

# **DIAMOND JOURNAL**



**Fall 2005**

# DIAMOND JOURNAL

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## Acknowledgements

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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 reveal conflict and often growth in the writer's character. Personal narrative may be defined as a true account of personal experience. Rather than "autobiography," which implies a rather comprehensive account of one's life, the term "memoir" might more suitably describe this type of narration. The writer of this genre, who must inevitably be highly selective in choosing details to share with the reader, strives to draw the reader as fully as possible into an experience that is largely communicated through creative use of the following:

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

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

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



## Table of Contents

Bam! Crash! Boom!.....	6
<i>Anonymous</i>	
Moonstruck .....	8
<i>Yvette Castro</i>	
Pseudo Tumor Cerebri .....	11
<i>Alishia Ginoza</i>	
Freedom .....	14
<i>Kathy Houghton</i>	
Grandma Got Run Over by a Moose .....	18
<i>Tanya Kaneshiro</i>	
A Second Chance .....	21
<i>Glynis Lewis</i>	
My Life with Autism.....	24
<i>Daniel K. Miyasato</i>	
A Trained Killer .....	28
<i>Donovan Modest</i>	
Terror at Hope Pond.....	30
<i>Rachel Montgomery</i>	
It's Too Late Now .....	35
<i>Thanh-Xuan Nguyen</i>	
Run Away .....	38
<i>Tran Nguyen</i>	
America's Secret .....	41
<i>Elika Otoy</i>	
Grandpa .....	44
<i>Elika Otoy</i>	
Because It's You, Ma .....	46
<i>Man Wa Shing</i>	

A Radical Freedom Blanket .....	48
<i>Hillary Stratton</i>	
The Run of My Life .....	50
<i>AJ Taumua</i>	
The Scar .....	53
<i>Juliet Tierney</i>	
Unforgettable College Life in China.....	57
<i>Juliet Tierney</i>	
The Importance of Integrity .....	62
<i>Kelly Washino</i>	
Sometimes It Takes A Bullet.....	66
<i>Norman Wetzel</i>	

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## “Bam! Crash! Boom!”

Anonymous

During my senior year, I had received a car from my parents. It was a 2003 black Corvette coupe with leather interior, dark tint, chrome rims, DVD player, and a Bose sound system; it basically had everything that a car owner would want. I loved to show my car off by driving recklessly, and most of all, speeding. At the time, I thought it was cool to speed, to show off how fast my car was against other cars. But I will never forget how incredibly stupid that whole scene was.

It was an overcast Saturday morning on May 15, 2004, and the sounds of the cleaning crew for the apartment I lived in had woken me up. I was upset that I couldn't sleep a little longer before my alarm sounded, so I decided to get ready for work. While having breakfast, I took notice of the weather which was looking gloomier by the minute. Usually, when the weather gets bad, the traffic gets backed up on the H1 freeway, and I didn't want to be late for work.

As I left the apartment in a hurry, I noticed that it was pouring so hard that the rain left big, gaping puddles in the walkways of the garage. Soaked and irritated by the rain, I leapt into my car, cranked up the bass and raced out of the garage.

I was headed toward the H1 freeway going at least 70 mph. I was dodging cars left and right. The feeling of danger gave me an adrenaline rush that fueled my feeling of importance and self image. I loved to take risks, and I wasn't afraid of anything.

As I approached the onramp, where cars from Alexander Street merged onto the highway, traffic was a little backed up ahead. Usually, I try to figure out which lane is being the most the most productive to avoid being caught up in the slow lane. On this particular day, the onramp lane happened to be the fastest lane. I usually don't choose this lane because the people trying to merge onto the highway make it slow, but it was apparently the fastest of the three lanes.

As I was getting adjusted to the lane, I realized that it was the incorrect lane. The cars once moving came to an impetuous stop. My reaction to stop was too abrupt, and I hydroplaned on the flooded road. I could feel every moment as if time had stopped and forgotten about me. I could see I was going to hit the car in front of me as I glided toward it like a black swan on ice, and I could see my hands clenching on to the steering wheel. And while all that was going on, all I could do was prepare myself for the impact.



"BAM! CRASH! BOOM!" The airbags went off in a flash, and I knew what had happened. The first thing to enter my mind was to drive away. But I knew I had to confess to what I had done. Immediately I jumped out from my car to see if the other people I had hit were okay. My own life didn't even occur to me yet. I could have gotten hit by other cars on the highway. I entered their vehicle and helped their bloody bodies out from their dismantled car and to the side of the road. It didn't take long for the police to arrive at the scene. Once they got there, they questioned all the victims involved in the incident.

While I was being questioned about what had happened, I overheard the driver and the passenger of the car that I hit telling the police officer, "We are so lucky that we decided not to take our daughter with us today; if we had, she would have been killed instantly on impact. She's just six years old!" I then noticed that my entire front hood was in the front seat of their car. And their car had actually hit another car in front of them because I hit them with such great force.

After I heard that remark and realized what had actually happened, I was possessed with a feeling of dejection and went numb. The sentence echoed through my head like a sound wave. It would repeat itself over and over again in my mind. It disgusted me so much that I hyperventilated and blacked out.

When I awoke, I was being ushered into a room at Queen's Hospital. I don't remember clearly what had happened before I blacked out, but the nurse told me that I behaved in a strange manner, so they stationed me at the psychiatric ward. They ran quite a few tests on me; most of them were unnecessary. Then finally, I was released to my family, who supported me a lot.

I am thankful that no one died in that car accident that day. The conclusive thought is unbearable. I don't think I could live the rest of my life knowing that I killed someone innocent for a very stupid reason. I can never look at a car the same way as I did before; they are made to kill. Now I take my driving very seriously and always remember that speed limits are set for a reason. Whenever I see someone speed, I think of how foolish and immature they are and look. The whole concept of this experience never stops to amaze me. I'm truly astonished at the tremendous impact it has had on me. Just to think, one day could change your life forever.



## Moonstruck

Yvette Castro

When I was a young girl, I used to peek out of my bedroom window and watch my sister, Yvonne play outside with the neighborhood kids. I used to get so envious because they were having such a great time, but I was always a shy geeky kid who hid in my room whenever there was company around. I lived in a Filipino community in a small town of Hanama'ulu on the island of Kaua'i. I may have been around my own kind, but for some reason I felt out of place.

I would always hide behind my parents during parties and events. I hated crowded rooms. I never made friends with the neighborhood kids, so I'd only play with my sister, whom I considered my only friend. I felt like in order to be accepted by the other kids, I had to have the best toys or possess a talent to impress them.

Our family had below average wealth. My mother worked two jobs to support our family. My father had retired when I was just six years old. I felt different because my parent's age gap was so far apart compared to other families in my neighborhood. I guess I felt embarrassed in a way, but I never loved my parents any less. To cover up my awkwardness, I'd just stay at home and watch TV, draw, or play video games. I preferred to do those things by myself rather than play with the other kids. I thought that I was weird. Even at a young age, I looked for ways to find myself.

Despite my awkwardness, my whole family was the complete opposite of me. They were always involved in social activities. They knew I was introverted and they tried to help me by exposing me to other things as well. During my intermediate years, I slowly began to try and step out into reality. My parents enrolled me in hula, piano lessons and church groups. I tried to fit in and be sociable, but I still felt somewhat intimidated and insecure because I never had the courage to approach people with confidence.

On the inside, I felt like I wanted to be the best at anything I did, but I let my fears get the best of me. I tried beating them by playing sports in high school. I joined the girls' junior varsity basketball team. I enjoyed it, and I was even chosen as the point guard. Even though I liked playing basketball, I felt like a failure because our team always lost. I decided not to continue during my senior year. After basketball season was over, I decided to try track and field sports. I enjoyed running the 50 meter and 100 meter dash sprints. I felt that I was pretty fast amongst the girls in my school, but I wasn't as fast as the girls from the other high schools. Again, I felt like a failure.

During high school I had one best friend, her name was Gaynell. She was



definitely not like me. Even though I hung out with her a lot, I tried to hang out with the other people she socialized with. I tried hanging out with different crowds or cliques in my school. Yet, I still didn't know who I was. I wanted to see where I fit in. Like in many schools, there are the popular kids, the cheerleaders, the surfers, and the skaters. I realized I didn't fit in to any of those crowds. I even tried socializing with the outsiders. They were the people who would cut class, smoke and drink whenever they felt like it. I found myself trying to be someone I wasn't. Once more, I felt unsatisfied.

As the end of my senior year approached, I started questioning my goals for the future. I wondered what I wanted in life, what I would become, and what I would do in the next five years. I spoke to my parents about what I was feeling. They talked to me about the importance of school and having good morals, but they never really gave me any guidance. They just said to do whatever made me happy. They gave me the freedom to make my own decisions. Whenever I'd ask myself these questions, I'd find myself always staring at the moon. I'd feel so at peace because I'd think of my special place in Hanalei.

I had spent countless moments in Hanalei. I'd go there every other weekend with my family. From my home town, it felt like a journey to get there because Hanalei is located on the other side of the island, but the distance traveled was worth the feeling of extreme happiness when we'd arrive there. I felt that it was my sanctuary and I'd always feel at ease whenever I was there.

Hanalei is a place of serene beauty. It possesses captivating, breath-taking views of the Wai'ale'ale mountains, wide open beaches that extend for miles, and countless rainbows that appear through light rain showers. Hanalei is translated as "crescent bay" (Wichman, 108), because of its shape. I used to climb up on the mountain side of the bay and look down so I could see the whole view of the ocean from a distance. As I looked down towards the bay, its shape resembled an arched semi-circle moon, which in turn ironically symbolized my life as being complete. For example, the moon goes through many stages until it becomes a full moon. In a similar manner, I looked at parts of my life as those stages and hopefully I would find a way to feel complete, complete as a full moon.

As the years passed, our weekend tradition stood strong, but it slowly came to a halt when my father got sick. A month after I turned 21, while my father was on his death bed, he gave me the best advice anyone could ask for. He said, "Don't let life pass you by." His wise words changed my life in ways I never imagined.

After my father passed away, I was devastated. Over time, my tears began to



fade, and I was able to find comfort through many unforgettable memories of him and by remembering those words he said to me. I wanted to make sure that when my life should end, I want to feel like I lived a life just like his, a life filled with no regrets and with complete satisfaction. Over the next several years, I stopped lingering on everything that I didn't do, and started pushing myself to do more things that made me happy, thus stopping me from robbing myself of my own happiness. I realized I never needed to change as a person, but to accept myself as who I was all along.

As a result, I respected myself enough to let my confidence out and it gave me the strength to overcome many obstacles. For instance, without the necessary education, I was able to find an accounting job and I worked my way up to an assistant manager position. Without my family's financial help, I was able to finance and purchase my own car. Without anyone's help, I was able to find the strength to get out of an abusive relationship. Through trials and tribulations, I've learned my lessons along the way. I'm finally fulfilling the dreams and aspirations that I've wanted to accomplish for so long. I'm putting myself through college, I have a place of my own, and I've continued to find faith in the Lord's Prayer. In the mean time, I'm content with what I have now. I feel secure in my own skin, I feel confident, I feel proud of myself, and I've matured into a better person. I can finally say that I've completed the journey of finding myself; I've reached my full moon. Granted there are other things I would like to accomplish, I know that journey will lead me to fulfilling many more moons in my lifetime.

When you read these words you will probably be thinking the same thing I did when I first heard them. As the doctors told me what I had, I was shocked because I had no idea what this thing meant except that the doctors reassured me that it wasn't a real tumor. After hearing that it wasn't a real tumor, it made me crazy because the doctors weren't telling me why.

Pseudo Tumor Cerebri means "false tumor of the brain." This "false tumor" means that what I have acts like a tumor but it isn't. In other words, tumors in the brain would result in frequent headaches, which I had, but there was no sign of any kind of foreign growth in my brain so it wasn't a tumor but it acts like one. I finally understood what this word meant after doing some research of my own and asking several other doctors besides my emergency doctors.

It all began 2 weeks ago, starting from the week before our Spring intersession. During that final week, I was getting really bad headaches and my vision slowly took a turn for the worst. When I had the headaches I tried taking every medication to get rid of them but nothing seemed to work because they just kept coming back everyday. Then slowly, my vision started to get blurry and eventually I experienced double-vision. My eyes feel like they're trying to pull apart and when I looked at an object, I was seeing two of the same thing. This is when I started to realize that I needed some help and needed it quick.

During midterm week, it was extremely hard for me to do anything because my head and eyes were in excruciating pain. However, I made it through the week but was terrified because everything felt wrong in my body. So, after taking my midterms, I made an appointment with my mom's ophthalmologist, which is an eye doctor, and that's when I started to slowly find out what was wrong with me.

I went to the doctor's office around 8am and after checking my eyes, Dr. Plechaty had told me that I had papilledema. This was swelling in my nerves that were in the eye and from that point he had ordered me to get a CT scan, picture of my brain, that same day. This when I started to get really scared because I had no idea that it was so serious, that I needed to have things done to me as quickly as possible.

My mom and I went down to Queen's Hospital emergency room to get everything checked out because apparently the people that take the pictures of your brain and the rest of your body were very busy and if I waited until my appointment time, it would've been a stressful day. Being in that hospital made me nervous, terrified and anxious, so many



feelings rushed through me as I waited for the doctors. After the emergency doctors had checked me out, I had to wait for an opening to get my CT scan and that wait was long and nerve wrecking.

At around 4:15pm, the nurse came in and said there was an opening for me so they quickly put an IV in me and sent me to the CT room. I was terrified because in just about a half hour, I was going to find out what was wrong with me and I didn't know what to expect.

After the scan, I felt this sense of relief because I thought that the doctors were going to give me some medication and send me home. However, that feeling changed in less than 15minutes. They had told me that my scan was fine but there was a lot of pressure and that is why I had the headaches and double vision. After hearing this I was relieved but then they said that they had to do a spinal tap because they had to make sure that the spinal fluid was okay and not in bad shape.

A spinal tap is when they take a needle and stick it in your lower back. There is a soft spongy area between the bone and that is their target. When the doctors told me what they needed to do, I was terrified and couldn't stop crying for 10minutes. My mom tried her best to calm me down and then a doctor came in to reassure me that it was going to be quick and that I would feel pressure as they were poking me. However when they started, that little bit of local anesthesia they gave me didn't work at all. I could just feel the needle going into my back and couldn't stop screaming.

What made things worse was that they had to poke me more than a dozen times because they kept missing because I was moving just a little bit. The area they needed to get was a small area and one small move could result in a miss and that kept happening to me. After all that pain, the doctors finally got this woman doctor to come and get the spinal fluid that they needed. I was extremely grateful for her because she got what she needed in one shot and ended my pain.

After all that hospital business was finished, the doctors had finally let me go home and by that time it was almost midnight. I couldn't believe that I had stayed in the hospital for almost 24 hours just because of headaches and eye problems. But after being released, I was put on medication and told to rest because after a spinal tap your back will hurt for a while.

As I slowly got better, I decided to do some research on this because it seems that this Pseudo Tumor Cerebri is new to the medical world and no one could answer any reason as to why it happened to me. I had asked my neurologist what causes this false tumor and the best he could tell me was that so far it has occurred in women around my



age and to people who are overweight or on birth control pills. But he said that I don't fall under any categories because I wasn't overweight or on the pill and that this was a new study for doctors.

Then I started to wonder if there are any treatments and if this thing could come back again. So far doctors prescribe diuretics, which is a pill that relieves the pressure in the brain and maybe even a little weight loss could help. What I am on is a diuretic and this pill really helped my double vision and headaches to disappear but the one thing that gets annoying is that a diuretic pill makes you go to the bathroom frequently. As for the headaches and the double vision coming back, there were some studies where the pseudo tumor has come back and some cases people lost their vision but in my case everything looks good and my doctors think that everything will go according to plan.

Besides headaches and double vision there are other signs and symptoms to look for as well. Some people with this had complained about ringing in their ears, feeling dizzy or nauseated and sometimes constant vomiting. I was kind of happy that I didn't have those other feelings because I would've been more scared and concerned.

Overall if left untreated, your vision could be lost and your headaches could develop into something worse. I'm just happy that I found out what was wrong with me before it was too late. I'm also glad that the medication I'm taking is working and my eyes are getting better as everyday passes and there are no more headaches to deal with. I just have a little bit of advice for those on birth control pills or overweight, be careful and make sure to ask your doctor about other sicknesses that can happen to you if you're on the pill or starting to become overweight. This is something I didn't expect and I didn't fall under any of those categories so everyone needs to take care of their bodies and don't be afraid to ask any doctor any questions you might have. Like my doctor told me, "there is no such thing as a stupid question, only a question that's not asked is stupid."

## Freedom

Kathy Houghton

It was a white ribbon of sand, dotted with the sage of cactus, basking lazily in the southwestern Caribbean sun. Turquoise waters softly lapped at its shores, a soothing antithesis to the parched landscape they bordered. Ivory nets meant to divide frolicking beach volleyball teams, swayed gently in the afternoon breeze, ignored and unattended.

Nearby, tourists overcome by the total tranquility, occupied lounge chairs. Ringing telephones and fax machines were temporarily forgotten in the heat and the haze of the rum punch lunch.

Jealous of their leisure, I drove by them on my way to work at the airport. There the atmosphere contrasted sharply with the bustle of taxis and buses arriving and departing in the dust and heat. Horns honked and drivers cursed as they struggled to pick up and transport the island's visitors to their destinations.

My team and I were meeting a charter flight of three hundred travelers, who needed to be escorted to the cruise terminal at the edge of town, where they would board a week-long excursion to various tropical locales. We were there to provide assistance to the weary traveler, who often had never left their home town, much less arrived in a foreign country.

As I gave instructions and delegated duties, two immigration officers approached me. I didn't see them coming. They seemed to appear out of nowhere, short and burly, with dark hair and eyes that peered at me curiously. They asked me what I was doing there. I explained my position, and they wanted to see my work papers. I told them that the local agency my company had contracted had advised my company the work papers had been approved, and we were just waiting to receive the actual paperwork. At that, they said I had better come inside, and led me away out of the hot sun into the iciness of their small, air-conditioned office. A supervisor asked me the same questions, and I repeated my answers.

"Who said you could come here and work," he asked imperiously. "Ricky Malmberg," I replied confidently. "You know, the owner of DePalm Tours. He's been arranging the papers for several months." Ricky was well connected with the local government officials, and I hoped that by dropping his name, I could avoid any further problems.

I was beginning to realize this was not going to be like any of the other countries in which I had worked. There I had been welcomed and respected as a representative



of a large corporation that brought billions of tourist dollars to their countries, and provided jobs for many locals, essentially putting the bread and butter on their tables. It was customary to arrive in a destination, apply for the required work visa at the local immigration office, and begin working. After returning repeatedly, one day they would surprise you with your work visa, which got stapled into your passport, and no one bothered you about it.

"It is illegal for you to work here without your papers." He peered at me sternly over the top of his glasses. "You cannot continue."

Suddenly, I wanted to go home to Canada, and offered to do so. I tried to be polite and respectful. "Well then, shall I board the plane and leave. The aircraft that just landed is mine, and it is departing within the hour. I can be on it."

That didn't seem to impress him. "No," he said. "You have to go downtown. You will be deported."

"Why do I have to go downtown?" I asked. I was quite sure I knew what that meant, and I was getting nervous. Downtown meant the town jail. He waved his hand to the two officers who had escorted me in, and they led me out to their jeep, whisked me off to the downtown jail and handed me over to the local police.

Again, an officer questioned me, demanding answers to similar questions that had been asked at the airport immigration office. My responses were the same calm and assured statements. I had been trained to be quietly assertive when dealing with stressful situations, and at that moment I was reaching inside for every ounce of confidence I could muster. That was my blunder. Tears and begging for forgiveness were what they expected. Using contriteness and feminine wiles would have been a far better strategy.

He shouted at me angrily. "You are a criminal, and your picture will be on the front page of the newspaper for everyone to see. You will be deported. We will take your passport and stamp it so you will never be able to return." He shook his head from side to side showing his disgust at my stupidity.

Again, I calmly replied that I would be happy to immediately leave their country if that is what they wished. At that, he grabbed the telephone and dialed his superior officer. He spoke quickly and harshly in the local Papiamentu dialect. I only understood about half the conversation and worried that things were not going as I hoped. When the call ended, he stood in one fluid movement, pushed me in front of him down the hall to a front office and gave a startled looking female officer abrupt orders.



She gawked at me curiously, her eyes running up and down as though she had never before seen anything like me. I suppose that in my designer silk shirt and matching skirt, I did not appear to be the common villain. With passport, handbag and jewelry taken away from me, she pointed to a small, filthy bathroom. She spoke little English, but managed to let me know I had to strip. I felt the blood pound in my head as my terror rose. I complied, complaining until she raised her voice and put a hand to the holster on her hip. My heart pounded in fear. Not knowing what further to expect, the thought flashed through my mind that if she laid a finger on me, this would be my last day of life. I knew I wouldn't be able to control my actions. But she wearily motioned me to dress and quickly shoved me into a cell.

The steel, barred door clanged shut behind me. Outside, a single bare light bulb glared brightly against the dark cement ceiling. The putrid odor of thousands of previous inmates surrounded me. Everything about the cell was cement. There was a slab about three feet high. I sat gingerly on the corner of it hoping to not soil my clothes, and surveyed my surroundings. An inch of brackish water covered the floor. I picked my feet up and sat cross-legged to keep myself dry. On the other side of the cell, a hole in the floor served as a toilet. Cold water poured constantly from a hole in the ceiling. Filth and rotting food had been splashed over every surface. Depression settled over me like a dark cloud about to unleash a storm.

My neighbors in nearby cells screamed and cried. A banging sound every few seconds seemed to indicate that one of them was throwing themselves against the steel door of their cell. I could only imagine his body bruised from the constant pounding. It went on interminably.

Shortly, though, my mind ignored them and raced over other thoughts. "Who could help me? Who knew where I was? Had my employees at the airport seen that I'd been taken? Could they help? How long would I be here?" Over and over my mind asked and answered my own questions. The more time that went by, the more nervous and afraid I became. "What if they just leave me here for a couple of weeks?" My mind couldn't fathom how I would endure that. I tried to think of ways I would spend the time. "What would I think about for that long?"

An officer came by, muttering in Papiamento, and left a sandwich wrapped in wax paper, and a Styrofoam cup of something. I was too dejected to even investigate it.

More time went by. I wondered how long it had been. Gradually, the activity at the station increased. I could hear the slurred voices of drunken prisoners who were

being thrown into cells. It was Saturday night in a tourist town, and I wondered how long I would have my less-than-luxurious accommodations to myself. The downtown jail was not large, and I began to fear they would require me to share my space with some of Oranjestad's less than finest.

Finally, after many hours, the steel door swung open. "Ms. Houghton, you come out now." My heart raced again. Was this freedom, or were they going to do something else with me? Without explanation of what was further expected of me, they led me to a side door, opened it and said, "You go now."

"But my things, what about my purse; I had jewelry," I said. The officers had forgotten that I had possessions when I arrived, and went to retrieve them. They returned with my items and presented a log for me to sign. My resolve to appear self-assured was breaking, and my hand shook uncontrollably as I provided the signature they demanded.

The side door opened again. This time, I stepped through it briskly, eager to escape my bondage. It was dark. I wasn't sure where I was, what street I was on, where I would find a taxi to take me to safety. A new excitement engulfed me. I knew that I was going to be all right. Joyfully, I stepped quickly away, putting the building behind me as fast as I could until it was out of sight. Then I stopped, breathing deeply the soft, warm, night air that moved gently through my hair and against my face. I savored the feeling. It was the feeling of freedom.



## Grandma Got Run Over By a Moose

Tanya Kaneshiro

"How long more?" I shout from the back seat, but nobody answers me.

They're all too busy concentrating on other things. My dad is navigating our car through the rain. My mom is sitting next to him in the front seat reading a Long's ad and my grandma is peacefully drifting in and out of reality while plopped in the back seat next to me.

The car is becoming uncomfortably warm because the windows are closed with only a slight crack to keep them from fogging up. "Silver Bells" is playing on our old AM radio and I understand why my grandma is dozing off.

We're headed up the Pali Highway on our way to Long's in Kaneohe. Since it's the Christmas season, all the stores are completely sold out of Care Bears, except that particular Long's. They still have a stock of Wish Bears remaining. Being the wonderful well behaved oldest child that I am, I've decided to boycott Christmas unless I get a Care Bear this year.

As we continue our drive, the rain breaks for a few minutes. I decide that this might be my one and only chance. "I can't hold it! I gotta pee," I whined.

My dad pulls the car over next to a grey, paint stained guard rail. I hop out and so does my sleep weary grandma. We climb over the guard rail and move through the tall bamboo trees. I stumble as my shoes get stuck in the muddy vines that are growing uncontrollably on the ground.

After maneuvering through the thick foliage, my grandma and I find a secluded spot for me to use the bathroom. As I start to unzip my old blue Levis, I smell something funny. It smells like one of my dad's old work shirts that got left out in the rain and hasn't been washed yet. It's a pungent smell, like a big wet dog with drool. I turn around and see smoke coming out of my grandma's ears. "Is that really smoke," I think to myself.

I hear a loud snort and realize that the smoke is not coming from my grandma. I stretch my head around her and see it staring at me with its beady red eyes. It looks as if we have just disturbed it from a nap it began only 15 minutes ago. I motion for my grandma to turn around, but she doesn't understand me. I can't speak. Fear takes over and I can't hold it anymore! For two brief seconds I am relieved to have released the pressure building in my bladder. The warm wetness wakes me from my frozen state and I scream, "MOOSE!!!"



My screams anger it more and the moose starts to charge towards us. I cover my eyes just as my grandma turns around to face the 10 foot giant. The rain starts again. The enormous raindrops pound on my hands that are shielding my eyes from the sight of the irate moose. I can't see anything. My hair is soaked and the rain is burning my eyes. I wipe my face and see it, standing on top of my grandma triumphantly.

At this point I think I can take him. Anger pulses through my body and I yell, "You killed my grandma!" Adrenaline is rushing through my veins and I holler, "You're going to be mounted on my wall!" Then he snorts at me and the smell of his cold inhuman breath stops my killer thoughts instantly. He starts to paw at the muddy ground with his hoof like a raging bull. All the gusto drains from my body. Adrenaline turns to fear and again I am paralyzed.

A fog rolls through the forest and all I can see are his piercing red eyes and his 8 foot wide brown matted antlers. "This could be my chance, if I could just get back to the car," I whisper softly. My seven year old brain tries to convince my paralyzed legs that my dad is bigger and stronger than this ugly moose, but my legs refuse to listen.

The moose walks slowly towards me, as if he's calculating which method of killing me would be more pleasurable for him. He keeps approaching until he is an inch from my face. His wet snot splatters on my skin with every exhale of his breath. He flaunts his big stained chiseled teeth at me and then I notice something peculiar. There is some type of peach colored leather between his two front teeth. I wipe the rain from my face again so I can face my murder, and then it hits me and I gasp, "That's not leather, that's human flesh!" This moose is a carnivorous man eater and I'm about to become his Christmas turkey.

His mouth opens wide and I can see down his throat. He can take my head off with just one bite. I can't face him anymore, so I close my eyes and prepare for my final breath. I can taste the tuna sandwich that I had for lunch and sadly realize that it will be my last meal. I can hear the Christmas song "Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer" in my head.

"What? Why!!!" Why was that stupid song stuck in my head, especially after I had just witnessed my grandma stomped on by a crazy man eating moose! Then it began. The Moose's jaws started to close with fury and all I could think of was that stupid song!

"Presents!" said a squeaky voice from the darkness.

"What?!? Who said that, am I dead?" I don't see any lights, I thought there



would be lights for me to follow when I died but there's only darkness. "I'm so confused!" I tried to say, but my voice was no where to be heard.

"Get up! It's time to open presents!" the squeaky voice yelled.

"Grandma got run over by a reindeer..." That stupid song! Even in death that song still haunts me. But then it ended and another song started "Jingle Bell, Jingle Bell, Jingle Bell Rock..."

"Tanya!!! Wake up now. Mom won't let us open our presents without you! Get up!!!" the squeaky voice then demanded.

Boy, that voice really sounds familiar. I then feel two cold fingers pry my eyelids apart. My eyes strain to focus on the black blob in front of me. Then I see it, its worse then a man eating moose, it's my younger brother!

"Why do you have an alarm clock if you don't get up when it goes off?" asks my brother.

Bingo! No way! That music was coming from my alarm clock! Relief ran through my body, I was having a nightmare. I'm alive, I have a head, my grandma is probably waiting downstairs right now waiting for me to open my presents! I jump out of bed, bulldozing over my younger brother in my haste. I run down the stairs, skipping three stairs at a time! I plop down next to my grandma and start to open the present she hands to me. I tear away the snowman printed Christmas paper and see it...Wish Bear. "Grandma, where did you get this from?"

"Kāne'ohe Long's."

## A Second Chance

Glynis Lewis

As I walked past a row of rooms with chain link doors, my heart sank. The pain that shot through me felt like I had been jolted with an electrical prod. The smell of ammonia from urine and cleaning products burned my eyes and brought waves of nausea to my stomach. The faces that stared back at me with pleading eyes, mentally begging me to pick one of them, were heartbreaking. I stood with my mouth agape, words and emotions twirling in my head, my voice stifled by shock and helplessness. "Oh my God," was the mantra in my head.

From the corner of my eye, I could see a woman approaching with what appeared to be a noose. As she neared, she stopped two rooms away from where I stood. She appeared callous in demeanor like a witch, with long red talons that curled, wiry hair that hung to her waist and a scowl on her face. She unlocked the chain link door and placed the noose around the neck of an injured, malnourished female. As she walked the frail female out of the room, the others that remained clamored and hollered, piercing my eardrums. I walked over to the witch-like woman and asked her, "Where are you taking her?" She replied harshly, "to the back to be euthanized." I asked her "Why?" She said, "She has been here for two weeks, and no one wants to adopt her, besides we have nowhere else to put her." I thought to myself, "Is this legal?" I'm sure there is a loving family that would be willing to take in this young soul.

While our brief discussion took place, the young female sat at my feet eyes boring into me, pleading, begging, crying out, "Please don't let them do this to me." I couldn't help myself. My emotions were getting the better of me. As the woman started to walk off tugging at the young female at my feet that did not want to budge, I stopped her to ask, "Why was she orphaned?" The story I was told is, when her mother died, her sister was to care for the young female along with two others. The sister did not want any of them so therefore she starved and battered them. The young female at my feet had been strangled with a chain and her voice box had been crushed, she could no longer vocalize. She had also received multiple cuts and a broken tailbone. With each word being spoken, I could feel my heart beating furiously; I thought it would explode in my chest. I bent down and stroked the hair of the young female, and made a promise to her. I promised that I would do my best to make her a part of my family, as tears came bursting through like a dam overflowing with raging water. The young female tried to climb onto my lap as the witch-like woman stood there huffing and puffing, her impatience almost at a crescendo. I stood face to face with the witch and told her that I wanted to adopt the young female now!

I bent down once more and took this beautiful young female into my arms. I carried her to the area set aside for adoptive parents that came to visit. Her body trembled



uncontrollably as she stared deep into my eyes. It was as if she was trying to figure out if this was a dream or a cruel joke. As I began to take a seat on a hard plastic patio chair with no cushion, the seat spotted with caked on dirt, she whimpered. It was then that I realized she had stitches on her belly that ran from the middle of the abdominal region to an inch above her pubic area. Each moment spent with her in my arms, the bond grew at an infinite rate. The young female and I sat alone for a few more minutes without speaking verbally, but telepathically. Finally, a gentleman from the adoptions unit came over to me with an application for the adoption. His eyes were so tender and kind, as he watched the interaction between the young female and me. He said to me that it was part of his job to explain some facts about adoption. He explained the responsibilities of medical and emotional problems this female carried as a result of the abuse she had endured in her short life. I told him that he needed not explain any further, as I did not care what baggage she carried. Nothing was going to deter me from adopting her. I was able and willing to take full responsibility for her care and medical needs. I offered her my heart and my home, filled with love and compassion. I promised her that much. From that point the paper work went swiftly, and I signed on the dotted line.

As the gentleman and I stood to leave, his arms reached out to take the female from me. My heart sank, I started to shake, tears welling up from deep within. What was happening? I had done everything the gentleman had asked of me, was the cruel joke on me? My facial expression must have been one of desperation and sheer shock. He explained that the young female had to remain in their custody until the agency finalized the papers, and that the doctor needed to examine her once more. For the next two days, I tossed and turned, struggling to contain my ardent emotions. The hours seemed like days, and the days seemed like years. I was bursting with elation, the count down giving me no peace until I could hold her in my arms again.

I arrived two hours before our reunification was to take place. If I stayed at home, I would have driven myself crazy. So why not go crazy right there at the adoption agency? Finally the moment arrived. As the door opened, our eyes met. She shook with glee as if to say, "Yes! My new mommy came back for me." I shook with joy and delight. Yes! She was finally going to be mine forever. As the gentleman strode towards me holding my new baby girl in his arms, the experience unfolded in slow motion. The young female yelped and I cried. I swept her into my arms and showered her with a million kisses. It was official; she was now part of my family. There was just one more thing I had to do. I had to tell my husband Marvin we had a new addition to our ever growing family. This was sure going to be a surprise.

When I arrived home, Marvin was asleep. I went about setting up essentials for her personal care. Marvin awoke while I was in the driveway unloading the rest of her

belongings. All the while I tried to figure out what I would name her. I decided to call her Pixie, as in pixie dust, because the bond we shared was magical. As I walked back into the house, Marvin said to me, "Where's the damned dog?" I went to my sons' bedroom to retrieve Pixie and introduced her to her new daddy. He looked at her for a few minutes and replied, "She looks like an ugly mutt; couldn't you have picked a better looking dog." Then he took Pixie to our backyard to play with her.

That was two and a half years ago. Today, Pixie is a well adjusted Jack Russell Terrier mixed with Chihuahua. A lot of tender loving care and many trips to the veterinarian's office have given her back her dignity. Pixie is extremely loyal and would not hesitate to protect me. She is very affectionate, extremely smart and spoiled by her daddy. She is truly a best friend to everyone in my family. I believe that fate brought us together, because she deserved a second chance.



## My Life With Autism

Daniel K. Miyasato

I sat down in my seat and looked left and right. The other students beside me looked at me strangely and whispered to each other. Not only were the students looking at me strangely, but the teacher was as well. What were they saying to one another? Did I mess up again? I felt confused and wanted to know what the heck was going on. Just then, the principal of my school came in with my parents and asked me to come outside. That's it! I guessed I messed up. I could see the other students looking at me. They probably thought out loud to themselves, "Good riddance, that guy is gone." I felt so sad. Why didn't anybody like me? Things changed in the principal's office. It was there that I found out that I was autistic.

In the principal's office, the principal and my parents were looking at me like they were about to burst out in tears. That showed me that the problem I was having in school was a serious matter. I didn't know what autism was and why I needed help. Also, this problem could explain why I had no other friends or maybe why I was messing up in class. Then I heard that autism is a condition where parts of the brain are not working, which makes it harder for those with autism to communicate. Wow!! That is why I had been acting up in class. That was why I had no friends in my school. It didn't seem fair to me that I had to have a handicap, which affected my social skills, while everybody else's social skills didn't need as much work.

I felt so left out and felt as though God had abandoned me. He gave me autism as soon as I was born and there is no way I can rid myself of this disability. Autism made it harder for me to make friends. Autism was probably the reason that the other children hated me.

Mom and dad hugged me and told me, "Now we know why you were acting up in class and we know it wasn't your fault." They wouldn't blame me or yell at me whenever I did something wrong. I began to break down, but I held all my sadness about my newly found problem inside. I hugged my mom and dad for understanding my disability. I knew that deep down inside my mom and dad loved me a lot and wanted only the best for me. If only I heard that I had autism sooner, before 4<sup>th</sup> grade, maybe I would be fine by now. I knew my life was still going to be tough from then on with this newly found autism problem, but for the first time I knew what the problem was.

I went home after I heard the depressing news about my autism and suddenly it hit me. Autism does make me smarter, but it weakened my social skills. I felt as though God made me a robot. I'm smarter like a robot and do what I need to get by, but my social skills are lacking tremendously just like a robot. I lay down in bed and thought to



myself, "I will be on the streets in the future and I have no life here on earth. I will fail high school and fail college and never make a single friend in my life."

I started to cry. I remembered hearing the other students in my class, "Only babies cry and you are dumb. You will fail. We're glad you will fail because we said so. You should just give it up. Hah ha hah, loser."

I wanted to tell my mother what the other students were saying to me, but I knew that would do me no good. Mom would break down in tears like I did since she has depression. She feels everything is hopeless and lays in bed feeling sorry for herself. She won't leave her room until the depression goes away. Her depression also won't go away immediately either. She might be like that for a week or even a month. She will especially feel terrible after I tell her the bad news. I don't want mom to get depressed because I told her the way the other students were treating me in the school. Her depression would be my fault. I love my mom very much and decided to hold off telling her the truth and to deal with the problem myself.

I went to school the next day and heard more ranting from the other students. "Hah, you have autusom! You stink more then...ugh...we do. You better...ugh...not get near us...ugh...or anyone else." I agreed even though I knew agreeing was wrong and even though they couldn't pronounce autism correctly. I felt the only reason I was in school was just to learn and get smarter. I tried to convince myself that the other students didn't matter to me at all. But all the mean words the other students told me in the school hurt me deep down inside and I just couldn't stand holding the problem in anymore. I wanted to tell my mom and dad what the other students were saying to me, but all my explanations would end in failure if I sent mom into depression. Also, dad was too busy to hear these words. I dealt with all the other students teasing and harassing until the end of school and went home. The other students laughed at me and I decided that nobody cared about me in the school anymore. Why be at school?

I arrived home with tears on my face, which I wiped away. I had plenty of anger towards the school I went to. I decided that nothing could be done about the way the other students were treating me. I gave up all hope and decided that I was never going to school again since the other students there were attacking me with such harmful words. I felt that the only place I could live happily was home since nobody hates me there.

I then walked to the T.V. to forget about what was happening and turned it on. The Care Bears came on, which was one of the only shows that made sense to me. The Care Bears said, "Love one another as you would yourself. Also you should share your feelings as it makes you feel cozy inside."



I wished that the other students at my school were like the Care Bears since the Care Bears have no hate, not even towards the bad guys. The students at my school weren't acting kindly like the Care Bears. The students at my school were acting the complete opposite. I sat down and thought to myself for a while, "Am I acting like the Care Bears right now? The Care Bears told me to love one another, but the students of my school weren't showing any love or caring to me. Why should I do the same?"

Then I found the answer that I was looking for in my problem with my school. I wasn't caring like the other students weren't caring for me. I was being just as uncaring as the other students in my school. What would the Care Bears say to me about how I was trying to fix my problem? I bet the Care Bears would be disappointed with me since I was breaking every single rule they made on T.V. and that made me feel terrible inside. I was acting just as bad as the other students were at my school.

After the Care Bears show ended, I went to my room and thought to myself about what I just discovered. What were the Care Bears were trying to tell me? They wanted me to care and love the other students no matter what they did or say to me. If I think about the feelings of others, I can figure out that every single person, no matter who, has some good in them.

I was looking at the way the other students were treating me. I thought to myself, "I'm just like the kids in the Care Bears show that they are trying to save." The kids on the Care Bears show don't know what to do at all to fix their problems. Then out of nowhere, the Care Bears come and save the day by changing the way the children think for the better. I found the way the Care Bears acted was what I needed to fix this problem.

The first motto fixed my first problem with the students, but what was so important about the other motto the Care Bears had, "You should share your feelings as it makes you cozy inside?" Then the problem was fixed when I found out what the second Care Bear Motto meant. The second motto meant that I should always tell my loved ones what's going on around me. I was not telling my loved ones that I needed help and that I held all my troubles inside of me. Telling my mom and dad would let out all my stress and it might resolve my problem with the teasing in my school.

I went to go tell my mom about all the teasing and harassing the students at my school were putting me through. Mom was glad that I told her about the problems in my school and gave me a big hug. I thought that my mom would go into deep depression right about then, but instead she looked rather happy. She felt much better than before and told me that I made the right decision and that she would notify the school as soon as



possible.

The next day in school when I arrived, everyone had changed dramatically. The kids weren't ranting on and on about me being different. They actually wanted to know what autism was. I told the other students about all the misery they put me through. After that, all the students in my class became a lot nicer to me and I still remember the words that the Care Bears said to me that made my life in elementary school so much easier, "Love one another as you would yourself. You should share your feelings as it makes you cozy inside."

The Care Bears show changed my life, and to this very day, I only watch shows that have a meaning in them. I don't really care if the show was designed for three year olds. If the show teaches me lessons and morals that will help me in everyday life, I say the show is good and ignore what other people tell me.

I still have a huge appreciation for the Care Bear shows today and the lessons they taught me. That one show changed my life and helped me understand more about my autism. I can see classmates becoming good like the Care Bears say, "No matter the person, there is always a little bit of good in them." I found out that you should look for the good in everyone and then you'll see that everybody has a place in this world. Nobody in the world is truly evil and everyone can change.

After following the Care Bear's advice, I made a lot of friends in my once hated school and became one of the most well liked students as well. Everyone in the school knew who I was and I became one of the more popular students in the school. I continue to live with my autism with greater respect for it. Also, I am on the look out for more T.V. shows like the Care Bears that can add new morals to my life.

I feel deep down inside God gave me a wonderful gift which is autism. With my autism, I will do wonderful things that will make the world a better place to live in for all.



## A Trained Killer

Donovan Modest

Some might say a person who intentionally kills another person is considered a murderer or an extremely violent person. I usually see things like that on the television or read about it in the newspaper. I never thought that I would be put in a situation where I would be in control of another person's future. What did I expect when I joined the military? I really didn't know, but the thought of taking a person's life never crossed my mind. I was faced with a decision that would affect the way I look at things for the rest of my life.

We trained hard everyday for nine hours and didn't know why. In the military, you do what you are told, and you don't ask questions. After the towers went down on September 11<sup>th</sup>, everyone in my unit was anticipating war. It was so close we could almost taste it. We talked about it a lot, and the new marines sometimes argued who would be the heroes, and who would be the wimps. To me the thought was tiring, and every time I heard the new Marines arguing about it I would haze them. The older Marines in my unit, who were called salt dogs, walked with their heads so high, as if they knew it all and had done it all. That was tiring, too. I was somewhere in the middle; not considered new, but not yet a salt dog.

It was another long training day. A couple of Marines had gotten promoted to Corporals and Sergeants. Usually a day like that ends with "Congratulations" and cheers to the newly promoted Marines and a motivational speech from our Battery 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant, but when our Battalion Sergeant Major came out instead of our 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant, we all knew something was wrong.

The first words that came out his mouth was, "Boys it our time." I knew exactly what he was going to say next. He said, "Boys pack your bags, we're going to the sand box." The new Marine's eyes popped out of their heads with excitement as if Ed McMan from the Publishing Clearing House had offered them a check for a million dollars. The older Marines' faces dropped to the floor as if they were wounded already. I was somewhat confused. My thoughts were scrambling in my head.

We were given orders to touch down in Pakistan and conduct a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO). We packed and it took us about a week to prepare our gear. We arrived in Pakistan on June 05, 2002 and for a month we sat around waiting for further instruction from someone with higher authority. We trained in the middle of the day when temperatures reached over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and sand storms spun like an uncovered blender. We just got there but many of us were ready to go home.

On July 12, it seemed like it was going to be another hot and boring training day when things didn't make much sense, and Marines complained of our purpose over there. A loud and abrupt explosion ripped threw the air. All the Marines walking around immediately dropped to the floor. I was in shock, and the first thing I thought of was the placement of my weapon, even though it was slung over my shoulder. A large truck had broken through our northern perimeter. All the training we had done for months now made sense. I knew exactly what I was supposed to do. The Marines in my section didn't hesitate to do their jobs either. We manned our 50-cals and MK-19s and opened fire on the vehicle immediately. Our bullets tore through the vehicle like scissors piercing a wet paper bag. The whole event lasted for about 5 minutes, but it seemed like an hour. My Staff Sergeant ordered me to take a fire team over to the mangled vehicle to make sure everyone was dead. We slowly walked towards the vehicle thinking to ourselves that no one could have survived. As we got closer, I noticed movement in the cab of the vehicle. A man with a machine gun crawled out. I turned back to my marines to tell them stand clear, but it was too late. As the man raised his weapon, I had gotten two shots off already without hesitation. The man dropped to the floor and died instantly. I just killed someone for the first time and it was the weirdest feeling I had ever had. I was nervous, mad, scared and happy all at the same time. My Marines looked at me like I was a warrior, and I felt like one. I knew at that moment my life would be different and that I had done something that many people would never understand.

Some might say that I'm a murderer. Some might say that I'm a violent person. To the Marine Corps, I am a trained killer who performed extremely well in combat. I was awarded a Combat Action Ribbon and the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. My life will be different now. I've killed a person and do not feel guilty. Now I've earned the right to be called a Salt Dog.



## Terror at Hope Pond

Rachel Montgomery

About a year ago I moved to Groton, Connecticut with my fiancé. He is a submariner and got stationed at the submarine base there. Of course, I went with him. During our short stay, we got addicted to a couple of pass time “sports,” such as bowling in a league, playing video games until the wee hours of the morning, and, once spring came, we really got into fishing and camping. I even bought my own fresh-water fishing pole, which I now have almost no use for living in Hawaii. Anyway, we went fishing all the time. One day in May, I decided to go fishing with a girlfriend of mine from work, Jessica.

Jessica and I met early in the morning at her house. The temperature was still pretty brisk outside, but then again it was only eight o'clock in the morning, and the sun was not at its brightest. I had driven over to her house wearing my typical fishing clothes: a white t-shirt, faded blue shorts with bleach stains, and an old pair of tennis shoes. I may not have even showered that morning. Jessica was decked out similar to me, wearing a plain grey t-shirt, a pair of denim shorts, and a pair of white tennis shoes. We both had our poles ready to go, Jessica even had a tackle box, and I had brought along a cooler full of munchies and drinks.

Before we headed to the bait shop, we decided to swing by our place of employment, a bagel shop known as Manhattan Bagel, to get a breakfast sandwich for the road. After we left there, we went to the bait shop to pick up two containers of gooey, squirmy night crawlers, which are the best thing to fish with, I might add. That fake plastic bait sold at those fancy shops does not work with fish. Fish like living creatures, and worms squirm and move about for a long time underwater after you cast them out on your line and hook. Anyway, after going to the bait shop, we were on our way to a pond known as Hope Pond.

Hope Pond was more like a lake to me because it was so large and seemed to be pretty deep. But, I guess it failed to qualify as a lake in Connecticut. Even though it didn't meet the state's requirements for a lake, it sure was full of plenty of fish. Mostly little fish, nothing too fancy, but I don't fish to keep my catch, I do it just for fun, and I always throw them back. Hope Pond is located off of Route 17, between Groton and Mystic. It wasn't too far away from home, yet it was out there enough to make us feel like we were in the wilderness. I loved fishing there.

We started our little fishing trip at a spot right off the side of the road. We passed over this little wooden bridge and pulled over on the side of the road. From there we could see the pond. It was so beautiful. It looked like glass. There was hardly any wind that day, and it was possibly the hottest day I had experienced living out there.



Spring was in full bloom. Everything was turning green and plush. There were flowers sprouting out of the ground and fresh grass. You could smell the freshness of spring in the air. It was a perfect day for fishing and relaxing in the sun. I thought nothing could ruin my day.

So, we took all our supplies out of the car and began to walk down this slope of rocks that led to the shore of the pond. There really wasn't much of a shoreline. It was mostly rock, then an inch or two of mud and sand, and then the rippling waterline. We had to be very careful not to fall in. Jessica decided to go around the bend to cast her line, and I stayed a few yards away from her and prepared my fishing line and bait. We tried to keep all of our supplies in between us on a steady rock so we could each get to it with little hassle. We baited our hooks and cast our lines far out into the water. After a few minutes without any movement of either of our bobbers, we began chatting about our fiancés, Will and John. Jessica became impatient quickly. She wanted to start catching something and fast. So there she was, reeling her line in and casting it out and continuing this process over and over again, while I just laughed at her.

I told her, "Chill out. This is supposed to be relaxing and you are making me nervous and anxious with all your arm movements."

She just laughed and said, "Well, I want to catch something." And with one swift movement her line ended up in the branches and leaves in a tree above. That made me laugh, but it only frustrated her. She was muttering unpleasant words and finally broke her line, leaving her bobber hanging in the tree. It looked like a bright orange Christmas ornament just hanging in a huge tree.

So, Jessica was at square one again and had to put on a new bobber and hook onto her line along with more bait. To me, baiting my line is the worst thing about fishing. I hated the way the worms squirmed and wiggled between my fingertips as I tore their bodies into many different segments. Then their goo and guts would get all over my fingers. That is why I wore old, dingy clothes while fishing, so I could wipe my fingers off after I baited my hook.

Jessica took a few minutes to bait her line she muttered little lines of frustration such as, "This darn thing won't go on..." and "Tying fishing knots is not easy or fun."

Finally, she got her new bobber, weight, and hook all tied to her line and baited her hook. I noticed she made the same disgusted face I did when I baited my hook. It is definitely not the highlight of fishing. The next time she tossed her line into the water, she kept it closer to the shore and almost immediately caught a fish. It was so exciting to



finally have some luck. Jessica and I were impatient; we wanted to catch fish all day, not just sit around a smelly pond. I hate how ponds always have that fishy smell. They reek of old fish, duck waste, and dirt. There isn't anything fresh about freshwater fishing.

Jessica continued to have luck with the fishing. I tried to adopt her technique and throw my line closer to the shore too, but all that got me was a tangled line with moss and weeds stuck to my hook. I then said to Jessica, "You know, there are a lot of different places along this pond that we could fish. And it is getting pretty hot. I wouldn't mind fishing with my feet in the water, and I know a perfect spot to do it."

Jessica agreed and we packed our supplies up and headed back up the rocks to the car. We drove down the road for about a mile, and I turned right onto a boat ramp. We continued down the hill, and at the bottom, there was an open area where we could park the car, set up some lawn chairs and fish. This was my favorite spot at Hope Pond, not only because no one was ever there, but also it was perfectly calm and there were always tons of places to cast my line out. I was always lucky when I fished there. Once, again, we got out our fishing poles and tossed our lines into the water. We were both getting hot, since the sun was blazing out, even though it was only about eleven in the morning.

Jessica suggested we wade in the water as we fished. We both took off our shoes and socks and slowly inched into the water about shin deep. It was amazing how much that cooled us off. It also helped us to see where the fish were lingering in the water. I was so content fishing like this.

I said to Jessica, "This is the perfect way to fish, bright sunny day, feet in the water, a perfect view of where the fish are . . ."

In the middle of my sentence a man calls out, "Had any luck?!" We both turn around, surprised that anyone was near us. We looked back up the hill behind us to see a medium-built man in his late forties to early fifties with dark denim jeans, boots, t-shirt and hat on. He looked like he was trying to find a good place to fish and seemed to be pretty friendly.

Jessica called back to him, "We've had some luck at another spot, but just got to this one, so we don't know if it is any good yet."

He continued our little shout fest by asking what we had caught. I continued to shout back in forth with him and Jessica kept watching her line.

The next thing I knew, Jessica, in a shaky voice, said, "Rachel, get out of the

water and slowly.”

So, without a question I started to inch backwards out of the water, keeping an eye behind me. Then, all of a sudden a frightened chill came over me, and I started to panic and run out of the water.

I turned to Jessica and then back at the water where I had been and asked her, “What?!”

Before she even had a chance to answer me, I saw the reason. There was a snake, a Water Moccasin, in the water, headed straight for where I was standing. It had an elongated dark brown body that blended in almost perfectly with the water of the pond. It glided across the water with its head perked up as if it was ready to attack the first thing that got in its way. Unfortunately for me, I was the first thing it saw. When Jessica first noticed it, it had been only a few feet away from me. I made eye contact with its dark cold eyes and felt my face fall and then freeze in a petrified position. A sense of dread came over my body and I am surprised I didn’t freeze up right there in the water.

The man saw my expression and called out, “What’s wrong?”

We yelled to him, “There is a snake in the water, and it is really close to us!”

He replied, “Throw rocks and pebbles at it to scare it away. I am sure it will leave if you do that.”

This snake was not easily scared though. It wanted to stay right where it was and wanted us to leave. That is exactly what we did. In a scuttle we packed our supplies with one eye on what we were doing and the other eye on that snake. It was like it was just watching us, knowing it had conquered us. We were concentrating on the snake so much we almost forgot our lawn chairs. Once we got everything together we drove off. I know I was panicked and scared because I was so taken by surprise. The last thought in my mind was of a snake scaring us out of my favorite fishing spot.

After Jessica and I left that spot; we called it a day and headed back home. Weeks later, John my fiancé asked me, “Hey, do you want to go fishing with the guys and me this afternoon?”

At first I got excited, but then that dreadful feeling came over me, and I asked, “What pond are you going to?”

He responded with the answer I so did not want to hear: “Hope Pond.”



I refused by saying, "I never want to go back there again. That snake wanted to eat me, and I will never get near it again."

It is a shame that my fear could ruin such a nice day, but it did. It was an unexpected turn of events, but that is usually the way things go.

## It's too Late Now

Thanh-Xuan Nguyen

Before my uncle died, I did the most ignorant thing ever; I did not tell him how much I loved him and how thankful I was for having him in my life. I wanted to, but I didn't and now it's too late because there is no second chance when it comes to someone's death.

When my uncle was alive, I used to live with him and his two children, who were around the same age as me. I stayed with them because my parents were living in Alabama, and I wanted to live in Hawaii. My uncle had to go through a lot of trouble just to get guardianship permission so that I could stay with him and be able to go to school in Hawaii. He took me into his home and showed me as much love as he did for his own children. I remember the many nights when we would all sit together and talk about what my cousins and I wanted to do when we grew up. My uncle would sit and listen very patiently and give us thoughtful advice, which helped me so much. Those happy moments felt so heart warming like I was living in the most peaceful world where problems never existed.

Everyday when I came home from school, I would always smell my uncle's sweet, juicy meals spicing up in the kitchen. My uncle was the best cook ever, and his food always tasted so wonderful, like drops of heaven that melt in the mouth.

He also had the best singing voice I had ever known. Whenever there was an event at church or small Vietnamese concerts, he would always be asked to sing for them. At home he always sang for his children and me with his karaoke machine, and we really admired his soft, sweet, and well-controlled voice. The songs that warmed up our hearts the most were, "Unchained Melody" and "How Can I Tell Her."

One day after school, my uncle sat my cousins and me down. He said there was something he had to announce. I remember my heart beating very unsteadily. There was a stinging pain in my stomach because his sad brown eyes told me that it wasn't a very pleasant announcement he was about to make. My feelings were right. He said that he had gone to the doctor that day and the result from his x-ray exam was that he was in the last stage of Colon Cancer. The cancer was incurable because it was discovered too late. I remembered the word "incurable" ringing annoyingly in my head a million times while my uncle went on and on about what might happen to him later.

That night, I tossed and turned in my bed with the word "incurable" constantly ringing in my head. That word alone was more powerful than any word I had ever known because to me it meant "death." It meant that there was nothing anybody could do to help; even perhaps God wasn't able to help either.



Though the ringing of the word still annoyed me, what bothered me the most that night was recalling my reaction to my uncle's terrible announcement. I had shown no reaction at all but acted just like a heartless fool who cared about nothing in the world. That was not how I really felt inside. My heart ached horribly, like ants eating through the flesh, and I felt cold chills running down my spine with the thought of losing him soon. I didn't show it at the moment because I was speechless. My mouth was so tightly shut, that it was as if it would take a drill to open it. I wanted so badly to speak up and say something comforting too him instead of just sitting there staring at the floor. That thought kept me up all night, so I told myself that the next time I would definitely tell him exactly how I felt.

Soon after, my uncle was hospitalized and learned that he only had a few months to live. I came to the hospital almost every night to visit him but had no chance to speak with him privately because his family members were always there with him. Finally, one day, I was alone with him, and he asked me to take a walk with him in the hallway near his room because he was very weak and wasn't able to go very far. I remembered us walking side by side in the cold, narrow hallway in silence. I was telling myself, "This is your chance, go for it. Tell him how you feel and say all your thanks to him."

Somehow I didn't, but my uncle did try to make conversation with me. He asked me about my school and my parents, but he didn't talk very much because he was so restless and was in too much pain to talk. Then it was time for him to go back to his room. I still didn't have the courage to open my tightly sealed mouth to say anything to him besides, "Bye uncle, take care." That was so lame, and what a coward I was.

That incident was the last chance I had with my uncle. Soon after that, he started to lose his memory very quickly and had totally forgotten who I was. He suddenly lost a whole lot of weight and seemed to age twenty years in a month. Though he looked old, he was like an innocent child because he couldn't talk anymore and only made little whiny sounds when he was uncomfortable. I knew that he wasn't able to understand anything that anyone said to him anymore, but somehow I was thinking that as long as he was still alive, then I still had some chance to tell him how much I loved and cared about him.

One day at my work place, I got an unexpected call from my cousin telling me that I should come over right away because he thought something was very wrong with my uncle. I ran out of work immediately and pushed on the gas pedal of my car as hard as I could like a crazy maniac on the freeway, and I raced straight to his house only to find out that my uncle was gone. He was lying on the couch with over a dozen people



surrounding him, but I knew he was gone before I could see his face because everybody was crying.

That was the moment I realized it was really over. I had taken all the chances I had for granted, and my chance was surely over at that point. I felt like dying, I hated myself so much and felt like the biggest loser on earth who didn't deserve to live because I couldn't even tell him how much I loved him. I felt streams of hot, steamy tears racing down my face like a million tadpoles running a marathon. Although there were weeping people surrounding him, I didn't care. I went straight over and kneeled down right next to his tiny, lifeless body. I stared at his pale white face, which looked so peaceful as if he were only sleeping. I kneeled there next to him with tears still rushing down my restless face, and I cried out everything that I had hidden inside me all those times. I told him how much I loved him and how scared I was of losing him. I knew he couldn't hear me, and it was already too late, but it all just came out. It wasn't hard at all, it was actually so easy to say it. What help did it do though? It was too late.

When I came home that night, I stayed up thinking about why I had to hold all that inside me for so long and why I dreaded it when it was so easy and simple to tell him I love him. When my uncle was still alive, I could have just told him, "I love you so much uncle, I'm so glad I could live with you. You're a wonderful person and thank you so much for all the things you've done for me." Now, who wouldn't want to hear that? If someone had said that to me, of course, I would be happy to hear something sweet and sincere like that. Now that my uncle's gone, he will never be able to know how much I appreciate his help. Before he lost his memory, his last thought of me was probably about how rude and heartless his niece was. He probably thought that I didn't even have the heart to appreciate a single thing he had done for me because I had said nothing to him.

From that day on, I swore to myself that I would never fail to let out my feelings about something special, especially if it was letting my loved ones know how much I loved them or how much I cared. It might be too late if we try to hold it in, and there might not be a second chance.

I held in my feelings for too long and because of that, my uncle never found out how much I love him. Through this I have learned to speak up about my feelings, and it has made me a better and happier person. Now it feels so wonderful to be able to tell important people in my life how much I love them, and I know that makes them feel good and appreciated, too.



## **Run Away**

**Tran Nguyen**

After a long, bloody war between the North and South, the North Vietnamese finally took over the South and united the country under a communist government in 1975. Three years later, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was struggling with terrible economic pressure and financial problems. My family had taken for the worst since my parents decided to move out of my grandmother's house in Saigon City to a suburban neighborhood called Nha Be after an inflamed argument. In addition, my father was detained in a labor camp that was used extensively to punish South Vietnamese soldiers.

The house in Nha Be that we moved in was in fact an abandoned house. The previous owner had escaped the country right before the communist took over Saigon city. My mother was tremendously stressed since she did not get much help from her husband or her mother-in-law.

In the end, my mother would take her frustrations out at her children. She got upset easily and would hit her kids for no reason. At school one day, I was surprised to see my little brother, Loc, show up at my classroom. He had come to say goodbye to me. He wanted to run away from home. He intended to go to my grandmother's house.

My family's new place was far away from Saigon. I did not know how many miles away but with my understanding, I knew it would take at least two to three hours on the bus. My brother was only ten. How could he know where to catch the bus or which way to go? I worried for him and without hesitating; I flew out of school to follow my little brother.

I felt responsible for him, even though we were only two years apart. After one week at my grandmother's place and with no words from our mother, my brother and I began to get bored. One afternoon, my brother told me that we should go to see a nephew of my grandmother. My grandmother had once taken my brother to this man's house. I had no idea where it was on earth, but my brother firmly assured me that he knew exactly how to get there.

It was still dark when grandmother woke us up to get ready. She gave us some money for transportation and a small gift for her nephew. Our travel supplies were simple. I remember a blue plastic carry bag about the size of a suitcase that my grandmother handed to me. Inside that bag was one liter of diesel, the small gift from my grandmother, and a three-level, metal lunch



container. We walked silently in the early dawn for half an hour to the bus station. My grandmother reminded us to behave when we got to her nephew's house. She had not mentioned one word about how long our trip would be or what to do next. She believed that we would get there in peace.

By noon, we reached a Y intersection that people called Mr. Dong. From this place, we got off the bus to transfer to the traditional Vietnamese taxi called *lambretta* which had only ten seats for passengers. Somehow its driver kept adding more and more people. I was stacked all the way at the end with my little brother. People's faces looked tired, strange and emotionless. I guessed these people must have hard lives. Their skins were dark; wrinkles spread all over their faces and hands. Nobody talked. The only sounds I heard were the engine of the vehicle and the coughing of an old lady carrying an overweight item on her fragile body. I could smell the odors of the lady sitting right in front of me. She pretended to sleep with her eyes closed and rocked her rigid body along with the motion of the vehicle. I felt a little nauseated from the odors and from the exhaust fumes of the diesel from the vehicle. My body was stiff since I had to sit up tight for more than eight hours drive.

Finally, one by one people began to get out of the *lambretta*, my brother and I were the only ones left. I heard the driver mumbling something and the next thing I knew, the vehicle had come to a full stop. We had to get off because this would be the last stop, the vehicle would turn around and go back to its station. I was extremely delighted to step down after hours of sitting in one place. My brother's face seemed to lighten up and there was a little smile on it. We both were happy to get off. However, our "happily-ever-after" ending was not as the same as the folk tales. The day was still bright but our mood was darkening because there was nothing in front of us except for a single road that ran further and further until it disappeared behind a large hill. I turned around and looked. There were no houses, no people and not even a friendly bird. I did not know what to do. I asked Loc to remember how he got to my grandmother's nephew on his last trip. His answer gave me goose bump. "Sister, don't worry," my brother said, "the nephew's house is just at the end of the road which we can not see because of that big hill".

We started walking own the road on a day that was humid and hot, one hour after another. This road seemed to have no ending. It disappeared and reappeared from valley to hill. Having grown up in a crowded Saigon city of southern lowland which was filled with vehicles and people, I felt this quiet highland was very unfamiliar and sparse. There were about only two or three



houses in three miles distance. I began to panic since the day was growing shorter and shorter. We had no food or water. I felt little frustrated to carry the plastic bag with the heavy metal container. I was tired and I needed to rest. My poor little brother, he must have been tired too but he did not complain. I looked at him like I had never looked at him before. His child-face was held high and looking straight. Maybe he felt guilty for taking me to such a place like this. We walked in silence, side by side. The only sound that existed was our footsteps. Click. Click.

I was nervous and little shaking when we passed by a large graveyard. Darkness began to creep over the sky. Here I found no life but death, no noise but silence. All I could think of was the wandering souls of the dead after dusk. Where would we stay for the night? And what would happen if we were lost? Oh, thank God. There was a single, lonely house on the side of the road. We would be safe. We could rest. As we walked inside the house, I saw a middle age woman on the floor. She was weaving some kind of leaves to form a mat. She was alone. After a formal greeting, I asked her if she knew the location where my grandmother's cousin lived. My question had a tremendous effect on her because her eyes opened wide and her jaw dropped. Finally, she spoke such an impeccable sentence that I would never forget. "Children, where were your parents? Didn't you know that you were at the northeast of the central highlands? You are thousand miles away from the place you wanted to go. Maybe you should stay here and live with me." I did not wait for her to say another word. I took my brother's hand and ran out the door. Together, we ran away.

## America's Secret

Elika Otoy

The Second World War took place in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and included many countries. Germany, Italy, Japan, France, China, and the United States are some of the nations that fought in this gruesome war; people all over the world suffered. My grandfather, Jitsuo Nakano, was one of the unfortunate Japanese Americans to be taken from their homes and families and placed in American run "internment camps."

The Second World War was already in progress when Japanese and American relations took a turn for the worst in September 1940. Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, an alliance with Germany and Italy that secured their interest in defending one another (Cooper 03). After this alliance was formed, things began to fall apart. Against the demands of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Japan invaded Northern and Southern Indochina. In response, Roosevelt cut off all export of oil to Japan, reducing their supply by nearly 90% (McKay et al. 1047). This denial of oil, among other matters, prompted the Japanese to take action against the United States, who at the time, was not an active war participant (1047). On December 7, 1941, a few minutes before 8:00 a.m., the Japanese waged a surprise attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii (Maddox 93). My grandfather, who was at home at the time, remembers seeing the planes coming in. This was the beginning of a very different life for my grandpa.

Within the United States a suspicion, and for some, a hatred of Japanese Americans developed; America questioned their loyalty. The Japanese Americans were victims of propaganda and harassment by many Americans convinced that they were spies for the Japanese government abroad (Cooper 04).

John L. Dewit, an Army general for wartime security on the West Coast stated, "A Jap's a Jap. They are a dangerous element. There is no way to determine their loyalty...It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen; theoretically he is still a Japanese and you can't change him." (Cooper 06)

The general American population began to develop a hatred for all Japanese regardless of citizenship. My family was among those who felt the hatred.

According to my uncle William Nakano, Executive Order 9066 which was issued by President Roosevelt in February 1942, gave the military authority to remove from the West Coast, all Japanese who posed a threat to United States intelligence. Nearly all 112,353 Japanese people living on the West Coasts of California, Washington, and Oregon were taken from their homes and put into American internment camps (Cooper 28). In Hawaii, the vast majority of the population was Japanese, so they could not remove all due to the potential effects on the economy, thus only a few of the Japanese



Americans considered a “threat” were removed (Nakano).

My great grandfather Minoru was among the first to go. He was arrested in February 1942 in Hawaii and held by immigration authorities at the Sand Island Quarantine station prior to being sent to a prisoner of war camp in Lordsburg, New Mexico. According to family history, Minoru was active in the Japanese American community in Honolulu. He was a building contractor and built the Waiālae Japanese School in Hawaii. In November 1942 my grandfather Jitsuo, who was 17, along with his pregnant mother and two brothers Bert and James, were sent to another camp in Jerome, Arkansas. My grandfather's youngest sister Akemi was born in the Jerome camp. His other siblings William, Henry and Sumi were in Japan at the time and were forced to remain there until after the war. My grandfather was forced to leave high school in his last year. He would never receive a high school diploma.

It wasn't until 1944 that my great grandfather would reunite with his family in Jerome. In July of 1944 the Jerome camp closed and the entire family was relocated to the Tule Lake internment camp in California. This camp was known to house radical pro-Japan internees. In 1945 the relocation authorities were attempting to distinguish between the loyal and disloyal Japanese Americans. They were required to sign a loyalty statement that read, “I will renounce my allegiance to the Emperor of Japan. Yes or No” and “I will pledge allegiance to the United States of America. Yes or No.” My grandfather said “No” to both statements in protest against the trampling of his civil rights and in turn was sent with about 60 other protesters to a camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Upon arrival in Santa Fe, my grandfather and the rest of his fellow protesters were told that their citizenships had been revoked. In the winter of 1945, my grandfather was deported to Japan.

My grandfather found his siblings that he had not seen since 1942. They were living in a one room farmhouse. As the oldest son in Japan, my grandfather began to work to support his siblings and eventually sent them to live with his father in Hawaii. In August 1946, one year after her release, my great grandmother passed away. She had lived in the camps for three years separated from her children and husband.

The American government restored my grandfather's citizenship in 1952 when they declared the revocation of citizenship unconstitutional. By this time, my grandfather had already started a family in Japan. They moved to Hawaii in 1972.

Regardless of the obstacles life threw at my grandpa, he always persevered. Without a college education, my grandfather raised his youngest brother and sister, as well as three girls of his own. He became a successful real estate agent and an active

volunteer within the Japanese American community in Honolulu. My grandfather passed away on January 2, 2003. There were over 200 people at his funeral; many were friends from the days at the internment camps.

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## Grandpa Elika Otoya

I had to get that Starbucks. I knew I was late to the hospital to spend the day with my sassy grandpa. My family decided we should take turns watching him in case he decided to get up and go home again. I just wanted that Starbucks. Arriving at the hospital about thirty minutes later than I could have, I found the doctors and nurses wheeling my unconscious grandpa out of his room. The doctor was glad a family member was present, and asked me to sign a release that would allow him to operate on my grandpa. He explained to me that the risk for the operation was very high, and he didn't think my grandpa would wake from his state. I called my mother.

Within an hour almost every family member on the island was at the hospital. We took up the entire ICU waiting room. And every one of them wanted to ask me what happened. "How did Grandpa become unconscious? Did he fall? What did the doctor and nurses tell you?" I kept wishing I could have had that extra thirty minutes. What did happen to Grandpa? The doctor who performed the operation was not hopeful, and my grandpa remained in a coma on life support. Nobody blamed me but myself. My grandmother and her daughters had to make a decision. They could either keep him on life support in hopes he would come around, or take him off life support and let him slowly starve to death feeling nothing but the morphine. I couldn't believe this was happening. My grandpa stated in his will that he wanted to die if he was ever in a situation where his quality of life was challenged. We decided to let him die without a dozen machines hooked up to him. My mother fought to get him a room at the St. Francis Hospice in Nuuanu.

My grandpa shared a room with a gentleman named Al, who was dying of cancer. He was a nice man and he had a lot of family that came and visited with him often. Sometimes I could hear Al whimpering. My mother would ask the nurse to come in and help, but there was nothing she could do. The room was dark with shiny Christmas decorations all around. I remember one that read, "Happy New Year." I wondered if my grandpa would make it to the New Year. There was a television set above his bed, and two comfortable chairs for his guests. He stayed with Al for about two weeks. It had been raining for what seemed months, and on January 2, 2004 the rain was coming down harder than I'd ever seen it. The rain pounded on the walls of my house like it was alive and trying to get in. I lay under my covers wondering how my mother was, and then the phone rang.

The voice was deep and somber, it was my mother. It was time to say goodbye to Grandpa. When I got to the hospice Grandpa was no longer with Al. He was alone with my family seated and standing around him; nobody smiled. I sat by my mother, who hugged me, her eyes asking me if I was all right. I took her hand and squeezed it. As I

glanced around the room I noticed most of my family was crying. Why had I not cried yet? We spent about 4 hours sitting with him as his breathing was getting slower and slower. I watched my strong and witty grandpa slowly die. A once proud man, now lying before the family he created--dying. This was not my grandpa. And yet still, no tears. Everyone else was crying except me. What was wrong with me?

My grandma moved over to sit on his bed. She took his hand and said, "I love you" and kissed him goodbye. And it was then that I began to cry. I couldn't stop crying, not for my grandpa, but for my grandma. She was losing her best friend and husband of 55 years. I cried for love. A love as special as my grandparent's love for each other, so beautiful and now so painful. His last breath was taken, and at last he was at rest. We were all somehow at rest. We said goodbye.

My family never found out what really happened to Grandpa. We will never know, and I will live with my decisions. Would it have made a difference if I had made it to the hospital thirty minutes sooner?



## Because It s You, Mom Man Wa Shing

I knew it would be painful, but I never thought it would hurt that much. According to all the movies I watched, a loud sharp *eeeh* marked the beginning of an accident. Then the person flip-flopped in the air, completely out of control. Bones split in multiple directions, collapsing due to the spontaneous force. Blood runs wild, like a thousand horses striving to live, marking its territory with scarlet. Eventually, broken bones would heal, but there were more than just bones broken, there was something else that would never heal.

For more than two years, I trusted that crosswalk, right in front of Roosevelt High School, to shield me as I safely walked across to the bus stop. It lay across the four lane street, where cars big and small, ran furiously left and right. It fulfilled its duty of securing people across the street as usual. And without any doubt, I put my life in its hand. But it betrayed me.

The school bell rang. Students rushed out from every single exit of the school and scattered away from Roosevelt, heading home. I was crossing the street with my friend. I was on her left, and she was on my right. We were angled inward a little to allow conversation as we crossed. We were walking in unison. The white car on the first lane chivalrously allowed us through. As we continued on our journey, the red car on the second lane crushed the peace, like a huge boulder smashing a tiny carnation, and trapping the world in slow motion. The red car was only five millimeters away from my leg. I still didn't have any sense of danger and thought: Wow! The driver was so talented! He stopped just in time! Without offering me any seconds to spell out my thought, I was down on the ground in pain. And time paused.

Soundless, motionless, I was still lying on the ground; not a second clicked. My left leg seemed to have experienced power failure, numbed, then quickly resumed with a backup battery. On the back of my head, a hill was constructed. And pain in my tailbone spread, doubled, expanded, causing all positions to be uncomfortable. Then everything resumed in ultra speed with the car backing up from me, multiple voices jumping on me, numerous hands grabbing me back on the sidewalk. My mind was stiff like rocks. I didn't know what happened, what would happen, and what was supposed to happen. I just sat there.

Then the police came, my third sister came, and the ambulance came. I told them the same story one after another. Somehow things were settled, and my sister rode the ambulance with me. On my way, the healthcare worker examined my injuries: leg injury, where I was struck by the car, head injury, where I slammed the car as gravity pulled me,

and butt injury, where I crashed against the earth. With the ambulance's speed, I was in the ER of Queen's in no time.

I stared at the ceiling, gazed at the lights as each one shot over my head until I got dizzy and turned to the side. One, two, three and I was lifted over to another bed. Then the doctors and nurses did their job as Mom arrived with my first sister.

From my position, Mom appeared taller. Normally I had to look down to meet her eyes, but instead, I inclined, like I was pulled back to the age of ten. She was like an angel with the ceiling lights shining above her head. Every inch of my muscles relaxed. I told them the same story again. But instead of getting a loved reaction, she scolded me, scolded me for being hit as if I had wanted it to happen, scolded me for being hit by a poor person, who didn't even have car insurance, and scolded me for creating trouble out of nowhere again. Her words were like arrows, thousands of arrows shooting through my heart, again and again. It was so painful that it overruled the other injuries. I felt nothing else, but my heartbeats. Each beat was associated with the stabbing of Mom's arrows. She spat out seven years of struggle in Hawaii, constant worries for the five of us, everyday tiredness from work, eight hours a day, and six days a week, and all the other mess we caused. The pain built in sorrow. I could respond only with tears, no words. The arrows dug deeper and deeper, and left a hole in my heart forever. Everyone else assumed that I was scared, because they didn't understand what Mom said at all.

Several hours later, when I completed all the check-ups, I finally reunited with my friend and solved some mysteries. She got struck by me as I was struck by the car. She sat in the front seat of the ambulance with us to the hospital. And when it was only us, I recited my mother's words with watery eyes, ready to spill out tears any moment. I added, It's painful, because it's from her. I wanted her to care, more. My friend's response shrank my heart. She said, My mom didn't even come. We just talked over the phone. I gave her a bitter smile. It turned out that I was not the only victim. I could see the hole in her heart.

The accident alone wasn't painful. It was you, Mom, you made it painful.



## A Radical Freedom Blanket

Hillary Stratton

As we crept along the entrance to the desert sunshine, we could see him standing tall, looking over the vast community made of desert sand and mountains. My parents are artists, and they have always been able to paint me a picture through their words on what this place looks like. But as our bus crawled along the dry desert path, not a picture, not a word, not a sound could describe the feeling I had when I saw, laying out in front of my eyes, this city that I would be staying in for the next full 7 days. This city full of sin. No, Not Vegas, but somewhere deeper in the heart of Nevada- Black Rock City. The event? Burning Man.

This year was the first year my parents let me trail with them in my uncle's custom bus that transported our family and friends to this miraculous event. Truly the only way to really understand what Burning man is, is to participate in the event. My parents grew up as hippies, met at Woodstock in '69, and have been apart of this event since '89 when it took place at Baker Beach in San Francisco. Which was only three years after it was created by Larry Harvey and Jerry James ([www.Burningman.com/whatisburningman/](http://www.Burningman.com/whatisburningman/)). Because of the prevalence of drugs and large consumption's of alcohol my parents sheltered me from Burning Man until I was of age to understand the importance and talent that goes on during it. I could feel my eyes tearing with anticipation as we drove through the Black Rock desert where we would plant our bus for a week, and use old, unoled bikes to transport ourselves around for the duration of our stay.

The desert is largely empty, full of nothingness (no trees, no plants, no grass), except for the mountains surrounding it. It is actually a playa- a dried lake bed- which is rated as the second flattest and largest place in the United States measuring 400 square miles of pure flat range area ([www.Burningman.com/whatisburningman/](http://www.Burningman.com/whatisburningman/)). By the end of my stay at Burning Man this desert had become my oasis of peace and sanity.

The event Burning Man has now evolved into a bustling city of 25,000+ people who make the journey out to the Black Rock Desert for one week out of the year to be part of an experimental community which challenges everyone to express themselves daily and to survive on themselves to a point that is not encountered in daily life ([www.Burningman.com/whatisburningman/](http://www.Burningman.com/whatisburningman/)). The only rule here is that there are no rules, no boundaries. Art plays a major part of this community, and it is unavoidable. Each year a different theme is given for the community and this focus ties together all

the pieces of artwork that are intensively made by participants hands. People find all different ways to make this theme come alive, whether it is through body art, a large art installation, a theme camp, costumes, or any other medium that one can think of.

Being here you do not have to worry about being the weirdest person you know. I never failed to find someone who had come up with some piece of artwork or thought that I had never considered. You are here, among this community to experience, create, celebrate life, and to survive amongst the heat that filters into your veins every moment that the sun is drawn into the picture. The art creations here are full of life and passion. I rode my bike around everyday and became emotionally attached to the sight of the beauty that was ignited by these benevolent creations. Around me every second were people who were "high" off the life that took place here, they were not in need of alcohol or other substances. As many say, "Burning man is my own drug." There were spiritual dances where nakedness and fire came together to create an ecstatic image one could think was unreal. And during the evening sunsets, I would ride my bike into the expanse of openness, with the hot breeze sucking out the moisture of my thin lips, and only a coral sky set out in front of me. Photographers wait all day long to capture the sight of the creations set into a background that most people will never experience in their lives. Everything that takes place here is recorded only in pictures and words. No media or vending is allowed. Sharing is the only thing allowed.

The last night in this make believe city in the desert all participants came together to watch the legendary structure of a tall blue-lighted man capture flames that soar to imaginary heights into the night sky. Watching the man burn while everyone is in a perfectly formed circle around him brings a new experience to everyone's trip here. It is said to be an epiphany, completely on an individual basis. You are surrounded by a countless amount of talented people and at this moment of seeing this formation of a human body ignited, I felt an epiphany of new found freedom covering my body as a blanket of my new personality. That blanket has never been lifted off of my old cold skin. And as I look back at the photographs, there we are, dancing in the desert, blowing up in the sunshine, with a freedom of personality that I have never seen in anyone who participates in the real world.



## The Run of My Life

AJ Taumua

It was 0515 hours on a January weekend. My friend, Fatu and I arrived home late from partying at a friend's house. We were expected to report for duty before 0600 hours. Since the Army Reserve center (ARC) was thirty minutes away, we had to hustle. As soon as we went outside, the cool atmosphere almost froze our bodies in place. We could hardly move around and had difficulty breathing. Our fingers were numb; we had mucus running out of our noses. The feeling of cooling down before the break of dawn was a nightmare. It felt as if thousands of long, tiny needles were poking into our skins rapidly. We struggled as hard as we could to make our way to Fatu's white Dodge pickup truck. The moment we settled in, we began to shiver. We never rushed for duty on weekends, but we felt that day might be different than the rest. Ironically, that morning was just the beginning of the events that soon changed my life.

We finally arrived at ARC in Spokane, Washington, at 0545 hours. We were just in time for our morning Physical Training (PT) exercise. We weren't feeling well because we drank too much alcohol the previous evening. We decided to act sober, knowing that if anyone found out about our drunken condition, we'd be in serious trouble. Moments later, our commander ordered the company for a 2 mile run, which usually lasts a bout 15 minutes or so.

"It's too early for a long distance run!" Fatu said, with much surprise.

"Yeah, can't we just do some push-ups in place or something?" I asked. I added, "I'm in no mood for running right now."

Fatu and I never complained about our company's physical activities and were never in a drunken condition before PT. I ignored the signs of us having a bad day and started stretching for the run. I wondered if I could have been wrong for not paying attention to these signs.

By 0600 hours, the company formed up and was briefed on our running routes for the morning. Our commanders then marched us out to the running tracks when, all of a sudden, I heard a cracking sound from my lower back. It sounded like someone had stepped on a soda can. I immediately assumed that it meant nothing and continued along with the group. I never gave much thought that to a sound like that could mean serious trouble.

When we got to the running tracks, we formed up again. Fatu and I were near the rear of the formation because we figured that it might motivate us to keep up with the

group. Fatu and I weren't born runners so keeping up with the others was something we challenged ourselves to do in every run. As soon as our commander shouted, "Double time! March!" we started off at a slow pace. Everyone had fun as we sang cadences and watched people cheer for us. I mainly concentrated on staying with the group and tried not to fall behind. I felt like we were running forever as we got closer to the one mile mark. We finally reached it. We swirled around and headed back to the ARC. I felt excited knowing that, soon after the run, I'd be on duty for a few hours before heading home. I focused too much on what I was doing after the run that I soon became careless. I began to trip over sharp rocks and step in big puddles of water.

"What more could go wrong?" I asked myself.

Suddenly, my lower back made the same cracking sound, but this time it was louder. I felt a horrible pain arising from my spine and my legs began to feel heavy and numb. I became confused and tired so I slowed down and fell out of formation. The rest of the company continued to the Arc and encouraged me not to give up. I wasn't giving up. The pain in my back got worse whenever I decided to walk, so I kept running at a slow pace. After a while it seemed like I was the only running until I heard a voice shouting my name from behind.

"Hey, AJ, are you okay?" Fatu shouted breathlessly. He eventually caught up and was now running beside me. I replied with pain in my eyes, "I don't know Fatu. My back hurts so much."

Fatu slowed down and assisted me back to the reserve center. He asked questions about my back and I told him what I assumed had happened. He always looked out for me whenever I needed help. Sometimes, when I wanted to be left alone, he would always be there to offer guidance and wisdom. Fatu was the brother I never had and always wanted.

As soon as we got to the ARC, I was immediately rushed to a nearby military hospital and received excellent care. After my x-ray examination, I was released and told that my results would be reported to my commanders. My doctor described what happened to my back and explained the cause of my injury. It seemed that my one of my spinal plates was pinching the nerves in my back whenever I took a step. My doctor further explained that it was caused by lifting heavy objects without the use of my legs, which I had a habit of doing. I was assured that everything would be fine and all I needed now was some rest.

Meanwhile, our company received word of a deployment to Iraq. We were



selected for that year's rotation and we took the call immediately. Fatu and I talked about going out of the country to serve in Iraq because we had heard great stories from our friends who had been there and done that. We always imagined ourselves as heroes coming home from a long fought war. We also imagined our loved ones, including thousands of people, greeting us as we stepped out of huge battle ships or fighter aircrafts. At that moment, I felt ready to serve my country with pride and honor. I failed to realize that the day wasn't over. This was a day when bad news would slap me in the face more than twice.

Within minutes, I was ordered to report to my commander's office to discuss my injury status. He told me that he had reviewed my doctor's examinations and came to a conclusion. Before he could say anything, he was sweating constantly as if he was afraid to tell me something. He leaned forward and backward on his big black leather chair like a kid who had become nervous before a school play. After a few hesitations, he stood up and walked toward me with disappointment in his eyes and said softly, "Sorry son, we can't allow you to be deployed with us due to your injuries."

My heart came to a complete stop. My world became smaller and I felt rejected from such an adventurous opportunity. I knew that I was not getting deployed for a just reason, but I felt terrible for not being able to fight alongside my friends, mostly Fatu.

After that day, Fatu and I took separate paths in life. He was heading to a world of hatred and despair while I found myself with life and prosperity. I realized that everything happens for a reason and there are some things in life that we cannot change. I also learned to never avoid signs because, sooner or later, it will change your life, whether in a good or bad way. I'll never forget that day's run....the run of my life.

## The Scar

Juliet Tierney

I was born in a chaotic period in 1968. China was in the throes of a decade long, plague-like affliction called the "Cultural Revolution." The fuse of the campaign was lit by playwright Wu Han whose play had angered Mao Zedong, chairman of Chinese Communist Party. The play, however, received a far different and more positive reaction from the country's scholars and intellectuals. As ruler of China, Mao was accustomed to having people agree with him. Those in disagreement were like dust in his eyes or a thorn in his skin, and he wanted them removed. The scholars, however, were well known and respected people, so Mao had to hatch a scheme that would snare the scholars. Thus, he used innocent students and workers to foment the infamous "Cultural Revolution" and seized this opportunity to persecute intellectuals from various walks of life.

The Cultural Revolution formally began in 1966. Mao and his wife Jiang organized the students into groups called the "Red Guards" and used them to spread their ideology and theory of society. The campaign climaxed in 1968 when, like a flame of gasoline fire, it swept rapidly across the whole country. The target of this movement was high ranking officials and intellectuals. The relationship between teacher and student, husband and wife, parents and children suddenly changed overnight. Democracy and law broke down; human rights were violated; and the judiciary was completely destroyed. The red guards could search anyone's house in the middle of the night, break everything they chose, and arrest anyone they wanted. Tens of millions of families were destroyed. Because my parents belonged to a group of intellectuals, our family suffered greatly.

During the Cultural Revolution, numerous marriages were destroyed because husbands were mistakenly treated as "counter-revolutionaries." My parents didn't divorce, but my mother paid a high price in her marriage to my father. When my mother married my father, he already had four children from a previous marriage that had been arranged by his parents to a young girl from the countryside when he was just eighteen. As an educated man, he was unhappy with the prospect of marrying an illiterate woman. However, he could not defy his parents in this matter. Eventually, he moved the family to Changsha, found a job, and decided to end his unhappy marriage. His wife fought back and left three children with my father, keeping just her oldest daughter with her. She believed that no one would marry a man with three young children.

My father was the only child in a privileged family. He never did any housework while growing up, so it was impossible for him to take care of three children alone. He let his children stay with their grandparents for two years, at which time he met and married my mother.

The relationship between my mother and her step-children was like oil and



water. Her step-children were all under ten years old when they were devastated by the dissolution of their parents' marriage. They were stubbornly believed that my mother was the one who ruined their family. Even having fifteen years experience as a teacher, easily handling fifty-two students in her class, my mother was frustrated in dealing with her step-children. Giving unlimited love to psychologically wounded step-children was not enough. They needed time to adjust and cure their fear and sadness. My mother patiently waited for them and her in-laws to accept her as a family member.

Two years after my parents married, my sister was born. Seven years later in 1968, I came into this world. My birth was not the joyous occasion that one would expect. My father had been arrested before I was born and sent to a remote labor camp for "reeducation," which meant giving up one's books and pen to do farm work. The accusation against my father was that an article he had written was "against the Communist Party and Mao Zedong."

My father was not even permitted to come to the hospital to visit his wife and new daughter. In the next bed a young woman who had just delivered a baby was surrounded by her parents and husband. My mother shed a bitter tear. Misfortune never came singly to my mother. She and I had just come home from the hospital when six young Red Guards burst in and searched our house. They burned all of the valuable books and letters my parents had collected, claiming them to be "poisoned grass," they broke my parents' wedding picture and pointed their rifles, with bayonets fixed, at my mother's chest. They demanded that my mother renounce my father and divorce him. My mother was scared to death. But soon, indignation triumphed over fear. She told those Red Guards resolutely and decisively, "I know my husband. He is a good person! Our marriage is our own business, and I don't need anyone's advice!"

I cried all the time for hunger no matter how long I suckled my mother's breast. I even made mother cry in pain as there was no milk coming from her breasts. At that time milk was a rare commodity, hardly ever found in the market. Mother tried to feed me with paste but that would not satisfy my hungry stomach. The sound of my wail was like needles piercing my mother's heart. She looked hopelessly at her skinny baby and wept. Her husband was not by her side and she had to worry about his safety. Besides me, she also had to take care of her five-year old daughter and three step-children. My constant crying tore her heart and tortured her into sleeplessness and made her exhausted. All she could do was watch as her tears dropped like rain. She was overcome by despair.

Since my father was in the labor camp without income, the whole family relied on my mother's thirty-six yuan wage--which was about four dollars a month. In order to put food on the table she ignored her heart problem and high blood pressure complications



and decided to go back to teaching. At that time my grandmother visited us from the countryside. She comforted my mother and took her six-week old granddaughter back to her house hundreds of miles from Changsha.

My grandmother had lived with her son since my grandfather passed away. My uncle and aunt had five sons and five daughters of their own. The youngest one was one and half years older than me. Aunt stopped feeding her youngest daughter to feed me. It was amazing to have an aunt like that. After raising ten children, she generously fed me and treated me like her own daughter. She saved my life.

Time passed quickly. Having lived almost three years in my uncle's house, I thought my uncle's family was my own, I called all my cousins brother and sister. I did not even remember my own parents or their existence. The peaceful rural life nourished me. In the early morning, the cousins let me ride on the cattle while they grazed. Sometimes they dug out a couple of sweet potatoes to bring home and roast for me. I often followed them to the hills in the back of the house and picked up chestnuts or some seedless tangerines. Sometimes they carried me on their backs to the far pond to catch fish and shrimp. My face gradually turned pink and round. My crying was replaced by giggling.

One day in the summer time my aunt was in the kitchen making lunch. She lit firewood to cook. I was wearing shorts, playing around her with bare feet, waiting for roasted sweet potatoes. After a while, aunt used a steel rod to pull a couple of sweet potatoes out from the brazier, and I ran over and picked up one from the ground. It was too hot to hold, and I dropped it immediately. I shook my hand, stepped back, lost my balance and fell down on that red hot spike. The unbearable pain on my right thigh made me shriek and cry hysterically. The whole family heard me cry and ran over to see what happened. Aunt was frightened. She held me up and saw that there was two inch long burn on my right thigh. I do not remember how they treated me. All I remember was the severe pain, hysterical crying and grandmother's sob "my poor child, my poor child..."

I celebrated my third birthday in uncle's house. On that day, two guests came from the city. Grandmother excitedly told me that they were my parents and told me to call them "Mom and Dad." I looked at my parents with strange eyes and did not say anything. Mother came over and tried to hold me, but I ran to aunt. "Yan, your parents will take you home," Grandmother smiled and said with tears in her eyes. I did not understand what Grandmother meant. "No, this is my mother," I pointed to my aunt. "This is my home. I'm not going anywhere." "Silly girl, I'm your aunt, and this is your mother." My aunt replied, even though she felt sad. Mother could not help herself and buried her head in her hands and wept. She had borne all kinds of wounds and pain,



but nothing could hurt more than her own daughter's rejection. On the second morning my parents thanked everyone, especially my aunt, and were ready to take me home. I desperately held aunt's cuff and cried hard. I did not want to go with these strangers. Five hours later we were still in uncle's house. Mother asked aunt to let her second daughter Fen, who was ten years older than me and with whom I spent the most time, come to Changsha with us. Aunt agreed, and so our family was finally reunited.

More than 30 years have past since my encounter with the searing steel shaft, and while the pain is long gone; my two inch scar is still very visible. It always reminds me of the traumatic moments in my childhood. My mother's scars, however, were deeply rooted. They never faded and were reflected in her sad eyes all the time. Although she was eventually accepted by her step-children, she could not escape the dark depression that gradually enveloped her. Scar tissue is unlike the tissue it replaces. It is inferior in form and function, and whether visible or invisible, it is the body's vivid record of a time, and a place, and a terror.

China, too, still bears the scars of her failed experiment with the Cultural Revolution. An entire generation deprived of a higher education, constantly battles labor redundancy and marginalization, a not so subtle reminder never to repeat the mistakes of the past.

## Unforgettable College Life in China

Juliet Tierney

I received an email today from Hong, one of my roommates from college. She told me that our class will have a reunion this year in my hometown of Changsha, an old historical city in the south of China. The exciting news brought back many college memories especially for those of us who live overseas and are rarely able to see old friends. I have missed my classmates' weddings and divorces, birthdays and anniversaries, christenings and funerals. Are they still as crazy as before? Has life changed their personalities? Has time ravaged their features? Hundreds of questions came to mind. I immediately emailed Hong asking for the date of the reunion, and mentioned that it had been ten years since the first day we met each other on the campus. A couple hours later I got a reply from Hong, "Dear Xiao Bu Dian (I was the youngest in the class, so they called me Xiao Bu Dian -- Little Baby), you are so cute. The first day we met was twenty years ago not ten!" "No way!" I doubtfully shook my head and shouted at the computer. "That's impossible!" Has it really been that long?! It seems like yesterday! I guess that I had spent too many years caught up in the hustle and bustle of this frantic world without ever pausing to look back. A feeling of nostalgia overwhelmed me as the distant memories of college life flooded back.

### First Day in Campus

It was September 1, 1984. Autumn sunlight carpeted the Yue Mountain and the Xiang River. Laying between the mountain and river the crowded campus of Hunan University was a picture of organized chaos. Returning students were gathering in small groups to catch up on the news about each other. New students were lined up for registration and making each others acquaintance. So-called "registration" was just simply letting students mark their names on a list because the school already had their files before they applied. There was no tuition for the entire 4 years of college. Also, the government offered free dormitory lodging and a limited number of food coupons. (Who said that Communism was no good? You won't find benefits like this in capitalist countries.) I walked around in a state of great excitement. The stately campus was surrounded by ten-foot-high walls. Those towering, gray brick walls had cruelly shattered the dreams of many aspiring students. Like all universities in China, the gates of admission only opened to those who took three days of difficult examinations covering six separate disciplines. There were no easy multiple choices questions, but rather compositions, essays, narratives and translations. One's score had to total at least 480 points out of 600. Only ten percent of all high school students in the nation were fortunate enough to continue their education at that time. I was so proud that I was one of them. The large red banners of "Welcome New Students" were pasted on the walls and fluttered overhead. I enjoyed reading them all. The words really meant a lot to me. I thought, "Starting today, I'm a student of the music department of Hunan University."



Every department set up its registration table under the broad green maple trees that lined the sidewalks of the campus. In the nearby street, peddlers drew large crowds hawking their colorful and inexpensive wares and necessities. Tables filled with blue and white flowered rice bowls; colorfully painted ceramic spoons; fluffy white cotton socks; embroidered floral and phoenix silk pillow cases; herbal scented soaps; and checkered bedding sheets lined both sides of the street. The narrow street was thronged with people packed shoulder to shoulder. Cheerful male students carried heavy suitcases, their sweaty shirts clinging to their chests. The melodic voices of the female students wafted through the air as they walked carefully in high-heel shoes and held books high to protect their chests. Bicyclers laboriously zigzagged like raw beginners trying to avoid the pulsing throng. The sound of laughter, chatting, haggling, bicycle bells and buses horns filled the air.

### *Battle of the Genders in the Dormitory Building*

Our dark, red-brick dormitory building was three stories high. It was one of the oldest buildings on campus. Inside, each room was a very simple. Four squeaky bunk-beds showed off their original wood color, and eight deeply scratched black painted lacquer desks occupied almost all the floor space. The arrangement only left a two foot wide space for the roommates to pass by. Eight of us shared one room. There was no heat and no air conditioning - not even a fan. Over one hundred girls on this floor shared one communal bathroom and washroom on this floor. Hot water was only available for four hours in the afternoon.

The girls from the music, fine arts and sports departments all lived on the third floor. The first and second floors were occupied by the sports department boys. This co-ed arrangement was the source of many practical jokes between the sexes dating back to the founding of the school in 1938. Boys would hang a dead rat on the wooden door frame and then wait for the girls' screams. The worst thing was when they gathered up the girls' personal items that fell from the bamboo laundry poles to the lower window sills, and then put a lost-and-found note on the their doors. Some items never found their way back to the owner because it was too embarrassing for girls to go and pick them up. On the other hand, after a long day of exercising, physically tired athletes had no way to close their ears to the "nightingales" that practiced Chinese folk songs and Italian arias late into the evening. The irritated boys could silence the "nightingales" but instead shouted their annoyance upstairs to their tormentors. The school had strict rules that the boys were not allowed to visit the third floor.

Truly, we did not know this rule when we arrived on first day. One of our



roommates noticed that the lock on our door was broken so she asked two new male art students to fix the lock for us. After they came up and fixed it, the 6'4" Li went to the washroom to clean his hands. Suddenly, high-pitched screams pierced the air. We did not realize what had happened but soon saw Li hastily return, flushed and embarrassed, repeating, "I saw nothing, I saw nothing." There were four girls taking showers in the washroom. They never expected that a man would show up since the third floor was off-limits to males. One of my roommates consoled Li, "Just pretend you were in the studio with nude models." Looking at his thick, near-sighted glasses, we held our sides and could not stop laughing.

### Common Classes

Besides individual vocal and instrumental classes we had some common courses for the whole grade. Literature class was always full. The professor was a short, round sixty year old gentleman. Unlike other overweight people, his pot belly was full of the world's literary masterpieces, philosophy and wisdom. He had a remarkable memory and never looked at a book when he talked. He could not only identify the author of a phrase but also the book and page from which it had come. He introduced us to the world's classics - from Shakespeare's Hamlet to Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. He could recite poems from the great Chinese anthology Book of Poetry and lines from the ancient Greeks epics The Iliad and The Odyssey. I still remember his melodic voice as he recited a poem by Li Po:

A pot of wine amidst the flowers,	花间一壶酒。
I sit alone, no friends to drink with.	独酌无相宜。
I raise my cup to invite the moon;	举杯邀明月。
With my shadow, that makes three of us.	对影成三人。
But the moon, of course, has never	月既不解事。
Known the joy of drinking,	
And as to my shadow, it just	影徒随我身。
Mimics my tipsy capers.	
But for now,	暂伴月将影。
I'll have to make do	
With these two	行乐须及春。
Or waste this spring evening...	

(Poem on Wine, Li Po)



His voice magically transferred those lyrical words to the sweet air; permeated our skin; and reached into our souls. We were overwhelmed by the romantic picture created by the poet - the bright moon, the straight shadows, the aromatic rice wine and the fragrant spring flowers. Listening to him recite poetry with beautiful cadences was a great joy. A forty-five minute, non-stop lecture was too short for both teacher and students. If you had a question, you had to wait until the class was over.

On the contrary, psychology class was torture. The teacher mixed his Mandarin speech with a heavy Cantonese accent and threw me into the clouds and mist of confusion. His inaccurate pronunciation was like indigestible food stuck in my chest and it made me uncomfortable. In addition, the textbook did not arrive from the publisher until late in the semester. Listening to his speech was like listening to another language. All I remember from this class were just two words, "consciousness" and "vision", and that was totally by accident. In his butchered accent, "consciousness" and "vision" sounded like "chicken feet" and "small feet" respectively. I had no idea what he was talking about but I was very sure that psychology had nothing to do with feet. However, I was afraid to question his teaching. Finally I got my textbook. Imagine my shock when I realized that he was talking about heady concepts and not feet! Gradually, the students lost interest and empty chairs became more common. Some students sat with their hands propping up their foreheads to prevent their heads from nodding up and down. I used to slide another book behind my textbook. I read several of the 20 classic novels on the freshman reading list during that psychology class. Luckily I passed the final exam, though just barely, although my score was not pretty. I did not sympathize with the teacher but rather with the students. The school could choose its students, but the students could not choose their teacher.

### Roommates

During four years of college life our roommates were very close to each other. We spent more time with each other than with our families. We went to class together, ate together, slept in the same room, and shared each others problems, joys and secrets - including boyfriends' love letters. Our oldest roommate Xiang was 23, seven years older than me. She seldom talked about her long-distance relationship with her boyfriend. We knew that her parents were angry about her dating a short, unattractive senior from Nanjing University. Her parent's disapproval did not change her mind. Every week there was a letter from Nanjing waiting for her in the mailbox. She always rushed to the room, closed her mosquito-net and immersed herself in his lyric, tender words. Sometimes, after we pestered and begged her, she reluctantly read his poetic letters to us. Her hands were always busy knitting sweaters for her beloved and they eventually stitched their lives together in marriage.

I didn't share love letters with my roommates because no one wrote to me. I was so naïve that men treated me like a little girl, not a woman. I recall once on "Children's Day" that our class monitor, Qiang, who was nine years older than me said "Xiao Bu Din, today is Children's Day. Do you want me to buy you a gift on your special day?" I felt so embarrassed. Who would ask me for a date? I did not even really know about adult relationships. There was no sex education for us. I thought a man and a woman would have a baby by just sleeping together. You never saw any mention of the subject in books, magazines or movies. People were ashamed to talk about topics of a sexual nature. My mother never taught me either.

One day I found a palm size piece of paper in the pages of a "Jane Eyre" novel that I borrowed from the public library. The title was centered in bold Chinese words on the top of the paper - "Instruction in Using a Condom". I did not read the contents; the title already shocked me. I was frightened and exclaimed to my roommates, "That dirty thing is not mine!" They laughed and kidded me endlessly. No one bothered to explain to me that condoms were for men and not women. This classic story has lasted forever in the lore of my roommates.

Will they joke of my naivety again at the reunion party? Has Li's wife heard about his encounter in girls' washroom? Has the gender battle continued in the dorms? The psychology teacher has hopefully found a new job teaching Cantonese. Hundreds of questions well up in my mind. Twenty years is a long time. When is the reunion coming?



## The Importance of Integrity

Kelly Washino

Two little words, truth and honesty can define a person's character in a heartbeat. It is all we really have in the end. We have all heard the words, "to thine own self be true." These words for me became life in motion, and I will never forget that day. It was a day of public humiliation and persecution; never the less it was a day when I faced my demons and won.

The day started at Maunalua bay. It was beautiful morning; the sunshine danced on the water as the waves rolled in on the shore. The air was crisp and clean, and the mountains behind us were full of life and beauty. It was one of those days when I was so grateful to be living in Hawai'i, and I was there that day to protect the majesty of what makes these islands so beautiful.

We, the East Honolulu Community Coalition (EHCC), and our many supporters, were gathered at Maunalua Bay for a press conference over a very controversial city project, the Haunama Bay Education Center. The project was so controversial because Haunama Bay is a protected wildlife refuge and nature preserve. The City and County of Honolulu, or specifically, Mayor Jeremy Harris, built a 10,000 square foot building on the edge of the bay, blocking the view of the bay and commercializing the protected sanctuary. The city maintained that they needed to build the education center to educate the tourists about protecting the reef. The fallacy behind their argument is that educating tourists about protecting the reef is not just limited to Haunama Bay. O'ahu and all the Hawaiian Islands are surrounded by living reefs that need to be protected and are trampled on daily by tourists who visit the island. The location of this so-called education center should be in a place that would O'ahu the best benefits by locating it in a place where the tourists have the greatest access. Hanuama Bay is closed on Tuesdays so no tourists get educated. They go to other beaches that day and become detrimental to the environment of our coral reefs. The other reason the building is so controversial is that only 20% of this large building is dedicated to education, the other 80% is glorified office space, locker rooms, break rooms, a gift shop, and a snack bar with tables along the bay's edge where trash and other debris will be blown away, decimating the protected nature preserve.

Now for the reason why all of our members and I were present for this press conference. EHCC called for the press conference because the truth had been so badly compromised regarding this project that we felt we had to do something to expose Mayor Harris and his lies and to let the public know the truth.

The truth to the EHCC and myself is a code that we live by. The truth is so



important that we should not deviate from its path or minimize its importance. If we make one mistake and say anything that is not true, our integrity will be ruined and nobody will listen to us. We will be labeled as “nay sayers” and “nimbis.” Who are we after all? We’re just a little community group against the big Giant Mayor Harris. We know how powerful the truth is and how that power can crush us like a bug and destroy our integrity if we abuse it. So we were extra careful and only reported the facts. We had documentation to back up everything we said.

So the day had come that would separate the fact from fiction and the liar and his lies. Channels 2, 4, 8 and 9 were present. Reporters from the Star Bulletin and the Honolulu Advertiser were there too. Ralph Portmore represented the city from the architectural firm, Group 70, which had designed the Haunama Bay Education Center, along with the manager of Hanauma Bay, Alan Hong. All of our members were present and some spectators. As the time grew closer, the crowd grew bigger and bigger. People who I had not yet met were coming up to me and giving me their support. I felt nervous and frantic inside, but I tried not to show it.

The stage was set and the moments that followed would be burned into my memory forever. The reporters started with my husband, David Washino, the president of EHCC first. David revealed several key facts regarding the flawed process in which the city got their community input and how the project had many design flaws that would cost the city a lot of money in change orders. He also mentioned that the project was rushed and their own sub contractors had reservations about the rushed, incomplete plans and had made references to the costly change orders. The reporters were eating up all of the information my husband gave them and were asking him more and more direct questions that were very revealing and made the city look bad. It was Ralph Portmore’s turn to respond to all the allegations against the city. My husband had been called aside to give a statement to one of the reporters when Ralph took center stage. Ralph proceeded with a series of counter statements that were so far from the truth, I could not believe my ears. I was standing in the front row when all the members of my group pushed me to get up there and stop all the false accusations. Before I knew it, I had four microphones in my face and everybody was hanging on to my every word. I felt like everything we had worked for was going to be lost in one second if I didn’t respond to Mr. Portmore’s statements. I could not let him get away with what he was saying because it was not the truth; specifically his claim that our group approved of the design changes to make the facility bigger. We did not give our blessing to any of it. I thought Ralph was losing it. I stepped up and said, “It is not true. The East Honolulu Community Coalition group members on Hanauma Bay task force did not approve any of the design changes and, in fact, we were not even given these changes until the last minute and there was no time left to comment, Ralph must be talking about some other meetings that he had that the



rest of us were not privy to.” Ralph really lost it after that. He said, “She’s lying! These people are lying to you, that is not what happened!” while he pointed his finger at me. At that moment, I felt so betrayed, humiliated and hurt because, after all, I thought that, though we were on opposite sides, we still respected each other enough not to take things personally. Whatever we were to each other, I thought we could part as friends. He had a job to do and so did I. All I could say to all of Honolulu, in a very soft voice, looking straight at Ralph was, “That is not true. We did not approve anything.” Ralph did not say anything more. As I watched him, I could see the pain and doubt in his eyes as he stood there scratching his head. I knew that he knew that I was right and he was wrong. But what could be done now as the interview was about to be on the six o’clock news? The damage had been done. I looked like the liar and he looked like the one who was telling the one who was telling the truth. I felt as though I was stripped of my honor, worse yet, I had failed and let everyone down.

As the crowd broke up and the reporters were packing up their equipment, I went to Ralph, looked him straight in the eye and told him, “I am so disappointed in you. You know me better than that.” As I turned and walked away, he looked like he had lost his best friend. He wasn’t gloating over his own victory or even smiling like I would have expected him to do.

That evening, the pain and humiliation of that morning’s events were just as I had feared. The news story showed Ralph calling me a liar and it didn’t even focus on the real issues. Even though I looked like a liar on television, I knew that the people around me knew that I had been telling the truth. I hope that the public would also see the truth as time went on. I knew in my heart and soul that the truth was all that had mattered. I knew I could hold my head high because I held the line and took the fire.

The next day, it seemed like everyone had seen the news the night before. All day I explained the real story behind the project. I kept thinking that it was so hard to do the right thing all the time. I could have accused him of being a liar, but what good would that have done? I would have lowered myself to his level and that wouldn’t have been right. The words “to thine ownself be true” kept going through my head and gave me comfort and peace. I had finally realized that I was okay with what had happened. I had done the best that I could do.

The evening came and I was watching the news and I couldn’t believe my ears. The evening news anchor reported that Ralph Portmore issued a statement apologizing to me and anyone who had been offended with his accusation of lying and that in fact, he was mistaken and that even if he were correct, his behavior had been inappropriate. He said that he was sincerely sorry. I was so touched by his effort to correct his mistake that I

wanted to call him and thank him for what he had done.

Life can be stranger than fiction sometimes and we never know what tests we are going to be given along the way. I know that I passed my test that day and that this whole experience has shown me that honesty and integrity are worth fighting for because all you have in the end is your word.



## Sometimes It Takes a Bullet

Norman Wetzel

My life has contained many defining moments; the first sight of my wife, my first arrest, my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, and dozens of others. Very few can compare to staring down death. The well of fear and relief that surged through me as my heart slowed, all light faded, and sound became lost in the distance surprised me. I was amazed as my thoughts focused from hazy chaos to razor sharp clarity and, in an instant; reality was reduced to simple, rock-solid fundamentals.

I guess I am expected to say something about how full of life I was as a youth, how energetic I was, how all my potential was bursting out, filling the world around me. It wasn't like that, though. I was a fairly timid young boy who avoided drugs and alcohol. My family was poor, but I never struggled for the essentials. School had been easy; I skated through with little effort, despite the fact that we moved a lot. However, because of the frequent moves, I had made few friends and never really developed worthwhile social skills.

After high school I went to college, because my father had told me I should, and found myself in a strange new world. Until then life had been easy for me, but there, I was the only person I could depend on to accomplish anything. Although I still found the academics easy, responsibility and discipline eluded me. I failed miserably, lost my scholarships, and found myself unable to afford to continue. So, having no other options, I went home.

The only true friend I had made in high school was obsessed with the Marine Corps, and we had often played war games in the wilderness outside the town. A few days after my return, he introduced me to his recruiter. I wasn't truly interested, but didn't want to disappoint my friend, so I listened. There was a man like I had never seen before; loud, strong and confident. I remember wishing I could bring myself to say and do the things I witnessed him say and do. He convinced me that he could make me like him, and as an added bonus, he would pay for my college. This was a ray of hope. All I had to do was sign on the dotted line. Little did I know that that signature would change my life forever.

Less than a year later, I found myself lying on the freezing sand. I remember the penetrating, bone shattering cold and the sand. There was always the sand. "How can the desert be this cold? It's a desert!" I muttered through rattling teeth. Although to be fair, the tremors in my teeth might have had something to do with the staccato of gunfire my fireteam was pouring over the mound of rubble in front of us. From time to time someone would brave the hail of bullets and snap a few rounds back at us.

“What are you whining about, Weasel?” screamed my team leader during a pause in his fire.

I spat some sand out of my teeth and hollered back, “I said, its \*% ^\$@ cold! How can it be this cold in the middle of a desert?”

“Shut up, stupid!” was the reply. “We’re gonna’ put some rounds downrange at 2 o’clock on that corner there! Head to your 12 and get up under that window! Toss a couple a’ ‘frags’ in the window so we can clear this building!”

He rose to one knee, triggered a few bursts at the window, and I took the opportunity to poke my head up and pick my track. It was a straight shot, but wide open with only a half-brick to hide behind if the heat came down. I remember thinking, “This should be easy. These guys can’t fight anyway.”

I looked at my team leader and gave him a nod. He snapped two more bursts at the window and began a three count with his fingers.

“Go! Go! Go!” and I was up. I scrabbled over the rubble. I remember cussing when my sling caught on a piece of rebar, and then I was over the top and totally exposed. The field ahead was clear though, and I bolted for the window. I stumbled and glanced down to check my feet. As my gaze flipped back to the window I saw a ragged head of hair rise into view. I snapped my rifle up to shoot and a freight train smashed into my helmet. Everything blurred into a smear of black and brown as I felt my head snap back before a second impact punched me in the ribs. Then the world stopped.

Every swearword I had ever learned, made up, or heard on TV flashed through my consciousness as I stood twisted in a moment of time. It seemed so quiet. I remember asking myself why my teammates had quit shooting. Questions flooded into the silence of my head. “Why can’t I get my feet to move? Am I falling? Who the !@# \$ does that @#!\$ raghead think he is, takin’ a shot at? Me? Why is it taking so long to hit the ground?”

Time oozed into slow motion, and the ground came up to meet me. I tried to soften the blow, but it didn’t help, and I landed like a sack of cannonballs tossed off a high-rise. My helmet bounced off the packed sand and skidded away. A brilliant flash of greenish-yellow followed as my head cracked against a rock and then everything disappeared.



I woke up after what felt like ages. I'd always thought things faded into view, but that was not the case. I jerked back to consciousness, but nothing was there. "I'm dead. That &\*\$% bastard got me. Well, at least it's over." My own thoughts surprised me. I'd always thought there would be some regret over being dead. Maybe some of the fear of death was mitigated by the fact that there was something after death. Whatever it was, I remember being filled with relief that all the stuff I had stressed about just didn't matter anymore. I was going to miss my family, but they'd get along without me. I had no girlfriend, so that was no problem.

After what seemed only seconds later, regret took hold of my mind. "Man, I wasted my life. . . I should have been nicer to that kid. . . I knew that hooker in Waikiki was a mistake, but I did it anyway. There was so much I could have done. I could have had a girlfriend! Why didn't I?"

"So, what happens now?" I thought to myself. "God, I'm here. What comes next?" There was no answer. I looked around a little trying to spot that light everyone had always told me about, but there was nothing. It was empty. Emptiness. No sound. No smell. No weight. Just nothing.

Then, slowly, there was something; not a pinpoint of light, not a sound, just something. Everything faded in like someone focusing a movie. Smoke rose up in the corners of my vision and swallowed me. It filled the air around me, a choking, burning, blinding, sulfurous smoke that obliterated all my senses. My stomach churned with fear. The worst was true. God wasn't coming for me after all. I was headed the other way. Faced with the prospect of eternity in Hell, the contents of my stomach boiled out of my guts and into my mouth. I turned on my side to let it out. As I heaved out my last meal, my eyes focused on the sand in front of me. I thought, "Since when does the devil use smoke grenades, and how did that half-brick follow me here?"

Lost in that little world of hellish smoke, confusion and darkness, I nearly jumped out of my skin when a hand grabbed my shoulder and rolled me on my back. I looked up into the dirty, bloody, sweat-stained face of my team leader.

"I told you to clear the building, not get shot, you dumbass! We got the @#\$%\$ that did this and the corpsman is on his way! Are you OK? Where are ya' hit?"

"Well," I thought, "he is definitely not an angel and, probably, not a demon. So, I must be alive." I still wasn't sure that was a good thing, but I was a little relieved I would get a chance to find out.

Later the next day I learned I'd been very lucky. The first hit had just grazed my helmet and my body armor had taken the shot to the ribs. I also had a mild concussion from knocking my head on the ground, but a few days of light duty were all I needed.

Several days of recovery gave me time to reflect on the experience. I sat on an ammo box outside my tent and contemplated "Life". I was shocked that I felt so unattached to it. I realized I had wasted my life, and the things I had thought were important, weren't. I wasn't happy with where I'd been and what I'd done. I was tired of letting others decide my future for me. Right there, I vowed never to let others choose my course. No longer would I stand and watch the world pass me by. Those bullets had indeed killed me. But the part they killed wasn't one I wanted anyway. Now, I had a second chance, and I wasn't going to waste it. With the sun at my back, the wind in my face and, yes, sand in my teeth, I squared my shoulders and set out for a different future.





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**(Writing, art on Hawaiian culture, identity, sense of place in Hawaiian and English)**

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**Coming soon!**

**(Essays, poetry, photographs celebrating food)**

## ***Ka Nani***

**(Poetry, short fiction, photography, art)**

## ***Diamond Journal***

**(Nonfiction narrative essays)**

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**(Research papers, reflective journals, essays, creative writing: plays, short stories, art)**

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# Student Journals at KCC

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Coming soon!

(Poetry, prose, photographs celebrating food)

## Aa 'Aoni

(Poetry, short fiction, photography, art)

## Diamond Journal

(Poetry, prose, photography, art)

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