deep. It felt like I had just plunged into a river. It flooded my engine compartment and my engine died instantly. I pulled over to the side of the road and tried to start my car but to no avail.

Being high as I always was during that period of my life, I turned on my spotlight

inside my car and proceeded to go to work. I don't remember what exactly I was trying to fix, but I do remember the California Highway Patrol pulling up next to me while I was doing it. Finally he got my attention and asked me what was going on, so I told him. Unfortunately he wouldn't push my car with his to jumpstart it, so I had him call me a tow truck.

When the tow truck got there I really didn't know what I was going to do. The tow truck driver didn't take checks, and I didn't have enough cash. But, I had that credit card sitting in my wallet, and it was the only choice I had. I couldn't leave my car on the side of the expressway because it would be towed and impounded. It was one of the hardest choices I've ever had to make. The guilt weighed heavily upon my shoulders on that dark, rainy ride home in that cold, bumpy tow truck.

For the next two weeks I avoided my friends, my family. The guilt was killing me. I didn't know what to do about it. I wanted to come clean but was scared to do it. I talked it over constantly with my friend Cory, who was my best friend outside the circle. I really didn't know what to do.

One Saturday night the family was going to a rave in Richmond, California at the Convention Center called Area 51. I was expected to go. Cory and I caught a ride up to Richmond with Nino and everything seemed as normal as it had ever been.

After a few hours we were all higher than kites candy flipping. That's when it came out that they knew. They knew it was me and I didn't know what to do. I wanted to run, hide, or find another ride home. Anything but having to face the people I thought of as family with my untruth, my deceit. The guilt was so overwhelming. Combined with all the drugs I was on, it made me frantic. That's when Cory stepped in and told me that I couldn't run away from this, that it was time I dealt with it.

So I did. I faced the situation head on, finally.

I found Rob and asked him if I could speak to him privately, away from everyone. We went and talked. I confessed everything that I did and that had happened, exactly the way it happened. I told the truth. For the first time in my life I told the truth and took responsibility for my actions. I think it was because I was scared of losing the only real friends I had ever known, other than Cory of course. I told him why I took the card in the first place and how sorry I was. I told him how much his, and everyone else's, friendship meant to me and that I didn't want to lose my family. Although I would understand if he felt like he needed to cut his losses and move on. It was my mistake, and whether I liked it or not I had to own it.

He went back to the boys and they talked it over among themselves. The tension was killing me. I can't remember when 10 minutes of my life had been more stressful. I really expected for them to cut me off and be done with me. That is what I felt I deserved.

When they came back I could hardly look any of them in the eye I was so ashamed. But then they said some words I would never forget. They told me that they forgave me and they believed that I was truly sorry. They said that they hoped that I truly learned a lesson from this experience, and that they were honored to be the ones who could help teach me this. They were a little hurt, yes, but they loved me like a brother and wanted to see me grow. I swear I cried that morning. Never before in my life did one person, let alone three, show me such compassion and forgiveness. They were as true as true friends can come.

This is an experience that has served me well in life ever since. It has shown me that people sometimes do deserve second chances. It has shown me that I need to have more compassion for people and understand where they are, how to help them get where they are going in life, and to keep everyone's highest good in mind.

## **My Nightmare Before Christmas**

**Chandra Swenson**

It was a beautiful winter day; life was good, or so I thought. With Christmas right around the corner, I felt the Christmas spirit. But in my household, the Christmas spirit was no where to be found. Our Christmas was far from normal. We had the tree, the presents, the extravagant lights, but that was the only normalcy to our family Christmas.

Pat, my boyfriend at the time had just come into town to visit. Excited to see him, I knew that I could not keep him to myself, so we went to a near by house party to visit all his old buddies. Everything at the time seemed to be going excellently, but the more alcohol we consumed, the more we began to argue. Getting annoyed with every little thing he would say or do, I drank more and more alcohol.

We both jumped into my car, intoxicated. We could not stop fighting. Eventually, I told him to get out of my car. With not even a care when I stopped to let him out, I drove back to my house in tears. I could not believe how we could love each other so much but hate each other even more.

I pulled up into my driveway and had a feeling that something was seriously wrong, but I just could not put my finger on it. A police officer was knocking on my car window seconds later. Thoughts immediately started to tear through my brain. Am I the one in trouble? Is Pat in trouble? Could it possibly be my family in trouble?

At a snail's pace, I rolled down my window.

"Excuse me, is this your house?" the officer demanded.

The only thing that could come out of my mouth at the time was, "Why?"

"The door is locked. Do you have a key to get in?"

How could the police officer know that the door to my house was locked? Why was he demanding to get in? At this point, all the drama that happened about 15 minutes earlier was far from my mind. All I could think about was my family.

I walked to the dreadful front door. Five other officers came out from around my house. I started to feel the tears coming, but I choked them back. I didn't have the keys to my front door so I had to pound on my little sister's window to wake her up. I tried hard to shelter her from what was about to happen by keeping things quiet. She unlocked the front door. With her eyes still filled with sleep, she headed back to bed. The officers were still standing outside.

“Is your father home?”

“I don’t know,” I said in a cynical voice.

“Well, could you please look for us?”

I took a look around the whole house, his bedroom last. There he was just lying in his bed. He looked so undisturbed. I went to the front of the house, dazed and confused, and told the officers that I looked through the house and could not find him. They replied, “You wouldn’t mind if we searched the house then, would you?”

The police officers forced their way past me and headed to my father’s room, as if they knew exactly where to find him. I stood in the middle of the living room, horrified. I could barely see into my father’s bedroom. The officers were yelling at him to wake up, handcuffing him at the same time. The police officers moved my father from the bedroom into the living room. I could not even move my body or blink an eye. “What is going on?” I asked an officer in a voice that I didn’t think was my own. No answer was given.

My older brother was not home, my step mother was not home, and my little sister was sleeping. I felt all alone. I ran straight for the phone to dial Pat’s number; he did not answer his phone. By then, the tears were rolling down my face. I was barely able to talk. I dialed Pat’s number again: still no answer. I kept trying to ask an officer what was going on, but he would not answer me; for this reason, I looked to my father.

I was trying to ask him all the questions that were running through my mind, but he would not even look at me. His eyes were fixed on the floor. I could see tears flowing down his face. Never did I think I would see my father cry. I was furious with my father but at the same time, I felt sorry for him. Finally, I heard a familiar voice. Thank God it was someone I knew and loved; it was Pat! He came at the perfect moment, without demanding answers or asking questions, and held me. I had never felt so ecstatic to see him in my life.

“What is going on?” I asked for the final time.

Finally, a police officer answered me: “Your father attempted to rob a near by casino. He held a woman at gunpoint and forced her to open a safe with all the money in it. She did not have the keys to open it, thus, he took off.”

Seconds after the police officer told me the story, they took my father away. At that very moment, I knew that things would never be the same.

The next day was Christmas. My little sister had no idea what had taken place just a few hours earlier. My family had to open our Christmas gifts without our father. From then on, Christmas had a whole different meaning for me and my family.

I visited my father about once a month. Unfortunately, it was my senior year in high school and I had other things on my mind. I love my father deeply, but I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive him for what he did. I have not spoken to my father for over a year and I have no idea when I will speak to him again.

There are things that will forever change life, whether it is a decision or fate. I have learned the hard way that life is not fair. Everything happens for a reason. If it was not for what my father did that day, I would not be where I am today. I probably would not have the strength and knowledge to move on with my life, and know what it takes to make things better. Like my father used to say, "What does not kill you will make you stronger."

## **Isamu's Billy Goat**

### **Moriso Teraoka**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



blindsided.

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

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

Father's answer was always the same. "I am thinking about it, okay?"

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

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

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

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

It was a matter of who would knuckle under first.

One morning, Isamu and the rest of us jumped out of bed—by the baying of a billy goat. And as sure as the sun rose from the horizon over Hilo Bay, a goat was munching the California grass behind the kitchen.

"Okan, Okan, Otan wen get me my billy goat," shouted Isamu as he ran out to pet the billy goat. His shout of joy extended over to the neighbor's classmate; Teruo, Hidekazu and Tadaichi hurriedly came over to see Isamu's billy goat.

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

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

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

After about a week, all the grass in the backyard was eaten away, and Isamu had to go down by the gulch at the entrance of our camp where a huge ulu tree sheltered an abundance of California grass. Isamu used Father's sickle, cut armfuls of grass, and none of the brothers helped him. After all, the billy goat was Isamu's. Water also had to be provided; having a goat was getting to be a chore.

Father saw Isamu's waning enthusiasm and sensed that it was no fun in keeping a goat anymore.

One morning, we got up by the crowing of the rooster in the chicken coop, but no baying of the billy goat. The grass that was cut the previous day was uneaten.

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

"Okan, what happened to the billy goat?" I suspiciously asked. After all, the goat appeared mysteriously and now disappeared mysteriously.

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

"But the man going eat the goat," I cried.

"Shikataganai, it cannot be helped," Mother replied, turning her back to me.

## **The Monster Behind the Door**

**Kristen Thain**

We were about ten years old in the middle of that long hot summer. My friend Heather was a little older than I was, but not much wiser. She was tall and leggy with blonde hair and freckles, and we were best friends. We both loved roller-skating, and we each had a pair of skates with brand new skateboard-type wheels. They were the latest thing, and boy did they make us coast smooth and fast!

The two of us liked to skate the deserted halls of the intermediate school that was an equal distance between both of our houses. We would coast up and down the open-air hallways, and we could make as much noise as we wanted because there was never anyone there. We had the run of the place. Our imaginations ran wild and we played make-believe for hours without interruption.

Heather's mom had made her take ballet lessons, which she hated, but she ended up with lots of different colored tutus: those stiff satin and crinoline skirts that flared out around your middle like a flower's petals. I adored those tutus, and I adored Heather for letting me wear them. One day we came up with the bright idea of wearing them while we skated.

We would meet up just about every day to don our tutus and skate around the school to the music in our heads. We played ice skaters and ballet princesses and magic fairies and whatever else our ten-year-old imaginations could dream up. The days were golden and hot, and it seemed as if both that summer and our friendship would never end.

I remember how we first discovered the clubhouse. I was trying to learn to skate backwards and Heather was "helping" me.

"Push with your legs, don't swing them," Heather said. "It's easy; I learned it in just one day."

"Easy, my butt," I said under my breath. All of a sudden I was down on the ground, on said butt, with the breath slammed out of me.

"You have to watch where you're going, silly," said Heather. "You smashed right into that door."

"You never told me to look over my shoulder! I didn't know to do that!" I returned, frustrated.

"Well, duuuuhhhh!" She said, as she skated in a backwards circle and fluffed out her

tutu.

I hated it when she said that. She said it a lot. She thought it made her sound smart. It was then that I noticed I had knocked the vent covering out of the door. It was about the size of a pizza box, metal, with slats running across it. It was made to allow air to pass through from the room on the other side and was set into the door at about shin level.

“Heather, look. We can go in here!” I said, my irritation forgotten.

“Not a chance. We could get in trouble” She said, but she skated right over to see.

“But there’s no one around here to catch us,” I argued. “It’s summer and no one’s ever here. Let’s just take a quick look.”

“Okay, then. I’m first,” She said excitedly. That was okay with me. Heather was famous for split second decisions. I waited while she climbed through, and then I followed. “Wow! Check out all this cool stuff! We got us a clubhouse now!” said Heather, skating around and looking everywhere at once.

It was a storage room filled with a lot of junk. There were desks and broken mimeograph machines, and that old school staple: the overhead projector. Even a bunch of report card blanks in a water damaged box. We were in heaven. This was the happy hunting ground for ten-year-old girls who loved to play teacher and house and other make-believe games. We forgot we were not supposed to be in there.

There was a small anteroom attached to the storeroom that was basically a janitor’s closet. It had a mop sink and a faucet with a length of hose attached to it. The room was about the size of a small bathroom and even had a small porcelain toilet in the corner, separated from the rest of the room by a small half wall. Next to the half wall was a big pile of what looked like volleyball nets, all covered by a smelly piece of dusty canvas. In the opposite corner, by the sink, was a stack of brooms and mops. We wasted no time making the whole storeroom our own. We used the brooms to sweep up the floor and spent the next two hours cleaning and arranging the space to our satisfaction.

As the daylight started to fade, Heather took charge and told me, “This is our clubhouse, and the rules are you can’t bring anyone else in here. You can’t even tell anyone about it.”

I had no problem with that. She was usually the one who couldn’t keep a secret. “Go put the brooms away, and let’s go,” she said. (She was pretty bossy in those days). I put the brooms

away and shut the door to the janitor's closet.

At the storeroom door, Heather started out the vent hole. "Look out first and make sure the coast is clear," I said. I wasn't thinking about getting caught at what was essentially "breaking and entering." I was more concerned with keeping our clubhouse a secret. After confirming that no one was out there (and in the following month, no one ever was), we crawled out and pounded the vent cover back into the door.

"Tomorrow we can play in here again," Heather said. "It'll be our secret place." I just nodded. It was a given.

We were in our clubhouse almost every day from then on. We played in that storeroom throughout the hot, dreamy, summer days, and we never saw anyone at the school. Eventually, we just stopped worrying about being discovered in our secret room, and it never in a million years crossed our minds that we might not be the only ones who knew about it. It wasn't very bright in the room, and it was musty smelling and dirty, but it was never frightening, at least not until that fateful day.

It started out innocently enough as we skated through the hallways doing twirls and knee bends and spinning around with our arms overhead. We held hands the way young girls do, and listened to the smooth clicking sound those new wheels made on the cement. We admired ourselves in our tutus reflected in the glass doors of the school library, and then we skated down the hallway toward the vent in the door and entered our secret clubhouse with nothing on our minds but who we were going to pretend to be that day.

Heather went first as usual. "Let's be teachers, and we can fill out the report cards with this." She held up a piece of pencil. "Get the cards out while I move the desks," she said. I yanked the box of report card blanks out as she moved the three desks that were shoved into the corner of the room.

"Get the broom. It's gross under here," said Heather. (She was often bossy, but she didn't mean anything by it.)

"Okay, and then let's pretend we're showing a science movie," I said, pointing to a busted projector on a wheeled cart.

"No, a health movie," Heather said. "Get the broom."

I sighed and skated the few feet towards the janitor's closet door. We were making some noise, but we both heard the sound that came from behind the closed door of the

janitor's closet. It sounded like a low growl. I looked at Heather, and she was looking at me. Her eyes were wide and shiny, and she blinked a couple of times. I shook my head and moved towards the door again.

"I didn't hear anything," Heather said softly, as if saying it would make it so.

I started to skate forward and heard it again; louder this time.

"Fffrrrrrhaaaaaahhhppppphhh!"

I froze. I looked back at Heather and she was frozen, too.

"Whahssat?" she said.

"Something's in there, Heather!" I whispered. My mind flipped through a mental rolodex of possible sources of that roughly growling, yet fatly wet noise. "Mongoose? No. Dog? No. Pig? No." Before I could finish my catalog, Heather took charge.

"Go see what it is," she said.

"Hell, no! Are you crazy?!" I said. "There is nothing you can say that will make me open that door," I was thinking. However, my feet were making tiny skate motions, and I was getting closer to the door and was that...?? Why yes indeedy. That was *my* hand reaching for the closed anteroom doorknob!

Now, even at ten, I had watched enough spooky movies to know that you NEVER, and I mean NEVER, open the door! I was the very one who sat on the couch in front of the TV with a bag of chips yelling, "Don't open it, you moron!" and shaking my head at the idiocy of the bubble-headed teenager on the screen. Yet here I was, moronically reaching for the doorknob.

"Don't open it, you moron." I said to myself under my breath, but somehow Heather heard me.

"Yes, open it! We have to see what's making that noise!"

"We? We?" Now just who and what army was she referring to? I wondered.

"You open it then," I thought to myself, "I'm not going to open it. No way, no how." I turned the doorknob. The door creaked; I had somehow known it would.

Heather was whispering “What is it? What is it? What is it?” under her breath. She was close enough for me to hear her, but not so close that whatever was in the janitor’s closet would be able to get her while it was killing me. Heather was no dummy. I, on the other hand, apparently was. I swung the door open inwards and glided into the dark room. I hadn’t realized how dark that room was. Where had the afternoon sun gone? It took about five seconds for my eyes to adjust to the dark.

“Well? Well? Well?” Heather stage-whispered.

The noise came again, just as my eyes focused, and that’s when I saw him. He was spread out asleep on the pallet made from the volleyball nets and the canvas covering. The room smelled thick and cheesy. What I had taken to be the menacing low growl of a vicious and mangy animal was merely the tame rumbling of some truly rotten sleep-farts. I couldn’t move. It was hot in the room, and he was slick with sweat and fogging the small area with booze breath. He must have weighed 400 lbs. and he was spread out there like a beached whale.

He was one of the custodians. I had seen him once or twice during the school year riding a power-mower over the playground grass. He was an older guy, with a dippity-do slicked, Elvis pompadour hairstyle, complete with sideburns. He was huge and fish-belly white. All that sweat made him glisten like a toadstool on a dewy morning. The piece-de-resistance, however, was the truly gargantuan pair of grayish Fruit-of-the-Looms that was all that covered him.

I was frozen in place with my eyes bugging out. I don’t think I was breathing. The lack of air may have been the reason for the strange images and thoughts that were reeling through my mind. I kept seeing snippets of the dancing fruit from the underwear commercial, and then my mind would once again try to wrap itself around the sheer size of the pair in front of me.

Heather was now just inside the doorway. “OhhmmmyyyGGggaawwwddddd!!” She squawked.

“Wow,” was all I could manage.

Just at that moment, he snorted and turned his head towards us and opened his eyes. “What?!” was all he said. My heart literally stopped beating and then did a quick flutter and got back with the program.

Heather shouted “RUN!” and turned around and was gone. I might have stood



there forever ogling those massive B.V.D.'s if I wasn't so used to following Heather's commands. I turned around to run, and I could hear him starting to rise. I realized that as fast as I was running, I wasn't moving an inch. I had forgotten I had roller-skates on, and I was stuck in one spot doing the Fred Flintstone run-in-place.

I couldn't see Heather. She was gone. "Oh please, Heather. Wait for me! Wait for me!" I whispered. I couldn't seem to get any sound out. It was like one of those dreams where everything is in slow-motion. I heard movement behind me, and I had to look. His eyes rolled wildly under his uni-brow, glassy and bloodshot, and then he was up on his feet and his hands were stretching out towards me. His B.O. hit me like a wet pillow. The colossal pair of skivvies sagged and bagged, and I was unable to tear my eyes away.

"Hey, you! Girlie!" he said. That galvanized me into action. I made a huge leap towards the doorway, pushed off of the jamb with both hands and shot into the main storeroom.

"Heather! Where are you?" I was finally able to yell. "Oh man! Oh man! Oh man! Wait for me! Wait for me! Wait for me!" I was sure it had been about an hour since I had first laid eyes on those mega-bibs, wrapped around that mega-man, but it couldn't have been that long because I was just in time to see Heather actually swan-diving head first through the vent opening in the door.

"Go! Go! Go!" she was shouting. I swear she didn't even touch the sides of the hole.

"Wait! Wait! Wait!" I was yelping. I don't know why it is so, but in situations like this, I've noticed that people always seem to say things in three's. I had time to wonder just where one might actually *buy* a pair of undershorts that large before I got to the opening in the door and saw the bottoms of Heather's skates disappearing out the hole.

"She's out! She's safe!" I shrieked to myself, and in that moment, I hated her with a passion so severe, it was a kind of ecstasy.

"Don't you leave me, Heather!" I was crying, "Don't you DARE leave me!" I dropped to my knees on the floor in front of the opening. There was no sound from outside, but there was definitely sound from behind! He was coming! I could feel the floor vibrate. I could SMELL him! I chanced another look over my shoulder, and what I saw made me swallow all the air I had just breathed in. My lungs were now empty, and my eyes were bugging out. He was lumbering towards me and those grungy-grey F-of-the-L's were right at eye level!

That did it! I turned and lunged through the opening in the door and was suddenly stuck. I had gone in and out of that opening a hundred times that summer and never had a problem, but this time my stupid tutu was snagged on rusting pieces of metal and screw heads, and my feet were unable to find purchase on the cement. The new wheels of my skates ticked and purred and spun, but just couldn't get a grip on the floor. He would have been able to see only my butt and wildly churning legs sticking out of the stiff folds of my tutu. I was plugged firmly in the opening with the tutu ripping and snagging as I tried to claw my fingernails into the cement on the other side of the door.

"You LEFT me! OhMyGod! OhMyGod! OhMyGod! You LEFT me!" I cried. Then he reached me and grabbed for my flailing foot. I almost fainted. I saw swirling black spots crowding the corners of my vision. At the same moment that I felt his hot rubbery hand on my ankle, Heather was miraculously there in front of me. She dropped down onto her butt, grabbed my hands, put her skates on the door on either side of my head, and PULLED! I reacted instinctively to his touch and kicked both my legs back right into his..???? And then with a huge "RRRRRIIIIIIPPPPPP" of the tutu, I was out and lying on top of Heather.

"Get off! Get off! Get off!" she was screaming. "We have to get out of here!"

"Okay! Okay! Okay!" I screamed right back into her face, which was about an inch from my own. In tandem for once, we both got up in one fluid motion and started a roller derby run down the hallway.

"Don't look back!" Heather shouted. But of course, we did.

He was wedged there with his head and one shoulder sticking out of the vent opening. He was turned toward us with his Elvis 'do quivering and my tutu still stuck to the edges of the opening and framing his face like a clown collar. His eyes were wide and bulging in the center of his face, like a couple of Manapua on a platter. His breath was whistling in and out through the wiry black hair in his nose, and he yelled out, "Hey, girlie! I won't tell if you won't! I won't tell if you won't!"

We didn't answer. We just turned and shot down the hallway and out of the school parking lot at lightning speed, and then without a word to each other, we split up and skated as fast as we could towards our respective houses. I plowed down the street like a speed-skater, my mind replaying the image of him standing there in his underwear, and me staring with horrid fascination, unable to move a muscle. He had looked like a giant larva or something. I started to laugh and once I began, I couldn't stop. I whooped and cackled all the way to my house.

I realized I hadn't said anything to Heather as we both tore out of the school, so I went to the phone to call her, and it started ringing before I could lift the receiver. It was Heather, of course.

"Umm, yeah, we should do something else tomorrow, you know? I mean, I'm kinda tired of skating for awhile," She said in a shaky voice.

"Heather, I'm sorry about your tutu," I said softly.

"That's okay, I don't want it back now," she said. "Besides, we're kinda getting too old to skate in our tutus anyway, I mean, I'm almost wearing a *bra*."

It dawned on me that I didn't much care about the fate of that tutu after all. "I still want to skate, but maybe not at the school," I said. "I really don't think I want to go to the clubhouse ever again."

"Well duuuuhhhh!! Tomorrow we'll skate somewhere else," Heather stated.

"Let's skate at the bowling alley," I said. There was a cool ramp thingy there.

"No, the supermarket," she said. (Heather could be a bit bossy).

"Okay then, bye," from me.

"Yup, bye," from her.

We never skated at the school again, and after that summer, I went to another school and Heather and I stopped hanging out together. I felt embarrassed for myself whenever I thought about us skating around in those tutus. It had definitely lost whatever appeal it had once had. I remember my shock at seeing a grown man in his underwear. I mean, sure I had seen my dad shlumping around the house in his skivvies on a Sunday morning, but that! That was something entirely new. He was so huge and *damp*. I couldn't seem to tear my mind away from the surreal aspect of it. And him! He must have thought he'd landed in some nightmare version of Swan Lake! I bet he was just as scared as we were. I'm sure he could see the potential for big trouble if we said anything. I'm actually glad we never told. He probably sweated away some pounds waiting for the cops that never came.

Looking back on our monster adventure, now that I am older and hopefully wiser, I try to think what explanation the janitor might have given for being there in the first

place, and more importantly, for being there in only his underwear. I guess he was just sleeping it off, or maybe he had a fight with his wife or something. Maybe it was just his secret place. I don't think he was up to no good; just that it was hot and he was sleepy and he never expected anyone would be there in the middle of the summer. Just what we were thinking!

I remember being dizzy with freedom as we made our getaway. I think that adrenaline burst was a surreal kind of narcotic. Once free of the school gate, I laughed and even screamed aloud just because I felt so alive. I still laugh whenever I think about it, and I wonder if Heather does too.

## **Mon Voyage**

**Vincent Tully**

If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a movable feast.”

-Ernest Hemingway

I arrived late in the evening following a five-hour train ride from Marseilles across the French countryside. I had made reservations for thirty euros a night at the *Young and Happy Hostel* centrally located in the Latin Quarter minutes from the Notre Dame and other obvious tourist attractions. The accommodations were what you would expect for thirty euros a night. A cramped room shared by three other transient fellows who all smelled like they hadn't showered in weeks. It would be fine though, for this would only be a place where I laid my head after rich days of exploring.

This was my first trip to Paris, but I had ventured to Europe fifteen years earlier when I spent the summer in Bologna, Italy visiting my father who was living there on sabbatical for the year. I was sixteen then, and the experience opened me to the world. So when my father again invited me to visit him, this time in France, I jumped at the chance. We met in the quaint town of Villafranche, neighboring Nice. A glut of aging millionaires and super models flocked like flamingos on the warm beaches of the French Riviera. After a week of father-son catch up, however, I was off to explore the rest of this old land on my own. I first stopped in Aix, a bustling university town located in the province of the same name, and next, Marseilles, the city where I was born. Finally, I was off to Paris, a city of guiltless pleasure and defiant nature.

My first day in Paris, I awoke filled with childish curiosity. My journey began on the damp cobblestones in front of my hostel where I was greeted by the fragrance of sizzling crepes from the sandwich shop next door. I bought one made to order, filled with banana and chocolate and washed it down with a shot of espresso. The food energized me as I walked the medieval alley-way leading to who knows where, the morning sun warming my skin as I moved between the shadows of aging buildings with peeling skin and wet laundry hanging out on balconies. I continued through a maze of century old corridors and allies, damp, fenced by stonewalls protecting small gardens full with herbs for families to use in the preparation of tonight's meal. Finally, I emerged from the dark to an open boulevard running along the Seine River where I was exposed to 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance palaces with the most opulent detail. It was obvious that these structures were built from the sweat of Old World craftsmen. As in ancient Egypt where great pyramids were erected for the pharaohs here too great monuments had been constructed for lavish medieval kings.

My feet and my mind continued to stroll along the canal when I found myself standing under a gauntlet of menacing gargoyles guarding the twin towering edifices of the Nortre Dame Cathedral. The beasts watched my every move. The structure was evil in a beautiful way and challenged the frontiers of my imagination. With soaring columns and buttresses that resemble the spine of some great animal the Cathedral stood as a monolith flanked by two veins of the Seine River flowing from the heart of the city. Nortre Dame is a story written in stone. Archivolt arches guard the front entrance depicting “The Last Judgment,” a common theme in medieval Europe where man meets his maker. There is no question that God fearing men conceived Nortre Dame and that it stands as a monument to the creator of all things.

The streets of Paris were littered with street venders, artist, transients and vagabonds. Most sold junk, such as reprinted burlesque posters, old Marxist books, and little gold plastic Eiffel Towers. Artists positioning themselves on every intersection had little more to offer selling mediocre portraits of the Musee d’ Orsay or Montmartre that went for 10 to 20 euros. Undoubtedly, Americans were their biggest customers.

Truly one of the great pleasures in Paris is to walk the streets. The magic of the city is found browsing through the open-air-markets, the funky little art galleries crowding back allies, and the maze of courtyards lined with shops selling antiques, junk and everything in between. Granted, you should try and see the Eiffel Tower. And the Louvre is also required viewing. But one should take it upon them self to see how the people of this vibrant city live. The best way to do this is on the streets. Even if you are not buying anything, the vendors will be happy to see you. You may merely feast with your eyes and ears.

My second night in Paris, I arranged to meet Gale. She was a friend of a friend back home. Gale had graciously agreed to show me the town and suggested that she could come by the hostel and then we could walk somewhere near by and have dinner. We ended up at a cozy bistro a few blocks from the hostel I was staying at and the place had all the charm of your favorite neighborhood hole in the wall. Small café tables with mismatched chairs cramped next to each other invited the occasional gratifying interruption from your neighbor, while empty wine bottles and old photographs and other oddities sat on selves giving the place its own warm eclectic feel, as though you were in someone’s home. Gale was kind enough to order for us, as her French was better than mine. She ordered a bottle of red that went well with my, *pot au feu*, or rabbit stew. For dessert, we both had vanilla ice cream with raspberries, which I found to be much lighter than American ice cream and similar to sorbet.

Originally from South Africa, Gale spoke in her distinguished British accent, which I found charming. I always find people with English accents amusing and often

automatically attach a certain level of intelligence or at least worldliness to them, usually unjustifiably so, but in Gale's case she turned out to be quite savvy as well as interesting.

Gale was well traveled and had been on the move for four years. She had lived in Paris for three months after spending a year in Edinburgh Scotland where she had worked as a cocktail waitress in a bar. She was twenty-two, pretty, with dirty blond hair and smooth pail skin that secreted a seductive innocence from her. She mentioned she had a boyfriend back in Edinburgh and that he was suppose to have moved to Paris with her but that he got tied up with his job and would probably join her in a month or so. I had only met Gale, but I could see that this guy was out of the picture, for Paris was not a place where you let your partner run free, this city created passions in the dullest of persons.

After dinner we ventured to an unusual club that appeared to have been a medieval dungeon at one time or possibly a grand wine cellar for past French aristocracy. Wooden tables and chairs crowded the perimeter of the three cave like rooms where dimly lit cast iron lanterns illuminated the vaulted ceiling overhead giving the place a solemn and eerie atmosphere. However, the somber surroundings were soon lifted by a chorus of drunkards crooning along side an old man playing the piano in the corner of the main room. Apparently, the seat at the piano was open to anyone who had a will to contribute to the party and revolved throughout the night.

Gale and I took a seat in the corner of the room. We had already talked a great deal over dinner and I was starting to warm up to her. She had a cutie shyness, which helped hid her swagger, but her innocence would be betrayed with a flip of her hair, or when she stroked the table with her finger or rocked her hips back and forth as she spoke freely and with out embarrassment about how she sun bathed topless in Greece this summer. I took the liberty of ordering us a couple of beers. "Deux pression s'il, vous plait," I called out to the waitress. It was one of the few French phrases I could utter. Maybe this would impress my host?

"What was it like growing up in Hawaii?" Gale asked with a faint smile.

Whenever I travel, I always mention that I am from Hawaii. When I'm on the mainland it serves as an exotic badge of honor and now here in France it serves as a buffer, or at least it gives me a little distance from a country that is currently despised because of the war in Iraq.

"It's great," I said. "It's probably similar to South Africa. Hey, why does everyone still wear Speedos down there; this is 2004, get with it already," I scolded.



“We are not ashamed of our bodies,” Gale answered. “Maybe if you Americans weren’t so fat you wouldn’t mind walking around in them,” she said sarcastically.

She was right. We are a bunch of fat asses. In France I saw one overweight person. And this gentleman was hardly obese. The French are lean creatures. Wherever you walk, little Iggy Pops and Kate Mosses follow you.

Suddenly, we were interrupted by a gentleman sitting next to us. He had a long white curly mustache like Sherlock Homes and wore a felt fedora hat on his curly blond locks. I can’t remember how the conversation started, but we were soon talking about fine Belgian beers, like the excellent Elephant Ale that I was currently drinking. Then the discussion turned to jazz. We went on in a spatter of broken French, English and pantomime. Fortunately, most Parisians speak enough English to pick up the slack for lazy uncultured Americans like my self. The man told us that the club we were in had been a haunt in the early sixties for expatriate jazz musicians looking to be part of the growing artist movement in Paris.

“Wow!” I said, as a semi-jazz fan. “Oo la la,” remarked Gale also about the same time, as a semi-Frenchwomen.

And the French guy continued, “Yah, Thelonious Monk, Art Farmieer, Miles Daviees, zey all played hier in zhee 60ee’s! Zey would all have open jam zessions zat went till thie sun came up.”

“That’s great, let me buy you drink,” I muttered in Italian (I think) and called out to the waitress again, “due birra alla spina, per favore.”

The next morning, I reflected on previous night. Gale had shown me a good time and had given me a glimpse of French nightlife. I was grateful. Later, as I ate my muffin and orange juice in the hostel cafeteria, the woman from the front desk interrupted me. She said I had a phone call. It was Gale and she was inviting me to a party at her neighbors’ loft in rue de Courcelles that night. Only three metro stops away from the hostel I was staying at. I meet Gale at six o clock at Place Pereire Levallois, a central hub for the metro. I had been there the day before, so Gale assured me that I could find it, and sure enough, I did.

Gale’s living situation was unique. She lived in a sort of communal artist building, no doubt for the cheap rent. Walking up the stairs to her third floor loft, the hallways were coated with paintings and sculptures created by the different residents in the building. Gale’s studio apartment, which she shared with another young women, was small and simple. On the floor lay two mattress beds. There was a bookshelf and a few pictures on



the walls and they used the communal bathroom out in the hall.

“This was only till I get on my feet,” Gale said. “Hopefully, I’ll be moving to the Place Mongo soon. I might be able to pick up a couple more days at the restaurant...then I will be fine. Come on, the party’s next door.” And with that, Gale ushered me out into the hall and into the next apartment.

Inside were twelve strangers sprawled out on different pieces of furniture. At first I was worried that I might not be able to speak to anyone, but fortunately half the room spoke at least some English and I ended up talking with a young Parisian painter for most of the night. Michele was defiantly unique, and probably emblematic of what most Americans thought of Parisians -- chain-smoking, greasy haired, disheveled and arrogant. This did not detract from the fact that Michele was also spirited and funny. In addition, I could see that he was also talented from the many paintings of his that hung on the apartment walls. I myself a painter might have been predisposed to long conversations with eccentric Parisian artists, but in addition to conversing about our similar backgrounds, I found Michele to be a gold mine on the inner workings of Paris and its people.

On the twenty-hour flight back home to Hawaii, I had a lot of time to reflect on my trip. I thought about Gale. I thought there was an exchange of energy between us, but I was never given confirmation on this. The last night at the party our time together was never exclusive - the small apartment created an inescapable group dynamic, but one that I enjoyed. We swapped emails and left open invitations if we were ever in each other’s neck of the woods, but in all likelihood, I doubt we will ever meet again. As I stared out the airplane window at the wide horizon of the world, I also thought about Michele, the young artist I had met at Gale’s party. Michele had inspired me. I reflected on how Michele lived. How he worked out of a small studio in Montmartre. How in this sparse room he splattered paint on canvases and sipped red wine till the sunset. How in the evenings he ate a good meal served along side a good bottle of wine, and this of course was accompanied by warm conversation with like-minded companions. This was the routine of the artist in Paris as well as of lay people for that matter. Devotion, with little worries other than one’s own interests.

It is true that the French have a devout passion for life. Most work no more than thirty hours a week and take one to two hours for lunch, usually at a café or restaurant where they will have a glass of wine or beer. In the evenings, the French do not huddle in front of the television to eat dinner like in the states. They sit down at a table with a bottle of red in the center and a basket of fresh bread that has been purchased that night down the

road. They eat a meal that has been thought out rather than pieced together. And they talk. They talk for hours, well after everyone has had their full and the dishes are put away and the bottle of red emptied.

Paris affected me; its people, its rich history. The French care less for efficiency than for craft. Reverence for beauty and feeling has not given way to comfort in this county. The slow life is still revered and the lust for money tempered by old values.

I hope to see this wonderful city again, for “Paris is a movable feast”, and I will always relish her memory.

## **Slow Down!**

**Alan Vandermyden**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

money. Almost immediately, she turns to me, giving me her full attention, asking what it is I need. I have accepted the Marshallese way, and she's glad to help me.

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

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

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

The waitress seats herself at one of the two empty chairs, asking us, "What do you want?" Amused again, we order, enunciating clearly and pointing to the menu items to ensure she understands us. We correctly assume that she knows very little English, hence the abrupt request for our order. She had likely just about maxed out her knowledge of English, and may have been apprehensive in getting that much out. She seated herself as a gesture of respect and politeness. (Years of language study and questioning the people we lived among would help me to understand this.) We were "missionaries," we were "riPalles"—"haoles"—Caucasians, we were men, and my associate was obviously much older than she. Our waitress would have been considered very rude had she remained standing while we were seated—especially if she were positioned somewhat behind one of us. We were one day to comprehend that what looked like familiarity to us was a sign of deference and respect in another culture. Melang Islet, Likiep Atoll, an idyllic, pristine,

“outer island,” with sun-worshipping coconut palms reaching across sweeping beaches, providing children with the perfect place to hang a rope swing. Just like the calendar pictures.

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

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

Maybe we just need to slow down!

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

Slow down, riPalle!

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

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

Slow down—time doesn’t really matter so much!

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

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

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

Just slow down and enjoy the evening!

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

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

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

Exercise. I like a brisk two-to-three mile walk most days. No problem. Go in the mornings. People are out in their yards, but they're not ready to greet me. They're still putting their face on, brushing their teeth, doing their hair, maybe even bathing out of a bucket. Kids might be doing the morning "rarō"—picking up the breadfruit leaves, coconut fronds and other litter fallen the previous day. And they're supposed to keep working. I can march on by without offending anyone! (Except for that one house up at the far end of the island, in Rita Village, on the lagoon side of the road.) Those three or four yappy little

dogs can't abide me going by at American speed! They do it every time: come out and start yapping and snapping at my heels like they're going to chew me up! But as soon as I relax, put my hands in my pockets, and slow down to the Marshallese amble, they're satisfied they've persuaded me to accept the local ways, and they contentedly return to their homes, their mission accomplished.

And yes! The mud splatters...I finally catch on. Slow down, and let my zoris drag. Do the shuffle that lets everyone know I'm coming. Noisy...but no more splatters.

## **10,000 Feet Above the Earth**

**Laureen Watanabe**

In October 2001, at a karaoke party, my friend, Kevin, mentioned he wanted to try something out of the ordinary before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. He mentioned going horseback riding, riding ATVs, or playing paintball, but none of these really sparked his interest. By the end of the night, he decided he wanted to go skydiving at Drop Zone Hawaii at Dillingham Airfield. I never thought I would consider jumping out of an airplane, but for some reason I said, "Count me in!"

Within the next couple of weeks, Kevin sent a mass e-mail, inviting ten friends, to see if anyone was interested in going skydiving.

Kevin e-mailed me again a few days later and said, "I don't think too many people are interested. What if we are the only two people who end up going?"

I wrote, "I will go as long as I am not going alone. If it is just the two of us who end up going, still count me in."

Towards the end of November, we took a head count of who wanted to go skydiving. There were only three other people who decided to join Kevin in his insane feat.

The four of us, Kevin, Devin, Pete, and I decided to go skydiving about two weeks before Christmas of 2001. I received an early wake up phone call from Kevin that morning.

"Good morning! Are you ready to jump out of a plane today?" Kevin asked.

I nervously replied, "I think so."

I did not get much sleep the night before because so many things were going through my mind.

"Am I crazy?" and "What am I doing?" were just some of the questions that kept running through my head.

We met at Toys R Us in Aiea at eight o'clock in the morning and carpooled to Dillingham Airfield. I wanted to carpool with Kevin because I was afraid of getting lost. I was too nervous to think straight.

"Can you believe we are actually going to do this?" I asked, as I got into Kevin's car.



“Nope!” he replied.

We rode with the windows down during our entire road trip and played upbeat music to get ourselves pumped up for the crazy feat we were about to accomplish. It was a nice sunny day with only a few clouds in the sky. It was a nice day to go skydiving.

“Are you sure you still want to go through with this?” I asked.

“I think so. I’ll let you know when we get there,” he replied with a smile.

As we got closer to the shoreline, I looked up and saw three or four specks in the sky. About a minute later, they appeared larger and we were able to figure out what they were: skydivers.

“Can you believe that is going to be us very soon?” I asked.

We called Devin and Pete who were in the other car.

“Look up in the sky! What do you guys see?” I asked Pete.

“Holy @\*%#!” he exclaimed.

This was Devin’s second time skydiving, so he knew what to expect.

As we pulled into the entrance of Drop Zone Hawaii, I turned to Kevin and asked, “Is it too late to chicken out now?”

Kevin just smiled and said, “It is up to you. You should not feel pressured to go, but it would be nice for the four of us to have this moment to reminisce about.”

I thought about what Kevin said and I made up my mind to jump because I thought to myself, “I have already come this far. It did not make any sense to back out now.”

Besides, I did not think I would ever get another opportunity to do this because I do not know anyone else who would go skydiving.

I turned to Kevin and I nervously said, “Okay, let’s go for it!”

We parked our cars in front of the Drop Zone building. There were people standing outside putting on their skydiving gear. We walked into the building, signed liability forms

and sat down to watch a mandatory fifteen minute safety video. We were each assigned a tandem instructor who went over what to expect when we jump out of the airplane and land on the ground.

My tandem jumper's instructions were, "You are going to be squatting at the edge of the plane with your arms crossed in front of your chest. As we freefall, your arms and legs should be out on your sides. As we reach the ground, lift your legs up and let my feet touch the ground first." These were the basic instructions and it made me more anxious and nervous because our instructions were very quick and short.

Pete, Kevin and I purchased a package that consisted of pictures and a video of our jump. We decided to spend the extra money on the pictures and the video because we wanted some sort of proof of what we did. We didn't think anyone would believe us. At that time, the instructor explained exactly where the cameraman would be throughout the duration of our descent.

We rode on a cart that took us to the airplane on the runway.

"Are you guys ready to do this?!" the instructor exclaimed.

He was trying to get us fired up for the jump.

"Yeah!" we yelled in unison.

As we approached the airplane, the engine was running and it was being warmed up. Devin was instructed to enter the plane first, then Kevin, and lastly, myself. There were a total of eight people (jumpers, instructors and cameramen) who sat on the floor in the cabin of the airplane. There were seat belts bolted into the floor where we strapped ourselves in. I was sitting closest to the doorway. I later noticed there was no door on the airplane. There was a thick tarp that dropped down to cover the doorway.

"Oh...my...God!" is what I remember saying as the plane lifted off the ground.

I could see directly out of the doorway as we ascended because they did not put the tarp down until we were at a higher altitude. Trees, cars, and the shoreline got smaller and smaller and I suddenly realized clouds were passing in front of the doorway. I had mixed feelings. I started to have second thoughts, but I still wanted to go through with it.

The tandem instructors sat directly behind us. Our harnesses would eventually have to be clipped together.

“Uh, guys? Do you remember where this clip goes?” asked my instructor.

The clips on our harnesses were made of metal and he started making noises by banging the two pieces of metal together. He was trying to lighten the mood, make us laugh, and try to get our minds off of what we were about to do.

He continued by saying, “Okay, now where does this clip go? Uh, guys, help me out here. I am about to jump out of this plane and I need to know how to connect our harnesses.”

We could not stop laughing. It really did take our minds off of the jump.

It was not long before we heard the pilot say, “Ten thousand feet! Get ready!”

My instructor clipped our harnesses together and we slowly got up in a squatted position. I did not realize that I was going to be the first one to jump out of the airplane. I started to get nervous as we duck-walked to the edge of the doorway.

“Whoa! It is freezing!” I yelled.

The temperature dropped quite a bit from when we were at a lower altitude.

“Cross your arms over your chest and place your feet at the edge of the airplane!” exclaimed my instructor. I could barely hear him with the sound of the airplane and the high gusts of wind passing in front of my face.

I tilted my head downward to take a look at how far up we were. I could not believe what I saw. I remember seeing a vast ocean and a thin white line. The thin white line was the shoreline near the runway we had taken off from. We saw some clouds pass in front of us as we squatted by the doorway.

I recall hearing, “One! Two! Three!” while we rocked back and forth to get some momentum to fall away from the plane. We did a couple of summersaults as we jumped from the airplane. My instructor pulled out a small parachute that stabilized us to freefall for about forty-five seconds to a minute.

I was smiling at the camera and screaming, “Whew hew! Whew hew!” during the entire freefall.

All my fears and anxiety were left in the airplane. The freefall seemed surreal. It was nothing like what I expected. I was expecting to feel the funny sensation in the pit of my stomach, such as the ones I felt as on roller coasters when they plummet over 200 feet. I have seen places where people go into a circular room and jump over a huge fan and float as if they were skydiving. The only difference was that I was a few thousand feet above the ground. As I felt the sensation of the wind blowing frantically in my face, I noticed we were getting closer to the ground.

When we reached about five thousand or six thousand feet, my instructor pulled the cord to open the parachute. This was the part I dreaded the most. I have seen incidences where the parachute does not open or the strings get tangled from the wind. I prayed for our parachute to open and sure enough, it did.

“Whew hew! Whew hew! I can’t believe I did it!” I yelled.

The instructor kept laughing because I could not contain my excitement. I am sure it was a piece of cake for him because he already had a few hundred jumps under his belt. I was a completely different person than I had started off as when I was on land. I am usually very quiet and reserved, but this was a huge accomplishment for me.

My instructor said, “Take of your goggles and enjoy the view.”

We hovered over the ocean and land for about five minutes. The instructor pulled on one of the strings to make us turn so that I could get a 360-degree view. The ocean still seemed pretty big, but the nice part was that I could see land for many miles. There were green trees everywhere and we were actually at a higher altitude than the tall mountain range that sits behind Dillingham Airfield.

“The view is amazing! So this is what it feels like to be a bird! I cannot believe I am doing this!” I exclaimed.

I could not stop smiling. There were times where I was speechless, just enjoying the view. My instructor had to ask me from time to time if I was all right.

I just laughed and told him, “I’m fine. Everything just seems so surreal to me. This is awesome!”

Time seemed to fly by so quickly and in the blink of an eye we were getting closer to land. My instructor reminded me again to keep my feet up and let his feet touch the ground first because someone broke his or her ankle before. Our landing was pretty soft

and I did not fall to the ground. It was a good landing.

As we stood on the landing area, my instructor asked, “So how was it? Was it worth it?”

“Oh, yeah!” I exclaimed.

I looked up in the sky and I saw Kevin slowly reaching the ground with his tandem jumper.

When he landed, we immediately hugged and he kept yelling, “Yeah! Yeah! Whoa! What a rush!”

We had permanent smiles on our faces for the rest of the day.

Before this day, I was usually hesitant to try new things and enjoyed listening to other peoples’ exciting stories. My friends have opened me up to a new world. Ever since the day we went skydiving, I have made a list of things I wanted to try. If I have the slightest interest in something new, I go for it. Thanks to my friends, I am willing to try anything...within reason...at least once. I am living life with more excitement and color. Skydiving with my friends has opened my eyes and heart to living a life filled with excitement and adventure.



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