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Hours of Operation: Life Sketches from the Archipelago.
[Original writing]

Lee, Lanning Christophersen, Ph.D.
University of Hawaii, 1992

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HOURS OF OPERATION:
LIFE SKETCHES FROM THE ARCHIPELAGO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH DECEMBER 1992

BY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents
Henry C. and Thordis C. Lee

Mr. Jim Harstad
Mr. Shige Yamada

the members of my dissertation committee

and the following writers for helping my work come together:
Seema Ahmed, Kawehi Anderson, Kyle Arsiga, Joan Bunao,
Klaylan Burchett, Adam Campbell, Soo Jin Choi, Wincha Chong,
Christine Chu, Steven Ginoza, Dalia Hanna, Keith Hirata,
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Peterson, Edward Ripley, Roselyn Ripley, Garrett Smith, Dana
Smrekar, Todd Tokunaga, Jo-Ann Uchimura, Ralph Williams, and
Caroline Wong.
ABSTRACT

When critics discuss the short story cycle, they point to characteristics such as consistency of setting, recurrence of characters, language and image patterns, coherence of narrative voice, thematic unity, and structural strategy, in order to argue that individual stories piece together for a specific purpose. While each of the stories in this collection was written to stand alone, their selection and ordering is directed toward a larger unity.

The stories divide into four sections: Work, Family, Love, and Friendship. In a world completely dedicated to work, the need for personal fulfillment, physical health and psychological stability, in short, compensation which stands for more than economic gain, is a primary concern. This collection suggests that, beyond work, this compensation may be found in relationships, interconnections with loved ones and friends as they help create life's meaning along the way.

A story cycle which parallels most closely the crafting of this collection is Washington Irving's Sketch Book. As writers often do, Irving inscribes himself as a character in many of his stories, convincing his readers that the narrative is indeed autobiographical. My fascination with fiction of this type has less to do with deciding whether a story is "true" than with discovering how an author persuades the reader that the experience could have occurred.
As Irving also may have done, I learned to write fiction by first attempting to produce concrete personal narrative essays. The next step involved finding areas in those essays where I could invent details, could move from the factual event into the realm of absolute invention. This led to a mild obsession with dedicating more and more space to the imagined detail, and far less to the actual fact.

Finally, just as in the chronicle of Geoffrey Crayon's search for meaning, for identity, for self-realization, much of what takes place in this collection never happened. But it is my hope that readers will believe, as Irving's readers must, that almost everything I write could, in fact, have happened.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Dedication                                      | iv  |
| Abstract                                        | v   |
| Foreword                                        | ix  |
| **I. WORK**                                    | 1   |
| BRINGING US BOTH BACK                           | 2   |
| GROUNDSKEEPING:                                 |     |
| Raoul                                           | 14  |
| Call Me . . Ravi                                |     |
| Manuel                                          |     |
| HE TAUGHT US HOW TO DO IT                       | 23  |
| FROM A . . BOX BUILDER                          | 32  |
| RESEARCH PAPER                                  | 45  |
| BORN AGAIN                                      | 53  |
| WE'VE GOT A TEAM                                | 59  |
| READING, WRITING, AND                           | 69  |
| COMING ONE MORE TIME                            | 76  |
| TEACHING THE GAP                                | 79  |
| CROSSWORD PUZZLE, JIGSAW BLADE                  | 86  |
| **II. FAMILY**                                  | 109 |
| IN KAREN'S FOOTSTEPS                            | 110 |
| ED AND ROZ                                      | 114 |
| WHAT REAL MEN DO                                | 115 |
| JUST ANOTHER TORNADO                            | 123 |
| TURNING THIRTY-TWO                              | 126 |
| WHOSE BASEBALL IS THIS?                         | 129 |
| PICK ME UP                                      | 134 |
| SOLITAIRE                                       | 145 |
| IN PASSING:                                     | 151 |
| Punchbowl                                       |     |
| Bleak House                                     |     |
| CARRY-ON BAGGAGE                                | 154 |
| ADAM                                            | 163 |
| UNCLE KNOWS BEST                                | 164 |
| BITE THE BULLET                                 | 175 |
| JO-ANN                                          | 185 |
| **III. LOVE**                                   | 187 |
| HEART OF GLASS                                  | 188 |
| MAKING BELIEVE                                  | 193 |
| BORN AND BRED                                   | 206 |
| DISORDER                                        | 226 |
| MOVING                                          | 229 |
| LOVE AT LAST                                    | 238 |
| CLIFF WALK                                      | 241 |
| OLD ACQUAINTANCE                               | 242 |
| PARTING SHOTS                                   | 252 |
| BILINGUAL                                       | 254 |
| **IV. FRIENDSHIP**                              | 269 |
| ALL KIDDING ASIDE                               | 270 |

vii

HOURS OF OPERATION
I. WORK
But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountains. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story.

Herman Melville
THE PIAZZA

BRINGING US BOTH BACK

That summer I was slaving at the record store. Galaxy of Sound, where the stars come out. I still remember that advertising slogan. Must have been effective; it's burned in my brain. Every time I recite it, I picture faces materializing in a dark sky. Gordon Lightfoot or Linda Ronstadt, at the speed of light, coming right at me out of the blackness of the Milky Way.

Maybe I should have moved back to Honolulu after I finished school, but I couldn't bring myself to go back home. Not yet. Even though it was July in Madison, which is the nearest thing to hell imaginable. Except maybe Madison in February, if you're into Dante and alternative representations of the Inferno. Madison in July is hot. Not Honolulu-hot though, except on the worst island days when the trades die and the humidity hovers just under one-hundred percent. Madison is surrounded by two lakes, and because there aren't any tradewinds, when the water starts to evaporate it's sauna time. Fortunately West Towne Mall had said screw it to federal regulations. It was always a cool 65 degrees.
Down on my knees behind the glass showcase next to the register, I'd just finished repricing the top twenty cassettes for the week and was rearranging them in their new order. I had my hand on Supertramp, the week's number-one bestseller in the midwest region. *Breakfast in America* had been coming on slow all summer. Springsteen's *Darkness on the Edge of Town* stood at number two. *Saturday Night Fever* held on to third, but it looked like the BeeGees were finally headed down.

The first thing I saw were two legs walking toward the case. "Excuse me," her voice said, "isn't that a Hawaiian group I hear?"

I stared through the glass at the legs. Don Ho, everyone expected. But Cecilio and Kapono sang at least once a day when I worked. El Santos, my district manager, a 1959 Kamehameha Schools graduate, said it was okay to play C & K so long as we had product in the store. We always did; I made sure of it.

"Yes it is," I answered, leaning back and looking up.

"Hey, Lanny," she said, smiling. "Great aloha shirt!"

"Kathy?"

"Yeah! It's me! Customers ever ask you about the shirt?"

"Every day. Especially winter. What brings you to Madison?"

"I had the day off, so I flew up, uh, to see you."
Kathy and I had known each other since preschool at the University Laboratory School. After high school, we'd both done our undergraduate work at UH-Manoa. Then I'd come to Madison for my master's degree, and she'd gone to the Art Institute in Chicago for her MFA. We wrote to each other but had never found time to visit. It was always, "Yeah! Let's get together," but we could always seem to find some excuse not to do it.

"So," I asked, getting up off my knees, "they let you fly for free?"

"Oh, no, it's a service charge. Minimal stuff."

That was the beauty of working for United. At the record store I could buy any album for cost-plus-ten, but that hardly compared with being able to fly for practically nothing. What a great job. Going anywhere, anytime.

"Kathy, I'll be off in forty-five minutes. See that coffee shop over there?" I pointed to the Carousel across the mall. "Wait for me. Here." I handed her my crumpled Wisconsin State Journal.

"Okay, Lanny. I'll be waiting."

At quarter to four, I told my co-workers I had to leave early. "Pressing engagement," I offered.

Andrea smirked. "Yeah, Lanny, I saw her talking to you."

Hardly feeling guilty, I jogged over to where Kathy sat barely engrossed in the local news.
"Let's break out of here!" I shouted. She laughed.

We ate dinner downtown at Porta Bella. Drank dinner would be more accurate. Neither one of us did much damage to the pasta we ordered, but we kept the waitress hopping with our wine refills. As always happens when a couple of Lab School grads get together, we spent most of dinner reliving the memorable shared events of life from age three to eighteen.

After dinner I drove us back to my place.

"Geez, Lanny, I can't believe you still have this Ghia."

"My folks didn't want me to bring it over, but I argued them into it. Now they're gonna be pissed if I take it back to Honolulu."

Kathy shook her head. "Remember the time we were collecting flowers for graduation?" I laughed. "Remember how we went to Uncle Billy's up on Tantalus, and how me and Lisa sat up on the back seat and waved like we were in the Aloha Week Parade?"

"Yeah, Uncle Eddie. Mr. Glaucoma Relief." Our science teacher had told us he smoked marijuana to ease the pressure in his eyeballs. We believed Mr. Science, of course. He'd been a pioneering researcher.

When we pulled into the parking lot Kathy said, "So this is the famous Divine Tower."
"Yup. I think they named it after my friend Andy," I said. "He drinks unblended Scotch whiskey, Glenlivet to be precise, in between large frosty mugs of the golden goodness of Old Style."

Kathy stared at me curiously through her wine-glazed eyes.

I shrugged. "Don’t mind me. Just mind-wandering."

She snickered, put one hand to her nose, grabbed for my hand with her other, and boosted herself out.

As we exited the elevator, a neighbor of mine, Lance, came out of his apartment. Because the Divine Tower is round, all the apartment doors front on each other in a circle. "Into the toilet bowl, buddy," he said. Kathy looked at me.

"Yeah," I nodded. "Round and round and round she goes, and where she stops, nobody knows."

Lance, waving, disappeared behind the elevator doors.

I finally managed to get the key in the lock. "Tight security," I joked, kicking at the door. We burst in.

"Wow, Lanny. Nice place. It’s . . . it’s a triangle."

"Um, yeah, kind of a wedge-shape. But get a load of this."

I led her to the glass doors, rolled them open, and escorted her onto the lanai. The sun still sat well above the horizon of Lake Mendota. "Have a seat. I’ve only got beer. Is that okay?"
"Sure."

When I returned, Kathy was sitting on the edge of her seat, staring out at the lake.

"Mr. Andrew left me a case of Old Style. He told me to make sure you try one."

We clunked cans. Kathy gestured hers toward the lake. "Is this the lake where that singer . . . what's his name drowned?"

"Otis Redding?" She nodded. "No, that's Monona, on the other side of town. This is Mendota."

Kathy started singing. "You say Mendota, and I say Monona. You say Monona, and I say Manoa. Manoa, Mendota, Monona, huh huh huh. Let's call the whole thing--Lanny," she said, giving me a serious look. "Don't you miss Hawai'i?"


Kathy shook her head. "No, it's not just like Hawai'i. How often do you remember sweating like this? And what are all those flies flying around on the water. God, it's like a cloud of flies. It's grotesque, Lanny."

I had to agree. "Yeah, it's weird, all right."

"And what," she inhaled deeply, "is that smell?"

"Smell?" I sniffed.

"Yeah. Can't you smell that? It's like something decomposing."
"Oh, that. That's Oscar Mayer. You get used to it."
"Maybe you can, but I couldn't. You must miss it. You
know what I miss the most about Hawai'i, Lanny?"
I waited. She finished off her Old Style.
"Do you?" she asked again.
"Ah, no. Primo draft? I don't know. I give up."
"I miss the trees."
I looked over at her. Her eyes watered, reflecting the
setting sun.
"Please tell me this isn't The Deer Hunter," I mumbled.
"What?" she asked, turning toward me.
"Nothing," I answered, looking away.
"The trees," she repeated.
We sat in silence for a while.
"But there are trees all over the place," I said.
Kathy shook her head. "Look around you, Lanny. What
do you see?"
I looked over the balcony. "I see ... trees. Lots
of them."
"Yeah, but I'll bet you ninety-percent of them are elm
trees."
"Um, maybe," I agreed.
"Well, almost all of them are. And plenty of them are
half dead because of some kind of elm rot, so they look like
shit," Kathy said. "And if you're lucky," she continued,
"you get to go out into the suburbs and see maple trees and dead elm trees."

"Come on, Kathy, there're more kinds than that."

"Okay, maybe. But in Honolulu you've got monkeypods and shower trees and banyans and coconut trees and lychees and plumerias and African tulips, and you look up and see kukuis running down the slopes of the mountains along with Norfolk pines and eucalyptus and--"

"Yo, Walt Whitman, I hear what you're saying."

"In my back yard I had an avocado and two huge mango trees." She tapped my forearm. "Where you going to see anything like that around here? And this is pretty good! You should try living in Chicago."

I looked at her for a long time.

"God, Lanny, I miss mangos so much." Her eyes still sparkled in the light.

"Kathy, this may sound like a stupid suggestion, but why don't you just move home?"

"Home? Chicago is my home now. I've lived there over four years. I've got this damn job that stations me right there. And besides all that, as if that weren't enough, I'm . . . ." Her voice trailed off. "Could I have another one of these?" She hoisted her empty can.

"One cold Old Style coming up," I announced, coming back.
"Thanks," Kathy said. She was standing against the railing. I set the beer down by her chair and joined her. I put my hand next to hers on the metal rail, but I couldn't bring myself to touch her. That's the problem when you're drunk and horny, but you've known the person you're with since you were three years old.

"Can't you relocate?" I asked. "When will you have enough seniority to move back ho--to Honolulu."

"No, I can't go back now. Not for a long time, at least."

She wrapped her arm around my waist, putting her thumb through my belt loop and leaning her head against my shoulder. I put my arm around her shoulders and hugged her to me.

"Do you still do your art?" I asked.

"Not much. I still have my loom. Sometimes, when I'm not too tired, I sit down and work on it for a while. And then sometimes, but not very often, I really get into it. Get lost, you know? Just like it used to be. Mr. Yamada would be proud of me. But that never lasts for very long anymore."

I laughed. "Remember that time--I think it was a Saturday morning--when I snuck up on you in the weaving room in George Hall. I must've stood behind you watching for five, ten minutes before you knew I was there. And then--"
"And then you clamped your hands on my shoulders. Man, Lanny, you scared the daylights out of me!"

"Hey, hey," I said, turning her toward me. "I said I was sorry. Sorry again."

When I opened my eyes and looked down I saw the white line of her scalp where she parted her straight black hair. She'd always parted her hair perfectly down the middle.

Kathy stopped holding me and turned toward Mendota again. "So he didn't crash and drown here, huh? Well, this is probably a lousy time to tell you this, Lanny, but I'm . . . I'm getting married."

I couldn't think of anything witty to say. Kathy went back to sit down.

"So, uh, where are you staying tonight?" I asked.

"I'm not. I'm taking the last flight out. It leaves at midnight."

"Midnight?" I said, turning to look at her, then at my watch. It was only 8:45. "We'd better get going."

Kathy tried smiling. "I'll take a taxi. You aren't in any condition to drive."

I didn't argue. She was right. We went in, and I called her a cab. "Better hurry down. It'll be here in a minute."

Kathy led the way out the door. "Into the toilet bowl?" she asked.
"And where she stops, nobody knows," I confirmed.
Stopping to let her get farther ahead of me, I watched her
legs move toward the elevator. "Kathy, we used to have a
nickname for you. Did you know that? We called you 'Legs.'
Kathy 'Da Legs' Siu."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. You guys! I thought it was
'Char.'"

"Well, that one was a joke. Like for when we were
pissed at you about something. This one was serious."

As I opened the cab door for her, I caught her arm.
"Hey, Kathy, congratulations." I fumbled at a handshake.

"Thanks, Lanny." Her lips brushed against my cheek.
"I'll send you an invitation?" I nodded slowly to her
question and forced a smile. The cab disappeared down the
darkness of Langdon Street. The stars were out in full force
now. Good old Gordon.

"Char Siu," I whispered, then turned and went back into
my tower.

That was the last time I saw or heard from Kathy
directly. No wedding invitation ever came. Of course, I
always wonder about how reliable the post office is. Maybe
mail gets lost that we never know about, so we don't miss it.
The following year I came back to Honolulu. Kathy was right.
I did miss it. More than she did, maybe. Last I knew, Kathy
had relocated, all right--to the Bay Area. Someone said she
lives in a huge house in Belmont, overlooking the bay, with three kids, two rabbits, and her pilot husband. She still flies the friendly skies. I've been through San Francisco half a dozen times since I heard that. Whenever I get in the airport I tell myself I'm going to call her. Sometimes I even sit down in a phone booth and pull her number out of my wallet. But by the time I hear that dial tone, I just hang up.
Something has spoken to me in the night, burning
the tapers of the waning year; something has spoken
in the night, and told me I shall die, I know not
where.

Thomas Wolfe
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

GROUNDKEEPING

Raoul
He plucked at the knotty clumps of nut grass, this
Raoul, in true business-like fashion, praising something or
someone for this opportunity to work, while he cursed,
inwardly and passionately, all Oriental immigrants,
including, and perhaps especially, all Filipinos, not to
mention those Tongans, who, and he knew it was the Filipinos
in particular, incidentally, spent much of their yardwork day
sipping, okay, sucking on, okay, even guzzling down rapidly,
their inexpensive, often homemade, liquor rations rather than
go at their work with clear heads, so it was a good thing
that they charged by the hour, and probably the very reason
why they did charge by the hour instead of by the job, while
he, Raoul, was, nonetheless, sitting here thankful for the
employment opportunity, for a change, even though he did not
drink that much, except maybe at night, either in the
confines of his house or of the friendly atmosphere of Anna
Banana's, where he tossed darts at dimly yellow-lit
dartboards, after spending a grueling day, praise be to
something, slaving for seven dollars an hour, not because he
drank on the job, but because he worked alone, where to be paid by the job would mean far too much time spent to earn far too little, for just one solitary man, working alone.

He looked up and saw that the little boy sitting on the high stone wall separating the two yards still had his back to him.

Call Me . . . Ravi

I finally made it, in just three easy moves. First it was the truck, next the raking crew, and then, finally, I had arrived: a single, powerful man sitting on top his own powerful machine, driving himself and his instrument along at will. I know there is no better, nor faster cutter on the crew. Like I said, I've arrived. And now that I've achieved this perfect blow-out, I intend to stick around for a long, long time.

When I applied for the grounds' crew, the committee was . . . well, stunned. Obviously they thought I was overqualified. They asked: "What do you want to do working on the ground maintenance crew?"

I said: "I think my bachelor's degree speaks for itself. Philosophy and maintenance of the university grounds, I believe, go hand in hand. I'm sure you can see that preserving order, serving to sustain the balance, the harmony, of this campus, is a natural and, may I add, even lofty pursuit for one such as myself--one who is dedicated to
the life of the mind. One who is devoted to preservation of
the forms?" I tapped at my temple with an arched forefinger.

They nodded, but I could see they wondered if I were
serious. "So, Mr. Chorenon--"

"Please," I interrupted, "call me . . . Ravi."

They looked askance at me, then at one another. "Ravi?
You don't indicate that as your first name." They hesitated.

"Is that your middle name?"

I nodded a slow "no."

"A nickname?"

I laughed. "Yes, you could call it that."

They pursued this investigative line. "I see, so that
name has some kind of . . . spiritual significance?"

I laughed again. "Yes, you could call it that."

They all nodded a while more. Then the hard questions
came again.

"So you wish to serve your alma mater--the University
of Hawai'i at Manoa--by functioning in some capacity which
allows you to . . . preserve the form of the campus?"

I knew now that I held them in the palm of my hand.
Through sheer force of will I had them performing at the very
execution point which I myself desired. I then proceeded to
dominate the interview, though the committee believed,
foolishly, that they were the ones in control of this
interrogation.
I said, "Yes, of course. I, Ravi, am he who commands both the outer, tangible form and the inner, intangible spirit. I observe and fully comprehend the whole; therefore I play best at the unifying part."

More shaky nods and stuttering "uh huhs" ensued. "So . . . Ravi," they continued, pushing their much mistaken illusion of advantage, "what kind of qualifications--other than your philosophical background--do you have for this job?"

Casting a subtle glance at the tattoo on my forearm, I realized that the image of the Reaper was concealed by the sleeve of my shirt. Not alarmed, I ran my hand slowly through the close-cropped hair on my head, allowing the committee to admire the cut I'd administered myself. "These scars," I said slowly, bowing my skull toward them for closer inspection, "are not from self-inflicted wounds."

I paused, allowing the impact of my statement to sink in.

After more of their weak nods I smiled, delicately pulled a cigarette from my pack, and puffed amusedly several times before I looked them straight in the eye. I was the master manipulator, pulling their strings at will. I toyed, absolutely, with their inferior minds. "Do you gentlemen," I asked casually, tapping the ash with great deliberation from my cigarette, "eat . . . pasta?" I riveted them, sweeping their attentive rank with a piercing stare.
Their confused facial expressions, their seeming insect wonder, caused me nearly to choke. But I, of course, maintained composure, thanks to an iron will developed through the rigor of perusing the encyclopedic works of every ancient philosophical master both east and west. From my upcurled lip into my subtly flaring nostrils, the smoke wafted in a thin stream of intricate simplicity.

They were intrigued by this elaborate sucking action; they were enthralled. Most heads finally nodded a tentative "yes" to my clever question. Who was asking questions of whom now, I mused.

"Well, gentlemen, no single one of you could ever consume pasta with the same fervor as do I."

I extinguished my cigarette slowly, methodically, allowing them this respite for feeble deliberation of my assertion.

When those tiny wheels squeaked to a halt, I continued my line of pointed questioning. "When you dine upon pasta, gentlemen, do you ingest it with such a passion, in so fiercely competitive a manner, that you would, without so much as speaking a single syllable, preclude anyone from even thinking about attempting to rival your rate of intake?"

More confused looks. Eventually they shook their puny heads in another collective "no."

"Then, gentlemen, I stand before you here, a humble man pushed far beyond the pale. Never would I have dreamed of
boasting to you of my pasta eating prowess, unless you had forced me to reveal my highly accomplished past. Look at me! Do you not recognize me from my picture on the front page of the campus newspaper? It is I, Ravi Chorenon. I alone survived fourteen desperate rounds of noodle inhalation to come before you here today. I, Ravi Chorenon, have proved myself—do you not agree? I have survived, a champion. I have personally consumed more pasta than any so-called man on this campus."

I stared each miserable specimen directly in the eye. I waited for the collective question to burst from their dry, cracking lips. And, of course, it came: "But, Mr.--uh, Ravi--how does that in any way qualify you for ground maintenance work?"

Although I did not laugh out loud, I allowed a derisive chuckle to escape my lips. "My dear sirs," I said, bowing as best I could from my seated position, humbling myself for purposes of making an even stronger show against their shrunken dreams of superiority, "would you just contemplate, for a moment, the concrete similarities between pasta consumption and the cutting of your troublesomely ever-growing grass?"

They meditated—as deeply as they were able—on my suggestion. More pointless nods of confusion passed from empty head to empty head.
"Then you see, gentlemen, obviously, that I am more than qualified to mow your lawns."

Murmurs of what sounded like "Yes, yes, we do see" were passed around the interviewing table.

"Well then, gentle sirs,"--I gestured broadly--"I humbly rest my ever-so-well-qualified case."

I reached triumphantly for one more cigarette, artfully employing the dramatic pause to better reinforce the preponderant weight of crystalline logic in their minutely churning minds. I watched as those minuscule crania came together and muttered whispers were exchanged.

Finally they addressed me. "Mr.--I mean, Ravi!" The much deluded honcho spoke. "We'll start you tomorrow... on the garbage truck detail. Be here at 5:00 a.m."

I smiled, understanding all too well that they were hoping to discourage me with what they believed to be some meager offer.

Not quite laughing aloud at their ridiculous challenge, I asked, "And what will you pay me?"

The small men snickered lamely among themselves once more. "How about all the pasta you can eat?"

I grinned triumphantly. "Make it ravioli," I quipped, "and you've got yourselves a deal."

So I accepted what I had always foreseen.

And before they realized it--though I'd known it ever since I'd willed it to be--I had risen above the dumpster
detail. I was rake-man next, then lead rakeman. And when the test results came back—though I'd preordained the result anyway—I was promoted to the lawnmower brigade. I don't just whack away at weeds, either. I run one of those powerful machines. I sit tall, perched atop the purring, responsive beast between my thighs.

Each day I sit here, day after day, riding out the infinite march of time. Alone, I mow and wonder, growing more and more powerful than they could have ever possibly imagined. I swiftly cut, forever now, those necessarily complete, and always absolutely perfect, circles.

Manuel

Better, Manuel thought, to whack at the grass or chop at the big branch with his machete, razor sharp, before sampling the sugarcane brew, since the last time he placed pleasure before work, Ai Sus! so painful had been the sharp lash of the heavy-duty zero-point-eight-zero sugi when it slashed repeatedly at his tender, exposed calf, even though the quart of one-fifty proof medicine should have prevented him from feeling too much pain at all on top his leg, so he screwed the lid back on his trusty chunky peanut butter jar and resumed whacking at the weeds, for seven-fifty per hour, until the next time his thirst would force him to think one more time about whether he should drink some liquor to replenish his ever-diminishing body fluids.
Looking up he saw his son looking down on him. His son sat atop the stone wall, watching his father work. He hoped that there would be no drinking. His mother had told Daddy that they couldn't afford it. Whatever that meant.
"I know we haven't lived a life of luxury and had all the things that make life easy. Well, not easy, but the things that help to ease life's pains, like a nice car, a big house, and things like that. Do you feel like something's missing from your life? Have you wished you could do something that you think you should have accomplished?"

"No, no, not really," she answered decidedly. "I'm happy with our life. If the world were going to end in a week, I wouldn't change my lifestyle to do things other people have done that I haven't. I'm content with the way things are right now."

"Really?" he said, looking deep into her eyes.
"You're sure about that?"
"Yes, I'm sure," she answered. "Aren't you?"
James thought for a while and then he answered, "Sure, sure I am. I'm very happy with the way things are. I just wanted to make sure you were happy."

Steven Ginoza
LIFE SEARCHING

HE TAUGHT US HOW TO DO IT

First day of school. Know what I mean? Bad and getting worse. Then lunchtime. Dynamite! A chance to whip out the cards and chessboards, shoot the bull with fellow would-be criminals you haven't seen for three long months. And the first chance of the year to put down a school lunch. It's almost the ultimate challenge, even though your body's had three months to steel itself against whatever the diabolical dark-force-side cafeteria manager has masterminded over the summer: "How many of these lunches can you put away?" she seems to ask, trying to break you down with those hard, beady eyeballs behind the red framed glasses. The cash register rings hard and cold, like her evil stare: "Welcome ... back to school."
The period after lunch. We'd call it "The Dead Zone." Our eyelids struggle against the force of gravity. Our stomachs are churning. Is it because we're aging high school juniors, or just because the tuna pizza surprise has finally hit bottom and is now corkscrewing its way through our sixteen-year-old intestinal tracts?

We don't know; we don't care. We never asked heavy philosophical questions like that way back then.

As students we slump in a hot room, digesting. We stare, semi-comatose, into space. Those sheets of paper they'd handed us first period--our class schedules--sit blindingly white in our hot little hands. Feverish from ptomaine poisoning? I don't know.

"Who the hell is this?" Dan asks, burping up an acid stream of stale air that burns the eyes of everyone within a five-foot radius. "Who is this H-A-R-S-T-A-D guy?" he asks again, sounding hard-boiled as he can.

"Yeah!" Patrick adds. "Who the hell is he?"

The joyful echo of "new teacher, new teacher" bounces around the room.

Yes! I think gleefully, a new teacher. A new teacher!

After confirmed and reconfirmed hunches about just how we might "welcome" this new sheep to the fold, we're ready to tear him apart--eat out his liver. The Lab School brood are borderline xenophobes, young people who like to "play" with outsiders. We're ready to shred any stranger who dares set a
sweaty foot on the sacred grounds of the University Laboratory School. We especially love new teachers, because we'd like to teach them a thing or two. Send them scrambling for some safe job. Get them running wildly for some employment opportunity outside the acid bath of high school teaching.

Then Dan says, "Shhhhhh. Here comes da tilapia now."

A tall, thin haole man limps fitfully through the door. He's shuffling; he's sweating. May be just the August heat. Then again, he may have risked the cafeteria lunch too. Just like us. Who knows.

He's toting a boxfull of books. The air in room 227 turns instantly musty because the venerable tomes he's hauling have come from some obscure alcove--some hidden cupboard or mystic storage space.

That beard. Black and blond hair streaked to a goatee point. A hippie? We've heard about them. We don't know any. Most of us are Oriental. We can only imagine facial hair as stunning as this.

He drops the heavy carton on the three-months-dusty teacher's desk. The floor vibrates slightly.

"Hello class," he begins, taking a white handkerchief from his back pocket, then deciding to wipe the perspiration from his high forehead on the sleeve of his red pinstriped dress shirt. Back in his pocket goes the white handkerchief, neatly folded. Will he be waving it frantically in the air
before this period ends? We hope so. "My name is Mr.--" He
turns to the pale green board, picks up a nub of white chalk
from the wooden rail, and writes:

H-A-R-S-T-A-D

in a practiced cursive hand. Pretty good board writing for a
novice teacher. He claps the dust off his hands and looks at
us. "Can anybody pronounce that?"

He looks hard at us, surveying each innocent-looking
face in a manner less friendly than I'd assumed he'd use.
I boost my hand in the air.
"Yes . . . I obviously don't know your names yet. What
is your name?"

"Lanny. Lanny Lee."

"Okay, Mr. Lee, do you think you can pronounce that?"

The challenge is there, like a gauntlet rusting slowly
in the dust. Something's not right here. This, I suddenly
realize, not eating a school lunch, is the ultimate
challenge. I try to penetrate the screens that hide
something behind this young man's face, to glean the absolute
and sacred pronunciation of his name that is secreted from
us.

Something is very wrong here. "Well . . . I was going
to guess . . . ." Half-perspiring, just like him, I survey
the expectant faces of my friends. "Horse-head."

The wiry man--now I notice his blazoned tan, like a
beacon advertising the veteran teacher's hard-earned three-
month summer hiatus--flashes brilliant white teeth, out of his bronzed face, in my direction. The explosion of light makes me suddenly sick to my stomach, as though I'd betrayed some dark, self-poisoning secret. All of a sudden he's beginning to pump up larger than he was. He starts to look like some gigantic figure out of Norse mythology, and I don't even have my trusty sword in hand.

"Oh, very good, Mr. Lee, very good. That's quite a new joke for me. Why,"--he gives the broadest smile imaginable, gesturing in such a way as to catch the attention of every student in the classroom while he laughs deeply--"I'll bet you think that's the first time I ever heard that joke."

The class, stunned, slowly begins to respond. Halflaughs break out in stuttered bursts around the room.

"Well, well, you are sooooo original, Mr. Moo?--Oh, I'm sorry, you said Lanny, right? Not Lani."

I hear Dan and Patrick behind me. Both snicker softly at my expense. They enjoy this new guy's jokes as much as mine. Lani Moo jokes. Jesus, I've heard them--since I was three, at least.

Then he gives me a real smile--I think. "It's Harstad," he says, smiling not just at me, but at the entire class. "My name is James R. Harstad, and you can call me .. . " He looks around at us; the suspense is killing me. "You can call me Mr. Harstad." The laughter escaping from his lips is only for his enjoyment. "Or Sir." He laughs to
himself again, then begins pulling out the musty books in large bunches, his powerful, scarred hands gripping them securely.

"And you know,"--he's not even looking at us now--"if you really want to hear about it"--he laughs again, only to himself--"it's really HarSCHTAd, as in SCHTAlag."

He feeds out the ancient volumes, column by column. We blow the layers of dust off the covers, cough and sneeze a little, then clean them finally by rubbing shaking fingers across the years of greasy dust built up.

The blond and bearded man moves front and center and says, "I want all of you to understand that this is one of my favorite books. I love this book, and I'm going to read it to you." He boosts his faded left Levied leg up on the teacher's desk, opens the book, then jams his right hand in his pants' pocket.

I hear Dan whisper behind my left shoulder, "Oh wow! Bedtime stories."

"Excuse me!" Mr. Harstad questions, a brief flash of light escaping from his lips. He's staring over my left shoulder at Dan. "What was that, Mr...?"

His sunned-blond eyebrows rise, indicating the question mark his voice does not.

"Well, Mr. Hamasaki, this story is important. Do you understand me?"

I hear Patrick, over my right shoulder, laughing softly at Dan's embarrassment.

"Excuse me?" Mr. Harstad now looks over my right shoulder at Patrick. "Do you think this is funny?"

He doesn't even bother to ask Patrick's name.

I can feel the air move with Patrick's violent shaking of his head, "no." I turn slightly to see Patrick looking down intently at his aged copy of this Ernest Hemingway book.

Mr. Harstad stares rock-hard at everyone in the room, going face by face through this post-lunchtime crowd of what he must see as runny-nosed eleventh-graders.

"You know, all of you guys have to be able to read when we send you out of here," Mr. Harstad continues. "And all you have to do is follow along while I read. You will become better readers . . . "--he snorts, laughing out into the space above our bowed heads-- "almost in spite of yourselves. Now turn to page three, please."

He looks out at us once more, then begins reading:

In the late summer of that year
we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains.

In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun,
and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels.

Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.

Mr. Harstad's voice carried on through what remained of the period. After he assigned us our reading homework, Vicky asked if he wanted the numbers of our texts.

"Thank you, Miss . . ."

"Ushiroda."

"Thank you, Miss Ushiroda. No. I think you're all old enough to keep track of your own books." He scanned each face one more time. "You will not lose these books, right, folks?" We all nodded emphatically.

We all watched him stroll out of the room, the dog-eared brown gradebook in his hand swinging freely at his side. He was smiling and whistling softly to himself.

As we walked down the hallway, Dan laughed and said, "Man, that's a year we gotta be with this guy?"

He slapped me on the back.
I laughed too, fingering my copy of *A Farewell to Arms*. I wasn't tired any more, and my indigestion was gone.

"Yeah," I said, still hearing the last words Mr. Harstad had read to us:

"Good night," I said to the priest.

"Good night," he said.

I said, "You know, Dan, I got a feeling that this guy is really gonna teach us something."

Dan snickered. "Yeah, Lanny--like how to read? Gee, it's about time, huh!"

We shuffled into our next class and sat.

"Yeah, Dan," I said, smiling at the possibilities, "and maybe even, just maybe, how to write."
A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

Henry Adams
THE EDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS

FROM A . . . BOX BUILDER

It was a Saturday morning, two Decembers ago. I was sitting in almost the exact same spot where I'd sat that Saturday morning back in the fall semester of 1970, after I'd broken into the art room through a window. Back then I'd wanted to spend the day handbuilding a huge pot I'd started during my ceramics class earlier in the week. This time I was working on a kind of organic sculpture vaguely resembling something between a human body and a mass of vine-like foliage.

I looked up from my work when he walked silently, as always, into the ceramics room. He smiled that soft smile of his, barely whispered a hello, and began loading articles from his ancient, green, metal desk into a small cardboard box. It looked as though he hadn't shaved that morning, which was unusual for him. His hair wasn't combed. I watched his swift, silent packing. There was no conversation. He finished quickly, turned to me and said, "And don't forget--" That gentle smile spoke volumes--"to lock up, Chris." I nodded. He turned away, then disappeared down the hallway. I didn't know it then, but that was the
last time I would see him at the school. He had retired, without telling anyone, and he was gone for good to Maui.

It was August, 1970, the first day of my eleventh-grade year. Most of my closest friends had already taken ceramics, some since ninth grade. Not a single one had ever said a negative word about the class. They all seemed to love it. I was bored. I can't even remember what electives I'd had in ninth and tenth grade. This art class looked like a good choice.

I suppose because I was known to make a good humored wisecrack or two on occasion, a few of my friends wanted to warn me to hold back a bit in this class.

"Eh, Chris," Gerald advised as we went down the concrete stairs past the kiln area and into the glazing room, "watch out for Yamada. He's a nice guy, but he's ... well, strict."

"What, Gerald, no sense of humor?"
Gerald rubbed his chin. "Ah, nah, yeah, but . . . . ."
Patrice laughed. "What he means, Chris, is that Yamada isn't going to put up with all of your lame jokes and let you be a butthead. You'll find out the hard way if you act wise."

"Eh, guys, my jokes aren't that bad, are they?"
No comment.
We turned in to the ceramics room. In one corner there were three rows of stools lined up, stadium style. Standing very tall at a table in front of the stools, Mr. Yamada was nodding and smiling at both the old and the new faces. He didn't look too mean to me, but I was curious now.

"Okay, all the old students, get working on whatever projects you want. All the new students, please take a seat on these stools." The Japanese man gestured to the elevated rows of gray metal stools.

I don't really know why I felt so nervous all of a sudden. "New students? That's me," I thought, feeling odd twinges of real dread for having consigned myself to this class. "Rules and regulations, maybe?" I wondered.

I sat in the back row. Gerald and Patrice had helped hatch a strange fear in me. I mean, Mr. Yamada seemed like a pretty nice guy, but I was worried. Something weird, some kind of bizarre vibrations were running through the novice group. Even the most notorious troublemakers, like Hama, were quickly settled and silent. We all could feel whatever it was.

After a big smile—it seemed real—and a hearty hello, Mr. Yamada pinched a handful of clay off a large, cone-shaped mound that sat on the table. He then proceeded to mold it, quickly, into a perfectly smooth, round ball. This ball he held out to us. "I want to welcome you to Beginning Ceramics. This," he tossed the ball lightly in the air, "is
the medium you will be working with. If you look over at those shelves," he pointed to a display area for finished projects, "you will see that we can create many different shapes--almost any shape you can imagine and then successfully engineer." Another enormous smile.

"Do any of you know what property it is that allows us to create this wide variety of shapes?"


"Well, let me put that another way. Do any of you know the word we use to describe the quality of clay that makes it so easy to shape?"

I was still quite nervous, but I raised my hand, very slowly.

"Yes . . . what is your name?"

"Chris. Christopher Lau."

"Okay, Christopher, what word do you think it is?"

Everyone had turned around to watch me. "Ah, is it 'flexible'?"

"Flexible. That's a very good word, Chris. Flexible is close, but that's not quite the word we're looking for."

He looked around at the other students. "Anybody else have a word."

I raised my hand again. "Yes, Chris," he chuckled. "Do you want to have another go at it?"

"Ahm, how about 'pliable'?"
"Pliable. That's another good choice, Chris, but it's still not quite the word we're after."

My hand went up again. "Is it 'malleable'?"

"That's a fine guess too, Chris, but we tend to use malleable when we talk, oh, say, about metals that are easy to work."

"Elastic?" I questioned.

"Hmmm, you're getting very warm, Christopher. You're almost there." He gave me what looked like a very kind, very encouraging look. But I'd run out of words. "Okay, I don't want to wear Mr. Lau out, so I'll tell you the word. It's 'plastic.' Clay is extremely plastic. Watch how easily I can mold this into any shape I'm after."

He stopped speaking and began to work the clay. In a matter of seconds his powerful hands and veined arms had turned the ball of clay into what he called a pinch pot. He held up the finished product. "Of course, this is a little bit easier for me because I've been practicing a while. But if you practice hard, too, you'll be able to do this just as easily."

He set the pot down on the table, picked up a piece of fishing line, and swiftly sliced the pot in half. He held the cut edges toward us. "See how thin the walls are. And notice that they are very even, though thickening slightly toward the bottom. Your first project will be to make a simple pinch pot, like this one. Are there any questions?"
There weren't. "All right," he said, smashing the pot back into the big cone of clay, "come with me and I'll show you where to get your clay and how to wedge the air bubbles out of it."

We followed quickly, in silence. I wanted to dig right in and whip out my pinch pot, but trying to figure out how to wedge the clay properly took the rest of the period.

During that week, and even the next week, I tried very hard to make the "perfect" pinch pot. Mr. Yamada would sit with each one of us, offering advice on technique. He smiled all the time and rarely spoke as loudly as he had on that first day. With no effort at all, he had gained total control over the classroom. He dominated it. And although he appeared gentle, no one looked very anxious to cross him.

Every day I sweated blood over my latest pinch pot. Every time I thought I'd done the job, Mr. Yamada would either weigh the pot in his hand and tell me it was not proportioned correctly, or he would cut it in half and show me how uneven the walls were. My frustration mounted, but I kept trying to get it "right."

"Don't be afraid to destroy your work and start over," he told me--every single time. Then he'd grin while he watched me mash my latest failure back into its little "plastic" lump.

After pinch pots, we were supposed to "master" simple coil rolling. Everyone moved busily on to making tiny coiled
objects—except me. I continued to struggle with my pinch pot, the only one in the class who still did not have what Mr. Yamada would call a "keeper." By the time he finally allowed me save my first lousy pinch pot, that still wasn't as nice as plenty of the others—and most of those were borderline pathetic—almost everyone else had finished their stage-two coil projects.

The class moved on to slabs then, but not me. "Try to get your coils more even, Christopher. Try to make them more uniform." It wasn't easy. "Thinner, Chris, make them thinner." Yeah, right, I'd think, gritting my teeth.

Something was happening to me. I spent more and more time sitting there doing nothing that seemed important. I was sick of the effort it took to roll out first the "perfect" coil, then the "perfect" slab. Why did everything have to be so "perfect"? I'd thought this class was going to be easy. Why in the world did all my friends think this guy was so great anyway? He was definitely turning me off to art, as far as I was concerned.

I let myself slide. I started fooling around, wasting clay on the most peculiarly useless little projects. One day I rolled out some very thick, very uneven slabs, plastered them together into a mountain, and planted a tiny clay tree and a little clay cabin on top of it. Tom laughed at me each time he looked over at my "sculpture." I asked him to kindly shut up.
At the end of class I was about to crush the whole thing into a "non-keeper" ball when Mr. Yamada came over to inspect my minor masterpiece. "You have to weld that tree together a little better," he said. "It won't make it through the firing like that."

"The firing?" I asked, not quite comprehending what this voice from heaven meant.

"Yes, the firing." He walked around to the other side of the table, taking in the full effect of viewing my humble piece in the round. "You know, Chris . . ." The considering pause was quite lengthy. "That's the first thing you've ever really done. It's definitely a keeper."

He walked away. Patrice came over to me. "Wow, Chris, Yamada really likes this, huh?"

"Really?" I couldn't quite figure it out. I thought I'd been wasting time. I thought I was fooling around. I was surprised he hadn't been upset. Welding the tree together took some time; I was late for my next class, but Mr. Yamada wrote me a note of excuse.

From then on, Mr. Yamada rarely talked to me. One day in late November he walked into the room. It was lunchtime, and only a few of us were spending that sacred lounging period working. I was piecing together what I seriously referred to as a "stylized goblet." Everything I did now was taking me one step farther, each time, into the realm of the strange, the stranger, and hopefully, one day, the strangest.
Mr. Yamada observed me for a while, his arms folded contemplatively across his chest. Finally he spoke: "You know, Christopher, if you keep this up, you could die famous." Then he turned around and walked back out the door.

It was a Saturday morning in December, 1970. School would be out in just under two weeks. I'd begun work on what I projected would be an enormous coil-built vase. I figured that class time and lunch time alone wouldn't be enough to complete it. After parking my car way up on Metcalf Street, quite a distance from the art room, I walked casually down the stairs of the mountain side of the building. I tried forcing open several of the lower windows without any luck. The last window budged a little, so I put more pressure on it. Someone hadn't secured the latch, and the window popped open. I wriggled in through the opening.

I took one of the gray metal stools off the table and then began a production line roll of coils, all of them as long and as thick as possible. With the other stools up on the tables around me, I figured I was pretty well screened from view by the security guards and other passersby. I hadn't turned on the overhead lights either, though it was overcast and fairly dark in the room. After twenty minutes or so, I began to feel pretty relaxed and fairly sure that I was secure.
You know, Mr. Yamada had always moved silently, like a **ninja** in fact. He could come up right behind you, but you'd never know it until he either said something, or slid stealthily into your peripheral field of vision.

That particular morning he turned the key in the lock and walked into the room before I even realized he was there. I was hidden from view, thanks to all of the stools, but I could neither get over to the window nor out the front door without him noticing me. I sat there petrified, wondering whether he had it in him to kill me. I watched him closely, hoping for an opportunity to escape.

I had never seen Mr. Yamada move the way he did that Saturday morning, now that he believed he was alone in the classroom. He appeared to be somehow possessed. After tossing his wallet and keys on his desk, he ripped off his shirt and quickly put on his long, blue denim smock. That smock had always hung on the hook next to his desk, but I'd never actually seen him wear it. It never seemed to get dirty. Now, dressed for what looked like some very serious work, he took long, forceful strides to the galvanized garbage can which contained the clay. In two or three muscular scoops, he piled up what looked to be about fifty pounds of clay. While he manhandled the huge mound at the wedging table, he whistled, loudly, some tune which was unfamiliar to me. He hoisted the perfect cone of clay effortlessly, though I could see the muscles in his back and
arms bulge. Still whistling, he walked over to the Robert Brent wheel and slammed the clay square in the middle of the bat. He went to the sink, filled a large bowl with water, then returned to the wheel with chamois, sponge, and teasing needle in hand. The wheel engine hummed louder as the spinning mound accelerated. While he centered the clay he wiped perspiration from his forehead on his bare shoulder from time to time. I could feel the intensity of his concentration; I realized that he'd stopped whistling. All of his energy became centered in the clay. I'd never seen anyone throw such a huge mass at one time.

And then it happened. He suddenly stood up and took several forceful steps in my direction. He stopped. We were looking each other in the eye. He smiled. "Oh," he said softly, "hello, Chris. Working hard, are we?"

I nodded, at most, a weak yes. I wondered what he'd do to me. He walked by me, picked up several empty boards, and returned to the wheel. He went back to work, throwing perfect tea bowls, one after another, maybe fifty of them, or more. After I realized our conversation was over, I went back to building my vase. I didn't feel very relaxed for some time, but gradually I lost myself in the work. Like he had, the instant he stopped talking to me.

My vase had grown by about two feet when I noticed him putting his shirt back on. "Christopher, I've set the lock,
so all you have to do is slam the door when you leave. And,"
he smiled, "make sure the windows are latched . . . tight."

"Okay, sure. Yes, Mr. Yamada, I will." That
afternoon, after double-checking all the windows and before
slamming the door securely shut, I inspected the blue smock.
It was still spotlessly clean.

On Monday morning, Mr. Yamada gave me a set of keys to
all the art rooms in Castle Memorial Hall. He also gave me a
letter, addressed to the security guards, stating that any
Lab School students who were working after hours and on
weekends were authorized, by him, to do so. By the time
senior year rolled around, many of us were in the art wing at
all hours of the day and night. Mr. Yamada taught everyone
how to operate the kiln. Production was up so much that he,
alone, couldn't possibly manage to bisque and fire all our
work.

When I graduated from the Lab School in 1972, I asked
Mr. Yamada to sign my annual. My slab technique must have
improved quite a bit. This is what he wrote:

Aloha to a Super Box Builder:

Christopher, it was rough going, but I think
I've succeeded a little in toughening your hide.

Shige Yamada

But the story doesn't quite end there. I've come back
to the Lab School, a teacher now. When I first ran into Mr.
Yamada, I called him "Mr. Yamada."
He smiled that same, old, mysterious smile, and said in that same, gentle voice: "Chris, we're colleagues now. You don't have to call me Mr. Yamada. Please, call me Shige."

"Okay, Mr. . . . Shige," I said. I nearly choked on the words.

Before that final Saturday morning, two Decembers ago, I must have seen him day after day after day. But I could only ever manage to call him "Shige" that one time. Every time afterwards, I addressed him as "Mr. Yamada." Each time I said it, he would smile.

It's a good thing my hide is so tough these days.
"Number fifty-five Kaneohe Circle Island! Any takers?" He looked straight at me and smiled. "Well, look what we have here, ladies and gentlemen."

I hesitated to step into the bus as he took a drag on his cigarette.

"Looks like we have a taker here. And how do you do on this fine day?"

I shook water off my umbrella and proceeded up the steps into the bus.

Dana Smrekar
THAT 7-ELEVEN GUY

RESEARCH PAPER

"All we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos is ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up. The Wilsons here is with us, an' the preacher is with us. I can't say nothin' if they want to go, but I'm a-goin' cat-wild with this here piece of bar-arn if my own folks busts up." Her tone was final and cold.

John Steinbeck
THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Turn off engine. Yes. Pacific Heights has always been my favorite turnaround, too--usually. I remember the good old days, when I would come to the end of the line and charge the riders who wanted to stay on the bus for a round trip. That discouraged them, and by the time I turned off my engine the bus would be empty. But everyone has a bus pass these days. I know these four kids do, unfortunately.

"Hey, you kids back there. Mind if I smoke a cigarette up here?" What's with these guys? Are they all deaf, or what? "Hey, you kids!"
The little Oriental girl looks up. "What did you say, sir?" Polite kid.

"I asked if it was okay with you folks if I sit here and take a smoke break."

They all look up. The tall kid with the boxtop cut--he looks Japanese--says, "Sir, I believe that's against the law--not that it's a problem with me, sir--even though I am a bit asthmatic. But don't worry about us, sir. Go ahead and ease your nicotine fit. Even if it's at the expense of our young lungs. Go ahead and smoke, sir, please. And if I should start wheezing, just drive me to Queen's Hos--"

"Never mind, okay, son? I'll smoke outside."

I get up to walk out, and they're all back to doing something on their laps. Curious, I walk down the aisle. They're all writing.

I lean down and casually say "Boo" to the tall haole kid who's sitting in the fourth-row aisle seat on the left. He jumps about a foot in the air. "Sorry, son, I didn't mean to scare you, but--say, don't I know you from somewhere?"

"No, sir, I don't think so." God, these kids are all so polite. Four kids writing? Weird. Why aren't they home playing Nintendo or doing something normal?

"What are you folks doing?"

The Filipino kid says, "We have this teacher who is forcing us to write pieces about bus rides. So we all
decided to ride the bus together and work on our assignment. I guess you could say, sir, that we are doing research."

"Wow," I say, "this teacher sounds like a real bad dream. Reminds me of my school days back at University High."

"University High!" the small Oriental girl--she looks Japanese, mixed maybe--exclaims. "We all go to University High, too."

"Really? My old stomping grounds, huh? Well, well, so you're all Junior Bows."

The haole kid asks, "Sir, what is your name?"

"Well, you can call me . . . Bo," I say. "You know, I had a teacher back at the Lab School who forced me to write a bus piece once. Actually, it might be because of that piece that I became a bus driver. I don't know. I mean, I majored in architecture at the University of Oregon and made a bundle of money afterwards. Hey, I'll bet I'm the only bus driver around who lives in a house he designed himself. But I got tired of it. I wasn't happy anymore. One day I decided to give bus driving a try, and I loved it. I still do."

"What was your teacher's name?" the Japanese-looking boy asks.

"Geez, that was a long time ago, kid. I think it was Lee . . . or maybe Lau. I don't know why it's so confusing, so hard to remember. Yeah, it was Lau. Christopher Lau."
They all exchange surprised looks. "That's the teacher who's making us write this stupid paper!" they all shout.

"Really! Well, for peepsake, I thought he would be dead by now."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," they all mumble.

"Excuse me, sir," says the Filipino kid, "but don't you have to start driving this bus again?"

"Oh, right. Thanks, son."

I turn around to head up to my seat.

"Excuse me, Mr. Bo, sir," the young lady asks, "but could we interview you? Ask you questions about driving the bus, and things like that?"

"Well, young lady, sure. Okie-dokie, why don't you all come up and sit near me. That way I can talk to you while I drive."

The tall haole kid says, "But isn't that against the rules, sir? It says right up there that passengers aren't supposed to talk to the driver while this vehicle is in motion."

"Hey, folks, for University High School students, I'll bend the rules."

They all crowd up to the front. Two of them sit right behind me. The other two sit in the first seat across the aisle. As I start the engine I say, "By the way, I don't think I caught your names?" I turn around and face them.
"I'm Kristine, this is Dana, that's Cliff, and Brad's on the end."

"Okay, fellow Lab Schoolers, who's got the first question?"

Kristine asks--she's seems pretty inquisitive--, "Do you have any memorable stories about people who've ridden on your bus?"

"Bingo, kid, I've got a million of 'um."

Just then I pull up at a stop for a single passenger. It's a very dark-skinned fellow who looks like a professional body builder. I wonder about him. As he grips the railing, boosting himself up the stairs, I can see the veins on his forearm pop out. The kids are writing furiously. He's wearing mirrored Oakley shades.

Looking down at me, he asks, "Can I catch this bus to get back downtown?"

"No," I say slowly, "but you can take any bus across the street there."

"Thanks," he says softly. Pivoting, he walks back down the stairs. Just when he's about to step out, he turns back and stares right at Cliff. Cliff's face reflects in the mirrored glasses, and I can tell he's trying not to look worried, but he does. This feels like trouble. Then, just like that, Charles Atlas is out the door.
"Whoa!" Cliff exclaims, exhaling hard. "I hate it when mean-looking guys like that get on the bus. Especially if they sit next to you."

Kristine asks me, "Do you worry, Mr. Bo, when people like that get on your bus?"

"Well, it's not so much worry, as wonder, Kristine. I mean, I know that guy was big, but I wouldn't consider myself to be small, either. Over the years, I've had very little trouble on my bus."

"Do you remember any time you did, sir?"

"Hmmm, let me see. Well, once I had this gang of delinquents hanging out in the back. I figured something might happen. They didn't really seem to be going anywhere; they were just riding, you know what I mean? Sure enough, they started hassling this little old Japanese man. They wanted his money. I stopped the bus, went back there, and escorted them to the street. No big deal."

"Gee," Dana says, "that's sounds pretty scary, sir."

I laugh. "Not really, Dana. Actually, if you want to see something really scary, you should ride the bus with this whacko I know who drives for Volcano Tours on the Big Island. At night, when he's taking the tourists down the Chain of Craters Road, he'll suddenly turn off all his lights and drive that way, in the dark, for a couple of minutes. You kids know how dark it is up there, right? He goes ripping
around bends in the road. I hear it really freaks the passengers out."

"Wow!" says Dana, laughing softly. "That's a good one. How does he do it?"

"I really don't know, Dana. You figure it out."

We stop for two more passengers, a Japanese man and a Filipino woman who seem to be friends. They flash their passes then head to the rear. I swear it sounds like they're speaking to each other in two different languages. One says something like, "Blah blah blah blah blah," and then the other responds with what sounds like, "Baka laka baka laka."

Brad's laughing about it and writing away, so maybe I'm not imagining things.

We're approaching the main terminal. "Oh, Mr. Bo," Kristine moans apologetically, "I wish we could stay with you longer, but we all have to go."

"Well, I hope I've helped you out some."

"Yes, sir, you have. Thank you." They all thank me. Man, these kids are so polite.

As I pull up to the stop, they all thank me one more time.

"Hey, you guys," I call as they wave to me from the sidewalk, "tell Mr. Lau that Romeo Gampong says hello."

They nod their heads.

"Thanks, folks!"
Two dignified looking teenagers, about sixteen, step onto the bus. They're well-built and wear clean-cut boxtop hairstyles, just like Brad's. The shorter one looks Hawaiian. The dark, taller, more well-toned one is definitely a Samoan. I really believe these two are mature young men who won't make trouble for me. They sit quietly in the back of my bus.

Hey, but who knows? Maybe the next time I see Kristine, Dana, Cliff, and Brad, I'll have a story to tell about these two kids. I sure do have my share of memorable incidents when it comes to bus-driving stories. But I know I can handle anything that comes my way, and I love what I do. Especially when I can run into great kids like those four. Believe me, I'm really not doing this just because it's my job.

I got off. I stood there in the rain—it was raining like hell—waiting for a bus to take me home.
Clifford Jara
A BUS RIDE HOME
It made me feel better. It made me feel not so depressed any more.

J. D. Salinger
THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

BORN AGAIN

By 6:00 p.m., Saturday--my day off?--had already been way too long a day. I'd awakened for the Farrington speech festival at 5:30 a.m. By 10:45 I'd logged roughly 2500 words of written commentary on eleven speech contestants' ballots, the equivalent of maybe eight student paper responses. Even five years ago, my hand wouldn't have ached the way it did by noon. With only an hour break after hearing that four of our Lab School students, Earl Aquino, Mari Matsuzaki, Heidi Tang, and Kawehi Anderson had won certificates in the competition, Mike Flaherty and I had driven to McCoy Pavilion for The Talking Island Festival where I'd performed four student essays, each with as much energy as I would give to any one student piece on any one day of teaching. Five years ago, I'd have begged to read more. At 3:45 I could only breathe a sigh of relief because time had run out; I wouldn't be able to read the fifth piece I'd scheduled, a bus ride story by Dana Smrekar. Stories take so much energy to perform convincingly.

And now, there I lay, sprawled on my bed. I rolled my head to the side. The red numbers glowed 5-5-0. The sun and I seemed to be competing to see who could sink faster. But
Kawehi had asked me if I would be coming to watch her perform Darrell Lum's "Beer Can Hat." When a student asks you, point-blank, if you're going to attend an event and you say you will, your reason for not showing up had better be either hospitalization or death. Otherwise, you go. I wondered if exhaustion were a valid excuse for showing up at Queen's emergency room. I could see a disgusted nurse telling me, "Hey, mister. Get serious, would you?" So I'd drop dead on the spot, just to prove that this was serious. Cause of death: premature old age due to not having a day off since May of 1989. That would teach them.

Dragging my body off the bed, I staggered, half-asleep, to my dull-red CRX. My tail bone still throbbed a bit from the fall I'd taken three weeks ago when Jim and I had gone for a medicinal hike up Palolo Stream, but I did sit down in what had become for me at age thirty-six, with my dully aching behind, a rather uncomfortable little sports car. Finally thinking about it, after staring stupidly at the garage wall for several minutes, I decided I was going deaf. At my age, I thought, it's hard to tell, just by listening, if you've actually remembered to start the engine. I stepped on the gas, and the climbing whine of the engine, together with my lack of movement, told me I had started the car, though I'd forgotten to put it in reverse.

The trip back to Ala Moana Park went by like a dream. I barely remember any of it. All I knew was that I'd finally
made it to the parking area. I needed to get over to the stage before I simply decided to forget the whole thing and drive back home---or maybe even over to Queen's.

The show going on at the stage where Kawehi would perform was beyond awe inspiring. I needed to sit on two squares of carpet just to keep my mind off how sore my behind was and on the little old educators who rattled away in fairly feeble voices about their forty-plus years of service each to public education.

If Fran Perreira hadn't shocked me awake, I'd probably have keeled over, not so much from fatigue, but from the prospect of being exhibited for show, like these aged storytellers, in thirty years. Is there something wrong with me? I wondered. I thought about the emergency room again. Just at that moment, Fran tugged sharply on my graying hair.

After the hair-pulling sensation finally made its less than rapid way to my nerve center, I turned. And there they were. Kawehi stood restlessly in the shadows, waiting out the time until she would give her full energy, at the end of a long day, to her own performance. And she'd volunteered to participate in this extracurricular activity on the night of her birthday!

The girls disappeared. I turned back to the old man who spoke. He now produced, almost magically, a well-worn ukulele. After distributing song books, he proceeded to
teach us how to sing Hawaiian songs. I sang along. I usually hate to sing along.

When the show ended, Kawehi, Fran, and Catie Tejeda came over and sat down. Mike, Kawehi's coach, materialized also. Again it was as if I were living out a dream. But something was very different--about me, about the night. I suddenly remembered what I'd told Mike after our afternoon performance: "If I make it back tonight, I am definitely going to eat shave ice." I'd wanted strawberry, the classic shave ice flavor of my childhood.

I barely stood up and headed over to the shave ice stand. I ordered a cone. When the woman asked me what flavor I wanted, I nearly said, "Strawberry, of course," but I held back. This wasn't the Queen's Surf snack bar of 1960. This was 1990. They had plenty of flavors to choose from. As I stood there in mid-speech, the pleasant lady staring at me as if I were learning disabled, I scanned what looked like twenty flavors. Finally I decided. "Vanilla."

"Is that all? Just one?" she questioned skeptically.

I looked at her, trying to read between the lines. Then I remembered again that this was 1990. "And Li Hing Mui," I added confidently, trying to act as if I'd only paused in my order for some kind of dramatic effect.

"Oooh," she asked, laughing, "you like Li Hing Mui, too?"

"Ah," I hesitated, "actually I've never tried it."
She gave me this huge smile. "It's delicious!" she exclaimed. "You'll love the tart flavor."

"Oh, um, that's good," came my lame reply.

Shave ice in hand, I shuffled back to the stage area. The show was about to start, but Kawehi had enough time to figure out that I hadn't had shave ice in a while.

"Wow!" I said between spoonfuls. "This Li Hing Mui is a great invention."

Kawehi gave me a startled look. "Eh, where you been, Mr. Lau? Welcome to da twentiet' century an den." It was the first time in hours I'd laughed about anything.

Finally, Kawehi was called forward to perform her 1989 state finals fifth-place rendition of "Beer Can Hat." Instantly, she held the audience spellbound. Tired as she had to be, Kawehi simply scooped the listeners up in the palm of her hand and proceeded to weave them into her riveting verbal world of eternal friendship and undying love. As I watched her, listened to her, I thought about all the Lab School students I've taught and what they mean to me. It was as good as being immersed in some fountain of youth.

When Mike and I were about to leave, I took a long look at the shave ice stand. I said, "You know, Mike, if I weren't so full, I'd buy one more shave ice. Thirty years ago, I could have eaten half a dozen of them."

He laughed softly. "So could we all."
As I eased myself onto my car seat, wishing I'd been smart enough to sit on three squares of carpet, I had to smile. Just like Darrell's Bobo, I felt as if I'd been given some kind of an irreplaceable gift, and Kawehi was a big part of it, some kind of vital, energetic force, I hoped I would never lose.
Brady walked up to the front of the room, placed his book on the podium, and then climbed up on the chair. From there he sat his butt on the back, like Mr. Lee would always do. He read one paragraph and then called on Adina to be the next reader. She read about a page and, without looking to see who was paying attention, Brady called on Eugene.

"Gene, yo' turn fo' read." The room was silent. Eugene had his head on his desk, and he was already starting to drool.

Kawehi Anderson
I NEVA FINISH MY HOMEWORK

WE'VE GOT A TEAM

What is a myth, today? I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent with etymology: myth is a type of speech.

Roland Barthes
MYTHOLOGIES

Ms. Bauer looked distressed. "Kim. I don't want to see you have to struggle for an hour and a half with this sucker, so I'm gonna get it down for you," I said, undoing the latch of the overhead after I'd managed to squeeze out of my seat and into the crowded aisle. When I handed her the suitcase, I heard my spinal cord scream. Actually it was only the little old haole lady I'd accidently brained when I brought Kim's monster in for a landing on the airplane floor. I could see I'd been pretty accurate about the tonnage—like one of those psychics at the carnival who make a living predicting weights. I'd figured Kim's suitcase weighed almost as much as she did.

59
Kim still concentrated on her unraveled cassette. Somehow the tape had become twisted. That look on her face, half mystified, half depressed, said it all. "I'll carry it for you," I offered, cranking up this hernia-waiting-to-happen. "I can't believe they let you carry this on board. What do you have in this thing, anyway?" That made her smile, took her mind off her broken music.

"Just some clothes . . . and stuff."

The "stuff" was making my back cry out. In a blinding flash of insight, I knew that Kim had to be one of Tower Records' best customers. The plane disgorged us. On the way to the baggage claim area, before we hit the down escalator at Hilo Airport, I finally assumed it was safe to hand Kim's life back over to her. Plenty of baggage wielding space in that spacious corridor.

Joe Montana to Winnie the Pooh. Recalling the theory of momentum from my physics 151 class as I swung the Samsonite wrecking ball in Kim's direction, I watched her tiny hand shoot forward. A fraction of a second later, Ms. Bauer sat down solidly on her butt. Tourists stared. The contorted facial expressions of several other speech team members said it all. Second down and ten. Kim shot out her hand once more. I grabbed hold and hoisted her to her feet. She wobbled a few steps before successfully calculating her balance. We were off and running for the first speech tournament of 1991.
"Remind you of THE MUSIC MAN?" I wondered to myself--a disastrous road show presentation by the Lab School on Maui the year before. "Nah, ancient history," I decided.

Out on the sidewalk, after reclaiming our luggage, we headed for the rental car area. Kawehi Anderson and Fran Perreira had already gone headlong into their pre-tournament psyche mode. We filed merrily past the Radford speech team. Kawehi laughed wildly when Fran blurted out, "Word to your mother!"

One of the Rams pointed at our two champions; was that fear in her eyes? Her friend glanced at the two ladies, who conversed at hyperspeed, and shook her head "Yes." Yes. They knew these two. We were a team other teams were beginning to recognize. Third down and seven. I wondered if they could reckon with us.

I sat puzzling over my Greek passage in the dimly lit Hilo Hawaiian Hotel room. Was Philoctetes supposed to go to Troy too, or did Odysseus only have to bring the bow and arrows? I tried to imagine a wound so grotesque that the smell of it festering would drive battle- and blood-hardened warriors to despair.

There was a soft knock at the door. Carefully marking my place in the play, I put out my cigarette and went to answer my fate. It was Heidi.

"Mr. Lau, are you doing anything?"
I cast a sidelong glance at my Greek homework in progress. "Well, ah, . . . . Why?"

"Could you take us to a drug store?"

"Ah, yeah, sure. Of course!" The tournament was only three hours away. Anything for the speech team. The Trojan War would just have to wait.

As we parked by Longs at the Prince Kuhio Mall, I entertained Caroline, Heidi, and Lani with one of my witty travel anecdotes.

"I left my toothbrush and my shampoo bottle out to dry before I packed them," I chuckled, "so, of course, I forgot to bring them with me."

Heidi's face crinkled in dismay. This was the second day we'd been in Hilo. "So you haven't brushed your teeth all this time?" All three of them gave me dazzling, post-orthodontic stares.

"Well," I defended guiltily, "I've been flossing and gargling to the best of my ability. So it isn't too bad, huh?"

"Oh, um, yeah . . . then I guess it's okay," Lani offered, jumping quickly out of the van.

I'd found my toothbrush after wandering up and down the aisles for years. Store security, I figured, would be tailing me by now.

Weaving my way up and down the aisles in reverse, I finally located the three avid shoppers. Deep in
conversation, they deliberated the merits of a multitude of pantyhose brands. I continued on my tour of Longs, hoping I wasn't giving the impression that I intended to leave the store without paying for my toothbrush. Eventually I settled on not buying any of the shampoos.

Back at the pantyhose concession, pros and cons continued to be debated. I contemplated going for the shampoo, even though the hotel had provided more than enough. Just as I was about to go back, Caroline cried, "I just don't understand anything about buying these things!"

"Why don't you ask one of the women who work here?" I suggested.

"Oh, no," Heidi explained confidently, "we'll just ask Lani. Lani knows all about these things."

We walked briskly out of Longs, purchased pantyhose and toothbrush in hand. I could feel the energy building. They were an awesome looking trio. First and ten.

It would be tricky, on the order of a Statue of Liberty play, to be sure. The fact that darkness enveloped us was on our side. The first three rounds of the tournament were behind us. Everyone seemed up for fast food. The problem was our friend, Merle Nishida, a Hilo High English teacher who was also a judge in the tournament. Coach Mike had said that she would definitely be judging one of our team members tomorrow, so we had to prevent her from seeing any of them.
Merle was hungry too—it was near 9:30—but her hunger would have to wait until the team members had loaded up and were returned to the hotel.

Merle sat parked two rows away from our vans. Rhonda stood beside Merle's window, talking to her. That would make it harder to conceal Merle's position. Still, we did have the shades of night in our favor.

As the students meandered back to the van, goodie laden, I kept repeating versions of the same lame advice: "Hurry up! Close that door! Don't leave the light on! Don't look over at Ms. Whang! Don't look at that car! Don't let Ms. Nishida see your faces! Avert your eyes!"

Frances and Kawehi hopped into the van. Fran threw all her hair over her face. Kawehi dove behind the seat. Taco Bell and Coke sloshed over the new van's carpet. French fry grease gave added luster to the pile.

"Who are we waiting for?" I asked, noticing the two empty spaces next to me just as I was about to burn rubber back to Banyan Drive.

A disembodied "Guess!" came from the darkness somewhere behind me.

"Is it Grace?" I inquired.

"No, I'm here, Mr. Lau," she said meekly, coming up from her reclining position in the very back seat. "It's Mari and Soo Jin."
"Oh, of course," I nodded stupidly. "Look! There they are now," I said, pointing, just as the two seniors waltzed merrily by Merle and Rhonda.

"Sorry we took so long, Mr. Lau," they said as they slid into the front seat.

"That's okay. Hurry up and close the door so we kill the light. I hope Ms. Nishida didn't see you two guys. And if she did see you, I hope she doesn't remember what you look like come tomorrow."

"Oh," Mari said softly, "she'd definitely remember us."

I launched the Aerostar toward the highway. By the time we dropped off the team my stomach was screaming. The restaurant Rhonda, Merle, and I were supposed to eat at was closing as we arrived. We were looking at overtime.

"How about this little hole-in-the-wall place I know of called 'Lolo's'?" Merle suggested.

"One dive or what?" Rhonda asked.

"Does it serve beer?" I whined.

"No and yes," Merle answered in school-teacherly form. "It's a real local-local kind of nice, cozy, friendly little family-oriented restaurant."

After navigating Merle's shortcut of every back street and alley in the labyrinth of downtown Hilo, we arrived.

"I'm starving," Merle and Rhonda said at the same instant. They were beginning to remind me of twins.

I was thirsty.
As we pushed through the door of Lolo's, Teru O'Lastes waved hello from a distant booth. The entire Second United Kahala Academy School speech "family" lounged in feeding slouches, their bodies sprawled over almost every table in the place. The mingled sounds of their grinding teeth and witty conversation grated on my eardrums. Loss of fifteen yards.

"Think they're first overall so far?" I whispered to Rhonda.

She nodded. "Overall, they are definitely first."

But the waitress brought us both Coors Lights. First and ten. Again.

After a late final round on Saturday, we'd rocketed back to the hotel for what Ms. Anderson called "Portagee" showers. The awards banquet followed and, aside from not knowing for twenty minutes which tables we were supposed to sit at, along with Rhonda's not being able to buy a beer, it was a pleasant way to end the tournament. Mari and Soo Jin had made finals in oratory. Mari had come in second and qualified for states.

"I guess I get to do my poetry now," she said. Double qualification. That would be a first for the rejuvenated Lab School squad.
Unloading the team back at the Hilo Hawaiian front door, I reminded them to go up to the room and check their ballots with Coach Mike.

It took no more than five minutes to park the van and come up from the basement into the lobby. Kawehi was just boosting herself off a couch.

"Did you go check your ballots with Mr. Flaherty?" I asked.

"Yeah," she answered, nodding her head unenthusiastically.

"Whoa," I said, "preeeeetty swift." I tried to smile, but I could see her disappointment. "So, Kawehi, what'd they say?"

"It was awful, Mr. Lau, awful. I am so pissed off." She shook her head in disgust.

As we got on the elevator I hugged her. "Remember, two more chances to qualify," I offered, even though advice like that doesn't really help a whole hell of a lot when you're hurting because you've missed this chance to qualify.

"Yeah, I know."

For Kawehi, for Fran, for the others who hadn't qualified for the state tournament this time, it was third and goal.

Before nodding off that night I glanced at my unfinished homework. The Greeks, I knew, had won in the end.
"Could it possibly be just the weapons?" I wondered. I quickly read the end of the play in my handy English translation. No, it was the arms and the man. The team had to have both to push it across. And not because he'd had anything to do with the Greek's victory, but simply because he'd decided to go on to Troy and do battle to his utmost ability, Philoctete's grievous wound had been healed.
"I want you to leave, and don't you dare come back. If I ever see your face again, I'll call the police."

He turned around and started to walk away. I ran into the house through the back door, locked both the back and front doors, and watched him through the sheer curtains of the picture window.

He turned around and came back to the side window. "You like me get one gun?" he threatened.

I was standing near the phone. "Get out of here now, and don't you ever come back, or I'll call the police," I threatened right back.

Joan Bunao
WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

READING, WRITING, AND . . .

A silent class sits in perfectly straight rows. Thirty students poised ready to learn in room 130. A Monday morning. Classes have been in session for five minutes. But not this particular class. They have no teacher. "It's 8:05," they think. Another sterling group of eleventh-grade English students. Their teacher, Mr. Lau, is always late these days. But because they are outstanding students, they sit patiently, hands folded on their laps. It's the Lab School tradition.

Finally, from down the hallowed hallways of the University Laboratory School a voice breaks into song: "The hills are alive with the sound of music, la, la, la, la." The class opens their journals as Mr. Lau approaches. They each write the day and the date at the top of a fresh page. They make sure they know the day and the date before they arrive at the classroom, because Mr. Lau no longer writes the
day and the date on the pale green chalkboard. Each student has a list of journal topics ready to suggest for the class since Mr. Lau no longer supplies journal topics.

The voice booms, "The hills are alive--ah, good morning class." Mr. Lau does a very slow slide through the door, managing to end upright, standing before the lectern. "Remember class, slow is okay in journal writing, but keep those pens and pencils moving. All set?" he asks, pulling his timer out of the faded blue backpack.

"Mr. Lau?" A student in the front row raises his hand.
"Yes, Mr. Rodrigues."
"We don't have a journal topic."
"Good point, Mr. Rodrigues, very good point. Would you care to give us a topic today?"

"Yes, Mr. Lau." Leon, model student that he is, turns to a seven-page list of possible journal topics. "I have many to choose from, Mr. Lau, but I believe--"

Mr. Lau cuts Leon off in mid-sentence. "Did I ever tell you, Leon, that I had your father as a student many years ago?"

Leon, because of his father's diligent training, is too polite to interrupt Mr. Lau. He has heard this tale many, many times before.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Rodrigues," Mr. Lau continues, walking toward the window and staring outside. "That must have been at least twenty years ago." His eyes glaze over.
Finally he turns to Leon. "And what topic have you for us today, Mr. Rodrigues?"

"I thought this might be interesting, Mr. Lau: Today is Your Thirty-Fifth Birthday."

"Yes, yes, Leon! That's a wonderful suggestion. I wish I'd thought of it myself." Mr. Lau slowly scrawls the topic on the ancient board. "All set now?"

The thirty students sit poised over their journals, writing instruments at the ready.

"Let's go for about, oh, somewhere between, oh, say, five and ten minutes today. I'll just punch in some random numbers on the old timer. After all students, we all know that time is immaterial."

Still the students wait, ready to write with great relish.

"All set now?" Mr. Lau asks once more. Thirty heads nod their readiness.

"Wait, stop." The students relax their writing hands. "Should I write about my thirty-fifth birthday, Mr. Rodrigues, or should I project twenty years into the future and write about my seventy-fifth birthday?"

"Whatever you like, Mr. Lau. After all, you are the teacher."

"What? What's that, Leon?" Mr. Lau looks startled. "Oh, yes, yes, of course, I am the teacher." Mr. Lau looks as if this is news to him. But he recovers. "Oh . . . of
course." He shakes his head slowly in recognition of the fact. "Yes, of course, I am the teacher. Thank you for reminding me, Mr. Rodrigues."

"You are quite welcome, Mr. Lau. Please don't mention it. You are too kind."

"My goodness, Leon. Your father has truly taught you the most perfect manners." Mr. Lau rubs his bearded chin, considering the options. "I think I'll write about ...." He runs his hands along the worn edges of the lectern. The students sit in burning anticipation of getting down to their journal writing task.

"Did I ever tell you, class, that a student once made me a lectern as a gift. Norman Krantz. Yes, I remember him well. Norman Krantz. Unfortunately, someone admired Mr. Krantz's work so much that the lectern quickly disappeared. Did I ever tell you people about that?"

They nod vigorously. He had.

"All set, folks?" Leon raises his hand. "Yes, Mr. Rodrigues?"

"Which birthday are you going to write about, Mr. Lau?"

"Which birthday, Leon?"

"Yes. The topic for journals."

"Oh, yes. I'm going to write about ...." Mr. Lau's gaze wanders toward the door. He removes his Coke-bottle-thick glasses and wipes his perspiring face on his shirt sleeve. His hands shake.

72
Another hand shoots up. Mr. Lau puts his glasses back on, the better to see who wishes to ask a question. "Yes, Miss Bunao."

"Do you feel all right, Mr. Lau?"

Mr. Lau laughs softly. "All right? All right? Why, yes, Miss Bunao. It's just so ironic that we should be writing about birthdays. Today is my fifty-fifth."

A scattering of "happy birthday" wishes come from students around the room.

"By the way, Miss Bunao, did I ever tell you how much you look like your mother and your Auntie Kathy. And, by the way, I think it a perfect indication of the Bunao integrity that your mother chose her last name for you instead of your father's."

Cynthia Bunao is also too polite to tell Mr. Lau that he has mentioned this many more times than she can count.

"How could I not feel all right, eh, folks? After all, it's my birthday. A happy day, to be sure."

Mr. Lau seems to have recovered his teacherly air. He has stopped shaking.

"I'm going to write about my seventy-fifth birthday. Now folks, all set?"

Just then a bird walks through the open doorway. Mr. Lau turns to look at the visitor. Some of the students look up from their spiral notebooks, wondering why they have not yet heard the familiar words, "Let's write." Mr. Lau stares at the bird as though he is seeing something he has never
seen before. Many students exchange quick, questioning glances. The bird goes back out the door. Mr. Lau still watches.

"Class, did you see that bird?"

They all nod together.

"That bird is more than twenty years old."

More questioning looks are exchanged.

"He used to come in here every day. He loved to listen to the students read. I wonder where he's been all this time?" Mr. Lau turns his gaze back to the students. "Did I ever tell you that?"

Leon raises his hand. "You mean about the bird coming into the classroom? Or the part about him being more than twenty years old?"

"Good question, Mr. Rodrigues. A very good question. Did I ever tell you that before?"

Leon looks confused.

"Did I, Leon?"

Leon hesitates. "No." Leon chooses the fastest way out of the maze. "No you didn't, Mr. Lau."

"Okay then, class, shall we write? All set?"

Cynthia's hand shoots into the air. "Excuse me, Mr. Lau, but it's time to go."

Mr. Lau checks his ancient watch. "Ah, so it is. And here we haven't even written journals today. Be sure to write a make-up journal tonight. I'll see you people
tomorrow. And by the way, I hope you've all learned something here today."

As the students depart, Mr. Lau calls out to them, "Remember, class! The hills are alive with the sound of music."

Leon Jr. and Cynthia Bunao walk down the hallway to their next class. "You know, Cindy," Leon says, "I don't think we'll be seeing Mr. Lau again for quite a while."

"I think you're right," she agrees.
I began by promising myself to ride a certain
distance without touching the handlebars. Like I would
start at a certain point, say, my driveway, and tell myself
to ride to the next telephone pole. I would always keep my
promise and "eat it." I got cuts, scrapes, and bruises
trying to master this so-called "game." Sometimes I would
get so frustrated. I couldn't seem to keep my balance, and
I kept wobbling. At first I couldn't even go three feet
without falling when I let go of the handlebars. I had to
make up stories to cover up the real truth about how I got
hurt. "Oh, my brother and I were playing tag, and he
pushed me down," was a famous excuse I gave. My friends
always bought the lie! I had band-aids on my knees,
bandaids on my elbows. Boy, did I look terrible.

Jo-Ann Uchimura
IT TAKES PAIN TO BE PERFECT

COMING ONE MORE TIME

But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the
present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or,
heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe
to forsee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until
he too lives with nature in the present, above time.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
SELF-RELIANCE

The bus disappeared, leaving the smell of diesel
exhaust hanging in the air. Still feeling weak, and now a
little nauseated, Chris wove his way over to the stairway
that led to the upper terrace. He collapsed on the cold
concrete stairs, knowing that he wouldn't be visible from the
street if he hid there to recover. The unmistakable scent of
urine came to him, but he was too tired to move. Compared to
the thick diesel odor, it was like breathing fresh air.

Chris let his head hang down heavily in his hands. He
felt his elbows pressing hard into his thigh bones, his
calves nearly cramping against the backs of his thighs. Gradually the sweat began to dry, and the feeling of a pleasant coolness came over him there in the unmoving, humid air. He could still feel the blood rushing rapidly through his body. At least he was still alive. "Geez, this is gonna be harder than I imagined," he moaned, hearing the thin echo of his hoarse voice. He'd been out of shape just a little bit too long. It was the first time he'd attempted any kind of jogging in nearly nine years.

The dizziness hadn't quite worn off, but Chris finally felt strong enough to push up the stairs. He braced himself, his palms sliding along the narrow, mossy walls on the way into the upper terrace. "Just in case," he sighed, still doubting whether his body could stay upright. When he reached the top of the stairs, he stooped to wipe his slimy palms on the grass. He let his head fall forward onto his knees. Piercing cricket chirps echoed around him. He'd lost track of time.

The vision of a rejuvenated champion bouncing up and down, hands raised over his head, flickered through his mind. Rocky. He lifted his head and looked up at the silent, circular concrete crown of the pumping station roof. In a moment of crystal clear-headedness, he realized it might be a while before he could dance at the summit.

Just then the mechanical arms of the pumping station kicked in, and the familiar old hum gently vibrated the
ground. It was that periodic performance that went on forever.

By the time he'd limped to the bottom of the hill, Chris had convinced himself that he was on his way back.
I went through the motions, imitating my dad, dropping my arm, lifting it, and turning my wrist. Still, the ball dropped into the gutter halfway down the alley. Disgruntled, I trudged back to my dad.

"Not bad," he said. We still have a lot to work on, though."

"Such as?" I asked.

"Well, for one thing, we might have to extend the number of steps to four."

"Four steps?"

"And there's the problem of posture."

"Posture?"

"Plus, we still have to work on your marks."

"My marks?"

"Don't forget the problem of turning your wrist."

"Oh yeah, I know about the wrist."

"And then there's your stance."

"Stance?"

"Your shoulders need work, too."

"My shoulders?"

My dad continued on down the list, naming all the areas I needed work on. It went for over two minutes. Every single thing that I was doing wrong, he named aloud.

Keith Hirata

PLACE IT RIGHT ON THE MARK

TEACHING THE GAP

Just a little to the left. No contact. Too much space. A little to the right. Too much metal. Too tight. Argh.

The first time he'd had to adjust the valves again. It was ten years and two cars later. With the Ghia, he'd performed the work religiously, every six months, right along with replacing the point and the plugs, the oil and the filter, and he'd pumped the grease into the chassis, tube by tube. Back then it had become second nature. A kind of art form. Now, the clearance was a big problem. Sliding under
the Ghia, he seemed to recall, had been so easy. Maybe the CRX was built closer to the ground. His stomach felt the irritation, the constant scraping of the silver plastic apron against it. And he felt increasingly guilty about the indelible grease lines being ground into the sacred T-shirt his former Quiz Bowl students had hand decorated and personally autographed for him. Why did his back hurt so much, especially at the waist, in the small of the back? It wasn't like he'd been bending over to get the maintenance done. Sweating under the engine compartment, he scratched his initials into the gravel-like coating that caked the underside of his car.

"Eh, Chris?" Someone kicked at his shin.

Feeling the ache in his lower back jack up another notch for the hundredth time, Chris wedged himself out from under the dull red CRX. Another dirt line or two etched itself into his one-of-a-kind shirt, and his stomach felt like it had begun to bleed.

He looked up into the sunshine to see Kimo staring down at him. Glancing down at his stomach, he noticed no blood yet. "Eh, Kimo," he croaked hoarsely, sat up and grabbed for his half empty, very warm Kirin.

"What you doing?" Kimo asked, pushing with his index finger to prop his glasses higher on the bridge of his nose.

Chris choked down the last of his hot beer and rubbed at his tender stomach with a greasy hand. Belching loudly,
he said, "Working on my car. What the hell does it look like?"

"Eh, man, no need schnap!" Kimo laughed and shook his head at the sorry sight of his dirty neighbor. "So, Professor Lau, why you no go Honda and have 'um do it for you?"

"Too expensive."

"Well, how 'bout Lex Brodie, brah? They cheap."

"Still too expensive for me, Kimo. That's what happens when you get unemployed. Like as if I had to tell you?"

"Eh, Chris, I work."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, but don't tell me you make enough now so you pay somebody to tune your engine."

Kimo chuckled and pushed at his glasses again. "Once a Pake, always a Pake, huh?"

Chris smiled and took off his own glasses. After rubbing his sweaty face on his filthy shirt sleeve, he said, "That's not what I meant, and you know it."

"Eh, eh, that's okay. You're right. I still do all my own work. It's good for me. It's not a money thing."

Chris put his glasses back on and looked up at his neighbor. "Yeah, Kimo, I know. But with me--well, it's been so freakin' long since I did any of this stuff that I . . . . You know."
"And to think," Kimo said, squatting and picking up the slippery ratchet, "you were the one who taught me how to do all of this. Remember?"

"Yeah, Kimo. Boy, do I remember. I burned up all three days of that Memorial Day weekend teaching you how. Does that car of yours still run?"

They both laughed.

"Why do you think I have to take the bus to work every day?" Kimo asked. "You were one hell of a teacher, Chris."

"Real funny, Kimo. I bet you never thought about how the quality of the student might just enter into this, huh?"

Kimo shook the socket wrench at Chris. "Good thing I'm not armed, or I'd--Hey!" he pushed the metal tool in Chris's face, "I am armed."

Chris waved the wrench away. "Okay, Grasshopper, since you're such a crack student, suppose you refresh my memory about getting the gap on these valves."

"What do you mean?"

Chris looked away at a car turning the bend, screeching its way up the hill. "I mean," he said, not looking at his friend, "tell me what it's like when you can feel that the gap is right. I taught you that, didn't I?"

Tossing the wrench in the air and catching it, Kimo said, "Get the hell outta my way." He waved Chris aside and slid easily under the car. "Wow, Chris, C-L. Signed your work of art, huh? Gim'me the gapping tool."
Chris placed the tool in Kimo's hand.
"What's the clearance?" Kimo asked.

Chris scanned the instruction manual again. "Says here it's point-one-seven to point-two-two. Use your own good judgment."

After several moments of working silence, Kimo pushed himself back out from under the car. "Get under there and check what I did ... Master." He slapped the gapping tool into Chris's hand.

Pushing and puffing, the blood pumping hard in his ears, Chris finally forced himself under the apron and beneath the exposed valves. He slid the 0.20 blade into the first gap. "Just testing you now, Kimo, but tell me what it's supposed to feel like again?"

Kimo laughed and kicked at Chris. "Not too loose, and not too much metal. Smooth, but not too smooth. Did I say it right, Professor?"

Chris ran the blade back and forth. Maybe it felt right. He didn't really know; he'd lost the touch. "I don't believe you, Kimo. Demonstrate."

Kimo's hand felt for the gapping tool then snatched it away. Turning his head to the side, Chris watched his friend pick up a used spark plug and tap it, blade inside the gap, on the cement. After a brief pause, he passed the tool and a spark plug to Chris. "Feel that gap, Dr. Lau? You feel how
it is? Not too tight, not too loose. Shoots, man, you
taught me what it feels like. Can't you feel it?"

Chris tested the plug. He thought he began to remember
vaguely, but he still didn't feel as if the touch were there.
He'd just have to trust his former student. "Okay, Kimo.
You pass." He struggled back into the sunlight. "Great job,
man. I must have managed to teach you something."

"Yeah, kind'a. Think you can do the rest?" Kimo asked,
looking down at his own shirt. "Chris, you owe me a shirt.
Look at this. My sister just sent this to me."

Chris focused on the dark blue shirt, now streaked in
several places with grease and dirt. "Let there be light,"
he read aloud. "Look, Kimo, I got an old student there right
now. I'll send her a blank check and make sure you get a new
shirt."

Kimo shook his head agreeably. "Okay, Chris. Okay.
Eh, it's cheaper than Lex Brodie, right?"

"I don't think they do tune-ups, but if they do then
you're right," Chris agreed. "Hey, Kimo, want a beer?"

The former student punched lightly at Chris's stomach.
"Nah, old man, I want to be able to slide under my car when I
get to be as old as you are."

Chris felt gently at his own stomach. "I've been
running."
"Well, Chris, you better run some more. You're probably gonna have to now, since your car won't be running anymore."

"Tell you what, Kimo, just save me a seat on the bus, okay?"

Kimo slapped him on the back, stood up, and walked down the driveway. "You know, Chris, you were a good teacher. You've saved me plenty of money, brah."

"Yeah, Kimo-Sabe, and you were a great student. Ah, thanks for the lesson."

Kimo waved over his shoulder. "Don't forget my shirt!"

Chris cranked the flywheel a quarter turn. Sliding back under the car, gapping tool in hand, he closed his eyes and tried to feel whatever it was he had taught his former student to feel. Slippery, just enough contact with the metal to slide and not scrape. The perfect gap? Maybe, he guessed, opening his eyes and shaking his head. He noticed his neighbor's initials in the grime next to his. That was the way he'd taught it to Kimo, a long time ago, when he'd known it well enough to teach.
"You have to go home, Kaleo!" I, dressed as a witch, began to preach to her. Something which I could see she didn't appreciate.

"I can't!" she screamed back.

"But why not? What exactly happened at home?"

"I don't want to go through it right now. But I'll tell you this. My mother told me never to come home. And if I did, she said she'd kill me." I could see tears forming in her eyes. She quickly wiped them away, trying to act strong.

Seema Ahmed
REUNION

CROSSWORD PUZZLE, JIGSAW BLADE

Fortunately, all the doggles are snoozing. So is zee cat. Ah yes, the professor of catologicology mumbled loudly as he dared, a rare example of the dreaded Pinkasaurus. The Pinkmeister. The Pinklepuss. Old Pinkle Winkle. Pinkie Winkie. Have I exhausted the possibilities? I hope so. S'too hard to think.

Unless I were a burglar. Breaking and entering, the officer would say, cuffing my hands behind me. Or wouldn't he? Reading me my rights. Miranda? My name in the news for everyone to see and to speak. Much worse perhaps than some kind of sudden death infraction. How do you spell it? That kid in . . . New York? With an I? Miranda. Jail bait.

That would be unfortunate, regardless of spelling. Or as good old Shigeko would say, There is no such word as irregardless, Christopher.

El Pink Wink stirs in el moonlight.

86
Shhhhh, he cautioned himself. And he should remember to whisper. Yes!

Tiptoe to my handmade gate. Work of art. Die famous. Slide the bolt cautiously and continue the stealthy upstairs stagger--Whoa! Try say dat t'ree times fast.


Second floor. Lingerie, sporting goods, office supplies. Pop's old office door squeaks every time, but . . . the doggies sleep on. Turn on a light? No.

"Ah!" Faithful left foo-oot jams into something I can't see, don't remember being there. Hope the furniture hasn't been rearranged. Walk carefully, my son, toward where the desk used to be. Still here. Roll the bottom drawer of zee file cabinet open. Eyes are adjusting, sir. Empty! Oh, yeah, top drawer. Whisper, whisper. Empty too? Gotta be sure. Let there be--flick on the lamp. Top drawer's loaded with all kine'a crap. Not my drawer. Whose? Everybody's maybe, but not mine. Open the bottom drawer again. And there they are. What else? Just like I stored 'um. Nine years worth of spiral notebook combination journal gradebook . . . books. Hmmm. Musty and rusty smelling, and gathering some dust and a few cobwebbies here and there, but very neatly arranged in chronological order.
An imaginary pupil sits before you.
Okay, Sabrina-Sabby-Sabs-Sab, so if chronos means time, and a meter is something we measure with, what would you guess a chronometer is?
She puzzles over this a millisecond or two.
Minutes will not pass, he muttered.
Snoopy, she says, holding up the back of her hand toward me and pointing to her wristwatch.
A very accurate Snoopy, he announces, praising her.
Ahhhhh, those sixth-graders.
What? Oh, yeah. Snap back to the task. One spiral per quarter, four quarters per year. Nine times four? Um . . . nine times four . . . uh, thirty-six. Drum your fingers on the cool wire bindings. It's a song! Sing softly. "Thirty-six spirals of grades in the drawer, thirty-six spirals of grades, if one of those spirals should happen to fall, thirty . . . uh . . . if one of those bottles of grades on the drawer should happen to fall . . ." This is tough. Math hath sometimes been my strong suit. Abandoning the music because it must be confusing the matter, he posed himself the question in a teacherly whisper. "Okay, Chris, if there were thirty-six spirals and one of them fell, how many spirals would be left on the wall?"
"Aha! Mr. Lau. Thirty-five!" Oops.
Nothing but silence from the doggie-wogs below.
Flip through the notebooks ... clumsy, of course. Soon, I'll have the answer. Proof positive, Inspector. Proof positive!

1990, 1989. Hey. These things are like backwards in reverse going forward.

Ahhh, 1988, fourth quarter. Hmmm, 1988. "Nineteen eighty-eight?" Lifting the notebook, trying to put the face and the class together, he paused. Think, he thought, think! Somehow you will miraculously pull this match out of el beer jumbled memoryyyyy--No, it's 1987. He graduated in 1987. The year after Lisa Horiuchi, and the year before Danny Alvarez. Hah! And the year, ah, yes, the year before Dann. Dann Walker. Good mannn, that man Dann . . . man. Wasn't he there too tonight, at Manoa Garden? Drinking outside at one of those concrete tables? I saw him and waved hello, uh?. Or did I? And, yes--no. I talked to him about writing. At the bar. We were--Were we writing, or something. Yeah. That was earlier on. I think. Right. That's correct. Wait. What am I doing? Who am I looking for . . . ?

Class of 1987.


"What the . . . ." All of a sudden it's panic time. I thought this was gonna do it. Dammit! One of the dogs just
growl? Gooood watchdog, he cursed. Feel that sweat start to roll down my legs. God, cold tonight, uh?

Find Second Quarter, Christopher, lift it out of the line, and turn to the last ... few ... pages. Higa, Stuart. Here it is. First Semester: A. Well, that's weird. Why didn't he remember that?

Drop spiral back in place, then, go allllll the way to the front and flip through each cover until you come to ... to 1982. Go directly to jail.

Hmmm. Think I should go through 'um again, just to be sure. No! Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop. How would Sherlock Holmes do this? How did Holmes do it last night? Hmmm. Can't remember. He was bloody. There was acid, violence, ... pottery. It's too cloudy. Too foggy here. A foggy day, in--

"It hits him! he whispered." Ahhh, yes. Yes! Count 'um, Dan-O. Elementary, my dear Rathbone. Count carefully.

Thirty-five. Count really really carefully again. Thirty-four. I believe, Professure, that the third time through will confirm either one number or the other, sooooo just do it again. Man, I'm sweating like crazy.

Thirty-five. Just to be positive, I should count one last time.

"Sheeeit!"
Shouldn't'a slammed da drawah, brah. The hounds are up and barking. See what you did? Bobble and weave to the door, buddy, my left foot's aslee-ee. Call down, in a low roar, if you please.

"Shhhhhhhhhhh, girls, it's mee-ee."

Instant silence. They recognize a friendly voice. A friendly suggestion.

Yeah! An' I got one more, as a matter of fact. Lean on this damn bookcase until the damn feeling returns to this foot. Make that this damn foot.

Oh, mannnnn. Lie down, buddy, it's starting to turn. Spin cycle coming on. This floor's so freakin' hard. It's the only thing I feel. Besides pissed. If you just close your eyes for a second . . .

I open my eyes. What time? I focus on my watch. Nice little nap. This is good. Cut the light.

"How could I be missing only one of those damn things?" I ask, closing the squeaky door carefully. I latch the gate behind me and return to my bedroom on the bottom floor. The dogs are sleeping. Pinkie rolls over.

While I wait for the water to run hot, I stand in the shower, wondering what on earth could have happened to that gradebook. The only one. The one I had to have. Why do I even bother to hang onto these things if the only time I really need to look at one of them, I can't find the one I
want? "Well," I say decisively, "one thing's obvious and for sure. One of those spirals must'a fallen off da wall, brah. T'irty-five spirals of grades in the drawah."

The shower helps. I'm not sweaty and sticky anymore. My head's cleared some more.

One last look? Nah, it's not there.

I sit down at my desk and look at the pictures of graduations and graduates that cover the walls and line the shelves above it. There he is. Stuart Higa. Class of 1987. We're shaking hands. His mother stands on the other side of him. She had just been telling me how much she enjoyed reading Stuart's papers. His last creative project for my class had been a poem. That love poem. Yes. Mrs. Higa liked that poem so much that she made copies of it and distributed them to all of Stuart's aunties and uncles. His grandparents too, I think. That poem had clinched the final A for him . . . Hadn't it?

"Mr. Lau," Stuart had said, just before we posed for the picture. "I was sooo embarrassed."

I slapped him on the back while his mom chuckled gleefully. "Why'd you show it to her?"

"She always reads my stuff."

"Why'd you let her make copies?"

Stuart, face bright red, said, "I don't know. I couldn't stop her."

"That's right," his mother confirmed.
Then we took the picture.

Stuart Higa. An A student in the end. I know it.

Garans-Baberans.

One more look upstairs? I wonder again. Nah, it's just not there.

I shuffle through the day's unopened mail on my desk. Score! Letter from a former student.

The date at the top of her letter reads: 10/11/91. "October eleventh?" I scan my Humane Society calendar. Today is November 15th. I check the clock. Make that November 16th. Flipping over the envelope I examine the postmark date: 11Nov.

She must have slipped on the date. She certainly wouldn't have waited that long after writing it to mail the letter. And not exactly a month later. My head is almost back to normal. The month has to be an accident.

I turn back to the letter.

Dear Mr. Lau,

Thank you so much for the letter you sent and for the letter of recommendation for the Leadership Award at Puget Sound. They did give me the scholarship. Thank you so much.

I stop reading, pull the dustcover off my Mac, and fire it up. What did I say in that letter? Opening MSWorks, I call up the recommendation letter I'd written from my Student
Disk, Volume II. Finding the right one takes only a moment. Go to Let.Rec file. Open C.O.90. What a system, buddy. So many students, so many letters. Thank God for computers. Make work so much easier. Here it is. Aiyal!

TO THE UNIVERSITY OF PUgetsound Leadership Awards Selection Committee: Seema Ahmed has asked me to write a letter in support of her application for your Leadership Award, and I am very happy to comply. I have known Seema for more than five years. She was a student in my grades seven learning skills class, and last year she earned an "A" in my junior English class. Back in event grade, Seema always performed at the top of her class, but I was concerned about her shyness. It seemed as though she had some difficulty opening up to her peers, and I worried that this might continue to be the case. However, Seema has come a long way in terms of speaking out and socializing. I think the major reason for this has been her growing interest in drama. As you can see in her application, Seema's dramatic credentials are impressive. Last year, she performed in a series of "For Kids' Sake" community service messages broadcast on local television stations. In these, she acted out typical problems that teenagers encounter. I am sure competition for this job was stiff, and I think it very much to Seema's credit that she was selected for such a high-profile and socially significant acting position. And this past weekend Seema won the Hawaii 'I's Young Woman of the Year Scholarship Program (formerly Junior Miss). Besides earning the right to represent Hawaii in the national competition this July, Seema won individual awards for Talent and Creativity (her singing) and for Academic Achievement. Seema's outgoing personality has grown over the years with her acting and singing talent. She is that kind of student I am proud to have attended the Lab School. Seema is an outstanding student. If weidrank our students, she would certainly be one of the top five in this year's senior class. Seema, again, has certainly come a long way in terms of confidence and dramatic interests, is an excellent reader. The maturity of her expression and the quality of her oral interpretation are truly remarkable. Her writing, too, is of top quality. She is equally good in creative and expository forms. Perhaps her most memorable piece of work is her essay on the haunted life of a teenage girl who was not handling life on the streets well. The essay moved into a real novel fiction because Seema created the story in the setting of a darkly oppressive Halloween party, intensifying the tragic quality of this young girl's life and her impending doom. Really, it was quite a sophisticated piece of writing for a high school junior. If there is one thing that concerns me, it is that Seema would take on too much extracurricular work and burn herself out. But she does not seem to be the case. Her load of evening play performances never seems to interfere with her schoolwork. Her energy seems unbounded, her sense of humor, her irreverent attitude. I always refer to her as the "Fireball." I recommend Seema for your Leadership Award without any reservations whatsoever. Perhaps most amazing is that she sees drama and music more as recreational, avocational activities down the road. If she doesn't major in drama, that will be a loss for the theater, but whatever disciplines she chooses, she certainly will gain. She is the kind of student...

What the . . . ? Killed all the spaces! Freakin' computers. Always screwing up.

I remember letters of recommendation very well. How could I forget? I'm still writing them. Why? When I'd been college counselor, I'd do them for every senior, sometimes fifteen or twenty for just one student. Multiply that by forty to fifty and it's almost exponential, the way the work mounts up. But every one counted.

So, have you gotten all the letters of recommendation for the Class of '92 done? Is anyone interested in the University of Puget Sound? Anyone going to the East Coast next year?

How's your oral coming along? Don't you have it in a few weeks? Best of luck--I'm sure you'll blow them away.

I groaned and glanced over to the stack of books for my oral dissertation proposal examination. A short story theory book I had been determined to reread that night looked a bit thicker than I'd recalled. I groaned again and shook my head in despair.
Things are fine and dandy here. I saw Aisha a few weeks ago. That was great! I'll probably see her and Dan again over Thanksgiving Break.

Aisha Ahmed. Let's see. I taught her twice. Right. First when she was a freshman and again as a senior. A long time ago now. Getting married. Dan. "But," I mutter angrily, "I could tell you right now what her second quarter and final grades were in both those years, not to mention all the individual grades I'd ever given her on every paper, test, quiz, and journal pickup." Aisha had graduated in 1986. She hadn't been in Stuart Higa's class.

Seema's letter goes on to talk about a speech tournament at Lewis and Clark. I look over at the clock. I have to judge a speech tournament at Leilehua in seven hours. Why do I keep doing this to myself?

Her letter closes with the encouraging words, "Knock 'um dead with your oral." I think about short story theory, think about Seema's letter, think about sleep, think about the speech tournament, open a fresh word processor file, and begin to type.

16 November 1991 (guaranteed)

Dear Seema:

Long time no correspond. Maybe. I'm a little confused tonight about dates, numbers, time. Sorry. Tonight I bought
a former student a beer. That was a first. Do you know Stuart Higa? Class of '87. He walked up to me at the bar in Manoa Garden and tapped me on the shoulder. When I turned around and saw him, I announced to the bartender, Reg, that this was a former student of mine.

Reg said, "Hope you wen geev'um one good grade, brah. I no like be standing heah if da buggah goin pull out one gun an start blasting."

"I gave'um an A," I said, patting Stuart on the shoulder.

"No, Mr. Lau, you gave me a B," Stuart corrected.

"Really?" I looked up at the ceiling and shook my head thoughtfully.

You know, Seema, the way I always used to spend a (space) lot of time staring up at the ceiling in class, like when I would be trying to answer a question or figure out some weighty literary problem of supreme importance?

"No, Stuart," I finally said, "maybe for first semester-- maybe. But not for the final grade. I haven't had that many tonight. I'm sure I gave you an A."

Stuart shrugged. "Well, maybe for first semester. But I thought it was a B for fourth quarter too. Ah, it doesn't really matter anyway, Mr. Lau. How you been?"

Seema, why is it that former students, no matter how old they get, always call former teachers Mr. This or Ms. That? Why don't they call me Chris. I always tell former
students who ask me if they can stop calling me Mr. Lau that they can call me anything they want as long as it isn't "Idiot," "Butthead," or, you know, worse. And most of them say okay, but then keep on calling me Mr. Lau. I bet Aisha would call me Mr. Lau if she saw me right now. Ask her. I'll bet she wouldn't call me Chris. Tell her she should. You should too. We're all out of high school now.

But getting back to Stuart Higa. Stuart seemed to figure it wasn't worth arguing about, although it bothered me plenty. I don't forget things like that. Things like grades, you know? When I give a grade, I think about it so much that I automatically memorize it, mostly.

So I said, "My frame of mind is improving." I lifted my beer. "Getting ready to study tonight. Unemployment has its up side. What brings you to Manoa Garden? I don't think I've ever seen you here before."

He told me he had to go sing karaoke as a class requirement and then write a paper about that experience. If you've ever heard Stuart talk, you'd remember his voice. It's distinctive. An interesting voice. Kind of low and gravelly. He was always one of the students I really enjoyed hearing read aloud.

Nervous about this singing duty, though. "You know, Mr. Lau, I don't even sing when I'm by myself, let alone sing in front of other people. I have a terrible voice. I can't
carry a tune worth a damn. I was the first one in the class to protest this assignment."

"How many others complained?"

"Everybody."

"So I guess you guys lost, huh?"

"Yeah. Well, you're a teacher, Mr. Lau. You know there's no way we were going to win anyhow. That's why I'm here. I figured I'd come get a beer to, well, boost my confidence like. And if I make-A, at least I won't worry as much, you know, as I would if I didn't have a little bit of a buzz."

I pulled out a chair and ordered up a twenty-ounce Bud for each of us. When Reg brought the beers, Stuart was surprised. He checked his watch. "Geez. I gotta go sing in fifteen minutes."

"Don't worry, Stuart. If you can't finish all of it, go put a lid on the cup and stick a straw in it. No one'll know. It'll look like a soda."

Stuart brightened up. "Hey, that's a good idea. Good thinking, Mr. Lau."

I nodded wisely. "Trust me, Stuart. No one will know."

Man, Seema, students old enough to drink--legally. And to top it off, he said he'd buy me one next time!

Oh, and before I forget, Dann Walker was there tonight too. Class of '88. He was having a beer. Sometimes I see
Danny Alvarez, George DeCorte, and Walter Quitan in there too.

Did I ever tell you why Dr. Brown quit teaching science? One day he was lecturing to the ninth graders. He was standing in front of them talking about something, and all of a sudden he realized he was old enough to be their father. He told me it hit him as if someone were punching him in the stomach. There he was. Making a lecturer's salary, no benefits, with no prospect of becoming a tenured faculty member. So he quit. Just like that. I've seen him a few times since he left. He's definitely happier these days, I think. Sure looks healthier.

For some reason, Seema, all of this reminds me of one of my favorite episodes of All in the Family. Remember that TV show? Archie Bunker. Let's say he's fifty-five or sixty. Somewhere in there. His wife, Edith, who volunteers at this place called something like "The Sunshine Home"--a retirement home--helps this old guy run away from there. She puts him up at her house, and Archie wants to call the cops and turn the old guy in. Edith won't let him. Finally--remember, they usually have to tie these shows up in a half hour--Archie calls the cops and they come to get the guy and take him back to the retirement home. As they drag this old man out the door--he fights them at first, then resigns--he turns around and says to Archie: "Whatever you do, young man, don't get old." Or words to that effect. That's a pretty
chilling pronouncement coming from him, not to mention how eerie it is for someone as old as Archie to get that kind of advice. Know what I mean?

So, where was I. Oh, yes. Stuart Higa.

I raised my cup for a toast, and told him this was a great occasion, a true event.

"Why's that?"

"Because, Stuart, this is the first time I've ever bought a former student a beer."

"Wow, Mr. Lau, that is something. Hope it doesn't make you feel old."

"Nah, nah, na--Hey! Are you taking this karaoke class through College of Continuing Ed?"

"No, it's not actually a karaoke class. It's an assignment for American Studies 310. You know, that Japanese American Experience class."

"Really? Man, Stuart, that class has been around for a long time. You can bet they must'a dreamed up this exercise pretty recently. Karaoke hasn't been around that long, has it?"

"Ummm, I think this is like the third time they're doing it. We have to sing in front of the whole class and then write about what it felt like."

"Wait, wait, wait, I said. Is that a Japanese-American experience, or is that just a Japanese experience? Actually, maybe it's more like just a local experience. Or--no--I
guess it's . . . It's confusing is what it is." I told him I wondered what equivalent assignment they'd had before they came up with this karaoke thing.

"Beats me, Mr. Lau, but you know it couldn't be worse."

"Oh? How about they make you break down and reassemble a Sony Walkman in the dark?"

"Hah! That's a good one, Mr. Lau. Or maybe you have to sell an American car to someone who owns a Honda."

"Man, Stuart, that's a sansei project for real."

After we got over cracking each other up, we toasted our collective sense of humor. "Here's to Lab School grads." Stuart made a clinking noise.

"Stuart, you know why I asked you if it was Continuing Ed?"

He looked puzzled.

"You're an art major, right?"

"Yeah, in photography."

"Right. And you remember, Mr. McGann, don't you? He used to teach English at the Lab School, right?"

Stuart nodded. The look on his face led me to believe that although he didn't quite see the connection yet, I was sounding logical enough to be making some kind of sense.

"Well, I think Commander McGann is taking a karaoke night class, and he's an excellent photographer, and . . . I was gonna say that you reminded me of him."
"Oh." Stuart nodded his understanding. "I like Mr. McGann. You know, I really love poetry."

"Yeah, Stuart, I seem to remember that. Commander McGann writes poetry too."

"I was taking this class, English 313--that's a poetry class--and Mr. McGann had his creative writing class right before mine. I used to talk to him all the time in the hallway. He's a great guy."


I don't know if you ever had Mr. McGann, Seema, but he was a retired Naval Commander before he came on board as an English teacher.

Stuart went on. "I even thought about double-majoring in English, but I want to get out of here sometime before I start drawing social security. I don't know. I still might try it though."

"Then, Stuart buddy, even more you remind me of the Commander," I said.

"Why's that?"

"Because he's about to start working on his Master's degree in creative writing, and he is drawing social security."

Then Stuart proceeded to tell me about a project he's working on as a Christmas present for his grandmother. It's this series of three photographs he took of the sun. The first is high noon, the second is like four o'clock in the
afternoon, and the third is sunset, with the sun just below the horizon so all you see are silhouettes. He's framing these three pictures with a copy of the poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay." That's for his grandmother for Christmas. Fascinating stuff.

"I really like that poem, Mr. Lau. It's one of my all-time favorites. If Frost had expanded it, you know, tried to make it more complex, used lots of heavy-duty words, gone off the deep end like a lotta poets do, I wouldn't like the poem. It's perfect as is. The real beauty of that poem for me is that it's so simple, so straightforward. The words match the message."

I took a long swallow of my beer when Stuart stopped talking. "You know what, Stuart," I said, "you already are an English major."

He laughed and glanced at his watch. "I'm about to be late."

"By the way," I asked, "how's your brother doing?" His brother is Bobby, an '89 grad. You must know him, even if you don't remember Stuart.

"He's doing fine, Mr. Lau. He's majoring in graphic design. He's about to start up his own T-shirt company. I'm helping him do his first shirt. I'll be shooting a picture of my grandma with a neck brace on. See, she has this neck brace because she was in a car accident recently. We're going to get her to look really spaced out. On the front of
the shirt the only thing you'll see is my grandma, really spaced out. On the back we're going to print in all block caps the word WHIPLASH."

I could picture it. "I like that, Stuart. Especially because everyone will be trying to figure out what the heck this picture is supposed to be, and when they walk past you, some of them will look back to see if there's any kind of explanation or something on the back. So they'll be mimicking a kind of whiplash action."

Stuart took another sip from his twenty-ounce cup.

"Right! Exactly, Mr. Lau."

Gee, Seema, glad I picked up on that.

"Well, I am late now." Stuart popped off his chair, shook my hand, and said, "Thanks for the beer, Mr. Lau. I got you covered for the one next time."

I watched him go over, get the cover and the straw, put them on, and then head for the door.

"Good luck on the singing."

He raised his cup in salute, tilted his head to the side and stuck out his tongue as though he'd been hung, and disappeared.

Anyway, Seema, it's now three o'clock in the morning, Saturday, November 16, 1991, and I have to get up at six to go out to Leilehua for a speech tournament.

Oh, before I end, I wanted to tell you that this year Frances Perreira and Wincha Chong have made it into the Young
Woman of the Year competition. If you come back at Christmas, you might go over to the school and give them some pointers. Who better than you to give them advice about winning techniques, right, Champ?

Take care. Much love and aloha from one Lab School grad to another.

While I wait for the letter to print, I check the rest of my mail. Bill, bill, bill, bill, bill. Unopened, I toss them on the stack with the others. Getting harder to pay these suckers. Unemployment has its down side.

In my bottom desk drawer, as I go for an envelope, I find more spiral notebooks. Could it be? Nah. Just in case, I take them out and shuffle through them. No, that thing is somewhere else. Stuart Higa. A true A student.

now. Some of them college graduates out in the world. Some
making serious money. And then there's me.

The frustration eats at me while I kick off my slippers
before going one-eighty-to-the-pad, as Commander McGann would
say.

So, yeah, like as if I didn't know I'd have to do this,
I get up one more time, go out into the dining room, try not
to wake the animals as I go through the gate, and turn on the
lamp in my father's old office again. They're all still in
the bottom drawer. Thirty-five spiral notebooks. No magical
solution to the burning question. No miracle find. Why
can't life be a bad novel? That's all it seems to boil down
to sometimes, when I think about it in off moments. Nine
years, thirty-five spiral notebooks. Good thing another one
hasn't disappeared in the meantime. The twilight zone. A
black hole.

I pull out the one that reads Seniors, 1987, Third
Quarter. I open to the first few pages and check the grades
again. Well, says here I gave him an A-/A for third quarter.
But did he blow the fourth quarter? I can't believe it.
Especially because of that poem. Damn. All the pieces
falling in but one. Picture with a damn hole in it. Goddamn
Robomoth.

Stone-cold sober, I turn on the reading light above my
bed. Now I'm not even tired anymore. Mildly aggravated,
yes; sleepy, no. Because I can't be sure.
I grab my short story theory text off the top of the pile. If I'm not going to sleep—I see 4-0-0 on the clock—I might as well read. I throw myself on the bed. Argh! At times like this, this short story theory seems to be getting very old very fast. Words, words, and more words that just don't seem to mesh. Better than sleeping pills?

Maybe, I think, finally dozing off, in the next hour I'll dream again about palletizing neat blocks of pineapple cans. Six-by-six. Twelve-by-twelve. Shiny metal cylinders rattling down on me in that constant clattering rage for order. Or those hard, soft, big, small, beveled-every-which-way suitcases, each demanding some perfect place in the solid brick wall I'm supposed to build faster than they stack up between me and the entrance to the pit, blocking out the light and the air. Aloha.

I roll over and squint at the clock. "Man."

Being organized is a good thing. Lets me figure out, right away, what I've lost. And for sure it helps me realize just what I've managed to keep.

The alarm goes off, and it's time for speech. Have I been asleep, or what? It's hard to tell.
II. FAMILY
"I really like your watch," Sabrina commented between chews.
"Yeah, a lot of my friends do. Snoopy's great."
"Yup," Sabrina agreed.
"I tell you what," Lyn said, slipping the watch off of her wrist. "You hang on to this until your hand is all better, okay? I have another watch at home."
Sabrina smiled. "Thank you, Lyn. I guess I do need a baby-sitter," she said. "And I'm so glad you're my sister, too."

Junko Peterson
A NEW SISTER SITTER

IN KAREN'S FOOTSTEPS

I would never argue, necessarily, that younger brothers and sisters always have a tough act to follow. For example, suppose that an older sibling turns to a life of crime, becomes, say, a part-time axe-murderess. Now, no parent in his or her right mind will say to that girl's younger brother, "Chris, why can't you be more like your sister?" I will, however, argue that in my particular case, my older sister, Karen, made life a borderline living hell due to her rigorous academic and extracurricular pursuits. Hardly a day would go by where either my parents or one of Karen's former teachers--since she preceded me by four years at the University Laboratory School--didn't utter those aggravating words, "Why can't you be more like your sister?"

Back in elementary, junior, and high school, I'd always thought I was doing pretty well. I had decent grades and never got into much trouble. Still, according to my parents, I was never doing quite well enough to rival Karen's
performance level. For instance, I'd be sitting watching TV and my mother would switch it off. "Why can't you be more like Karen?" she'd ask, pointing to Karen who sat engrossed in yet another classic work of literature in the corner of the living room. Miss Future 800 SAT Verbal would look up from her musty tome at me and smile; I'd go outside and play basketball.

And I hated to practice piano, but my sister dedicated a lifetime and a half to voice and violin rehearsal. While my dear sister fiddled or twittered away, my father would say, "Chris, did you do your half hour today?" Miss Future Gilbert and Sullivan Society Singer would look up from her music stand and smile at me; I'd go out and smoke a cigarette.

In school it was a curse moving up the ranks behind Miss Straight A Future Barnard College *Summa Cum Laude* English Literature Graduate. Every teacher who'd had her would welcome me to a new school year with, "Oh, you're Karen's brother. I hope you'll do as well as she did in my class." Come report card time, these teachers would invariably shake their sorry heads over my B's and C's. And, of course, when those report cards came home, my parents would pull out Karen's and mine and compare our records. I'd go outside before either my mom or dad could say a word.

Once I followed so closely on Karen's heels that I paid a painfully heavy price. We were about to watch TV early on
a summer morning in August. I guess she was resting her eyes
and her mind for yet another go at yet another novel. I
said, "I want to watch cartoons."

Miss Future Debate Champion argued, "No. We're going
to watch Concentration." She turned on the set and switched
the channel to Concentration.

I reached for the dial, and Miss Future Extemporaneous
Speech Champion slapped my arm. "I'm going to the bathroom
to brush my teeth," she warned, "and when I come back,
Concentration had better be on that TV, buddy."

Quite upset, I followed her to the bathroom, my arm
still stinging, and proceeded to badger Miss Never Had A
Cavity In Her Life. When Karen finished, I followed her back
out the bathroom door. Unfortunately, Miss Future Dramatic
Interpretation Champion slammed the door after her, and my
finger, as my hand swung forward from my side, got caught
between the door and jamb. After I had opened the door and
screamed at what I saw, Miss Future Opera Mezzo-Soprano
bellowed even louder.

My mom came tearing up the stairs, pronto. "What
happened?" she cried.

I was sobbing so hard and concentrating so intently on
the finger that dangled by just a thread of flesh and a shard
of bone that Miss Future Storytelling Champion had to answer:
"Chris slammed his hand in the door." If my mom had said
anything at that moment about how I should act more like my sister, I'd have gone outside and jumped off the roof.
I climbed up the tree to where my dart was. Little did I know that my friends were still trying to hit the coconuts with their dart. I pulled my dart from the tree and... PACK! I looked down at Ryan and Troy. They were staring straight up at me.

"Sorry," Troy apologized.
"Are you okay?" asked Ryan.
I could tell by the look on their faces that they really wanted to bust out laughing.
"Yeah, I'm okay."
I pulled the dart out of my head and looked at the tip. "Gee, when we said hit the coconut, I didn't know we meant my head," I said, looking at the bloody tip.

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Roz bowed down and touched the taro plant with her index finger. "This the one, Ed." She said, "This the one Grampa planted first. All the other taro plants came from this one." Caressing the leaf, she whispered, "Alofa tele au 'oe, Papa."

Ed looked up and scanned the horizon. The taro stretched as far as he could see in all directions. All this, he knew, would come to him one day.

"Ed? Ed!" Roz called. "You listening to me?"

Christmas was near, and I already knew what I would get my Grandpa. I wrapped up the coconut pie and put it under the Christmas tree, even though it might spoil.

Coconut pie was special to me because my Grandpa would always share with me when I was with him. I was so glad to know that I could afford a present to give to my Grandpa.

Why? Why, Grandpa? It was only December 13th when you died, and you never did get to open your present.

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114
Fathers are teachers of the true and not-true, and no father ever knowingly teaches what is not true. In a cloud of unknowing, then, the father proceeds with his instruction.

Donald Barthelme
A MANUAL FOR SONS

WHAT REAL MEN DO

"Chris," my dad began, "there are two things in this world that mean everything to a real man. I'm not talking about mankind in general here, partner. I'm talking about the ingredients that make real men. Do you catch my drift? Are you following my thinking on this?"

I slurped up another spoonful of Frosted Flakes. I nodded my head 'yes.' I had no clear idea what he was talking about.

My dad continued after clearing his throat noisily. "Real men go to law school. You hear what I'm saying? A real man becomes a lawyer. And it doesn't matter what kind of law he practices. The main thing is that he has studied, has passed his bar, and has gone into practice of the law."

He stopped to sip from his coffee cup while he stared intently across the kitchen table at me. It was still pretty dark outside. The sun had barely begun to rise.

"Do you understand, Chris?"

"Ahm, so, I'm not a man . . . 'cause I'm not a lawyer?"

"Well, Chris, law school's a few years off yet, so I'm not saying it's your fault that you aren't a lawyer this
morning." He pounded his index finger on the table twice to emphasize 'this morning.' "But before you know it, you'll have your college degree and then you'll be off to law school. See?"

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Chris?"

"Does a lady going to law school become a real man too?"

"No." He shook his head. "She becomes, well, a real woman, I guess."

"Did Mama go to law school?"

"Nooooo."

"So she isn't a real woman?"

"Ah, well . . . ." Several steamy coffee sips went down. "Yes, she is a real woman." He leaned over the table toward me. "She had you, didn't she?" He reached across and messed up my hair with a big, hard hand. His logic was working at too high a level for me to grasp, but I nodded as if I did understand.

"Did you go to law school, Daddy?"

My father turned to look out the window and inspect his prize anthurium bed. He looked the huge bed over very carefully. It seemed as if he were trying to memorize the position of each blossom.

Finally he put his coffee cup down gently.

"Did you, Daddy?"
"Yes, Chris," he nodded slowly, "I did go to law school."

"I thought you did insurance. I didn't know you're a lawyer guy?"

"Well, Chris, I'm not. I had to quit law school to come back to Hawai'i and make money--so your mom and I could live. If I'd been able to stay in law school, I'd be a lawyer now. Like your uncle Alec. You know uncle Alec is a lawyer, right?"

"Uh uh," I answered.

"Well, he is. He was lucky enough to be able to finish law school. And today, he's a very important lawyer in Honolulu."

Now it looked as if my dad's eyes were closely inspecting the ceiling.

"Oh," I said, looking up toward the ceiling too, trying to see whatever it was he was staring at. "I didn't know that."

After a long pause in our conversation, I asked, "Daddy? Can I have more cereal?"

My dad smiled, returning his gaze to me. "Of course you can. But you're old enough to get your own cereal, aren't you, little man?"

I shook my head 'no.' "I can reach the cereal box, but I still can't get the milk down. Pretty soon, though."
"Okay," said my dad, rising from the chair, "you get the cereal, and I'll get the milk." He assumed his racing stance so that I'd start running for the cupboard. I already knew he wouldn't run, but, at that age, I still couldn't control my urge to meet his challenge and outrun him. Of course, I arrived at the cupboard before he strolled over to the refrigerator.

Once my bowl and his coffee cup were refilled, he sat down and just watched me eat.

Finally I asked, "Daddy, what's the other thing that makes you a real man?"

"Ah, yes, thanks for reminding me, Chris. The other thing is boxing. I'm going to teach you how to box."

"Do you know how to?"

"Yes, don't you remember? Remember how I told you I used to box in high school and early on in college?"

"Oh, yeah, I guess."

My father went back to examining his garden through the large pane of glass that was our kitchen picture window. "You remember how I could have had that boxing scholarship in college. I could have saved all my money for law school. But," he looked back at me, "remember why I had to quit boxing?"

"Ahm . . . ." I thought hard, looking at the bowl of milk and soaking flakes to try and refresh my memory. "Ah, you had to do something else, right, Daddy?"
"That's right, Chris. Just when I'd won the boxing scholarship, I got drafted. By the time the Army finally let me go, I was too old to box for the college team anymore. So," he brought his coffee cup down with a thud, "I had to spend every cent I made, working three jobs, on my college education."

The look in his eyes scared me. I shivered. He shook his head as if coming out of a dream he did not believe, then gave me a reassuring smile. "So law school was out--especially once I met your mom."

"You got married, huh."
"Yes, we did."
"And that costs lots of money, huh."

My dad laughed out loud. "Very expensive, Chris. Very, very expensive."

Suddenly he clapped his hands together. "You know what, Chris?"

"What?" I could feel the excitement.
"Today, after school, I'm going to take you to Sears!"
"Really?" I nodded my head enthusiastically. "Why?"
"Why? Because I'm going to buy you some real boxing gloves."

"Really?"
"And I'm going to buy you a heavy bag!"

"Really?"
"And I'm going to buy you a speed bag!"
"Really?"

"And I'm going to buy you a jump rope!"

"Really?"

He was rubbing his hands together so hard I could almost see them smoke.

"Daddy, we have a jump rope at school. All the girls really like to play it."

"Oh, I'm not talking about that kind of jump rope. I'm talking about the kind of jump rope real men jump rope with."

"Oh, okay. So Karen can't use it?"

"Well, if your sister wants to use it, she can. We always share, right, partner?"

"Oh, yeah, right."

My dad positively glowed. I hated to bring him back to the nuts and bolts of the matter.

"Daddy?"

"Yes?" He looked at me again.

"I know what the boxing gloves are . . . ." I took a long, worried pause. "But what're those bag things you said?"

"Don't worry about it," he assured me. "Don't you worry about a thing. Everything will be explained. You'll understand all of it, once you see them, and once I show you how to use them."

"Oh, okay." I liked it when my dad showed me how to do things or how things worked.

120
"We can't worry too much about law school yet," he encouraged, "but we can begin on the old boxing right this afternoon."

I was nodding hearty assent.

"Now clean up those dishes, and let's get ready for school."

While my dad and I carried our dishes to the sink, a thought hit me. "Daddy?"

"Yes, Chris?"

"What if... what if I don't want to go to law school? Will I just be a half of a real man?"

"Don't worry about it, Chris." He patted me on the back. "You'll want to go."

"But what if I want to do insurance, or teach, like Mama?"

My dad leaned forward and looked hard into my eyes. "Chris, you know you shouldn't take everything I say so darn seriously. Don't I always tell you, and your sisters, that whatever you want to do when you grow up is okay by me?"

"Uh huh."

"Well?"

I couldn't understand exactly what he meant. "So are we gonna go to Sears today?"

"You bet we are, Chris." His smile was enormous. I gave him a huge smile right back. This sounded like it would be a lot of fun. My dad and I--boxing partners.
As I walked upstairs to get ready for school, I saw my dad lean hard against the sink. He'd stopped smiling. Staring out the window again, he must have been inspecting his prize anthurium bed, but from another angle this time.
I kicked back on my chair and watched WWF wrestling on USA Channel 12.

"So what, Dad, you like go?"

"Go where, son?"

"We go wrestle. Pretend I get the World Wrestling Federation Belt, and you like try and win 'um from me."

"Oh, Garrett, come on. I may be forty, but I'm still young enough to kick your butt."

"Come on, then, let's go!" Garrett said.

Garrett Leong

FORTY IS TOO OLD TO ACT YOUNG

JUST ANOTHER TORNADO

I was in third grade. My family and I were on our yearly camping trip. This time it was Kauai, my father's birthplace.

We were stocking up on camping supplies at a small Mom-and-Pop store in Waimea. The store owner was an old high-school friend of my dad's, so the two of them were rehashing every good old day they could possibly remember. This turned pretty dull. I wandered outside to the elevated lanai area that ran the whole length of the store front. I was working on an ice cream bar that wanted to disappear faster than I could eat it, so I hung over the railing and let the melting liquid drip onto the red dirt in the parking lot.

I noticed a pair of tough, old-looking men eating plate lunches in their rusted-out green jeep. They were dressed in torn up T-shirts, faded khaki pants, and big leather boots caked with red dirt. I thought they might have been out hunting, though I couldn't see any guns.
The air didn't move. Heat waves rippled straight up into the sky. I thought about hurrying to get down more of my ice cream, but it was too hot to speed up. I felt lazy. While I stared out into the heat, I listened to the steady drone of activity coming from inside the store.

Suddenly, there was a swirl of leaves and dust about five feet in front of the jeep. At first I didn't think much about it, but the twisting action kept up. The circular collection of debris kept defining itself more distinctly; the column's height grew a little with each revolution.

In a matter of only a few seconds the red funnel of wind rose to the height of the jeep's hood. And then together, the two men dropped their lunches on the seat. One of them shouted at the other one, and they jumped out. The shouter grabbed a beaten up gray Army blanket from the back seat. They ran toward the funnel, spread the blanket between them, lifted it over the whirlwind, and dropped slowly to their knees. This move snuffed out the tornado instantly. The whole scene ran like a slow-motion movie for me.

Calmly, as though nothing had happened, the two men refolded the blanket, jumped back into the jeep, and resumed their eating and talking. It looked like some kind of routine activity for them.

My father tapped me on the shoulder. "Let's go."

"Did you see that?" I asked excitedly.

"What?"
"That twisting hurricane thing."

My mom and dad exchanged parentally knowing looks.


"A tornado?" my mom, a Chicago native, asked slowly, giving me one of those looks I've since come to know she reserves for students who claim that some dog ate their homework. "Where?"

"Right there." I pointed to the jeep. "Ask those guys."

Of course, right at the moment I wanted to get confirmation of the event from the hunters, they started up and drove off in a cloud of dust. I watched intently, hoping the dirt they'd stirred up would form another tornado. It didn't.

My folks were already down the wooden stairs at the end of the lanai. "Come on, Chris," my father called, sounding a little rough and angry this time.

I followed them slowly, disappointed because they didn't believe my story.
Before she could protest, I dashed out the door and headed toward the bus stop. I glanced at my watch and decided that I could play some video games before school, if I hurried. Maybe today I could beat my friends and have the honor of posting the highest score. . . . It was an expensive hobby, but what did I care? I wasn't spending my own money. "Oh no!" I exclaimed, stopping in my tracks when I realized that my mom had an idea about how I actually spent the money she gave me. I thought about it and concluded that I might have to take a break from playing until her fears were calmed, or I could buy her a nice gift. That would, no doubt, convince her that I had been saving my money to buy her something nice.

Garrett Smith
SLIP SLIDING AWAY

TURNING THIRTY-TWO

You always ask in broken English if my mother knows I smoke. Is that a joke? It's growing old, old. But I still laugh and act silly, then ask you about Albert.

Your weird son scares me with his crooked face, his crazy eyes, his chipped teeth, his stuttered laugh that sometimes breaks into high squeaks, or violent shrieks. He always drools thick strings down his stubbled chin onto a white T-shirt stained with different meals he hardly ate.

But you sell cigarettes to minors, so I come often into your dark, fluorescent, yellow-lit, mildewed blue corner store that smells of urine and stale saliva, the occasional whiff of Pine-Sol, all enclosed behind unwashed windows displaying piles of death-preserved insects.

Before I ask for the all-important cigarettes he starts squealing on the floor behind me because he's wound his pet
rope too tightly around his thickly muscled wrists. You drop my wrinkled sack of gumballs, go quickly to your wild child, whose gnarled, twitching fingers slowly turn dark purple.

Meticulously unraveling the cutting knots, You untangle him with great care, murmuring streams of soft Chinese words, stroke his muscled, heaving shoulders, ease his sharply stuttered groaning. You pull that saturated ball of liquid tissue from your bottomless flowered pocket, wipe delicately at mucous streaks and tears on his cracked lips and thick neck.

Then you reach him out a gumball from the same glass jar with the same moist hand, leaving your callused, ancient fingers stained red and blue.

Now he's quiet, sucks intently, so you come back to me and ask, "Something else you like?"

"Yes, please, a pack of Kools."

Your narrowed eyes peer over gold rims and thick lenses. "Your mother, boy, she know you smoke?"

I start laughing to avoid your stare. "How's Albert?" I ask.

"Oh, he fine now. He good boy. Today he thirty-two."

Out on the sidewalk I stare into the crumpled bag. I see your candy-colored fingers grasping sticky, ragged tissue to dry your man-child. I hesitate, then drop it in the trash. I strike a match, light my cigarette, wonder where
I'll be at thirty-two, and wind the pack's plastic wrapper around my index finger.
"Just listen, okay," I said. "I know you're mad, but I was too. The next time you're told to do something, do it. Don't make me repeat myself or do it for you. You're not a child anymore."

I stood up and walked out of his room. Benny muttered something under his breath, and I heard him.

"Shit!" he yelled as he slammed his door. I knew he was angry, but he'll just have to learn. Someday he'll understand me, and someday . . . maybe I'll understand him.

Clifford Jara
I TOLD YOU TO CLEAN YOUR ROOM, DIDN'T I?

WHOSE BASEBALL IS THIS?

The neighborhood gang converged on Spencer's house every day after school. When football season was on we'd play football, during basketball season we'd shoot baskets, and in spring we'd play baseball. That particular day we were having trouble getting started.

"We don't have a ball," Spencer said.

"Where is it?" I asked.

"Ah, Rodney was showing off and hit it in the Chang's yard. How we goin' find um if they only cut grass every five years?"

Rodney, Spencer's brother, should probably have offered to search for the baseball, but since he didn't, we weren't about to suggest it to him. He was a foot taller and at least that much wider than any of us.

"I'll get my ball," I suggested.

"What? You get one?" Spencer sounded surprised.

"Yeah, you know, my Braves' ball."

129
"Your what?"

"The Milwaukee Braves' ball my dad brought back last year. The one I showed you. With all the autographs."

Spencer's jaw dropped. "You kidding, o'wot? Goin' get totaled."

"Ah, that's okay. I only know Hank Aaron and Warren Spahn anyway. The rest of those guys--who cares."

"Okay, brah, up to you."

I ran home and took the autographed Braves' ball off the metal stand my dad had bought especially for it. The TV looked a little naked minus the ball, but it really didn't matter much. If it had been a basketball signed by the Celtics or, better yet, by the Lakers, I'd never even have considered using it. Actually, I couldn't really understand why my dad would take the trouble to haul the baseball all the way back for me from Wisconsin. He knew, I thought, that basketball was my favorite sport. But I'd made sure to thank him for the present anyway when, radiating all kinds of excitement, he'd produced it from his well-worn suitcase.

We threw and hit that baseball all afternoon. We practiced plenty of sharp grounders on the hot, black asphalt road. We simulated numerous line-drives off the Chun's twelve-foot stone wall at the street's dead end.

By the time I came home to dinner, all the signatures, including those of Spahn and Aaron, were well past erased.
The ball still looked fairly new, but the horsehide cover was heavily scuffed and chewed up.

When I sat down at the dinner table, I carefully laid my glove and ball by my plate. With a forkful of fried rice midway between the plate and his mouth, my father stopped chewing. He gave me one of the hardest looks I could ever remember. I stopped chewing.

"Whose baseball is this?" he almost whispered. His question cut ten ways through the air around the table. My mom and sister stopped eating too. Everyone looked at me.

"Mine," I answered softly, trying not to choke.

"You bought a new baseball?" he asked, louder this time. His fork still sat in mid-air.

"Ah," I put down my fork, "no."

"Someone gave you a new baseball?" His face moved uncomfortably close to mine.

I sat back in my chair a little. "Well, no." I couldn't understand what the problem was exactly, just that it was a very, very big one.

"Chris. Please don't tell me that you played with my Braves' ball. Please don't tell me that."

"Your Braves' ball? Well ... my Braves' ball. I ... yes?"

My dad's eyes stared at me like two Oriental laser beams burning holes in my head. He wouldn't blink.
"I thought it was my Braves' baseball." The words barely made their way out of my mouth. I hardly had the breath to speak.

"What do you mean, your Braves' baseball? What gave you that idea? What could possibly make you think that was your Braves' ball? You tell me you like basketball. You like the Lakers, right?"

"But you said it was for me, didn't you?"

"That's right, Hank," my mom put in.

This distracted my dad. He looked at the mangled trophy, then picked it carefully out of the glove with his thumb and index finger. Without another word he rose from the table and walked upstairs to the living room. I heard the TV click on.

"Chris," my mom said, "you shouldn't have played with that ball. Your father brought it all the way back from Wisconsin for you. That was a very special baseball. You know the Braves are his favorite team."

"Yes," I said, trying to pretend I was eating some more. I'd lost my appetite.

My mom and sister finished their food. I sat there, staring at my plate and stirring slowly. When they started to clear the table, I walked upstairs to my room.

The Braves' ball, minus the players' signatures, sat on its metal stand. Before I closed my bedroom door I looked over toward my dad and said, "I'm sorry."
My father looked away from the TV screen at me. He spoke softly: "That's okay, Chris. I know. Go take a bath, do your homework, and go to bed."

The next morning the Braves' ball and the stand had disappeared from the television. My dad never mentioned it again.
In the sporadic overhead lights scattered around Mid-Pacific Institute's parking lot, hundreds of termites swarmed for the incandescence, and every so often, an insect would fall helplessly to the ground when its wings broke off and were carried away with the night breeze.

Wincha Chong
ROMP 'EM

PICK ME UP

Every winter . . . No. That's not going to give you an accurate picture. That's only the rainy season in Hawai'i sometimes, when we aren't experiencing a drought, though we'd still call it winter anyway, no matter how hot and dry. So what I should say, to give you the right idea, is "Every rainy winter." You know. Long, hard rain. The kind of weather when already soaking kids love to keep on shooting each other over and over again with those juicy African tulip bulbs. The kind of weather when up and coming geologist-skateboarders perform all kinds of hydrological tolerance experiments, rolling dangerously close to inspect once ramp-perfect drainage ditches now raging with water. Can you see it? Really hard, really long rain. Veteran surfers love it because of monster swells. Tourists hate it, forcing half-smiles through their tears and cracking weak laughs for those tiny microphones as they capture themselves on gray, underexposed videotape for all their pale friends--those February-bound midwestern VCR viewers back home--who will sit glued to ice-cold TV screens for an envious glimpse of the
paradise they wish they could afford to visit themselves. I'm talking the unendingly kind of wall-solid precipitation where you have to sit, probably sneezing and feverish, in your damp, refrigerator-like car. You're waiting for the miracle let-up after four or five straight days of driving, torrential downpour. Maybe fifteen minutes later you finally give up. You toss your bailing can into the back seat and give in to being soaked again on your way to the front door, on your way to a hot bath in your heavily mildewed shower. And after your shower, you deliriously wander outside to check your new, moss-green wardrobe that's been maturing for over a week on the laundry line, the culture growing profusely despite your heated threats to finally go out and buy that clothes dryer your family has lived without for every generation since the discovery of electricity. I'm referring to the epitome of a genuinely wet winter in Hawai'i. It's so dark for so long that you begin only vaguely to recall the yellowish-white, ball-shaped object that used to help you distinguish between two distinctly different periods in a twenty-four-hour day. The sun can barely show from November to March. Sometimes it's so dark for so long that even the giant clam at the aquarium dies for lack of sunlight. Do you get the picture?

Well, every really, really, really rainy winter, I think about Alika. He was my next-door neighbor a long time ago. Actually, he lived about twenty houses down the road,
not to mention around two bends. But back in those days he would be considered a "next-door" neighbor. Even if he didn't want to be. Hey, nowadays, he'd be lucky even to be labeled a "neighbor." Right now, I don't even know who lives above or below me, let alone down the hall.

Rainy winters. Alika. I swear it wasn't my fault. After all, my father had chosen to pick me up after school, so I was really only incidentally involved. It had been my dad's idea all along. From the first day it rained--the day before Thanksgiving--he'd uncharacteristically volunteered to save me the long bus ride and walk home after school. He worried, he'd claimed, that I'd get wet and maybe catch cold. But I believe the humanitarian pledge was only a pretext to cover up his suspicion that I might use getting wet one day as a good excuse to fake being ill for a few days afterward, so I could stay home from school.

Anyway, he'd been picking me up after school for many days. Maybe three weeks by then. My pale green student bus tickets were slowly turning into mush in my trusty, hand-engraved Cub Scout wallet. I'd considered the possibility of drying them out, actually taking good care of them, then telling my dad, at the end of the rainy season, that I'd lost the tickets. That way, I figured, I could pocket the extra money he'd fork over and play pinball at College Inn during my lunch breaks. But so far I'd been too lazy to remove the
deteriorating packet of tickets and put them somewhere for safekeeping.

You know, now that I think about it, if Alika blames us—I mean, my dad—for what happened to him, for the way his life turned out, I couldn't fault him. He would have a fairly compelling argument. I think even my dad, the man who never went to law school but always wanted to; the man who always wanted me to go to law school though I never wanted to; the man who still, to this day, constantly suggests that I should give up teaching and go to law school—Even he would agree that Alika's case was solid.

On the day in question, I'd sat shivering under the school's open hallway cover, watching the lightning, counting the seconds—one thousand one, one thousand two—you know the routine—until I heard the thunder. "Or is it the other way around?" I asked, listening to my scratchy voice echo in my ears. Finally my dad had managed to slog his way to the school, through the river-like maze of Honolulu streets, from his Alakea office. Looking up at his car, my mind wandering feverishly, I weighed the theory of Steenie against Keith's. Steenie's Theory posited that you should run as fast as you could through the rain in order to lessen exposure time, thus decreasing wetness. Keith's Theory, on the other hand, assumed that faster speed through rainfall would mean being hit by all the water drops you would not otherwise have
encountered in the first place, had you proceeded more slowly, thus increasing wetness. Steenie, I seemed to recall at the moment, was a straight-A student.

Running hard up the hill and then up the steps at the top of the hill to the car, I broke a heavy sweat, despite getting soaked to the skin. I was hot and cold at the same time.

"Don't slam the door," my dad cautioned as I sat down carefully on the newspaper he'd arranged for me on the bright yellow upholstery. "Get wet?" he asked casually as I gently closed the door of the black '62 Impala, his pride and joy. Apparently it was the pride and joy of others too. His dream car had been stolen four times in two years and had been stripped twice. It was almost as if he'd owned three different cars in two years, except that the body and various other parts were the originals. The insurance company had bought us the rest of the second two cars, but my dad was still named as the proud registered owner. That's what it said on the certificate tied to the visor. The original visor. I don't know if premiums rose as fast back then as they do now, but my dad would have paid any price to keep his "baby" in tip-top condition. Maybe he'd paid so much by then that the insurance company actually owned the car.

"Y-yes, I d-did," I managed through my chattering teeth.

138
"Well," he stated stoically, "it would be much worse if you had to catch the bus." I detected the hint of warning that I'd better not try to fake illness because of a few raindrops. I instantly feared the lecture about how he used to walk, day in and day out, to school and back home, in all kinds of weather, in only a thin T-shirt and slacks, in his hearty childhood days, back on the Kekaha plantation.

"Where's your umbrella?" he asked.

"I l-lost it some-pl-place."

"Again?" he questioned suspiciously.

"Y-yes." I shook violently, but he didn't seem to notice. He turned up the heater a notch.

"Did you find your jacket?"

I shook my head no.

"Did you check the Jungle gym?"

I shook my head yes.

"That was a nice, expensive jacket," he reminded one more time. "I don't think the person who found it will bother to return it."

The window grew foggier with each word he spoke. My father reached over the seat into the back and retrieved two tissues from the box that always sat behind him. Handing me one, he said, "Wipe down your side." We both attempted to clear the window of as much of the blinding, distorting fog as we could. Our tissues turned soggy, then finally broke apart, rolling into mushy bits and pieces. I sneezed. My
dad threw me a questioning glance. Then, after a moment of hesitation, he reached in back and pulled two more tissues from the box. "Blow your nose," he ordered. I did, being careful to use only one tissue. I knew from experience that he expected me to sit armed and ready in shotgun position for further window wiping duty on the way home.

Finally we were off. Each time he shifted gears, the music playing on the most recently installed radio was cut through with static to the point of nonrecognition. "Must be a short in the electrical system," he muttered. The harsh glow of the lightning glared behind the clouded windows from time to time. I continued to sneeze periodically. My father kept supplying me with more tissues, each time holding them away from me momentarily and casting a sidelong stare before handing them over. It almost seemed as if he believed I wouldn't get sick if he was suspicious enough and let me know it.

When we turned right at the bottom of Pacific Heights Road, my dad reached into the back seat for more tissues. Instead of retrieving a pair, he produced an empty box. I coughed at it. "Cover your mouth when you do that," he commanded. He dropped the box and resorted to using his hand to rub at the window.

As we churned upwards through the downhill deluge, the car shuddered and shimmied in the strong wind. At times, for an instant, I could feel the tires lose their grip on the
road. My dad fought to stay on course. He had trouble freeing his hand to wipe away the fog. "Remind me to bring out another box of Kleenex." He kept a huge supply in the hall closet.

We had struggled two houses past Alika's when the engine died. The water ran so high that it must have jammed up something under the hood. After a dozen attempts at restarting the car, my dad finally yanked the keys from the ignition, sighed hoarsely, and slumped back against the seat. When he opened his eyes, he rubbed them slowly, then said, "I'm going to roll back down into the Leong's driveway, turn around, and roll forward so I can park on the shoulder."

Vigorously cranking down the window, my dad stuck his head out into the downpour and proceeded to do exactly as he had proposed. Because the Leong's driveway sloped uphill, we had enough downward momentum coming out of it to carry us across the street and onto the shoulder. It was quite a feat. Parked safely on the side of the road, just past Alika's garage, my dad rolled up his window. He sat exhaling slowly. Finally he said, "Lock up, and let's walk home."

By now the windows were a solid grayish white. You couldn't see anything outside. At the moment my dad swung his door open, quickly, but careful not to boomerang it out into the street and place excessive pressure on the hinges, I heard a terrifying crash. I turned to look at the back of my dad's soaking head. He held the handlebar of a crinkled
bicycle that was embedded in the yellow padded door. The
door was now obviously overextended. It barely hung straight
on the hinges.

My dad dropped the bike, jumped from the car, and ran
toward the front. I forced my aching body over to his side
and slid out onto the street too. My dad crouched over a
body. I went to his side. Alika lay face down in the
torrent of water. He looked like a swimmer frozen in mid-
breaststroke. "Get the bike," my dad ordered. He hoisted
Alika out of the river and carried him into his garage.
Alika's face was a bloody mess. When he came to and mumbled
to my father that he thought he was all right, I noticed some
of his teeth were missing.

My dad explained to Alika's mother that her son had
been bicycling full speed down the road when my dad opened
the door. Alika had barreled right into the door as my
father swung it open and had shot over the window, landing
ten feet away. "It's lucky," my dad observed, "that your son
didn't go through the glass."

After we saw Alika off to Queen's Hospital, my father
and I trudged the last half mile home in the rain. We hadn't
been able to close the car door all the way, so my dad had
jammed it shut with a two-by-four.

"You know, Chris," my dad commented as we toweled off
side by side, "I couldn't prove it in court, but Alika and
his friends are the ones who steal my car."
I sneezed and nodded. I knew that Alika was a suspicious character. He'd taught me how to smoke. And he'd stolen my dad's Pall Malls from the glove compartment of the Impala so he could show me how to do it.

We weren't sued. Not only that, but Alika's family moved out of our neighborhood the following spring. I never saw him again, until last Christmas. It was raining.

I sat at the airport bar waiting for the next flight to arrive. My bags, the airline assured me, would be on that flight. Finishing off my third or fourth beer, I sat staring at the aquarium. My concentration on the twisting silver and black shark was broken by the loud laughter of a man and a woman farther down the bar. Turning from the gyrations of the tiny leopard shark to gaze in the mirror at the noisy couple, I thought I recognized Alika's reflection. He and the woman were drunk. I could hear the thunder outside. A flash of lightning made the bar seem less gloomy. I swiveled on my seat to look out at the runway.

Returning to the reflection, I watched the two drop some money on the bar, stagger off their stools, and weave their way toward the exit. His teeth appeared perfect, but he couldn't walk straight.

The bartender said something to me.

"Huh?" I mumbled, refocusing my attention on him, away from the back of my drunken former neighbor in the glass.

"Another one? Want another one, brah?"
"Uh, yeah, sure. Thanks."

I checked my watch. The numbers were difficult to read, but I figured I should act as if I were concentrating so hard on the time that I couldn't be bothered with anything else. When I looked back in the mirror toward the exit, Alika had vanished. A pair of tour company greeters, leis draped on their arms, came laughing through the door and called hellos to the bartender. He waved. The harsh thunder made me close my eyes. Listening to the hard winter rain as it crashed around me, I waited for my baggage and my father to arrive.
"Get out of the car now!" my mom yelled furiously when we got home. "Go to the back yard." My already bruised knees were shaking as I walked around to the back. She went through the house.

She came out through the screen door carrying a spatula and a mini-frying pan.

I winced in fear. I made myself say the words: "What are you going to do, cook eggs?" I asked sarcastically, knowing I had it coming.

PWACK! The spatula hit me on the back of my leg.
BONG! The low, metal sound of the frying pan struck against my rear.

"I'm sorry, Mom!" I shrieked.
PATTAP, PATTAP! Two more against my back.

All of a sudden my mother hugged me, and my crying became uncontrollable.

Lisa McIntosh
SKIRTS AND KITCHEN UTENSILS

SOLITAIRE

It was humid, but he savored the close, moist heat in the third-floor bedroom of his home on Pacific Heights. He often talked about how much he loved cold weather, would sometimes brag about withstanding nights of extreme cold dressed only in his shorts. But deep down he knew that nothing could ever beat the hottest, most humid Honolulu weather for his own real comfort.

He stooped, a bead of sweat falling on the brown bedroom carpet, and slowly rolled open the bottom drawer of his gray metal filing cabinet. The disorderly mess of papers struck him as having looked important to him at one time. But not anymore. He dug through the layers of yellowing warranties, certificates and policies, until he uncovered the deteriorating zippered leather pouch at the very bottom.
Sitting back in his green velour recliner, he shoved aside the last hand of solitaire he'd played on the matching green footstool. Carefully unzipping the pouch, he wondered if it might fall apart if he were too rough. He didn't dump out the contents. Instead, he removed each medal and ribbon carefully, one by one, arranging them in neat rows on the soft stool surface. No matter how often he looked at them, each time they seemed foreign to him. They were like a rare treasure he'd unearthed after it had sat silently in the earth a thousand years. He was an archaeologist who poured carefully over fragments of an ancient civilization.

As a sergeant, he'd suffered severe frostbite in the Battle of the Bulge. The bitter weather had crept through the stiff leather of his boots. His feet had frozen white, blue-veined and barely lifeless. They were numbed so badly that he'd surprised himself by keeping up the fight until the action broke.

He fingered the ribbon commemorating his participation in the Holland campaign. It seemed hardly to come anywhere near compensating him for the thousands of hours his wife had massaged his dully aching feet, let alone the thousands of dollars he'd spent for the best, most comfortable shoes he could buy. At this moment, in the dripping heat of the late Hawaiian afternoon, he was thankful that even though his feet had little feeling, at least they didn't ache as much as on rainy or cold days.
"And nothing," he thought, "would compare to the pain of them hacking off my feet."

He pulled the first of the purple hearts from the case. Examining the deformation of the second toe on his left foot, he wondered how that little oddity could possibly deserve the same token as the jagged trench on his inner left thigh.

A bullet had ripped off his toenail. The shot had pierced his boot, only taking, permanently, the toenail. "Better in the foot than in the head," he'd always joked. He remembered how carefully he'd removed the blood-soaked shoe, how relieved he'd been to see that everything besides the nail was intact.

The gaping rift on his inner left thigh still throbbed from time to time. The steel fragment had torn cleanly through his thigh, leaving the scar that always made him uneasy about wearing shorts at the beach nowadays.

"But why should I be embarrassed?" he'd always wonder. "I was proud to serve. I had no problem with dedicating four years of my life to the war." Still, he always preferred dungarees to shorts at the beach. And he'd been a die-hard swimmer and surfer in Kekaha before he'd left for college in Wisconsin.

"Besides," he thought, "I'd never have met Chrissie if I'd gone straight through college."

He'd given up his boxing scholarship for the draft. He'd been at the point of receiving an athletic scholarship,
but the Army had cut short his flyweight career. Still, the four years had been worth it. He loved his country.

Dragging himself back to Wisconsin after his discharge, he remembered how he'd appeared at Paulie's front door. She loved to tell everyone the story of how he'd come limping and shivering up the driveway on Hiawatha Drive. Paulie had thrown open the front door and come running to him, the young man she'd taken in before the war as if he were her own blood son. "Why are you dressed this way?" she'd asked, so thankful that at least he'd come back alive.

"Well, Paulie, I had this terrific Army-issue winter coat, but I threw it in the trash when I landed in Chicago. Actually, I threw away everything I had there."

So he'd ridden the bus, teeth chattering, from Illinois back to Madison, dressed only in a thin shirt, slacks, and street shoes he'd just been able to afford.

Paulie had sat him down by the fireplace to warm up. His feet were aching. "I did save this." He drew a P-38 from a crumpled paper sack. "I thought John might like to have it."

Paulie, smiling politely, took the gun from him, wondering whether her husband really would enjoy the memento. "Oh, I'm sure he'll love this. Where'd you get it?"

He turned and stared into the blazing fire. He didn't answer Paulie. But John told her later that, after many beers and double bourbon shots, "Hank might have said he took
it off a German lieutenant he shot through the head, point-
blank. I couldn't quite understand what he was talking
about."

That was a war story he'd only told once. And he loved
to talk about all the war adventures he'd lived through with
close friends, the lucky ones, not the dead. His were a
highly selective set of stories, and he loved to tell them
because they were always funny.

Once, when his son had pushed him, he'd said, "Chris,
you never see the people you kill. You just shoot across
open ground, maybe at moving shapes, and you hope you get
lucky."

And back he'd gone to the University of Wisconsin. He
really was always thankful that the four-year gap in his
education had made it possible to meet Chrissie.

It happened in the Rathskellar. He'd walked into the
popular watering hole on the ground floor of the student
union. He'd been looking for any woman, and there she was,
sitting with her sorority sisters. She was a Norwegian girl
from Chicago, seven years younger than he.

He still couldn't believe that he, a shy Hawaiian boy,
had had the nerve to walk over to her table and say, "Stand
up, and if you're not taller than I am, I'll take you to a
movie."

She'd stood up. She stood half-an-inch taller. But
she'd agreed to go out with him anyway.
And they'd ended up married.

"So really," he thought, fingering the contents of the pouch, "the war was good to me."

Now, here he sat, stewing in the humid heat, with no strong pain in his feet or thigh or head today. Married for forty odd years, three children, four grandchildren, making more than enough money to live comfortably, to afford all those pairs of soft shoes. Everything actually was very good. In fact, it couldn't possibly be any better.

He carefully replaced the collection of medals and ribbons in the worn leather pouch. He zipped it closed with some effort. After burying it again under the disordered stack of yellowing papers, he returned to the recliner.

It took a few minutes to clear the whirl of thoughts that crowded his mind, but the memories gradually subsided into their proper place.

The room had grown dark. He wondered what he should do with himself. After a few more minutes, he switched on the lamp beside him without thinking. He picked up the mess of cards, shuffled them together into a neat deck, and dealt himself another hand of solitaire.
More tranquil memories of times spent at the railroad tracks flooded my consciousness. Memories of long, peaceful walks with my grandfather and his dog, Chippy, along the side of the tracks. I'd always stop to pick a bunch of Queen Anne's Lace for my grandmother. Though my grandfather once informed me that they were really only weeds, I still thought they were the most beautiful flowers in the world.

I looked at my watch with a start, realizing that I had been walking on the tracks for almost two hours, and that the sun was sinking low below the line of houses. I filled my arms with the wild Queen Anne's Lace and retraced my steps toward the house with a token of sympathy more special than anyone else could ever give.

Kim Palma
THE TIES THAT BIND

IN PASSING

Punchbowl

"Did I ever tell you," she asked, "that your grandmother read all of Charles Dickens aloud to me? Can you imagine that?"

He watched her pull the bright orange battery-powered grass clippers out of her purse. She kneeled. He thought he remembered her telling him that once, maybe even the last time he'd accompanied her here. Or was it just that because she'd read to him aloud, he believed that he remembered her telling him that. He couldn't be sure. "Yes, maybe. Maybe once," he mumbled.

"And" she added, pressing the 'on' button of the portable clippers, the small whir of the engine growing from the ground up until he imagined that the sound echoed, like a
chain saw, off the walls of the crater, "did I ever tell you that she read me all of . . . ."

The gray marble plaque became a distinct rectangle amid the green grass blades, but the rest of the story was lost in the engine's roar.

Bleak House

The son grabbed at his father's finger, grasping it as best he could with his tiny pink hand. "And," his father said, stopping in mid-sentence of their nightly reading session and clasping at the tiny hand, "did I ever tell you that your Gramma read me all of Hemingway aloud?"

"Bah, bah, bah," murmured the little boy, bubbles forming on his lips.

"Well, she did. And I did tell you, little man. Maybe you weren't listening?" the father asked. He picked up his beer from the ringed coffee table top and noticed how the coolness of the can could not penetrate the calluses on his fingers, cold circles with dead centers. "Although she said at the end," he added, "that she'd lost all respect for him because of his treatment of animals."

"Bah, bah, bah," went the little boy, pounding sporadically at his blue Cookie Monster's head with a tiny plastic sand shovel.

The father continued reading: "Now where--Oh, yeah. . . . to do something with his interests, and bring them to
some settlement. It procrastinates, disappoints, tries, tortures him; wears out his sanguine hopes and patience, thread by thread; but he still looks to it, and hankers after it, and finds his whole world treacherous and hollow. Well, well, well! Enough of this, my dear!"

He needed another. "One more beer please, Mommy," he called back over his head. The little boy shoveled at the eyeball of the unprotected puppet.
It hits me! The man sitting next to me is Mr. Tomita. His daughter and I used to play together as children. That's him! I'm so excited that I finally remember him, I practically shout, "Mr. Tomita!"

He jumps and stares at me with these wide eyes and a pale face.

"Mr. Tomita," I say more gently, "do you remember me? I used to go to school with your daughter Tracy. Remember me? Malia Kimura? I used to live down the street from you."

I search his face for a sign of recognition or even understanding. He stares back at me with a sort of fearful confusion in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he mumbles. Then he continues with something to the effect of me being wrong about who he is. He gets up and moves to another seat. But I know it's him.

Kristine Kim
THE ENQUIRER

CARRY-ON BAGGAGE

She hadn't worked the job long enough to tell if the pale woman was lying. She asked again, "All over the world?", unsure why anyone would want to fly anywhere, let alone everywhere, with a stuffed head.

The bloodless passenger dressed in a pantsuit of faded black velvet, her red-lipsticked mouth barely moving, whispered again: "Oh yes, dear, all over the world. And no one ever questioned my bringing him aboard. You are the first."

The unpracticed flight attendant watched the white hand touch lightly one of the pointed horns protruding from the newspaper-wrapped head. A small smile flickered across the white face. The liquid black eyes appealed to the young attendant.
"Yes, yes, my dear," she repeated tonelessly. "I've traveled through Europe and Asia with him. Together we have walked the Great Wall." Her eyes grew wide as she stared into the younger woman's. The intensity of the gaze caused the stewardess to shiver and nod her belief in the older woman's statement.

"I've even taken him to Yakima, and there was never a problem getting on a flight."

"Excuse me." A blond girl trying to squeeze past the pale woman and into the plane tapped her on the shoulder. "Is that thing real?"

The attendant replied, "Yes, it's real, all right."

The woman in black smiled at the young girl, then stepped aside to let her through. The smile became long and broad as she returned her attention to the stewardess.

"Mother?" A voice came from four rows down the airplane aisle. "Mother?"

The woman looked toward the voice. "Yes, dear?"

"I think there's room in this overhead." The daughter, dressed in white, gestured for the older woman to come to her.

A dark red fingernail ran smoothly down the curve of a horn, stopping gently as it came in contact with the newspaper wrapping.

"Well . . . ." The stewardess hesitated. "I guess . . . if no one at the gate said anything . . . well, go ahead."
"Thank you so much, my dear." Turning, she glided away down the aisle toward her daughter. The perfectly wrapped head traveled like a child cradled in her arms. Since neither mother nor daughter could really reach up into the compartment, both stepped up on aisle seats after the mother had slowly boosted the head onto the open overhead door.

A gate attendant joined the stewardess to watch the attempted stowing of the head. "You know," he said, shaking his head, "I'm surprised no one's ever said anything to her about bringing that thing on board."

"I'm going to call up the counter," said the stewardess, "just to make sure it's okay." She walked quickly out the door and up the covered rampway to a brown telephone.

When the pale woman tapped the gate attendant on the shoulder, she surprised him. He dropped his manifest printout.

"Oh, young man, I'm terribly sorry. I hope I didn't startle you."

If she'd carried a decapitated rose, she might have passed for Morticia Addam's mother. But she held only the deer head tightly clutched to her breast. A horn tip pressed into the flesh just below her Adam's apple, turning that patch even whiter than the skin around it. "I can't seem to make him fit inside there." She gestured toward the overhead compartment. "Is there anywhere else I could put him?"
The young man picked up his printout, then scratched his head. "I suppose we could try in the coat closet."

He walked to the long closet and folded open the door. It was jammed with a variety of baggage. "Sorry," he apologized, "it's all filled up. I think all of them are full by now. Let me see if there's any place up in first class."

The woman glided silently past him as he pulled back the beige curtain that separated the first-class passengers from those in coach.

"Here, I guess we can put it under this seat. It's empty."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "on the floor?" The horn pressed deeper into her throat. He thought she'd gasp for air. "Do you think he'll be safe under there?"

"Perfectly safe, ma'am. Absolutely safe."

He had some difficulty prying the stuffed head from the woman's hands, but gradually each pale finger and dark red nail peeled away from the dead trophy. As he pushed the head under the seat he thought about tucking his little girl into bed. He asked, "Did you kill this thing yourself?"

The ghostly woman gasped. "Oh no. No, no, no. My husband. He did."

"Oh." The attendant rose from the floor. "Well, there it is." He laughed nervously while the woman ran her left
hand slowly across her forehead. The thin hand went limply to the woman's side.

Stooping, she caressed the nearest horn with her middle finger. "You don't think someone will accidentally kick him, do you? Harm him in any way?"

"Ah, no ma'am, no. No, I think he'll ... be just fine under there. Just fine." His nervous laugh came again. He guided her back down the aisle and through the curtain, then watched her walk stiffly to the seat beside her daughter.

"Where is she?" The young stewardess stood beside the gate attendant. Her voice hissed in his ear. "Where is that woman with the moose head?"

The attendant raised his arm toward the seated couple. The stewardess stalked to the mother and daughter. She bent sharply at the waist so that she was face to face with the pale mother.

"You lied to me," she whispered.

"What, dear?"

"You lied to me about that moose head."

"Why whatever do you mean?"

"You told me that no one questioned you about it. I just found out that they warned you at check-in and at the gate that you couldn't bring that thing on board."

"No, no," the pale woman protested. "No one ever said a word to me. I've traveled the whole world over with him--"
almost in my lap--and no one has ever said a thing to me about not bringing him on board."

"That's right," the daughter added.

The stewardess shot a freezing stare at the daughter. Then she looked hard at the mother. "Ma'am, you were told twice that you could not bring that thing on board. I know you deliberately smuggled it through the gate. Probably under your coat, right?"

"Under my--why I never smuggled him anywhere. I have traveled all over the world with him. They never said a thing, not even in Yakima."

"That's right," repeated the daughter. "That's true."

"I have never gone anywhere without him. We have never been separated."

"That's the truth," the daughter echoed.

The stewardess straightened and spoke in a louder, angrier tone. "Where is it?" she demanded. No answer.

"Where is it!" Passengers stared at the furious employee.

"He's flying first-class," the woman stated proudly.

"That's true," the daughter added.

"David!" shouted the stewardess.

The gate attendant walked over to her, making apologetic faces to the interested passengers.

"Where is that thing? This woman says it's up in first class."
"That's right." David spoke as quietly as possible. "It's on the floor under 5B."

The stewardess stomped up the aisle. Rising from her seat, the pale woman floated after her. The beige curtain flew back in one swift movement, and the stewardess shot to seat 5B. As she attempted to pry the deer head from under the seat, she heard the woman in black moaning.  

"He has traveled all--"  

"Cut the crap, lady. This head is going down into baggage."

All the first-class passengers swiveled their heads toward the young stewardess. Finally she managed to disengage the head and stood. The questioning looks from the passengers caused her to blush a deep red. "Sorry, ladies and gentlemen. I'm sorry. No reason to be alarmed."

The pale woman reached for the head as the stewardess walked back down the aisle. Her voice rose high and clear. "I'll have you know that I do not appreciate this sudden change in airline policy. They said nothing to me about bringing him on board in Yakima."

The stewardess marched out the door to the brown phone. "In fact," the pale woman continued at peak volume, watching the stewardess from the doorway, "on the last flight they let him sit right next to me in an empty seat."

Passengers removed their headsets to listen. Books and magazines lowered into laps.
The daughter's cry came from four rows back where she stood on her seat: "That's right!"

The stewardess returned. A baggage handler appeared at the airplane door.

"Eugene, please tag this--this--thing for Chicago, and put it in baggage."

"Oh!" the woman shrieked.

Eugene grabbed the head and wheeled from the door.

"Oh God!" the woman wailed.

"Please return to your seat," warned the stewardess. She ran swiftly after Eugene. When she caught up to him she whispered, "Better yet, throw the damn thing in the dumpster. Let her file a claim. I'd like to see her try, the lying bitch." Eugene chuckled.

"I heard that!" The deathly woman had followed her out into the passageway. "I heard what you said."

Eugene had seen too many of these customers who tried to get away with bringing oversized baggage on board. He cradled the dead animal's head in his arms. Jerking the head from side to side, he rocked it savagely. "Oh," he hissed, "is it crying?" He and the stewardess exchanged malevolent smiles.

The old woman began to cry. Eugene turned and, holding the head by one antler, trotted nonchalantly up the passageway, swinging the newspaper-bound prize at his side.

"God!" the woman wailed sharply. "Oh God!"
The flight attendant grabbed her by the arm, spun her around, and pulled her back into the plane.

"Mama!" the daughter called from her perch atop the seat. "Come here, Mama." She jumped to the floor and ran toward her mother, then wrenched the pale woman's arm out of the stewardess' hard grasp. Together the pair limped back to their seats.

Sitting hunched over with her head leaned against her daughter's, the pale woman continued to sob softly while she pulled at the white skin of her throat. The daughter ran her hand back and forth across her mother's rounded shoulders. She was crying too, for her mother's sake.
I tried aiming the gun at the pig’s head. Then I dropped the gun gently to the concrete floor. I couldn’t do it.

"Shoot’um!" he ordered, even louder, as his face turned red from heated anger.

I picked up the gun, stood it gently in the corner, and walked away.

Uncle Charley kept screaming at me: "Get back here and shoot’um, I told you!"

I could still hear him yelling, but I just kept on going. I couldn’t go back.

Uncle died last year. He left me his .30 calibre.

Adam Campbell
THIRTY CALIBRE

ADAM

Ka'ahele leaned back on his hands, his palms pushing on the prickly grass blades. Looking up to the top of the monkeypod tree, he guessed it must stand at least forty feet by now. His uncle’s pig pen sat empty, silent.

As he stared up at the tall tree, Ka'ahele suddenly felt the pressure of a strong hand grip his shoulder.

"Ho, Bully, you wen scare me."

"What, Ka'ahele, you t'ougt was Uncle's ghos o wot?"

Ka'ahele laughed at his cousin's joke. "Nah, Bull, I knew it was you. Das Uncle ovah dere." He pointed at the monkeypod tree.

Bully shook his head in agreement. "You right, brah. Dat tree ees Uncle."

Hard to miss, Uncle Charley was always there.
The friends moved closer to the table. Artell heard one of the men say, "You give me half a step and half an inch."

Then a man in a blue shirt said, "Hmmm . . . two grand?"
"Yeah!"
"Deal."
The two men shook hands and walked away.
"What was that all about?" Artell asked.
Carlos looked around and said calmly, "Well, you know those two guys who went shake hands—they agreed to fight their chickens on a bet for two thousand dollars. The chicken that belongs to the guy in the blue shirt was a little bigger and taller, so its knife will be a half step higher up on its leg, and the blade will be a little shorter. That's so the big chicken doesn't have an advantage over the other one."
"Oh," Artell said.

Kyle Arsiga
MANOK, MANOK!

UNCLE KNOWS BEST

Uncle Billy sat at the breakfast table—he'd been sitting there for nearly three hours. His half-round glasses reflected light from the morning passing away outside. Each time I walked back into the dining room he was studying the San Francisco Chronicle "green" sheet, the sports section. Actually, he'd managed to spend almost the whole three hours scrutinizing the line-up for the day's races at Golden Gate Fields. Every once in a while he'd jot a note to himself about some horse or other, on a well-worn steno pad. He'd smile, then sip at his Burgie Beer.

Occasionally he'd tap on the top of his empty can with his lucky handicapping pencil. This was the signal for my
Auntie Ruthie to serve him up a fresh twelve ounces of inspiration.

"Coming right up, my de-ah," Auntie Ruthie would sing from the kitchen where she was involved in lunch and dinner preparation over a hot stove on that humid day.

She would waltz out of the kitchen, cold Burgie in hand, and ask me if I'd like a beer, too.

"Um . . . no thanks, Auntie Ruthie. I want to keep my head straight for this race thing."

Uncle laughed. "Well, Chris," he said softly, peering over the straight rims of his glasses, "it's impossible to win anyway. You should have a beer."

"Yes, de-ah," auntie Ruthie encouraged. "We're sure to lose anyway, so why don't you just relax with a nice cold beer."

"No, no, that's okay."

She disappeared into the kitchen again. Uncle Billy sipped slowly, belched softly, then returned to his deep study.

I watched him. "Uncle Billy, if we're going to lose anyway, then why are you spending so much time looking over the horses?"

"Just in case," he said without looking up.

I drove the three of us across into Oakland, then on to Albany, to the massive parking lot that looked more like a
field for some kind of state fair. The crowd was enormous. It was a weekday.

I asked, "How do all of these people get out of work at noon?"

"Well, de-ah," my auntie began, "many of these poor people, like Uncle and I, are living the life of leisure known as retirement. For some of them, like your uncle, the track is their primary source of recreation."

My uncle waved to someone he knew. "Ready to win today?" he called.

The fiftyish-looking man waved, smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. Then he returned to his newspaper.

Auntie Ruthie asked, "Is that Joe?"

"Yes, dear," my uncle replied, adjusting his lucky cap to cut down on the sun in his eyes.

"See, Chris. That man is a doctor in Berkeley. He is not retired, but he finds time to come over here--"

"Because he can afford to," my uncle cut in.

Auntie continued. "Yes, Chris, most are retired, some work, but many are--"

"Professional gamblers," Uncle added, helping her explain and chuckling softly as he said it. "They make enough money to live on just by playing the ponies."

"Really?" I asked. "Do you know anyone like that?"

"He wishes he did, de-ah," Auntie Ruthie chimed in. "Then he could pick up some hot tips. Maybe he'd have a
chance to win. What do you think, de-ah?” She passed her arm through his and smiled at me.

"Yes, my dear," he agreed, dropping her arm.

On the way to the main gate Uncle stopped at a little stand. "This is Lester's," he said. "This is where I pick up my edge."

My aunt smiled at me, then let her expression fall into one of humorous disgust, opening her eyes wide and flaring her nose as she turned down the corners of her mouth.

Uncle explained. "I've tried all the tip sheets, Chris, and Lester's has paid off more times than any other."

Auntie Ruthie laughed out loud, then began to snort. "If Uncle could only walk out the gate once in a while before the races ended, he might actually come home ahead. I think the only one making any money out of this is Lester."

Uncle Billy smiled, then purchased a tip sheet. He exchanged some comments about particular races that seemed more like "sure things" than some of the others. After he'd garnered all the inside information he could, we went through the gate, bought our programs, then found seats out in the sun on benches lining the track.

"Quite a smell," I commented. Uncle Billy, steno pad in one hand and Lester's tip sheet in the other, was already lost in picking winners.

"Yes, de-ah," my auntie said. "Would you care for a beer?"
She pulled two Burgies out of the little cooler she'd brought along. She popped one and laid it beside my uncle. He picked it up and sipped deeply. I declined the beer, still wanting to keep my head straight. My auntie opened the other beer and began looking over her program.

"So what are we looking for?" I asked, scanning the pages of the program.

"Well, de-ah, I like to play hunches." Auntie pulled two pens from her purse and offered me one. "For instance, in this first race I like the name of the number-six horse: Chelsea Blue."

"Uh huh, I can see why," I said, nodding because Chelsea is the name of one of her granddaughters. "But are you going to bet on the horse just because of that?"

"Why of course, my de-ah. I don't need no Lester's tip sheet to help me pick my winners." She elbowed my uncle in the side. He looked up at me and smiled another patient smile.

I looked out at the track. "What's that board with all the numbers?"

"Those" my uncle said, "show the odds on the race. See where the fraction says two-zero after the number-six horse? Chelsea Blue?" He looked sideways at Auntie Ruthie. I nodded. "That means she's a twenty-to-one shot." He squinted his eyes merrily at my auntie.
She chuckled. "I don't care about the odds, nephew. I play hunches."

My uncle burped.

I got up to buy a cup of coffee. While I drank the mind-sharpening caffeine, I watched the lighted board change. The odds on Chelsea Blue had gone up to thirty-to-one. Hmmm, I thought, so that must mean she's got a one-in-thirty chance of winning. Doesn't sound too promising.

Some men standing near me were studying another kind of newspaper. It listed all the horses and all kinds of other information. I listened to them talk about how one jockey would use the whip, how another jockey had slipped, and how track conditions and recent workouts seemed to favor the number-two horse: Sports Mission. I looked up at the odds board. Sports Mission was a two-to-one shot. The number two horse? A two-to-one shot? That sounded good.

Uncle Billy tapped me on the shoulder. "Did you place your bet yet?"

"Ah, no. I don't know what to do."

"Well," he gestured in the direction of the betting windows, "just follow me."

I stood behind him in a line of maybe twelve people. When he finally reached the window, he reeled off his bets for win, place, and show, his daily double combinations, his pick-sixes, and his pick-nines. I was surprised it only cost him thirty dollars.
"See how easy it is, Chris?"

I nodded but didn't say anything. "What's Auntie Ruthie going to do?" I asked.

"She made a place bet . . . on Chelsea Blue." He grimaced and moved off to the side while I placed my bet.

"I'd like to bet on Sports Mission to come in first, second, or third."

The man behind the window stared at me.

My uncle stepped up to my side. "Two dollars. Across the board. Two," he said to the man.

A red figure of six dollars lit up on the computer terminal.

I paid the six dollars. "Don't forget your ticket," my uncle warned.

The three of us watched as three horses none of us had bet on came in first, second, and third.

The day wore on, unprofitably for all of us. I was down more money than I could keep track of because I'd become more familiar with all the different kinds of bets.

"You know," said Uncle Billy, as we looked dismally at the line-up for the final race, "these foreign horses do very well on the turf, and Russell Baze is riding this one named Belfast Queen."
"Baze?" my auntie asked, astonished. "He won't pay off again. He's way over his payoff percentage for the day, my de-ah."

My uncle looked over at her. "Lester says it's a sure thing." He smiled at me.

Auntie Ruthie laughed out loud. "My de-ah, how well has Lester done for you today? I should think you would have dropped his wonderful tip sheet in the rubbish can many races ago."

I was trying hard to concentrate. Between the beers I'd finally ended up drinking, and the intense, though lessening heat of the sun, I was having some trouble focusing on the fine points of their discussion.

"My darling," continued my uncle, "as a matter of fact I did toss Lester in the trash several races ago. But he told me, when I bought the sheet, that this was a sure thing."

I needed one more beer and didn't want to draw on Uncle Billy's dwindling supply. Before I went to buy one, I placed my most costly bet of the day. "Ten dollars. Across. Three." The computer spit up my ticket, and I paid the thirty dollars that I was willing to risk on Russell Baze.

My uncle had bet ten dollars on Baze to place and show. My auntie had bet on an Oriental jockey who was wearing a bright red outfit.

The race began.
I was screaming for Belfast Queen and Russell Baze all the way through. I grabbed my uncle's arm so tightly that it could have turned black and blue. In the time it took for the horses to go around the track, Baze moved from last place to first, pulling ahead just at the wire.

"I did it, I did it!" I yelled.

"You bet him, de-ah?" my aunt asked in disbelief.

"Yes, ten dollars across the board."

My uncle stuck out his hand. "Congratulations, Chris."

"You, too," I said, slapping him on the back for his place and show.

After he and I collected our winnings, the three of us walked out to the car.

"So, de-ah," my auntie said, "how did you make out, overall?"

I thought hard while checking my wallet. "Well, let's see. That paid $52.40, so I made $22.40. If I subtract that from the eighty dollars I lost, I came out only about ... fifty-eight dollars down?" It sounded pretty bad to me all of a sudden.

"Not bad!" my uncle exclaimed. "But if you'd put all thirty on him to win, you'd have made back everything you lost."

I felt a little ill. I must have looked it, too.

"Never mind, my de-ah, you did much better than . . . Uncle," Auntie Ruthie said.
"Or Auntie!" Uncle Billy added, smiling broadly. Their encouragement helped lessen the blow.

We stopped on the way to the car so that my uncle could talk about the races with Lester. He congratulated the master tipster for finally steering him the right way in the ninth race.

"So, Bill, you bet Baze to win?" Lester asked.

"Well no, no. Just place and show. But my nephew here did."

Lester waved to me and smiled.

Even though I'd dropped what for me was a large chunk of money, I was excited again.

"You know," I said, driving back to San Francisco, "I think you could come out ahead if you kept track of Baze. You put him on a computer spread sheet. Know which days of the week and what races he runs best in. Check win percentages against his gate position. Work in all those variables like weather, trainer, owner. You know?"

My aunt snored peacefully, having fallen asleep. My uncle cracked open a new beer in the back seat and laughed softly. "It might be worth trying," he said. "Come to think of it, that's probably what Lester does. Actually, Chris, it all comes down to luck." He laughed again, drinking down the beer as though it were his first of the day. "It's all luck."
In the rearview mirror, I saw his eyes twinkle with the sunlight reflected off the bay. "And mine . . . " he paused, "or should I say ours, seems to be . . . pretty bad."
We headed towards the counter where you can either cash in the marbles or trade them for a "gift," as they called it. Jiichan asked for a few cans of dried seaweed (for my mom) and a stick of gum for me. He cashed in the rest of the Pachinko balls, except a couple of them, which he handed to me afterwards. "Come back to Japan to play Pachinko again with these," he explained.

On the way home, Jiichan slowed his walking pace down. I felt closer to him somehow. I felt like I had something that I'd shared with him. We hadn't spoken much to each other the entire time, but I learned more about the true Jiichan. He wasn't just the guy who sent a box full of goodies to my home in Hawai'i every Christmas. He was a skilled gambler, and I was proud of him for that. The stick of ume-flavored gum he bought me was stuck carefully under a park bench long before we reached home, but I still have the two shiny Pachinko balls.

Junko Peterson
THE PRO GAMBLER

BITE THE BULLET

Old Mr. Kaneshiro fingered the perfectly round hole in the windshield of the brand new Honda Accord. Amazingly enough, the bullet had not shattered the glass. Stooping at the knees, he closed his left eye and sighted through the hole to the cracked rear window. It was as if he hoped to get a clearer view of just exactly what to do by examining the more major damage with his view unimpaired by the front windshield glass. "Shhheee . . . ." His voice trailed away.

"Whoa, Grampa, good ting Gramma neva hea, yeah?"

Mr. Kaneshiro turned slowly to stare hard at his number-one grandson. He wondered, one more time, what on earth had made him finally give in and buy the rifle. It wasn't as if he were certain his namesake was even his
favorite grandchild. Hadn't he wished, time after time, that Alyssa, Kenji-the-Third's older sister, had been born a boy and named for him. Her, he knew he liked. She would never have shot out her grandmother's windshield. "Eh, so what if she neva hea, Sonny Boy?" he asked. "You tink she not goin notice get one problem da nex time she get in da car fo go someplace?"

Kenji-the-Third twirled the twenty-two rifle like a baton. "Look, Grampa, I stay in da ROTC!" The crazed glare on his grandfather's face made him instantly serious. "But fo real, Gramps, good ting you wen show me how fo make da silenca outta da can and da rags, you know. Othawise, guaranteed Gramma would be out hea already."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Mr. Kaneshiro muttered, looking up toward the kitchen window. "But I neva show you how fo make da silenca because I t'ought you was goin shoot out Gramma's new car windows, boy. I wen teach you dat cuz in dis neighborhood da houses stay too close kine. Lucky ting da back wen only crack. If wen shattah . . . Shhheee."

From somewhere deep in the house, his wife shouted: "Kenji, you wen finish fix da fence, o wot? Hurry up an get in hea. Da Bows stay comin' on. I get yo lucky beah, already. Hurry up!"

"Okay! Coming!" Mr. Kaneshiro wished hard to sound as if everything was fine. It must have worked. Thelma didn't come to the back door. He turned around and found his
grandson sighting down on him with the rifle. "Eh! I told you not to point dat ting at people!"

"Only joking, Gramps. Geez. Chill out." The boy dropped the rifle barrel to his side, his finger still on the trigger.

Mr. Kaneshiro shook his head vigorously in disbelief. "Das one good way fo shoot yourself in da foot," he wanted to say, but he thought twice before deciding not to mention this particular hazard.

"Kenji-san, by any chance, da safety stay on?"

The boy looked down at the gun. He engaged the safety. "Yeah. I jus wen put um."

Mr. Kaneshiro scowled. "An you tellin me fo chill out, Sonny Boy? Did I tell you, huh, dat whateva you do, no shoot Gramma's new car? Didn't I tell you dat? Huh? Didn't I?"

Kenji-the-Third looked down at the ground and scuffed at the dirt with his Air Jordans. "Yeah, Grampa, yeah. But was one accident. Was like da time dat lady came fo talk to us in healt class." He looked up at his grandfather. "You know, da one I wen tell you about. Da one Ma got all pissed cuz da lady from da free clinic wen get up in front of da class and start t'rowing da condoms plus da M&M's at us. Das da chick wen say dat telling guys like us not fo tink about sex and stuff was like telling one guy fo go run aroun da building an not tink about one blue elephant cuz da only ting dat guy goin tink about is one blue elephant. So Reggie wen
tell he no believe her, so she tole him for go run aroun building t'ree one time fo see if he t'ought about one blue elephant. Even though she said no tink about um. Remembah dat, Gramps?"

"No," Mr. Kaneshiro said, shaking his head and rolling his eyeballs, "you nevah tell me dat."

Kenji-the-Third's voice grew confident. Leaning on the rifle as if it were a gentleman's walking stick, he continued: "So Reggie wen go run aroun da building one time, and when he came back da lady wen ask him if he t'ought about da blue elephant." The narration stopped.

Mr. Kaneshiro's voice sounded impatient. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, so what Reggie said?"

The grandson smiled. "Reggie said, 'No, all I wen tink about was sex.'" The teller laughed at his humorous story, throwing back his head and roaring out loud.

Raising his hand to his face, old Mr. Kaneshiro, banged the heel of his palm several times against his forehead.


"Kenji, what's goin on out dere?" Thelma's face became visible at the screen window above the kitchen sink. Mr. Kaneshiro made a quick calculation about whether his wife, with her sixty-three year old eyes, at this time of morning,
would be able to see the damage to her pride and joy.

"Not'ing, Telma. Kenji-san was makin wisecracks about BYU."

"Well, hurry up! Yo lucky beah stay gettin warm."

"Coming, Deah."

Thelma disappeared from view.

"Sonny Boy, you lucky Gramma nevah see dis right now."

He shook his finger at the now quiet boy. "An what da hell is da same about Reggie an what you wen do to Gramma's car--specially afta I tole you not fo hit um?"

Kenji Three stabbed at the ground with the barrel of the gun. "Well, I wen stay aiming ova dere," he lifted the barrel and pointed at one of the empty beer cans sitting along the top of the garden fence, "an jes befo I wen pull da trigger, I looked at Gramma's car, because you wen tell me not fo shoot um, an I guess . . . ." He stopped.

"What? What you wen guess, Sonny Boy?"

"I guess da gun wen follow my eye."

Mr. Kaneshiro raised his hand again, but he stopped short of reaching out to slap his grandson's head. "An you lucky, boy-san. Jes tink if Gramma wen stay inside da car?"

This question puzzled the boy. Scratching his head, he said, "But, Grampa, how can be? She stay inside da house. Lucky, yeah?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Mr. Kaneshiro agreed. He decided to turn his anger toward trying to figure out what to do.

179
"Grampa!" came Thelma's voice from the back door. "I gotta come out dere an drag you in by yo ear, o wot?" The door opened slightly.

Hissing at his grandson as he began to lope for the back door, Mr. Kaneshiro said, "No move, Sonny Boy. I comin back real fas."

Kenji-the-Third walked over to where the makeshift can silencer lay on the ground. He picked it up and reattached it to the barrel of the rifle he'd finally managed to convince his grandfather to buy for him. Carefully aiming at an empty Bud can atop the two-by-four fence rail, he pulled gently at the trigger, glancing swiftly at the back door just as the round went off. The can stood where it had been placed by old Mr. Kaneshiro, but one of the hens in the nearby coop squawked and started up running, a few feathers fluttering to the ground where she had stood. The rifleman ran to the place where the chicken wire fence sagged and examined the bird. As far as he could tell, no blood had been drawn. Suddenly he felt the hard thud of his grandfather's hand on the backside of his head. "Owweee, Grampa, why you wen do dat?"

Mr. Kaneshiro wondered whether Alyssa would have volunteered to give up her Saturday morning to come and help Grampa shore up the sagging coop fence. "Eh, where Ally stay today?"
Kenji-the-Third rubbed the impact area on his skull. "She stay at church. Get one meeting or somet--." "Church! On Sataday? Gimme dat gun!"

Still massaging his scalp gently, Kenji Three did nothing.

After carefully shifting the lukewarm lucky beer from one hand to the other, Mr. Kaneshiro grabbed for and ripped the weapon out of the boy's hand. "I tell you, boy-san, you lucky da game look hopeless already. If da Bows was geevin um, an I was missin um, I tink I might jes shoot you in da okole."

The grandson began to sob quietly. "What, Grampa, you no like me?"

Mr. Kaneshiro had started back to the car, but now he whirled around. "I no like you? Who da hell wen but you dose goddamn shoes? Wasn't your ma, yeah? Wasn't your dad, uh? Who? Who wen buy um fo you?"

He waited. No answer.

"Who?" he demanded again.

"You did . . . Grampa," the boy answered softly, between stuttered gulps for air.

"An who wen buy you dis damn gun you was whining about forevah, huh? Wasn't Gramma. I know dat."

"You . . . Grampa."

Mr. Kaneshiro whipped around and stalked back to the car. His wife's month-old Accord looked ancient. The dream
car she'd given herself as a retirement present had become his instant nightmare.

"Shhheee . . . . What I goin do?" he asked, praying for some answer.

The boy had followed him. "How bout I jes go in an tell her, Grampa. Den she can whack me."

Beer can tilted in mid-swallow, the old man choked at the mention of this brilliant plan, sending a spurt of foam out his nose. "You not even old enough fo buy one gun, Sonny Boy. Who you tink Gramma goin know wen buy um fo you? She da one tole me not fo buy um!"

"But, Grampa, if I tell her was all my fault, she not goin blame you. I can buy da glass outta my allowance, little bit each time."

"Boy," Mr. Kaneshiro snorted before downing the last of his lucky beer, "you sure you related to me? Gramma would kill me. Guaranteed."

Kenji-the-Third looked up at his father's father. "But I should tell her, uh? Das right, uh?"

Old Mr. Kaneshiro shook his head and tossed the empty can over toward the garden fence. The beer can rolled to rest next to the small pile of pencil-thick reinforcement bar he'd bought to boost the sagging chicken coop fence. Suddenly, his face lit up. "Go get one piece of da pencil rebah. Go bring um."
Kenji-the-Third ran over to the pile of new rebar, picked up a length, and hurried back to his grandfather.

"Now go t'row all da beah cans in da trash and hide da gun."

Gently, Mr. Kaneshiro placed the bar at the front hole and slid it through easily. "Hah!" He pushed the point of the bar all the way to the cracked rear window.

The screen door slammed. "Kenji! What you guys doing? You wen fix da fence o wot?"

Mr. Kaneshiro, head bowed, shuffled over to his wife. "We was, Telma, but had one accident. An somebody--" He lifted his face from the ground and frowned at his grandson. "Somebody wen t'row one piece of da rebah . . . ." He escorted her to the car, "An, try look."

"Oh no!" Thelma gasped.

Her grandson ran to her side. He looked from his grandmother's to his grandfather's face while he said, "Sorry, Grams, was one accident. I was makin like one guy wit one speah. You know, Olympics kine. I goin pay fo um from my allowance. Promise." He squinted at his grandfather.

In an instant Thelma had recovered. She looked at her husband, then patted her grandson on the shoulder reassuringly. "Oh. Oh. Okay. Was one accident, yeah? Canna help. Okay, Kenji-san. Try be mo careful nex time though. Come. We go watch da game."
With her arm around her number-one grandson's shoulders, Thelma turned and, together, they went back to the house.

Old Mr. Kaneshiro watched his wife and his namesake disappear through the screen door; he knew who would pay. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah," he mumbled. After the door slammed shut, he shook his head tiredly and exhaled a disgusted sigh. He tossed the rebar toward the pile after carefully withdrawing it. Opening the Accord's rear door, he reached in and peeled the flattened bullet head from the crazed windshield. "Shhheee . . . . T'rowing da speah! Geez da bull lies dat no good kid can tell." Walking slowly toward the house, he kept shaking his head. It was definitely time for another lucky beer, no matter how the Bows were doing or how much this one would cost him.
Right after the recital, my grandpa took me to Thayers' Music Store. He bought me a Steinway and Sons' grand piano with a matching black metronome that lights each beat.

I am still playing the piano and making mistakes during recitals, but that's what makes it special, like my grandpa, and his gift.

Lisa McIntosh
JUILLIARD MATERIAL

JO-ANN

What was it that Jo-Ann had told him, his granddaughter watching him from the upstairs hall window, the last time he had climbed the old, purpling Japanese maple, when he believed that it had grown to the point of wild beyond wild, especially when the trades whipped it back and forth across the aging roof of his wife's orchid hothouse, the shelter for her exotic flowers that he'd lovingly handbuilt for her simply because she'd mentioned, off-hand, that she wished it were there for her?

What was it that his granddaughter had said, he wondered, as he pushed himself up the sturdy, rough trunk, ready to crop back again the wilderness that encroached upon his perfect vegetable garden, no charge, although they had paid him top dollar back when his clientele had grown so numerous that he was forced, finally to take no more referrals; when he could finally work, seven days a week if he so chose, could finally afford any orchid, no matter how rare, how exotic, to please the woman who had married him,
and he her, because their parents had commanded that it be so, though through the years of hard times their love had blossomed into such a passion that, by the time the money had become no problem, the love between them had grown stronger, stood taller than the Ko'olaus?

What was it that she said to me? he wondered, reaching for the first of many branches to be pruned, again, for the millionth time, his back aching just as he remembered it always ached. Even worse now that he was alone. "Oh, yes," he said aloud, answering his own question, lopping the second branch, "Jo-Ann said that a gardener's work is what? Yes, ever so endless."

Wildflowers that grow on the side of the house, red gingers that grow against the walls, and pink camellias, all mean something. These flowers keep my grandmother company. My grandfather delivers them every other day. Fresh water is always exchanged for the old, and the stone is brushed clean of dead leaves.

Jo-Ann Uchimura
MY GRANDFATHER'S GARDEN
III. LOVE
It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning--

F. Scott Fitzgerald
THE GREAT GATSBY

HEART OF GLASS

By the time they reached Punaluu, Clayton didn't want to drive anymore. They stopped at the beach park and went to sit on a green slatted picnic bench. The sky had become overcast. Down on the sand, an old man had sculpted what looked like a starfish, but the tide had come up, and the legs were beginning to wash away. The man had moved higher up and was working on another project.

"Eh," Tom said, "when Dr. B. told us that if a starfish lost its legs new ones would come out, was he kidding or what?"

Clayton shook his head. "I don't know. That guy is pretty weird. It's kinda hard to guess sometimes whether he's telling us the truth or not."

Tom slapped his friend on the back. "Hey, I got an idea to cheer you up. Let's figure out a Valentine present for Kathy."

"Oh yeah? Like what?" Clay, as always, would play straight man for Tom.

"Wееeell now, let me see." Tom reached in his pocket for a cigarette. He lit one for each of them. "I guess 24

188
karat gold jewelry's out, right?" He took several contemplative puffs. "I say we should wrap up something gross in one terrific cellophane job, real Valentinesey-looking. Leave it on top her locker with an anonymous-admirer type note. Maybe a centipede or something. Except," he puffed, "when it bites her," he puffed again, "it'll probably die."

"Nah," said Clay, "she'd be wise to that anyhow. She'd know it was something I did to get back at her."

"Hmmm, perhaps you're right there, Professor Lau. I got it! Maybe you should just ignore her 'til graduation and break her heart."

"Yeah," Chris nodded, "a heart of glass. I bet I'd break it."

"Ice, man, ice. Hey! Dick Tracy! One ice bullet right through the heart. No evidence."

"Nah, she'd probably catch it with her teeth and spit it back at me."

The humor broke down. While the two friends sat silently, listening to the waves break, the old artist worked steadily on.

Tom had smoked his cigarette down to the filter. "That's it!" he suddenly screamed, jumping up off the bench. "We'll cut off her arms and legs and see if she can grow new ones."
"Eh, Tom, enough already. You're starting to depress the hell out of me."

"Oh, 'scuse, uh, Mister Lau," Tom said, striking a match hard for emphasis.

The wind came up and the air grew cold. The old man finished his project. It was a dolphin; the detail was painstaking. He washed off his hands in the water, then came back to look at the completed likeness. He walked very slowly around the whole piece, smiling at his work. Then, abruptly, he turned away and went off down the beach, strolling casually near the advancing water line. The waves, whipped wilder by the rising wind, started to lick at the perfectly carved body he'd left behind. Hardly as solid as it looked, the sculpture began to crumble.

After a long time Tom said, "You know, that must take a lot of practice. I can't believe how some people can actually do things like that."

Clayton nodded. "It's an art, all right. A real art."

Tom laughed. "Man, that's the word for it. That is the word for it." He flicked his cigarette butt toward the pounding waves and watched it blow backwards and fall at his feet. "All art, no heart."

"No heart! Eh, Tom, heart is what it's all about, man."

"Yeah, Clay, a heart of glass, right?"
Clayton looked hard at his friend. "Tom, what're you talking about?"

"About her, brah, about Kathy."

"Oh, oh. Well, I was talking about that old man and those sand sculptures."

The two sat watching until the last masterpiece had disappeared. Finally it was too cold for the two friends to sit any longer in the hard wind.

The Circle Island tour had to end. They came back to school in time for the 3:30 bell. Clayton pulled up into the same diagonal space where he'd parked that morning. They watched students heading for home, for practice, for hamburgers and french fries across the street at Wise Burger.

Clayton shook his head. "So, Tom," he said, "I guess we're going to get some real heavy 'D' for this, huh?"

"Yes, buddy, I fear you're going to learn what detention is all about." Tom laughed. "And you, a model student, too. Why, it'll break Miss Chase's heart to see her star pupil warming the bench with all the other bad little girls and boys."

"I think she'll get over it," Clayton said, laughing as he pictured his parents and teachers mourning his having passed over to the dark side.

Tom slapped him on the shoulder. "Eh, Clay, happy Valentine's Day, brah. Thanks for the great time. And take
it easy." Tom slammed the door, waved, and walked down the grassy hill toward the high school.

As Clayton was about to back out of the space, he saw Kathy's legs, in the rearview mirror, run across the street to the bus stop. She was carrying a single red rose. He thought about just how stupid he would seem if he asked her whether she needed a ride, but at that moment the number-four Highlands bus rolled around the corner.

A second later, Kathy was gone.
Mark wiped his sweaty palms on his pants. It was the first time he would ask a girl out. He reached into his pocket and popped a Certs in his mouth for "fresh breath." He took one deep breath, closed his eyes, and went walking down the hall towards Nicole.

For the first time, the hallway seemed as if it wouldn't end. This was a long voyage to nowhere; he thought he was standing in the same place. But Mark was slowly making ground on what might be the time of his life.

Todd Tokunaga
THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

MAKING BELIEVE

This is a hard story to tell. As if all stories aren't. Jim Harstad, my writing teacher, told me once, after he heard me read a piece about my great-grandfather murdering my great-grandmother, that the hardest thing to write about convincingly is death. I don't disagree with that, but for me, writing about love is a fairly tough assignment too. All too often, when I write about women who've been important to me, I tend to get maudlin. The stories sound like poorly written, terribly sung, horribly played country-western songs. I don't like to sound that way. That's one reason why this particular story is hard to tell. Another reason is that it's too damn complicated, as far as stories go. Maybe the complication comes from the fact that, in a way, this story might be considered by some to be a little bit strange. I don't know. I'm just going to try and tell it as best I can. You be the judge. I mean about whether the story is,
in your opinion, odd, and, if not, if just ordinary, whether it's just a plain hard story to tell.

Right now I have two jobs, three if you count getting an education as a kind of job. And just one if you only consider getting paid, some kind of wage-for-work contract, to signify employment. The paying job I currently hold involves working ten to fifteen hours a week for the KOKUA program at the UH-Manoa campus as a student hire, recording textbooks and other written materials for students with visual and learning impairments. I love this job. Unlike some I've had, I actually get to feel good about what I'm doing. Like I did at the Lab School, say, or at Dole Intermediate, or even, and maybe most especially, when I did private tutoring.

There's just something about teaching and the educational process. And when that teaching is one-on-one, intensely personal, like it was with someone such as Kimo Easterwood, a 1985 University Laboratory School graduate, for instance, the feeling you get when the student succeeds is unlike almost any other kind of feeling. I won't waste words trying to describe it, and I refuse to bore you with sickening similes, dead metaphors, and lame clichés. This isn't a country-western song, although I admire that style of musical artistry very much. But those songwriters and singers live and breathe country; I don't have the benefit of that kind of background. If you don't know what that
teaching feeling is like, then all the words in the world
won't convey it to you anyway. Suffice it to say that
Loretta Krause, principal of the Lab School, often has
referred to me as Kimo Easterwood's father. Kimo and I
aren't related, except by academic sweat and mutual respect,
but when I watched him graduate at Andrews Amphitheater, I
did watch my son graduate.

He works in Hollywood now, a lighting technician,
raking in the bucks. Soon, he tells me, he'll get his shot
at director of photography. But Kimo, like me, has a non-
paying kind of job too. It began at Varsity Theater when he
worked as an usher. He couldn't stand the music they played
during intermission, so he volunteered to mix several tapes
for them. They loved the music he chose. I haven't been in
Varsity Theater for a while, but the last time I went--I
think I saw Henry V--they were still playing his music, and
he'd been in California two or three years by then. Now, he
spends all of his free time, outside of lifting weights, and
all of the free money that he doesn't spend on new cars and
food, on mixing music. He owns thousands of dollars worth of
studio-quality equipment. In fact, the way he describes it,
it sounds to me like he does have a studio setup. You know,
with minor additions he could cut an album. But you see, he
gives these mixes away for free, to friends. There's no
money involved, although I'm sure he could make a killing if
he charged market value for what he produces. These tapes
are in high demand. It seems like his friends are clamoring for this or that kind of collection. If he charged, though, he'd have to pay for rights, royalties, and all that. And doing that would make it a business, real work. He does it, this mixing of music, all for love.

I remember how Kimo practically jumped up and down when he found out I had an AM/FM radio in my Ghia. Hooked on KDEO at the time, thanks to my years in the midwest and, especially, to my job at a Madison record store, the first day I gave Kimo a ride home after we'd studied over in the Hemenway Hall lounge I turned over the engine and caught the last half of Emmylou Harris singing "Boulder to Birmingham."

"Is that KDEO?" Kimo asked.

"Yes. You'll probably find this hard to believe, but it's my favorite radio station."

"My dad listens to KDEO all the time," he said.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. That's Emmylou Harris, isn't it?"

"Yes it is. How do you know her?"

"Well, like I said, my dad listens to KDEO all the time, so I hear it a lot too. Emmylou Harris is great."

"Yup, Kimo, she really is. Every time I hear her it takes me back to Madison. I saw her in concert there, a long time ago, with a good friend of mine. From that record store I told you I worked at? I mean, whenever I hear Emmylou, I
go right back in my mind to that night I went to the concert." I looked over at Kimo. He gave me an amused chuckle. "Sorry. I didn't mean to sound like a moron."

He laughed. "We're talking major babe here, huh?"

I turned down the volume. "So is KDEO both you and your dad's favorite station?"

"Ah, nooooo, not really," he answered.

"Oh. Well, why don't you switch it to your station?"

"Can't," he said. "It's an FM station."

"Sure you can. This is an AM/FM radio. Switch it."

"No shit? Right on!" It was as if he'd just hit the lottery or something. He found the switch, flipped to FM, and turned the dial.

"What station is this?" I asked.

"98 ROCK. Mind if I crank it up?"

I didn't mind. He turned it up and then some.

From that day on, the first thing Kimo would do when he jumped in the car would be to switch from KDEO to 98 ROCK. I still listen to 98 ROCK from time to time these days, even though it's settled into a decidedly far more commercial format than when Kimo first introduced me to it. But I listen to it because it reminds me of Kimo. You know, my son. I tend to do that. Associate people or places with certain kinds of music. Like Kimo and 98 ROCK. The record store and KDEO.
Kimo Easterwood truly lives for music. I have known very few people about whom I could say that. And this second "job" of his, his hobby or avocation or whatever you want to call it, he does purely out of passion.

His true vocation, the lighting technician work, he loves too. His favorite kind of film project is shooting music videos. I think he must nearly feel about his career the way I feel about working in education. Someday I'll write about Kimo--I've actually written three pieces about him already--but not today. I mention him here, and my experience with him, to help tell this story. There are people for whom music is an integral, inseparable part of their existence. As I say, I personally don't know too many of them, but I have known a few. And I want you to see that passion for work can very definitely have little or nothing to do with whether you get paid for doing it. You have to have a good idea by now, knowing some of my feelings for teaching and for students like Kimo, about how work, especially teaching more than almost anything else, can be a labor of some deep emotional value for me.

You know, I've never been fired from a job. Every job I've had, I've left by choice. For a good reason. Let's see:

Dole Cannery: seasonal worker

FAST printing project: job completed

198
Aloha Airlines: summer hire.
Bulk mail processor: freight handling job
Freight handler: back to school
Memorial Union janitor: comprehensive exam study
Record store: move back to Hawai'i
Duty Free: still unexplained two-year illness
College of Continuing Ed: English 100
English 100: teaching position at Dole Intermediate
Dole Intermediate: teaching position at the Lab School
SCOPE Summer School Program: summer hire
Private tutoring: English PhD program
Lab School: exhaustion.

Do I have them all here? I think so. Fourteen jobs. A mini-resume of my employment history. Plenty of teaching experience. Plenty of passion. But which job have I loved the most? Well, it really is hard to tell.

As I said at the start, I have two jobs these days. This is the one that you might call a pastime. Every time I visit Hamilton Library, I look at a different telephone book. When they switched from actual books to microfiche, the job became a little more complicated, but I still manage to keep to my schedule of searching a different city each time I go in there. Sometimes, if I'm in Hamilton long enough, I do two or even three cities on study breaks. Call it a hobby,
call it whatever you will; I've done it every time I go in there for nearly six years now. It was far easier back when I knew I could go right to the Madison phone book and find what I was after. These days, I figure that by the time I drop dead, I'll at least have given this task an honest attempt, perhaps have gone beyond every city in the United States and expanded into the international directories. Canada and Mexico seem like good choices if I ever get that far because, after all, they are contiguous with the continental U.S. But my instincts tell me, that if I do get to the international stage, cities in some French-speaking country might be a good bet. Actually, Quebec would be my first logical choice if I ever get that far. A smart choice for both geographical and linguistic reasons. Maybe I'll just jump ahead and check out Quebec when I go in there this afternoon. This really is like a kind of job, even though I don't get paid for doing it. But the big payoff will come, one day I'm sure, from performing my task conscientiously. Like a religion. In not so great moments, I worry about unlisted numbers, but I always manage to convince myself that this number and address will be listed. I do this to keep myself going. I have to. Does this pastime compare to Kimo's?

I'll never forget the day my District Manager, El Santos, called me at the record store to tell me that my new
Assistant Manager would be an old Assistant Manager, someone who was taking a break from her college studies to come back to Galaxy of Sound and earn some money. On the phone, he had to repeat her name several times.

"Can you spell that for me?" I wrote it down. "Wow, El, that's some name."

"Well, she's some girl. You'll see what I mean. She said she'll be coming by this afternoon to introduce herself to you. Tomorrow she'll start work. One of the best employees we've ever had. She knows more about classical music than anyone who's ever worked for us, except maybe that guy, Peter. The one I told you manages our Oak Park store. Remember?"

"Oh, yeah, I remember Peter."

"Take advantage of her classical music background," El advised. "She's majoring in ballet, she's been studying flute for maybe twelve years, and she takes piano too."

"Hey, El, you sure you don't want her to take over as manager? Sounds like I should be assisting her."

He laughed.

"So how will I recognize her?" I asked.

"She's got kind of blondish brownish shoulder-length, straight hair. About five-four or so."

His description ended. That was it?

"Great," I said, "that really narrows it down in this town."
"Don't worry. She's a college student. She's more than smart enough to introduce herself to you."

For the next few hours I scrutinized every woman walking into the store who looked like she could be a dancer. Somehow that seemed like the feature that would distinguish her from the rest. The suspense was killing me.

Around three in the afternoon I was assisting a customer near the back of the store. The record I'd been playing had finished. Just as I'd located whatever it was we were looking for, Emmylou Harris started singing over the store speakers. "Together Again." I looked over toward the stereo, and there she was. I could feel right away that El had been nearly right: She was some woman.

Which job I've had that I loved the most? If I were put on the spot, forced to tell you, I'd say managing Galaxy of Sound, West Towne, at least before the end came in view. Never would I have told my boss to take the job and shove it, but things had become pretty dismal. To say I left the record store in order to move back to Hawai'i doesn't quite paint an accurate picture. I mean, it wasn't as if I had to move home so I just had to quit. The day I met my new Assistant Manager, and for many months thereafter, I had this strange feeling that I would settle down in Madison. Something I had never dreamed might happen. Unfortunately, my plans were finally forced to change direction.
The day I gave my two-week notice, El said, "You know, West Towne has become the number-one classical sales volume dealer in Madison. Actually, you're even outselling Oak Park."

"Gee, hope that doesn't break old Pete's heart."

"Nah, he's strong. If anything, this'll get him going. You've really jumped the figures."

"Yeah, well, the two of us have been working on that. It's a format. We laid it out, developed it, you know, and put it to work. Our program, well, we knew it couldn't fail. She'll be a good manager for you."

I swear, El had never sounded so emotional. He's a kind man, but he's also business-world tough. You have to be that way to make it in the retail game.

He said something like, "I used to know that things were great between you two. You could feel it in the store. But I can tell it isn't that way anymore. I'm sorry to see this happen. You're two of my most favorite people."

"Yeah, El, for a while there we were definitely two of our most favorite people too. But I guess, well, some things can't seem to work, huh. No matter how hard you try or how much you hope."

I barely, just barely, dragged myself back to Hawai'i. When I came through the gate from the plane my mom took one look at me and gasped. I guess I really did look like death warmed over--one of her favorite lines. On the way to the
baggage claim area she kept saying things like, "I've never seen you look so ill." "Are you all right?" "What's happened to you?" But I didn't want to talk about it. It was still too hard a story to tell at the time. I still hadn't been able to distance myself enough from the situation, you know?

Friends told me that the newly promoted manager of Galaxy of Sound, West Towne stayed on for a few years. She hurt her back, apparently a kind of permanent injury, so she changed her major to French and finally became a high school French teacher. She married, took her husband's name, and after a while left Madison. Where she went, no one seems to know.

I don't want to believe that I've wasted all these words. I mean, the main character in my piece has hardly appeared. But like I said, this story is very hard to tell. Maybe it's just too complicated, for me, in the end, at least for the time being. In fact, it's so hard to tell that I'm afraid I've left the heart out of it, that the center is, finally, empty. Some stories, I understand, have to be written that way sometimes, but this is odd. For me. It's really not my style. I simply do not write stories like this one.

These days when I hear Emmylou Harris--and I have all her albums--I always picture long winter walks in the night,
a hundred dozen roses, macaroni and cheese, gin and tonics, Manhattans and white wine, and long, long Greyhound bus rides. I imagine how every time she told me so, she said it in her funny rolling R way: "I am yourrrs for good." And I can't ever seem to stop wondering, wherever she is, if my old Assistant Manager remembers me in any way near the same way that I remember her.
The boy looked up and saw his grandfather staring out the window. 
"Well, then where did these other shotguns come from?"
The boy pointed at the rack that held several shotguns.
"Those are the family shotguns. They've been passed down for generations. They're real old."
"Boy, I bet they'd bring a lot of money."
"Don't you ever think of selling those guns."
The old man looked at the boy. "Each gun tells a story. A story worth more than all the money in the world."

Klay Burchett
MEMORIES ARE LIKE A STORY

BORN AND BRED

Every afternoon at 5:00 p.m., Sergeant Stillman would exercise his homing pigeons. The tradition continued during the five years I was in school on the mainland, and I remember the unexpected pleasure I felt watching that V-shaped flock cut its way through the early evening sky on my first day back in town. I recalled my own birds, and I wondered how the sergeant and Auntie Clara were getting along these days. As the months passed, that aerial display became a source of great relief for me. I looked forward to that time of day, needing it badly. But the afternoon of the fire was the last time I would ever find any solace in the daily departure, flight, and sure return of those remarkable birds.

Honolulu was depressingly hot the summer I came back, but my optimism was high. Surely, I thought, some lucrative job opportunity waited for me on the horizon. After several weeks of diligent hunting, however, my initial enthusiasm
wore thin. Soon I began going through the interview ritual just to look good for my folks. I wanted to appear sincere for all my concerned friends and relatives.

Getting out of bed became a struggle for me. If I wasn't too hungover to make it downtown, I made perfunctory showings at far from "prospective" places of employment by day. By night I shot pool and hit the bars. With or without friends, it made less and less difference with time. The only thing of importance any more was being home, awake, at 5:00 p.m. Those pigeons mattered a great deal to me.

The night of the fire, drunk and weaving up the hill at 3:00 a.m., I passed the last fire and police vehicles on their way down. After parking in my garage, I was convinced by the heavy smell of smoke and water that the blaze had been nearby. I walked unsteadily down the dead-end street where both Clara and the sergeant lived.

Coming to Clara's lot, I could see that the house had burned completely to the ground. Small wisps of steam rose in the still night air. The front yard, site of her once immaculate vegetable garden, was now a trampled soup of mud and ashes. Even the spectacular bamboo forest in back had been reduced to a rubbled expanse of short, broken stumps.

As I stood swaying slightly in silence over the ruins, I became aware of soft sobbing noises behind me. Turning, I saw Sergeant Stillman sitting on his bench beneath the
Norfolk pine. He was barely visible in the shadow of the enormous tree.

"Sarge," I called.

He didn't answer.

Climbing the narrow stone stairway from the street to his yard above, I called to him again. He must have heard me, though he still did not respond. The crying had stopped.

I went to the bench and sat beside him. He was staring down at Clara's lot, mesmerized by the scene. His close-cropped gray hair was streaked with ash, and so were his undershirt and khaki pants. He looked weak and tired.

"Where's Auntie Clara?" I asked, though I somehow sensed what had happened.

The old man wiped his face with a blackened hand, smearing more ash and grime across it.

"I tried to go in and get her . . . but I . . . too late."

He shook his head slowly.

I began to cry for Auntie Clara too.

Clara Wang wasn't really my aunt. After she stopped being mean to me, she invited me to call her Auntie Clara.

When our neighborhood gang was very young, the funny little Chinese lady hated us, I think. Her bamboo forest had been prime territory for playing "army," and we used to drive Clara crazy by tearing around through her massive, overgrown
jungle. Half the challenge of our mock battles was to avoid being detected by her, but she always caught us anyway because of the noise made when we ran through the thick layer of dead leaves.

"Hey you kids!" she'd scream. "Get outta my yard. I goin' call da cops if you kids don' get out!"

She always said the same thing. Scared silly, we'd take off through the stream bed behind, straight for home. Home safe, we'd wait for the screaming of sirens telling us that the police had converged on the scene of the crime. It never happened, and sooner or later we were back in her yard, daring her to discover us again.

When we grew out of the playing war stage, and into the cigarette experimentation age, we'd still hang out in Clara's back yard. She'd yell at us, but we reacted differently in those days. We still exited via the stream, but we walked off casually, laughing loudly in order to spite her.

All her animosity, however, seemed to disappear after Ben died. With her husband gone, she channeled all her attention, all her energy, into her vegetable garden.

One day we were tiptoeing past her house when she came rushing out to us. "You boys like boiled peanut?" she asked, smiling.

We had never seen that expression on her face. We relaxed our "get ready to shag it" stance, shrugged our shoulders, and said, "Sure, Mrs. Wang. You bet."
"You wait hea."

She ran into the house and came flying back with a cut-down beer case full of boiled peanuts.

"Sit down," she encouraged, pointing to the driveway.

We sat and ate. No one said a word, partly because we were a little uneasy, partly because the peanuts were so good that we ate non-stop until they were gone.

"Soda? You like soda, yeah. Try wait."

Again she zipped into the house and hustled back with Diamond Head strawberries for each of us.

We thanked her as we stood to leave.

"You come back any time, okay?" I always give you something good, okay?"

"Okay." We smiled and walked away.

I was the only one in the group who took Clara up on her offer. She kept her word. Every time I felt hungry before dinner, I'd walk up to her house. She always had boiled soy beans, or shredded mango, or cuttlefish, or something for me. I'd sit there munching away while she blended fruit and vegetable matter into her garden.

Once while we were out there, a slug happened to be oozing by on the curb. Clara got up on her little chicken legs, walked over and grabbed it, and then proceeded to work the creature into the soil with her very sharp weeder.
I stopped crunching on the potato chips she'd provided. Clara noticed the lapse in my activity and purred, "Das good for my lettuce, you know."

"Really?" I shuddered, making a mental note never to eat the Manoa lettuce which had looked so good just moments before.

"Sure. Das organic, you know. Make da vegetables come beeg."

I had a sudden inspiration to do something nice for Clara.

"Hey, Auntie Clara. You want my pigeon droppings for your garden?"

"Oh boy! Dat would be real good for dem, you know."

I ran home and returned with a heaping coffee can full of the treasured manure I'd scraped from the bottom of the coop.

"Eh, tanks yeah," she beamed as she quickly mixed the stuff into the soil.

"You like soy bean? I jus' wen' boil um today."

Looking skeptically at the soy plants in the middle of the heavily fertilized garden, I hastily declined.

"Gotta go, Auntie Clara. Sorry. I'll bring you droppings next time."

"Eh, Clayton," she called as I walked away. "Mo' betta you bring me some birds. I cook for you. Ono, you know."
I turned and looked at her as if she must have been kidding me. It seemed too weird to be real. She was smiling enthusiastically.

"Sure thing," I said, walking away with visions of slug sections, bird droppings, and barbecued pigeons.

Not long after that, I decided that I'd had it with the homing pigeon hobby. I packed all my birds and sent them air freight to a cousin who lived in Kona. Clara, I believe, missed the droppings, and I know she was disappointed that I hadn't offered her any birds to eat.

A few days later, as I approached Clara's house, I noticed a California orange crate propped up with a stick, standing in her driveway. A long string trailed from the stick to the garage. I walked into the dark building, and there sat Clara, peering intently past me at the contraption outside.

"I get food inside. I goin' catch da bugga."

"What?" I asked, turning toward the crate. There, a foot away from the trap, walking right into it, was my Silver Bar. I was amazed. He'd flown all the way back from the Big Island.

I was about to speak when Clara pulled the string.

"I get um, I get um," she screeched, jumping up on her pencil legs and spinning around.

"Sit on da box, Clayton, sit on da box."
The happy hunter raced into her house. I knew the pigeon couldn't lift the crate, but I sat on the box anyway. I was confused. The thought of releasing him crossed my mind, but Auntie Clara came charging back. She carried a large kitchen knife in her hand.

"Get up, Clayton, get up!" she screamed.

I rose slowly and stepped backward. Swiftly she knelt, lifted the crate just high enough to reach underneath, and immediately produced my Silver Bar. Walking quickly to the garden, she stooped over the Chinese peas and easily slit the bird's throat with one deft stroke. The animal jerked in her bony hand as she drained its blood into the soil, muttering all the while about a good harvest down the road.

Stunned and sick, I started to make my way for home.

"Eh!" she called. "You like eat dis bugga wit' me tonight?"

"No thanks," I gestured over my shoulder. "See you later."

The steam had stopped rising from the pile of debris. Sarge and I sat watching the sun come up. I was stone cold sober, and so was he.

"Gotta go, Sarge. I've got some job interviews this morning."

As I stood to leave, he grabbed my hand.
"I'm going to miss her. Did you know that I really . . .
I really did like Clar--Mrs. Wang?"

"I know, Sarge," I replied.

I went toward the stairway. He spoke again:

"Come with me. I'm going to take the birds to Waianae. Follow me out there, please." He looked so pathetic, so drained. I could hear the pigeons stirring in back. I really didn't want to go.

"Okay, Sarge."

By the time I drove up, he'd loaded the birds into the bed of his truck. The beat up black shotgun case leaned against the door. He took that old gun everywhere.

Sergeant Stillman, an Indiana native, moved into the Nakamoto house across the street from Clara. Twice stationed at Schofield, he'd become attached to Hawai'i. A veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam wars, he settled in Honolulu after his retirement. The sergeant looked like a man who might have enjoyed the battles he had fought, though he'd only mentioned his wartime activities to me once. That was the first day I met him.

One afternoon, not long after the demise of my Silver Bar, I was eating in Clara's driveway while she plowed through her garden. The Nakamoto's front door opened, and out came a large haole man. He held a gun case in one hand,
and some rags in the other. He sat on the front step, 
removed the weapon from its case, and started cleaning it.

"Who's that, Auntie Clara?" I asked, wondering where 
Mrs. Nakamoto might be.

Clara coughed and spat into the dirt. "New neighbor. 
Always watch me. Always look down here. Make me nervous."
She kept digging in the dirt, mumbling to herself.

"Where's Mrs. Nakamoto?"

"Hale Nani. Long time now. You neva know?"

I watched him polish the rifle. I had never seen a gun 
up close so I considered going over to say hello.

Suddenly he put his work aside. He stood up, walked 
down the stairs, and crossed the street. He stuck out his 
hand and said, "Sergeant Stillman, Army, retired."

I wiped the shredded mango residue from my hand and 
shook his. "I'm Clayton. Pleased to meet you." He had 
quite a grip.

The sergeant stared at Clara for an uncomfortably long 
time. She seemed oblivious. Finally he took two steps 
toward her and said louder than necessary, "Sergeant 
Stillman, Army, retired. Pleased to meet you, ma'am."

Auntie Clara looked at him, then at me, and returned to 
business. The sergeant's face reddened, and I noticed that 
he slid his hands up and down his pants in a nervous kind of 
way.


He started to polish his gun. It was a powerful looking thing.

"I'm sorry about Mrs. Wang."

"No need to apologize, Clayton. I shouldn't have acted so foolishly. All things in good time." He looked down at her, his eyes distant, sad.

I reached out and touched his gun.

"Ever see one of these?" he asked, returning his attention to me. He held the thing up for my inspection.

"No sir," I replied. I'd never said "sir" in my life, but his military air demanded it somehow.

"A Browning Citori trap model shotgun. Over and under 12 gauge. A more beautiful piece of weaponry you'll hardly find."

"Yes sir," I nodded, not really understanding all that he said, but enthusiastic because he seemed so.

"This sweetheart would cost you a bundle, but I picked it up in Nam for a song."

"A song?"

"Yes. Simply picked it up. Easily done. Nice, huh?"

216
"Very nice," I replied, wondering what he was smiling about.

"I used to kill a great deal of time over there. Trap shooting beer bottles, ... skeet shooting ration tins."

He'd stopped smiling. He was looking way beyond me somewhere.

"Excuse me, Clayton. Got to fix dinner."

I went back to Clara's driveway. She was still puttering away.

"Auntie Clara, why didn't you say hello?"

The old woman stopped her digging and turned slowly toward me.

"Why you go up dere? Why you talk so much? You sit. Eat your mango seed."

I ate; she worked. Finally, she jammed her weeder into the ground and, without another word, got up and went into her house. I figured that would be it for the afternoon. As I walked away, I turned back and looked up at the sergeant's house. I could see him staring down at Clara's lot.

I liked Sergeant Stillman from the very beginning, though I didn't quite know what to make out of his preoccupation with Auntie Clara. He seemed like a very kind man. Whenever I went to Clara's he'd talk to me. He'd try to make conversation with Clara too, but she'd never respond.
Still, that didn't stop him from trying to get some kind of response out of her.

The Nakamoto's yard had always been in pretty bad shape. That began to change. Sergeant Stillman chopped, mowed, and weeded that place into perfect condition. He always did this work when Clara did hers. I supposed that Clara would admire his yardwork, so I couldn't understand why she never did compliment him on it. One day I asked her about it:

"Auntie Clara, isn't Sarge's yard nice and neat?"

She gave me one of her hard looks. Then she looked up toward his lot. "Hmph. Dat man drink too much." She kept on working.

I'd never thought about it much before, but she was right about the drinking. Whenever I'd talk to him he did smell of alcohol. With the passage of time, his drinking got worse.

One day he had really been putting it away. He leaned precariously against the Norfolk. I wondered if he'd fall over on me. He was observing Clara, as usual.

"She doesn't like my yard."

"Sure she does, Sarge. She admires it very much," I forced myself to lie.

"She doesn't tell me."

I didn't know what to say.
"Clayton, a fine woman like Mrs. Wang should have someone to take care of her, don't you think?"

"She used to. Her husband died a few years ago, and I guess she misses him very much."

The sergeant leaned forward heavily on his knees. He looked really unhappy now. I guessed I'd said the wrong thing. Down in the valley, a flock of homing pigeons was flying.

"I used to have birds too," I said. "Auntie Clara loved to mix the droppings into her garden."

"You don't say?" The sergeant brightened up and sat forward on the bench. "I admire those birds, Clayton. The troops could have used a lesson or two from them. True precision."

Sargent Stillman stared down at Auntie Clara.

"Young man, do you still have your coop?"

"Yes sir."

"You don't suppose that I could buy it from you, do you?"

I had a sudden inspiration to do something nice for him.

"You can have it for nothing, Sarge. For a song."

He turned and stared at me for a second. Then he smiled.

"Now?" he asked. "Today?"
Together we broke my coop down. Together we reassembled it. I told him about old Mr. Izawa in Kalihi Valley. How he would sell good young birds cheap. The sergeant was so excited that he went right over there the next day.

A couple of weeks later I went down the dead end street, and there, on Clara's sidewalk, sat a large cardboard box full of pigeon manure.

"Psst. Psst," Clara called me from the dark garage. I walked inside.

"Eh Clayton!" she demanded, obviously upset. "Why you give him your coop? How come you tell him I like da droppings? What you t'ink you?"

I was very uneasy.

"I'm sorry, Auntie Clara."


She turned and stomped off.

I felt terrible. Losing Auntie Clara was like losing a real relative. After that I never saw her in the garden again. It went untended. She didn't even harvest the crop that was already flourishing.

Every day I'd go by in hopes of finding Clara out there. I wanted to apologize to her. The box of manure just sat there, deteriorating. One night I went over very late and threw the mess away.
Even Sergeant Stillman must have given up on Clara. Even he stopped coming outside after a while. The only tangible evidence that anyone was still alive came at 5:00 p.m. every afternoon. Those pigeons flew like clockwork right up until the day I left for college.

The sun was pretty high by the time we reached the end of the road. Sarge, dressed in Army jacket, cap, and black boots, and still wearing the ash covered undershirt and pants, walked ahead of me on the unpaved road. The shotgun case under his arm, he carried a single caged bird in each hand. They must have been very special to him. I struggled behind with two large cages containing eight to ten birds apiece.

We walked a good distance in silence.

"This way," he said finally. We turned off into the bushes and headed uphill. The brush was high and dense, and the trails were narrow. I hoped he knew the path well because I would have been easily lost.

We climbed for the longest time, twisting and turning our way to wherever it was he wanted to go. I had decided to ask for a break, but we emerged into a clearing. It was the end of the line, a kind of rock outcrop which looked out at the wide Pacific.

"Here," he said, setting down the cages and gun on a large, flat stone. I gladly dropped the cages there.
He went off into some bushes on the side. When he returned, he carried a gallon jug. We sat together.

"Good stuff," he said, patting the bottle and looking into it longingly. After uncorking it, he began to swallow hard.

"Here," he said, handing me the liquor.

The mash was potent, but I forced down a few mouthfuls. We drank in turn until I had had too much.

Then he broke the silence:

"Clayton," he almost whispered, pausing a long time to stare out to sea. "You must take all the time you need to find that job."

He drank some more, then spoke again:

"Don't ever settle for just anything. You must never be locked into a routine that consumes your life."

I lay down beside him, dizzy and fatigued. I closed my eyes.

"Don't ever tie yourself down, boy. Do you understand me?"

I think I answered in the affirmative.

When I came to, the sun was sinking. I stood and saw that the sergeant had a second bottle on the way to empty.

"Better let them go, Sarge."

"You do it. But leave the two Red Checks for me."

I walked over and undid the latches of the larger cages. Stepping back to avoid the crush, I lifted the
covers. The homing pigeons rose in a low roar of wing flapping and rushing air. They headed straight for the setting sun, circled overhead three times, and then headed for town.

"Excuse me, Sarge. Bathroom." I went down the trail several yards.

I was coming back to the outcrop when I heard the explosion. I ran and stopped at the clearing entrance. Sergeant Stillman sat with the shotgun cradled in his arms. The dying light shone in his eyes, and he smiled a wicked smile.

"What are you shooting at?" I asked softly, shivering at the sight.

"Here," he said, getting slowly to his feet. "I'll show you."

Moving to the flat rock, he stooped and undid the catch of the single cage. The other carrier lay on its side, a few yards to the right.

Positioning the shotgun at his side, he kicked the last cage over. The startled Red Check flopped on the ground momentarily, and then shot straight for the last speck of sun. Stillman swiftly raised the weapon to his shoulder, sighted, and fired. Instantly the bird disintegrated into a cloud of feathers.
I stopped breathing for several seconds. The sergeant scanned the horizon. Once again he smiled that peculiar smile. He murmured:

"If I could see far enough, you know, Korea would be just about over there."

He gestured with the barrel of the gun.

"And Nam," he pivoted slightly, "right about there."

We stood in silence. The sun was gone.

"Oh, Clara," I heard him sigh.

"Sarge, we'd better go." I was scared.

The sound of the gun breaking open startled me. The spent shells jingled on the ground. I heard him reload.

"We better split now, Sarge," I pleaded.

"You go, Clayton. I'll stay here--kill time."

"I'll get lost, Sarge. I can't see."

"No you won't. You go downhill from here. All the trails lead to the bottom."

The sound of the gun closing made me sweat.

"Please, Sarge," I begged.

"Get out of here, Clayton!" he yelled.

I jumped, turned, and started to move down the trail as quickly as possible.

"Take good care of those birds," was the last thing I heard him say.

I wanted to get to my car in a hurry. I had to call the police. I had to help. The way out was difficult. I
was cut up by the dense brush. Getting out wasn't nearly as easy as he'd made it seem.

When I finally did make the road, I ran like crazy for the beginning of the pavement. Just as I reached the parking area, I heard the final explosion.

They sent Sergeant Stillman's body back to Indiana. The day after he shot himself, I went to his house, crated the pigeons, locked up the coop, and sent them off to my cousin in Kona.

I came home from the airport and collapsed on my bed. Just as I began to drift off, I woke myself, got up, and walked over to the sergeant's house. I unlocked the coop door, propped it open, and filled the two troughs with seed and water.

That homing instinct is incredibly strong. Those birds will travel unbelievable distances to return to the familiar confines of home. They can't really seem to help themselves. If any of them did happen to make it back, I wanted to be sure it felt welcome, comfortable. Still, I hoped I would never see any of them ever again.
"Here I am, you see. It hasn't been overwhelming."
"Then it hasn't been love," said May Bartram.  
Henry James  
THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE

DISORDER

She chose a physics major for fun, studied religiously between big party blow outs and a million dates with a million boyfriends--one crippled in a wheelchair.

She helped rebuild, nut by bolt, an abandoned particle accelerator in the Sterling Hall basement between computer lab sessions on FORTRAN and Pascal she'd tackled for kicks.

At night she'd get plastered with her fellow-physicists in the old observatory under the star cover she could identify name by name, blindfolded, because she knew their formations like the back of her hand.

By age ten she'd mastered German all by herself, just so she could sneeze out funny phrases for comic relief and end up a language minor, along with Spanish, to the tune of a 4.0.

At fifteen she modeled on demand, and toiled years for minimum wage at the record store with a sharpened yellow pencil wedged behind her ear in case a lull afforded her homework time. But sales were always brisk when she worked, so she scraped and bowed for horny customers who hit on her so hard she'd have to shoot them with her finger when they shuffled out the door, their hairy arms burdened with albums.
they had to buy to show her their cash. The walking wounded, rejected, shot again, staggering out, with myriad additions to their burgeoning music collections.

Album covers, preferably the Top Forty, were prime targets for her verbal pot shots. She loved geologic aberrations: Mica Jackson, Off the Brick Wall; Rod Stalagmite, Boulders Have More Fun; The Rolling Stones, Some Garnets.

The night before I left, we ate on State Street. Lots of red wine, a little pasta, and non-stop laughter. She turned heads like falling dominoes.

We ended up writing almost every day for two years, to the point where my mailbox became the center of the universe. Finally, it drove me crazy enough to tell her I'd be back in August, just two months away.

And then she mentioned her sixteen-year-old sister who suffered in Memorial Hospital, the anorexia ward. In and out for over a year. They force-fed her, gave her therapy that would make her more comfortable with food in her stomach since she'd lost fifty pounds. Skin and bone. At home, an outpatient, she haunted the bathrooms after every meal, filled them all with a permanent smell and gray-green mold that thrived on white porcelain. The entire worried family would watch her walk from the table, hear her vomit repeatedly, purge herself of everything she'd swallowed to try to please them.

227
That August, back in Madison, it was impossible to see her. She was always out. So I went to the pretty gingerbread house beyond Vilas, knocked, and her sister, healthy, beautiful, opened the door.

I walked in surprised she'd recovered so well, sat and chatted with her mother who kept looking past me while her sister ran upstairs to tell her I was there. I finally saw her.

She walked down slowly, clutched the railing with her bony hand to support herself. She tried to smile with her drawn face, her dark, sunken eyes, which she'd made up heavily for my special benefit.
Nina looked up from her damp letter toward the ceiling. The doorbell rang, interrupting her thoughts. It was her neighbor delivering a package that had come for Nina when she was out. Nina took the package, and saw that, again, the return address was Cleveland. Nina threw the package on the ground. This, she knew, was from Tracy, for she had mentioned in her last letter that she was sending Nina a surprise. After Nina calmed down, she picked the package up and placed it at the top of her closet, where it was to stay unopened for a long time to come.

Dalia Hanna
AN UNOPENED PACKAGE

MOVING

Chris sat outside his front door on the cold stone stairway. As the sun inched up the sky he checked the movement of shadows cast by objects fixed around him. This was the third cup of coffee; he was well into a fresh pack of cigarettes, waiting for the shadows to look just right. The beer had to wait until late enough in the morning. Don't start too early, even when you're on vacation. It's a matter of self-respect. When the west-pointing shadows had nearly disappeared, well before they began to stretch out to the east, he would pop his first Bud. Of course he'd savor it, like he did every morning, sipping it very, very slowly. Don't drink the first one too fast. Save speed, or at least not worrying about it, for the beers that follow.

An orange U-HAUL van stopped just past the driveway of the Nakamura's old house. Then it backed tentatively up the concrete strip toward the garage. Just before the van might
collide with the garage roof, it jerked to a halt within a bare inch or two of solid contact. Chris hadn't realized the bottom floor of his former neighbors' house had been rented again.

The van door groaned open and a woman stuck out a pair of legs. When she slid down to the pavement, Chris could see she was tall--five-seven or eight. He guessed she was somewhere near twenty-five. She looked like a runner.

Chris glanced at his own arms and legs, pale and hardly athletic looking. He thought about the gut he was working on, how it had started to push through his T-shirts. Sucking in his stomach, he flicked a just-lit cigarette down into the bushes. He waited for a man to emerge from the van. None did.

The tall blond closed the door and walked to the rear of the van. She released the catch and, pushing up on the balls of her feet, heaved the sliding door up and open. She boosted her body easily onto the bed and slid inside. Chris wondered if she might want some help.

But instead of going over, he got up and went into his house. The shadows, he suddenly decided, were just right.

After retrieving a can of beer from the refrigerator, Chris sat down at the kitchen table and looked out the window, watching the blond woman carry box after box through the front door of her new home. He made the first beer go a long time. It looked like she was enjoying the workout.
At night the lights would go on and off throughout the first-floor apartment. Chris sat in the kitchen darkness and viewed the light show for three successive nights. The curtains were thin enough to let the light out, but too thick to allow seeing anything but faint shadows inside. He imagined her performing various tasks in the different lighted rooms.

During those three days, Chris kept expecting some man to show up and visit the woman. No one came. On the fourth night, a Sunday, he finally decided to go over and say hello. He thought he'd pose as the neighborhood "welcome wagon."

Chris dressed in a long-sleeve shirt, long pants, and a baggy jacket. Then he slipped a six-pack of Bud and a bottle of Blue Nun into a wrinkled brown paper grocery bag. He brushed his teeth and forced himself not to smoke for an hour before he went.

His heart pounded to the point of almost making him sick as he knocked on the door. The porch light flicked on and the door opened a crack. "Yes?" she asked, looking out at him with one round, gray-green eye.

Chris tried to sound as cheerful as possible. He wished he'd brought his cigarettes. "Hi. I'm Chris Lau. I live over there?" He pointed with an index finger at the house beyond her range of vision. Jazz saxophone played softly through the crack of the open doorway.

"Yes?" she asked again, her tone rising.
Chris ran his free hand through his short black hair. "I--," he hesitated, "I saw you move in. Thought I'd come over and welcome you to the neighborhood?"

The door swung open all the way. "Hey, that's great," she said. "Please, come in."

Chris bent over and leaned against the doorjamb, still holding his package in one hand. He fumbled awkwardly with his shoelaces. She might not expect it, but since she was barefoot, he thought he'd better take off his shoes. She didn't protest. He felt clumsy, like this might be taking forever. His face flushed.

"I'm Andrea," she offered, taking his hand when he finally stood erect again. "Please come in."

He was struck by her eyes. It wasn't the color. They were odd, somehow.

"Please sit on the couch." She turned away from him, leading. "It's one of the few things they left here."

Chris noticed the pile of boxes stacked in the middle of the floor. "Still unpacking?"

She laughed. "Oh, yeah. I hate moving. It takes me until about the time I move out to move in." She faced him, shrugging her shoulders.

He liked her sense of humor, and there really was something different about her smile.

"What's in the bag?" she asked, pointing at the liquor load as he sat down.
"Oh. Beer. Wine. Do you drink?"

"Mmmmm," she said, drawing the expression out into a kind of melody. "I'd love some wine. Lemme get some glasses."

Chris watched her long body move away from him. She wore a loose blue blouse and faded jeans. He pictured her face again. The album on the turntable ended.

She came back, two glasses and a corkscrew in hand. "Need this?" she asked, holding the corkscrew out to him. "Oh, yeah." He'd forgotten that. "Yes. Thanks."

Chris took out the bottle of Blue Nun and started to work on the cork. Andrea walked to the stereo.

"That was great music. You like jazz, huh?" he asked, carefully turning the corkscrew.

"Mmmmm, yes. Any good jazz, but sax especially. You like it too?"

"Yeah, well, I don't really hear too much of it, but I do like it."

She laughed as she bent down and began to leaf through a stack of albums she'd managed to unpack. Her long hair fell across her face.

The cork came sliding out of the bottle. No crumbs floated in the wine. For this, he was truly thankful. Another album started up.

"Cheers," Chris said, standing and handing her a full glass. They clinked glasses and sat down together on the
couch. Her thigh almost touched his. He glanced at her profile. As she sipped, the blond hair fell back, exposing her ear. Chris saw a red scar that started just in front of her ear and ran up and back into the hairline.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye. Quickly her hand went up to her hair and brushed it back in place.

"So have you lived here long?" she asked abruptly, turning to face him.

Chris watched her eyes. "About two years." He tried to look into both eyes at once.

"Rent?" she asked, turning her profile to him again in a quick pivot.

"Yeah. I get a great deal. It's one of the places my folks own."

"What do you do?" she asked. Chris noticed that this time as she sipped the wine, she tilted the glass higher, leaning her head back as little as possible. The hair remained where she'd positioned it.

"I teach. High school." He downed his wine and reached for the bottle. When he offered her more, she put a hand over her glass.

"I can't handle too much," she said. "I'll get a massive headache if I overdo it."

"Oh, right," he said. "Me too."
She licked at the wine in her glass. Her body began to make slight movements to the music. Chris needed a cigarette. The music seemed to get louder.

"And where're you from?" Chris asked suddenly.

"Maryland. I'm at Manoa working on my master's in French."

"Hey, that's great." He paused. "Are you good?"

She laughed softly. "Well, I lived in France for two years so I could practice. I wanted to sound like a native." She emphasized the word "native" and grimaced. Then she smiled. "I guess I'm pretty good." She turned to face him. Her eyes, moist from the wine, were even more odd looking. They were liquid to the point of tears. She didn't smile.

Chris asked, "You like Hawai'i so far?"

"More than France."

Just then the phone rang, startling her. She rose quickly from the couch and hurried to answer. It sat by the stereo. As she knelt to pick up the receiver, she turned the volume of the music down.

Chris watched as she alternately spoke and listened; mostly she listened. The conversation was in French. Gradually she wound the cord tighter around her finger. At one point, she suddenly released the cord and reached for her hair. Her hand pulled it back, exposing her ear.
When she finally hung up, she smoothed her hair. "I'm sorry, Chris. Something's come up. I have to go out." Her eyes looked wild, crooked.

"Oh, yes, sure." As he stood up he offered her the bottle.

"No thanks. It'd turn to vinegar or something before I could finish it."

"Well, Andrea," he said as he backed off the porch after retying his shoes, "welcome to the neighborhood." He wanted desperately to say something else, but no words came.

"Thanks, Chris. See you." She closed the door and snapped off the porch lights.

All the way back to his refrigerator, Chris cursed himself for not having asked her out. By the time he sat down at the kitchen table with a fresh beer and a cigarette, her house was dark; she was gone.

Early the next morning--too early for him to be up on a vacation Monday--Chris woke up to the sound of a U-HAUL van backing up the Nakamura driveway. Then it stopped.

Chris moved out of bed and went to his seat at the kitchen table. While he sat smoking cigarettes, he watched Andrea load boxes. She moved fast. He couldn't tell what the expression on her face meant.

After she loaded the last box Andrea jumped up on the front seat and started the engine. Chris waited, expecting the van to go. It didn't. Suddenly she climbed back out and
started to jog across his lawn. She carried a white envelope.

The doorbell rang. He thought about going to the door. His heart pounded. The bell rang again. He lit another cigarette.

Andrea ran back across the lawn; she'd left the envelope. After climbing into the van she drove off without hesitation. Chris made it to the front window just in time to see her disappear down the block.

When the engine sound was long gone, he opened the front door and picked up the envelope wedged under the "welcome" mat. There were no markings on the outside. He went back into the kitchen and carefully placed the sealed letter on the table. Popping open another beer, he sat down and stared at the envelope as if he might read its message through the thick paper. It looked like an unaddressed wedding invitation.

He started another beer. Each time he put the can back down on the table he tried to place it exactly on the water ring. The pattern was perfect; he wanted to keep the circle nice and tight. The envelope sat unopened. He blew another long, slow stream of smoke at the ceiling and watched it billow about the faded and cracked white paint. It occurred to Chris that the shadows outside still weren't quite right, but he decided that was okay, this one time.

237
Raymond Carver
WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE

LOVE AT LAST

You know, there were times when you and Oakland saved me. In fact, every time I needed saving, through the Madison years, I could drive to Oakland in twenty-four hours and feel at home. Remember the Oatmeal Minstrels? All those nights your gang and I ate your oatmeal cookies and played our guitars until the sun rose. That Audrey with the loaded gun under her pillow. Man, could that girl handle her twelve-string. All of us were single back then. Some of us still are. When did you lose touch with Carlisle? I can't remember your funny story about how she got that nickname. I never did find out what her real name was, I don't think. Too bad you lost track of her, but I know how friendships go.

You and Carlisle had that strange plan. You two said if you didn't find the right men soon, you'd resort to artificial insemination, move to Mexico, and raise your perfect babies in bohemian simplicity. Carlisle wanted to write bizarre stories about strange animals who roamed all the better for multiple heads and eyes. Would that have made a novel? You said you'd paint more of those violent
abstracts, like my favorite: the hot pumping heart with the bright red blood surging through constricting orange veins in the midst of a violet and black emptiness.

You two would always talk about your biological clocks, how they were ticking you toward motherlessness. Carlisle and I sat sipping beers, watching you perk espresso in that mirror-like silver pot, or slicing up those fat yellow lemons with your very sharp knife while you kept a watchful eye on the blue double-boiler, cooking your gently whipped egg whites for those perfect meringue pies with the great brown beads of sugary sweat that I ate so ravenously. And through all this I would listen to you two talk about men, all of them slime, who'd treated you so badly.

There was the young architect who lived in Piedmont behind his huge picture windows along with the lovely little wife he forgot to mention. And how about the English teacher who loved old movies so much that he sold all your possessions while you were home in Hawai'i so he could expand his poster collection and leave you a bare apartment. I know you laughed when you mentioned it needed redecorating anyway. But from the way you told it, I almost cried. Then there was the old Berkeley radical, balding above his cracked leather jacket, who drove like a maniac on his vintage Harley. You said he took one trip too many south of the border to restock his mobile drugstore and thought you might see him in ten to fifteen years. Or how about the struggling lawyer who slaved
for his father, a true junior partner, so daddy could sneak lunches with you, help you polish your Spanish, buy you red roses and perfume. Am I inventing this, or did you tell me he dropped dead of a heart attack, leaving you to explain his presence in your apartment to the frantic son who finally managed to get away from the office.

Anyway, congratulations to you on your lead mechanic and your fine daughter and son. You were always a great mother to me. You waited so long for the right man to come along, to give you the kind of love that you always deserved, though I'm still not sure even he could appreciate your lemon meringue pies more than I do.

I know Audrey moved back to Hawai'i, but I really wish I knew about whatever happened to Carlisle. Did she, I wonder, abandon her novel plans? Find love at last, too, like you, somewhere beyond her art?
Oh you can stay and lead me on
You can go the way you please
But when you find a little love
It's never easy when someone leaves . . .

Gordon Kim
BLUEBOY

CLIFF WALK

We choked down nachos, the works, with extra peppers, like a test, the same way we weathered the jalapeno storm that night in Newport, the cliff walk day, perched in the wind on that rickety wharf intricately suspended over the rhythmic lap of the Atlantic Ocean, caught between hard rock and golden oldies bouncing on the water, echoing, around the empty bottoms of sipped Sea Breezes and downed draft beers—so many that I barely made that motel bed.

I took you on that fearful flat tire odyssey from Hartford--where they boast of being built on risk--and brought you safely to the wild weave of sun and shadow beneath the library tower renovation project where white swans bent their long necks to gray water in a man-made lake overarched by a thin bridge beside you. That made me dizzy like the sudden winds blowing long brown hair across your face, causing your hand to pass before my eyes and blur the picture, but not the vision, of you, burgundy-jacketed, against the brisk summer weather of Amherst.
"Take me. I can be yours. Just take me." My heart started to beat wildly. I felt my face burn. Cold sweat began to form on my hands and forehead. My eyes were focused on the ring. In my head I debated whether I should take the ring or not. If I wanted to take it, which I did, how could I? My head started to spin.

"Oh, yeah!" Joyce jumped to her feet. "I'll go and get the dress I was telling you about." She disappeared into her room and left me alone with the ring.

"This is your chance! Take it! It's now or never!" I thought. "No! Don't take it! It's your best friend's ring! Don't do it!" My heart gave a leap. Then I lunged for the ring and quickly put it in my pocket.

Soo Jin Choi

THE WINK OF A RING

OLD ACQUAINTANCE

The school Randy went to, "Education Through Fear" was the Brothers' unspoken motto. Maybe just for Randy. The worn wooden rods sat on their desks, ready for him, in every classroom.

When he was a junior--for the second time--Randy quit school. He took up guitar and singing instead. Actually, with him, it was just a matter of deciding to spend even more time playing his music and writing his songs. Randy never graduated from high school, but I don't think it's hurt him much. Now he makes more money than I do, and I've got two college degrees. And even though I'd like to, more than anything in the world, I can't sing, play, or write music, the way he can. But that's okay; one of these days I'm going to ask him if I can be his business manager, maybe even
handle his money for him. You could say I want to ride his wave, and I'm not ashamed to admit it either.

Randy's famous—a local musician. Women, when he plays his music even at small, local lounges, flock to him. He's not married. I know why. If you could pick the woman of your choice almost every night of the year would you tie yourself down to just one? That's one of the perks. That's one wave he rides by himself. He's never turned me on to even one of those women. I can be sitting there, by myself, listening to him, and if a hundred women throw themselves at him during a break, he'll manage to schedule them all. I don't know how. Still, I can't work up the nerve to ask him to throw one of them my way.

About three months ago I felt about as married as I'd ever felt. One night the old lady came home from one of her always hard days shuffling everybody else's paperwork. She was still trying to decide if I loved her then, I guess. I was just about set to go listen to Randy play, then bring in the New Year at his house. She said, "Why do you spend so much time with Randy? What's the matter with me?"

I said, "Nothing," but I was wondering about it myself.

She stared at me with those monitor-screen glazed eyes of hers. I put down my Kentucky Fried drumstick, wiped my fingers on a paper napkin, and cleared my throat. "Honey," I said, "if I were you, I wouldn't put a strain on our relationship like this. Not for no reason at all."
She's scary sometimes. Like right then. She started snickering like crazy. Then she walked over to the TV and picked up my graduation picture--the one where Randy and I are shaking hands. I'm the one wearing the cap and gown. Randy's the one clutching two bottles of beer and the combination opener and corkscrew. In the back you can just see the ducks burying their heads under their wings, sitting on those rocks in the scummy pond right outside Blaisdell Arena.

BAM!

She launched the picture, heavy frame and all, right at my head. I hit the deck. The picture connected with the wall, right where my head would have been if I hadn't moved fast enough.

"Chris," she said, staring me down like I was a spreadsheet where the figures had just adjusted wrong after the latest input, "do you call what you're doing a job?"

"Honey," I answered, picking my words with some care, "I used to. But you know what? I'm starting to think of it as a vacation--a vacation from you!"

I closed up the red and white box for emphasis. I got up from the table, reached into my pocket for the car keys, and watched her in the hall mirror while I walked fast for the door. She's an Aikido expert. I didn't want to get nikued on the way out, so I was watching her just in case I had to duck again.
"You butthead!" was all she kept screaming while I made my quick exit.

Just as I closed the door I heard her yell, "I've had it with you! I don't ever want to see you again!"

Like I said, that night was New Year's Eve. Randy and I got plastered. My car was two days' old. We were going to another party I'd remembered. Somebody I knew was throwing it, but I couldn't quite recall who it was. We were speeding through Kaimuki somewhere.

I said, "Eh, Randy?"

He was lying down in the back. He'd always liked to watch the streetlights zip by overhead—even if he was the one doing the driving. Sometimes it was spooky.

"Eh, Randy!" I repeated.

"Huh?" he asked.

"Where are we going?"

He sat up and leaned over the middle of the seat, right between the headrests. One body, two heads. "I don't know, Chris. You were the one who wanted to leave my party and go someplace. You said we were going to a great party."

"Oh, yeah." I had to think hard. Focus. "Did I say where it was?"

"Hmmm." He was thinking hard about it too. "No, you just told me it was going to be good. You said something about this Lisa person."
I thought some more. There was a party, somewhere. Lisa. "Did I tell you to bring your guitar?" I watched his face in the rearview mirror. It kept turning to look back and up each time we flew by a streetlight.

"No, Chris, you told me not to bring it."

I kept my foot as close to the floor as possible. I could have sworn we blew by blue-and-whites every few seconds. Why wasn't I being arrested? Lisa? We were going someplace, fast, and I knew, deep down, that I really did have a party to go to somewhere. And I was pretty sure it was tonight.

"Now who do I know who lives out this way?" I kept asking myself. I figured if I could guess that, then I'd have to know where I was going, eventually.

We were barreling around Diamond Head, blazing in the direction of the ocean. Suddenly, Daniel's house flew by. I applied the brakes, screeching to a stop in the middle of the street. Fortunately there were no cars behind me. That was it. Lisa was going to be there. I remembered everything in a blinding flash.

I turned around to look at Randy. He was back in his reclining position, humming an unrecognizable song. Probably a tune he was working on. His arms were crossed over his chest. "Randy, we're here."

A streetlight stood directly over the rear window. It shown strangely, casting an uninterrupted bright orange glow
over Randy's face. He didn't even blink. I didn't think he was dead, though. His humming was a great clue.

"We're where?" he finally asked, shifting his eyes to my face.

"We're at Daniel's house. That's where the party is."

"Daniel?" Randy sat up and looked, leaning on his elbows, out the back window. "You mean high-school-time Daniel?"

"Yeah, him. That's the party I was talking about. And Lisa's," I paused, "going to be there."

"Really?" Randy rubbed at his chin. "It'll be good to meet her." Then he lay back down on the seat. "I wish I'd brought my guitar."

I jammed the gear shift into reverse, gunned the car back up the street, swerved right, then rocked backwards into Daniel's driveway.

As I opened the door and stepped out, Daniel materialized at my side, fresh beer in hand. "So, Chris, I see you finally made it."

We shook hands. I peered back into the car. Randy was still staring up through the window. "Yeah, I brought Randy."

"No kidding!" Daniel leaned in the window. "Randy! You cruiser. How's it going, brah? Scored anything recently?"
I couldn't hear what Randy answered, but the beer that was meant for me disappeared through the window.

"Daniel? Daniel!"

Daniel looked up, then walked over to me. I think he shook my hand again. He'd always been a great host, even way back when all three of us went to school together. Every New Year's Eve, for as far back as I could recall, his family had always thrown the biggest New Year's Eve party imaginable.

"Daniel, where's Lisa? Is Lisa here?"

The expression on his face--staring at it for what felt like three hours--made my head pound. The night was spinning around me.

Finally Daniel tried to laugh. "I was going to ask you the same thing. I thought she was coming with you, Chris?"

"What! Didn't she just fly in? Isn't she going to meet me here?"

Daniel laughed softly when I leaned forward to get a closer look at his face. Then he looked at me like he was wondering if I was putting him on or something. I felt, all of a sudden, as if I were in the twilight zone. My head gyrated on something that I didn't quite understand.

Daniel gave me an apologetic smile. "I thought Lisa was coming with you, man," he repeated.

"Why?"

"Why? Well, maybe, because you kept saying you were going to bring her by tonight. Is she coming?"
"Who? Lisa!" Then it hit me like a Brother delivering a blow, with a personally engraved paddle, to Randy's butt. I took a deep breath. I'd definitely told Daniel, more than once, that I was going to bring Lisa along. I was always going to bring her along, not meet her there.

"C'mon, Chris, let me get you a beer. I think you need it." Daniel walked toward his house, his head slowly shaking back and forth. He was drunk enough that I doubt he caught my detour back into the driver's seat.

"Randy?"

"Yo!"

He was there; that's all I wanted to know. I started the car, burned rubber out of the driveway, and drove like a maniac back to Randy's house. I retraced the best approximation of the path out that I could remember.

On the way to his front door Randy handed me his half-empty bottle; I swallowed the beer in a single breath. We staggered into the house, Randy in the lead. Funny, I was sure there had been men at the party when we'd left, but now I only could see women. They were getting ready to sing "Auld Lang Syne." One of them held out Randy's guitar to him.

Randy grabbed his instrument, then wobbled over to the kitchen counter. After wrapping the strap around his neck, he produced, as if by magic, a foaming bottle and a full glass of champagne. Someone screamed, "Should old
acquaintance be forgot!" It sounded like a question. "It's not time yet!" someone else shouted.

I turned around, went to my car, and drove home as fast as I could. Fireworks began exploding in earnest all around the neighborhood as I tumbled out of the car.

"Lisa?" I called into the dark house, nearly breaking my key in the lock as I forced open the front door.

I flipped on the overhead light. The box of chicken sat quiet and grease-spotted on the table.

"Lisa!" I called again. Still no answer.

I glanced at the television and saw that she'd returned the graduation picture to its proper place.

"Lisa!"

With the sound of fireworks going off all over I picked up the photograph. Then, as if I wasn't sure I even had the strength, I tossed it at the wall above the chair where I'd been sitting earlier. Roman Candles screeched through the air overhead. The picture frame left a huge dent in the textured plaster work. The rockets exploded.

I went to the refrigerator and popped open another beer. Making my way to the bedroom, I threw open the closet door. Not a trace of her belongings. I checked the drawers. Empty. I looked in the bathroom. Not a thing that wasn't mine.

Returning to the table I looked down at the photograph on the floor. The glass had cracked. After hurriedly
downing my beer, I dropped back into the same chair, facing the front door. I sat there, not moving, hardly even breathing, watching the door and waiting for the world to stop spinning again.
But one year our tradition suddenly became a sad memory. The week after Thanksgiving, when I was in the second grade, I came home from school and ran into the house excited about the task at hand, taking out the decorations from the hall closet. When I went into my mom's room to ask her if I could start, she sat me down right beside my brothers, who were already there. She explained to us that my dad was moving out and that they were getting divorced. She also explained that our Christmas would be split in two halves. The first half of the day we'd be with my mom, the rest would be spent with my dad.

"Can we still decorate?" This wasn't my main concern at the time, but I had nothing else to say, and I was sort of wondering if my favorite part of Christmas, next to opening presents, would be taken away, like my dad.

Christine Chu
CAN WE STILL DECORATE

PARTING SHOTS

These shelves are all albums of my married life. I don't have any pictures of me or my ex. That volume there is photos of our range. These two here are dedicated to our toaster oven. Remember when Polaroids used to fade? These haven't aged, though we've been divorced a long time.

They say it's the little things that add up. For us it all started with the coffee pot. We'd driven a long way. She said, "Honey, I think I left Mr. Coffee on. Can we go back?"

We drove home and, sure enough, she'd left him on.

The second time we were boarding a plane. I told her to go ahead, that I'd go home, turn Mr. Coffee off, and follow on the next flight.
When she met me at the airport, after my flight, I informed her that she'd been mistaken.

I remember the next stage well. We were going for a hike in the country. Before we drove off, I personally unplugged Mr. Coffee, like I always did, after the airport incident. An hour into the hike she announced that she'd left the iron on. "What, exactly, were you ironing?" I asked. She couldn't remember, exactly.

We found the iron, where we always kept it, way up on the top shelf of the linen closet, cold as a banker's glass eye.

Then I bought the camera. Eventually we moved to a two-bedroom apartment.

As you can see from all these shelves, we couldn't quite work the problem out.
Peaceable Kingdom is an allegorical depiction of the founding of Princeton University on the banks of the picturesque Raritan Canal. While the founding fathers cheated the Indians out of the choice plot of New Jersey sod, the first three prospective Princeton undergraduates wrestled with the local inhabitants, including the tiger that became their team mascot in 1899 (at the first football game between Princeton and Rutgers).

Mel Kubota
MANY THANKS . . .

BILINGUAL

In a way, this is a story about language acquisition. The SAT scores, especially on the verbal portion of the exam, for Hawai'i students are traditionally lower than the national average. Recently, quantitative scores have been a bit higher than the national average, and statisticians are quick to attribute this phenomenon to an influx of Oriental nationals into the Hawai'i student population. This influx may also be one of the reasons why the verbal scores are low: non-native speakers, who perform miraculously in the "universal" language of mathematics, underachieve when it comes to measuring their English language proficiency, simply because they are less familiar with a tongue not spoken in their native lands.

But there are numerous other possible reasons for the lower marks of Hawaiian students. You know, sometimes it is hard to be born in America, to be automatically classified a native speaker, when your parents speak a foreign language around the house. This is another common explanation for why
Hawai'i students often do not perform well on the SATs, that their parents speak little or no English. Couple this handicap—"I'll call it that unless you happen to be looking for a future with the CIA or the United Nations—with the fact that speaking English in Hawai'i often translates into speaking pidgin English, and you have more commonly voiced ingredients than necessary for verbal test score disaster.

My mom, a Chicago native, was practically fluent in, of all things, Latin by the time she graduated from high school. My dad, born into a non-English speaking family on Kauai, began life bilingual. When they got together in college, they were prime candidates for foreign language acquisition, and, guess what, they both excelled in Spanish at the University of Wisconsin. Their Spanish was so good, in fact, that they used to sit around discussing, in Spanish so I couldn't understand what they were saying, whether they should send me to my room or spank me, cut off my allowance or make me put in extra weekend yardwork hours. It was frustrating for me growing up, not knowing until the moment of sentence, what exactly my fate would be this time.

Of course this isn't exactly an example of the kind of bilingual puzzlement I'm discussing here. My parents were not speaking Spanish TO me; they were speaking Spanish ABOUT me. Though this occurred frequently, I was not hurt in terms of my SAT verbal performance because of it. That may have been more the pidgin English stereotype, or the fact that I
never worked very hard, or even that I was just a low-wattage bulb from the start. I've been a little wary of Spanish speaking people all my life, but that's another story.

An example of the kind of language question I'm talking about is this. Go back a generation or two. Suppose your parents are from somewhere in China. Let's say they met one night in Hawai'i, after they came over to join other relatives who'd first journeyed to Hawai'i to work on the plantations. At the big church social one sultry Saturday night, your father eyeballs your mother across a crowded room, they have a great, gauzy dance, they fall in love, and the next thing you know, they marry and settle in to create a family. It's a fairytale romance. This kind of love story they make Hollywood musicals about, and great singers like Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald would have played the lead roles. Of course they wear make-up. Or they contract Astaire and Rogers because the two did, after all, meet at a dance. Or if they make the extravaganza closer to the present day and hope to show some political savvy, they cast Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer, maybe even Nancy Kwan and James Shigeta if big box office is not a consideration.

Along come the kids. That usually turns most Brigadoon romances into film noire, but not this one. Now because your mom and dad are so Singin'-in-the-Rain in love, they speak Cantonese to each other. While you, the kid, are growing up struggling with pidgin English in school, your folks help you
out by speaking to you in Cantonese mostly and English rarely, and then it's in that kind of half-the-sentence-in-English and half-the-sentence-in-Cantonese super confusion. Then comes the moment of truth: the SATs. And that's where this saga turns from Tinsel Town fairytale to hard fact. It's another thing that happens frequently in Hawai'i, even now. Asians, Pacific Islanders, they're all in the same boat.

Whatever the reasons may be, it is not often that a student from Hawai'i aces the SAT verbal and thereby takes a giant step toward writing his or her ticket to the halls of ivy or other acres just as green. I didn't stumble onto that yellow brick road myself, but I know at least one person who did.

Don't ask me how Mel, an Aiea High School graduate, blew the roof off the College Boards. That's a question for the tests and measurements gurus at the Educational Testing Service to answer. I know nothing about the science of educational psychology, so I won't even hazard a guess. I could speculate about his being one of the brightest people I've ever known, a dedicated student and avid reader, a man who earned his Ph.D. in English Literature while satisfying his dual passion for Charles Dickens and biblical exegesis, but I'm no scientist, so I hesitate to offer any soft suppositions.
Remember how Jimmy Stewart was continually foiled in his attempts to escape Bedford Falls? Well, this isn't the same kind of situation. Mel could have gone anywhere for college, but I think he really loved Hawai'i and was perfectly happy to be able to stay. He chose the University of Hawai'i gladly, or so I'd like to believe. I'm thankful for that because I met him there.

Those Hollywood love stories, writers like Charles Dickens, and all good fairytales have something in common. I think the best way to say it is phenomenal coincidence, or maybe a kind of perfect enactment of some kind of fate.

You know what I mean. Haven't you ever looked back at times in your life when things happened to you that seem incredible? Maybe a series of odd, even random appearing events led you precisely, even systematically in hindsight, to the job you hold now?

Let me give you an example from my own life. I'm sure it will help you see what I'm getting at.

From day one in school I was not a math wizard. By the time I hit senior year in high school, still adding mentally on my fingers, and because we did not need four credits of mathematics to graduate, my Algebra II teacher told me that I should drop out of the class. "Take another art course," he told me. "You're hopeless in math."

So I and another student, Patti Choy, were offered this option for the mathematically retarded. We didn't mind.
Jump ten years into the future. Looking for a new career move after having come to the end of my retail rope at Duty Free Shoppers, out of the blue, I came up with the idea that I'd go back to UH-Manoa and earn a degree in electrical engineering. Why, I don't know. It seemed like a good idea. I knew this would involve more than a slight proficiency in number crunching, but I was dead set on pursuing this path, no matter what.

The week before the semester began, I had to go take the math placement test. I took it, I guess, and trudged back up to the fourth floor of Keller Hall to check the wall-to-wall printout of exam results the following day. Having had considerable trouble even with adding and subtracting on the test, as you might have guessed, I felt quite sure of not having placed into Math 205, Calculus I, and I held out little hope of making it into 140, Trigonometry and Analytical Geometry. But I crossed my slightly stiff fingers that I'd answered at least five of the questions correctly and vaulted into 130, College Algebra. Locating my social security number on the massive list, I read across. It said, "No class."

My high school teacher had been correct, give him a big red pencil C for that. I was indeed a mathematics idiot. I stood back, moronically morose, against the opposite wall and watched as other students squealed with inscrutable delight over their glowing test results. Finally I turned my face to
the wall and was about ready to scream when I noticed a little sign with a tear-off stack of bright orange cards attached to it. The sign read:

Fail the Math Placement Exam?
Want Help?
Take Our Math Refresher Course.
Improve Your Score!!!
College of Continuing Education

I tore off one of the cards, deciding right then that the $45.00 would mean nothing if this course could really, miraculously, help me out of mathematics preschool.

The first night of class I sat right in the front row. Never had a math teacher been able to recognize my face before, but this one would. In strolled a tall blond student-looking type with a brownish closely cropped beard. He wore a Honolulu Marathon Finisher's T-Shirt, shorts, and Nike running shoes. After gently depositing his books on the desk he wrote his name on the board: Larry Lynn.

Turning to us, he said, "That's me. Please don't ever call me Lawrence. Please call me Larry. And only Larry."

Larry appeared to be an escapee from the hot surf spots of Southern California. But his relaxed appearance gave none of us an indication of what a first-rate teacher he would turn out to be. Not only did he work our butts off,
assigning BOTH the even and odd exercises every night, but he taught us tricks that made the work seem easy. Working math problems became child's play. There must have been ten or twelve of us in that class. Six weeks later we all took the placement test again. When I went to the wall to check my score, I saw that I'd placed into 140. As it turned out, nearly everyone in the class had at least made 130. Not a one of us flunked. "Yes!" I thought. "So I won't even have lost a semester. I don't need Math 130."

I went rushing down the hall to Larry's office to tell him the good news. His reaction wasn't quite what I expected.

"You know, Chris, you took my class because you were really struggling with math. I taught you enough to ace the test, but you should take 130 anyway. You'll learn things in there I didn't teach you. Things that you'll need in 140."

I stared out the window. "Larry, I'm getting old, fast. I'd really like to make as much progress as I can, as fast as I can."

He nodded. "I know what you mean, Chris. I'm not getting any younger myself. But I strongly suggest that you take 130. When I was an undergrad I tried to take second-semester German just because I'd had enough high-school German to place." He looked at me.

"Uh, yeah, and?"
"I passed the class with a D. I ended up starting all over in French because I had to drop third-semester German."

"Okay, okay. I get your point. You aren't," I looked at him, "teaching 130 next semester by any chance?"

"Yes I am."

"Would you mind if I took it from you?"

"Not at all. You're a good student. I can use as many of those as I can get."

I ended up with the highest grade in that section of 130. After Larry handed me my final exam, I asked, "By any chance are you teaching 140 this summer?"

He laughed. "See you in class?"

In that section of 140, I had the highest grade too. I felt invincible.

When I picked up that final, Larry said, "Don't even ask. They won't give me a section of 205 until I take my comps for the master's."

"Oh. Uh, how soon can you do that?"

"I don't know yet, Chris. Maybe not even until the end of next semester."

I remember sitting in the front row of my first semester calculus class, wondering if I'd do as well with a different teacher. There was no name in the instructor slot of the schedule, so I couldn't even go ask Larry whether he thought this person was good or not.

Guess who walked in the door?
"Larry?"

"Hey, it's me."

"But I thought you said they wouldn't give you this class until you passed your comps."

"I just passed them last week. You looked so depressed you made me feel guilty. I figured I'd better study hard and pass just so I could teach 205. I guess I should thank you, Christopher, for forcing me to get my butt in gear."

"Well, thank you, Lawrence. I was hoping you'd catch my drift."

I'd like to say that I was the best student in that class too, but I wasn't. I did receive an A, but it was more of a struggle. It wasn't Larry's fault either. All the students respected his ability to make the hardest problems seem much easier than they first appeared.

Very few grad assistants get to teach higher than 205. Larry didn't. It was nearly a year before I saw him again. I'd taken 206, earned a B, and then started teaching English. So much for electrical engineering, but that's another story.

It was my birthday. I limped into Manoa Garden to celebrate with a beer after having graded papers until sundown, and there, at a rear table, sat Larry Lynn. He had killed off half a pitcher by himself. Recognizing me, he waved.

"Hey, Larry," I shook his hand. "What's happening with you?"
"I came in here to celebrate," he said, raising his beer. "Go get a glass and help me out."

I came back and sat opposite him. "Did you finish your master's?"

"Yup, I sure did. And I've been accepted into the Ph.D. program at Colorado. It's time to move on."

"That's great!" I toasted him. "That does call for a party."

"Yeah, well, that's not really what I'm celebrating. Actually, Chris, today's my birthday."

I lowered my glass in mid-sip. "What?"

"I said, today's my birthday."

I stared at him, blinking. He stopped drinking, set his glass down, and stared back at me. "What is it, Chris?"

"Larry, you're probably not going to believe this, but today's my birthday too."

Larry laughed. "Well, then what took you so long to get started?" We hoisted our glasses in mutual salute of another year blowing by.

"Damn, Larry, that is so damn weird. Hey, what year were you born?" I asked.

"Ahhh, you don't want to know that. I'm an old guy," he said. "Guys my age have their doctorates and've been tenured already."

"No really, what year were you born?"

"1954."
Without any exaggeration, I swear, my jaw dropped to the floor. The same day, the same year. We were exactly the same age. I thought about asking him what time he'd been born, but I didn't.

Mind blowing. It was as if someone, a kind of alter ego, or maybe a kind of fairy godfather, had been born and transported to Hawai'i to help me repair a part of my self that I thought had been, because of a former math teacher, irreparably damaged. The dream of electrical engineering had died, but, at the time, I was making more money tutoring students in math than I was teaching English 100.

Now is that Charles Dickens, or what?

Which brings me back to Mel. We met in a Victorian novel class. The Dickens novel in that class was Great Expectations. Talk about your classic love story and the hinge of perfect coincidence.

Which brings me back to language acquisition.

I have never heard Mel speak Japanese, but he studied it at UH. For two years he studied it. For all I know, he may be fluent. After all, as I said before, he's one of the brightest people I've ever known. But if he isn't fluent in Japanese, if he isn't even close, I believe I know the reason why.

It seems that there was this woman in Mel's Japanese class. Sue Egnew had come all the way to Hawai'i from upstate New York in order to work on a master's degree in
Asian Studies. She earned her degree, as did Mel. The stories they tell about who pestered whom more are very funny. I don't know which one to believe. In fact, sometimes I think they made up all those story-counter story episodes as a way to keep me on my toes.

The way Sue tells it, you'd think that Mel would be so wrapped up in her during class that when the teacher called on him he wouldn't know what was going on. Sue says that after a period of non-activity and polite pre-class hallway conversation, Mel began making his move on her, started tearing down the mall to catch up with her after class every day. To practice his Japanese, no doubt.

I don't know who wanted whom more, but they did end up with each other. It's easy for me to picture, knowing them the way I do, although since I moved back to Honolulu we haven't been as close as we were then. Still, I'm sure I can see how they listened so very closely to each other speak Japanese, and after every class he probably watched her walk—maybe she was thinking of him—down the mall from Moore Hall. And then, on that one heart-stopping occasion, he finally shouted out wild Japanese greetings as he ran breathlessly to her side, where they made small talk. That led to bigger talk. And finally they learned enough about each other to begin speaking that movie magic language of love.
Before going to Wisconsin marriage vows were required to silence the worried whispers voiced by two sets of very concerned parents. Not that Mel and Sue were unhappy about that; I don't know any married couple more enchanted. Hard to believe, though, that these were 70's parents. And through some pretty rough years in Madison he studied literature and instructed students, and she counseled other students very patiently about financial aid. We weren't exactly three babes in the woods, but Madison seemed, at times, like an awesome exercise in pioneering frontier territory for us. And me, well, I depended on their company. We used to watch Hawaii Five-O together.

It always struck me, how they could sit for hours at the dining room table, Mel making model airplanes, Sue stained glass, without saying a word.

Now days, I know, Princeton life wears on them, but I've seen them there. Sometimes an odd feeling comes over me. It's as if they've been thrown to the wolves one more time. But they still persist, side by side, sharing mutual interests in their unspoken affection for one another. They don't need Japanese. Hell, they don't even need English. All they seem to need is the knowing that the other one is there.

Think about it. Mel staying in Hawai'i when he could have gone anywhere for college. Sue coming all the way here from Syracuse for graduate school. The two of them ending up
in that one particular Japanese class together. And me meeting them. Then we all move to Wisconsin together at the same time? Kind of an amazing chain of events. Sometimes I look back and believe that if it hadn't been for them, Mad City would have consumed me. It didn't, many thanks to them. And for that, because of them, and almost as much because of their love story . . . . Well, maybe I should call it all a fairytale.
IV. FRIENDSHIP
Hi! I'm back! Well, when I was in Florida and went to Disney World, Epcot, and M.G.M., the first things I noticed were the CLEANLINESS, FRIENDLINESS, and of course the RIDES!

The Disney article didn't go to waste after all. I knew what to expect and what rides were the best. After our vacation I re-read the article and was amazed at how everything was so true.

Remember me at Quiz Bowl time because I'm really looking forward to it!

Much love and aloha, Caroline Wong

P.S. "Bright Green" shirts this year!
Caroline Wong
TEMPEST IN A TEACUP

ALL KIDDING ASIDE

I wanna be where the people are.
I wanna see--wanna see 'em dancin',
Walkin' around on those,
What-d-ya call 'em,
Oh feet.

Howard Ashman
PART OF YOUR WORLD

Our little group has always been and always will until the end.

Kurt Cobain
SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

"Hey! I never kid anyone I don't like."
Bill Teter

We'd flopped onto the Lihue Airport two hours before. After wobbling into our hotel, the Kauai Resort, we were assembling in the lobby, ready to drive someplace nearby for a brief feeding frenzy. The flight had left Honolulu on time, but we'd landed a little late because we'd run smack into a tropical storm moments before making our final suicide
dive. The turbulence had been violent enough to offer us many opportunities to reencounter lunch, but the worst part of what had turned into a kind of nightmare carnival ride had been the pancake landing. Boy, talk about your ups and downs and revitalizing old clichés. The sky, so dark that visibility had been next to zero, pressed against the plane windows, and as we bounced merrily skyward then seaward in a frenetic zigzag, I'd leaned warily over to the foggy window from my aisle seat to check for any encouraging signs of land. Just as the runway, built like a kind of margin between the sea and the land, should have come into view, I'd had the vivid impression that I could see fish waving their little fins at us. Or were they beckoning? With this happy vision clouding my actual perception, I suddenly saw the blacktop lunge toward us, and the plane hit with a crushing jolt. One of our girls screamed at the very moment we made absolute contact, and I mentally shared her shocked surprise as I noticed the twinge in my middle back. "Arrrgh," I thought, cursing my fate, "I should've just sat still."

"Do you believe in omens?" Coach Mike had asked as we chanced traffic to cross the street, headed to rent the vans while the speech team waited for the luggage.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Mike uttered one of his this-is-freakin'-unbelievable chuckles and said, "I think I twisted something in my leg when we came down."
"Really? You got hurt, too? I was wondering if that was a limp."

He'd given me a worried look. "Too? Too? What happened to you, Chris?"

"I was sitting in a damn weird position when the pilot dropped us on the runway. Feels like something in my back is screwed up. Might be pretty bad the way the pain is mounting."

We both shook our heads and contemplated the Budget counter. "Knock on wood," Mike whispered, tapping his knuckles on the oak veneer.

"This'll be just great, Mike. We'll have to roll around Kapaa High School in a couple of wheelchairs."

"Sure hope they've brought the campus up to code for handicap access," he agreed, shaking his head again.

Now, sitting in the lobby, I watched this year's team assemble. The look was definitely formal; they were all wearing ties and long-sleeved dress shirts.

"Mr. Lau, this is a test," Caroline informed me in her budding teacherly manner. Students love to examine teachers. "Guess what I bought last night?" she asked. I remember, somewhere, I'd heard a clock ticking down on me.

Pivoting carefully in my seat, I could definitely tell there was something way more seriously wrong with my back than I had suspected. "Hmmm." Forcing my brain to shift
focus from the dull pain along my spinal cord to her puzzling question, I offered, "Panty hose?"

Ms. Wong flashed me one of her award-winning smiles. "That's right! Very good. You get an A for the day, Mr. Lau. I believe you'd make a very good student--" she paused, shaking her head woefully, "with a little more practice."

"That's great, Caroline. I knew you'd be prepared. But the beauty of flying over the day before, even if it resembles a kamikaze run, is that if we forget to pack something, we still have plenty of time to go buy it. I mean, you could probably spin yourself a pair of panty hose with all the time we have to, uh," I snapped my fingers for the word, "burn."

Cathy Cabalo chimed in: "We have positively no time to spare for manufacturing panty hose, Mr. Lau." I read the seriousness in her face. "I have to pump out as many evidence cards as I can before I crash tonight."

"That's right, Cathy," speech team president Kawehi Anderson announced. "Caroline wants to practice her oratory. No time for spinning, Mr. Lau. I know I want to do my humorous half-a-dozen times before I go to sleep. And I'm going to bed early tonight, too." She surveyed the available members of the team. "We all agreed on seven o'clock, right?"

"Bet I'm asleep before you," Ms. Cabalo challenged.

"Bet you not."
"Bet so."
"Bet not."

I interrupted the heated debate. "Quite an affirmative constructive, Ms. Cabalo, but the first rebuttal was a bit weak. What value, exactly, were you upholding there?"

"Why, the value of sleep, of course," she replied. She held out her hands, palms facing each other, as if she were about to pray for my salvation. "Mr. Lau, don't you think your jokes are truly too stale?"

I refused to bite. She is a fiendishly good debater. "Eh, eh, eh, listen," I said, artfully side-stepping her insightful criticism cleverly disguised as a challenge to an argument. "I know all you folks are going to hit the sack early, but try and have some fun, okay? Watch a little TV or something, why don't you. This team is so darn serious about preparation and sleep, you'd think this was some kind of Olympic event. Should we be in Albertville, or what? Coach Mike and I are really worried that none of you are going to try and have a good time over here. We don't think that's healthy. Sure we all want to kick butt in our events, but stay loose, gang. Who knows? That might make you even stronger for the competition than acting like a bunch of cloistered nuns and priests. I'm worried some of the other schools will start to talk about how the Lab School team is a bunch of party poopers. We don't want them to get the wrong idea, do we?"
Amber and Jeaneen shot each other sidelong glances. Sitting side by side on the far couch, they shook their heads in emphatic disdain.

Lani, a puzzled look clouding her brow as she sucked meditatively on a cough drop, asked, "Mr. Lau, are you seriously suggesting we should force ourselves to stay up and suffer through something like, oh, what's that FOX show about those dippy teenagers in California? I think they're supposed to be having some kind of Valentine's theme show." She jammed an index finger in her mouth, then withdrew it. "What-cha-ma-call-it?"

The students all gave her blank stares. Unfortunately, no one seemed to have heard of Beverly Hills 90210.

Kawehi said, "Mr. Lau, I don't ever watch TV--I mean never--on a school night, and for sure I'm not gonna veg out on some lame teeny bopper soap opera and break my concentration on the competition tomorrow. Understand?"

"Me either," Kathy Santiago added with great vigor. "If I'm gonna blow off a lot of precious preparation time glued to the boob tube, I'm at least going to be smart enough to watch MacNeil-Lehrer. I want, absolutely, to blast the competition out of the water in my extemp rounds tomorrow."

"Yeah, Mr. Lau," Earl said. "And you used to be a teacher? It's almost impossible to believe. Do you seriously recommend that we rot our brains out with a show like The Simpletons, or whatever they call it. Get serious,
would you? We're not here for a party, Mr. Lau. We're here to bring greater glory to our school—the mighty University Laboratory School, just in case you've forgotten the name of your alma mater. Stay focused, Mr. Lau, would you, please?"

A fanatic chorus of reprimands showered down on me. Lines like "Yeah, Mr. Lau" and "Get with the program" came at me from all sides of the room. I felt instantly ashamed of myself.

"Okay, okay, okay. I'm sorry," I apologized, justly chastised. "I, well, kinda thought maybe this team could use a break. You know, for a change. Coach Mike is always telling me how you guys never want to waste a minute in speech class, how everything is all just business, business, and more business. I mean, you're all teenagers, aren't you. If you don't watch out, you'll all drive yourselves to early graves because of this Puritan work ethic of yours. Go to bed at seven if you really think it'll help. You guys are right; I'm wrong. I want you all to do well just as badly as you do. No matter what it takes. Whatever it takes. Oh, never mind."

Shen tried to cheer me up. "That's all right, Mr. Lau. We know you're only thinking of us and how to help us out. But I believe that your generation might have depended, perhaps a little too much, on television. That overdependence, coupled with this general notion of, quote, fun to be had, unquote, way back when you were at the Lab
School ... well, we can't help but think that you placed too high a premium on pleasure, on this mindless idea of having fun. Undoubtedly that's the reason why the speech team fell apart for so many years. But we're back now, and nothing is going to undermine our determination to do our best in this, or any other speech tournament."

Starr leaned over and patted my hand reassuringly. "Don't worry, Mr. Lau. Rest assured that we will, eventually, recover from the ill effects of your generation's television addiction." The sympathy registered in her eyes began to show in the faces of the other students.

Faith came up behind me and patted me on the shoulder. "It's okay, Mr. Lau. We know you care ... " she hesitated, "even if you don't quite see the point of what we're getting at."

I felt a little less guilty, but, as always, the students were right. It's really tough for someone my age to remember how to be serious.

"Who are we waiting for?" inquired Coach Mike, limping, slightly, into the lobby from the parking lot.

Kim and Nicole came rushing breathlessly from their room into the lobby. "Sorry we're late," Nicole said. "I was helping Kim run through her oratory one more time. We had her stand and do it twice in front of the bathroom mirror, fine tuning her gestures and facial expressions. You know."
"And just to keep me sharp," Kim added, "Nicole suggested I spell there, their, and they're each time they came up in my speech."

"Miss any?" Mike asked.

"N-O, you K-N-O-W," answered Nicole, beaming with pride at her friend and fellow Lab School English student's spelling prowess.

Coach Mike and I glanced at each other and shrugged our shoulders. If we were going to ease this team into a more relaxed mode, it would be a very long, very slow, very tricky process.

Laureen, tripping in, and Summer, puttering right behind, were the last to arrive.

"Don't tell us, let me guess," said coach Mike. "You guys were rehearsing Summer's program reading."

"Oh, no," Summer chipped in shyly. "That was earlier. I gave Laureen an impromptu topic, and she just finished her speech. I knew we might be late, so she didn't take five minutes for prep time. She just launched right in. Still, she ran a little over the time limit, anyway. Sorry."

"What was the topic?" Coach Mike asked.

Summer, who was examining her ankles for some reason, looked up and smiled sweetly. "Oh, ah, Valentine's Day."

"Did you have anything to say about that?" I asked.

"Not really," Laureen replied. "But I used my imagination and talked about one,"--she ticked off the three
points on her fingers—"true passion, two, expressions of libido, and three, the commercialization and consequent trivialization of love. I believe the speech was quite powerful, considering how little I personally am interested in such romantic drivel."

"She was extremely convincing," Summer concurred, looking up from her examination.

Mike, always the coach, asked, "What sources did you use to illustrate your three major points?"

Laureen rubbed her chin thoughtfully. "Let's see. For true passion I cited The Iliad, Chaucer's Troilus, several choice scenes from Shakespeare, and . . . what's-her-name, Summer?"

"Mari Matsuzaki."

"Oh, right," Laureen said, blushing at her temporary memory lapse. "How could I forget. My strongest example, of course."

"Sounds good," Kawehi commended, nodding approvingly. "What about for commercialization and consequent trivialization?"

Laureen chuckled. "Well, I wanted to ease up on the audience after offering Freud, Faulkner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald for various expressions of libido, so once I discussed Dickens' two endings to Great Expectations, I went with Danielle Steel, Hallmark, and that Ala Moana Shopping Center stud who claims he always buys his babe's gift"
himself, a little small, mind you, so she can take it back for something else if she so desires."

"Sounds like a superior effort to me," said Jeaneen, slapping at her thigh and repressing tears of laughter, as usual.

"Ahhh, Laureen," I remarked proudly of yet another Lab School literature addict. "How astute of you to be able to analyze Gatsby in that context."

She looked shocked. "Are you serious? I talked about him and old Zelda, of course."

That sounded equally erudite.

"Well, folks, shall we?" Coach Mike gestured into the parking lot.

"For-ward!" shouted Summer, causing tourists' heads to pop up all over the place, their eyes worriedly darting about the lobby.

Caroline was the last to pass me on the way out. After she'd gone by, I attempted to boost myself out of the chair. Failing in the effort, I groaned and sank back into the flower-patterned cushion. Caroline lifted her head, turned to look at me, and came back.

"Are you okay, Mr. Lau?"

I made a dismal attempt at a laugh. "Oh, yup, doing swimmingly, Caroline. It's just that, well, I always have trouble finding my feet after I fly."
She gave me a small grin. "Me too, Mr. Lau." She shook her head in embarrassment. "That was me you heard screaming when we landed."

I laughed at this revelation.

She shrugged. "I take that back. Actually, I love to fly. It's bad landings I don't like."

"Me either," I agreed, nodding my head in sympathy.

Attempting to stand again, I floundered one more time. Caroline offered me a hand which I accepted with great thanks.

"No sweat, Mr. Lau. It's the least I could do after you went out of your way to take us pantyhose shopping last year."

"Amen. And thanks again for the hand up. How do you feel about tomorrow?"

Caroline looked down at the floor. An odd, nervous laugh escaped her before she said, "I, yes, and, well . . . I don't know. Maybe I should be doing my dramatic. I mean, I know my oratory, but maybe I'm more comfortable with the way I do my Lion in Winter." She threw up her hands in confusion. "I just wish I were in a round already. So I could, you know . . . whatever."

"But do you feel pretty good?"

Again the nervous laugh and awkward smile. "I'll let you know when I stop shaking, Mr. Lau."
The next morning Coach Mike and I were dead to the world when the pounding on the door began. We'd been just a bit more lax than the students in our nighttime regimen. I heard Mike mutter a few words at the door, then groggily focused on him hobbling back to his bed.

"Who the heck was that?" I croaked.

"President Anderson. The kids are all up and dressed. They've already eaten breakfast, too. And they're about to gear up with a little pre-tournament practice session. They wanted to make sure that we didn't lie around all morning."

I groaned. "What time is it?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Geez, Mike. The first round isn't until three."

"I know," he said, rolling his eyeballs. "But you know these guys."

"Yeah, yeah. Wish they would ease up." I tried to move. "You use the shower first. My back hurts so bad, I don't know how long it's gonna take me to get over to the bathroom."

While Mike showered, I managed to wedge myself out from under the covers and sit up. Since no one was looking, I slid to the floor and crawled to the bathroom on my hands and knees. A few aspirin began to help, but standing up straight was quite a challenge.
At the moment Mike emerged from the shower section of the bathroom, I was still in a crouch, so I pretended to be looking for something under the sink counter.

"Lose something?" he asked.

"Yeah, ah, looking for my karma. How's the leg?"

"Better, I hope. Not great."

I waited for him to turn the corner, then scuttled into the shower. It took more than a few gallons of very hot water to get me back into a poorly postured standing slouch.

The rest of the morning I took the pressure off by lying on my bed and watching TV. Poor maid. Every time she knocked to come in, I told her I'd be out "soon."

Several more aspirin throughout the day helped me to make it up the stairs to the lobby and out to the van. Kathy Santiago rode shotgun. Out on the highway, she said, "Gee, Mr. Lau, you sure drive like Speed Racer, huh."

I glanced at the speedometer, even though our van struggled in bumper-to-bumper traffic. We were moseying somewhere under the need to worry about breaking the sound barrier. Someone in back had already announced that we could undoubtedly slither to the competition faster than we were driving there. "Or hop there on our hands," Shen had added.

"What do you mean, Kathy? We're running about forty miles below the limit."
"No," she said, laughing. "I mean you bend over the wheel like you're really intense." She imitated my pose in her seat.

"Oh, yeah. Well, I don't usually drive like this, but when we landed yesterday, I kinda screwed up my back."

"Really?" She shook her head. "Are you taking anything for it?"

"Thanks, Kathy, yes. Besides all the aspirin on this island, Coach Mike and I dosed ourselves, medicinally speaking, pretty good last night."

"Well?" she asked.

"Not yet."

I looked in the rearview mirror. Something was different about Ms. Bauer. I puzzled over this a second, then it hit me.

"Kim. Where's your Walkman?"

"Didn't bring it."

Wow! Kim Bauer without headphones. This was interesting.

"What happened? Did your brother borrow it and break it again?"

"No, not this time, Mr. Lau. I just didn't want any distractions. Not this weekend. And that way, my Walkman will be kind of a reward for me if I do well."

"Ah, yeah, right."
Kathy Santiago had turned on the radio. Funny. That was usually the first thing they did when they jumped in the car at the airport. But not this year. She'd found the all-news station. Because we were moving at a snail's pace, she pulled out her notebook, dropped it in her lap, and began jotting down items of interest. Things, as far as competition intensity was concerned, were definitely looking up. I don't believe in omens, but if I did, this looked, I had to admit, fairly promising.

I had to sit through four debates that afternoon. Curses. Not only that, but because I had to judge every round, I didn't get to check in with the students to find out how they felt they were doing. Focusing on what the debaters were saying, however, did seem to help my physical condition. For sure my mind was occupied with the struggle to navigate the flow of their arguments.

By the time I had wended my weary way back to the judges' lounge with my final ballot, it was time to go.

"Let's take them out to eat at a relaxing place," I suggested to Mike.

"Good idea, Chris, but they've already ordered pizza for pick-up on the way to the hotel. They said that way they could eat, brush their teeth, and be in bed before any of the other teams had made it back to the hotel."

"Geez, whose idea was that?"
"Guess."

I pondered a moment. "Cathy Cabalo?"

"No, but she called in the order. And," Mike pounded his fist against his forehead, "get this! Under her formal tournament clothes, she's already dressed for bed."

"Yikes!" I puzzled another few seconds. "Jeaneen?"

"She was the one who said she wanted to be asleep before any of the other schools' team members."

"Amber?"

"Well, she had the idea about brushing teeth."

"Lani?"

"Bingo."

Lani had been a question mark all the way up to the time we'd gone to the gate in Honolulu. She still had a bad cold, and we hadn't even been sure she would be well enough to show.

"How's Lani's voice?" I asked.

"I don't know. Sure hope she doesn't lose it."

"Yeah," I agreed, "that would be some price to pay."

Back at the Kauai Resort, most of the students had zipped downstairs, pizzas in hand.

"Caroline looks better, huh, Mike?"

"Better! She must be feeling good about the way her rounds are going. I'd say she's flying in comparison to yesterday."

286
Mike and I were limping our way to the stairs when Summer motored up behind us.

"Beep, beep."

We stepped aside and motioned her to go ahead. "Please play through," Mike suggested. We gestured her down the stairway.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Flaherty, Mr. Lau." Down she went.

"Not only are these guys all super serious, but they've got great etiquette, too," I said after she'd shot out of sight.

We continued easing ourselves down with the help of the handrails. Starr and Faith came bearing down from behind.

"What's wrong?" Faith asked with great concern.

"Looking into senior citizen bus passes" seemed like a good answer.

Faith stopped and tilted her head to one side. No response.

"Old age," Mike explained, chuckling.

Faith looked puzzled. "Huh?"

"Old age. It's a joke," I offered.

"What is?" Faith asked again.

"Old age," Starr repeated, nodding her head and trying not to be too amused at our slow progress. "Understand?"

"No." Faith shook her head. "What about it?"

The two girls blew past us.
Turning to Starr, Faith asked, "Did you know this hotel has peacocks walking around?"

Mike and I watched them go, both of us deciding, by the time we'd staggered to our room, that there really wasn't anything funny about the joke after all. Faith had been right.

Starr dove out into the hallway. "Are you really okay?"

"Yeah, Starr, thank you," Mike answered.

"Would some pizza help?"

"No, thanks anyway."

Starr flew back into her room.

We, on the other hand, collapsed through our doorway.

I really don't believe in omens, and after Mike and I doctored ourselves a bit more that evening, I had forgotten why we were worried about them to begin with anyhow. The following morning, as I muddled through two more high-level debates in the final two preliminary rounds, I did remember. Curses again.

Poor, unfortunate soul. Maybe I'd actually found my fate under the bathroom sink and just hadn't realized it. But it could have been worse. After all, there could have been three or even four more preliminary rounds.
Kawehi, Caroline, and Lani did make it to semis, but by the time I ran into them, only Caroline had survived to give finals a go. Kathy Santiago was also in finals for extemp.

As the crowd of students cruised the hallways searching for the final round rooms, I managed to bump into three of the four girls. Kawehi told me that she'd given it her best shot, but that the humorous competition had been tremendous.

"I don't know, Mr. Lau. Sometimes I think maybe I'm just out of my element."

"No way, Kawehi. I've seen you perform your humorous twice now, and I know you're more than good enough to make States."

I turned to Lani and asked if her impromptu topic had been a rough one. She confirmed that it had. Her voice was very hoarse, but she still had it. "That's okay, Lani, you've got both Radford and Districts to go. Get healthy, and you will make it in."

Caroline, tissue to her eyes, was weeping tears of joy. Who could blame her? She'd worked her tail off, slaving for a year and a half in an attempt to actually walk into the world of final round competition. I gave her a big hug and wished her luck. Because she hugged me so hard I knew I had to brace for the pain in my back. But the pain was gone.

I could see it in her eyes. She knew very well, serious competitor as she always is, that what she was about
to do would take a great deal more than mere luck. It always does.

All the time I sat judging my final round of program reading, I kept praying that the next time I saw Caroline she'd be waltzing down the hallway at least two feet off the floor.

When we entered the boarding gate lounge the following evening, we were all walking tall, and none taller than Caroline Wong. Were we all proud of her? Most of the other students had gone home that morning, but the remaining six of us contemplated introducing her to the curious audience of fellow fliers. Another school might have done that; we didn't have to. As we marched aboard our flight, Caroline hand-carried her first-place trophy home. Not only had she finally become part of that very special world of final round competition, but she stood now, dancing decidedly, right on top of it. And overall, the team's finish was the strongest ever in three years of tournament competition. Everyone had finally been able to relax. The neckties had been tossed for T-shirts, tanktops, jeans, shorts, and slippers.

"Caroline, do you feel better now?" I asked.

This time her laugh disguised nothing. "Yes, Mr. Lau, I'm actually back to breathing normally."
"I bet you," I said, pointing to her prize, "that Coach Mike'll want to hold on to that trophy for a couple of days before you take it home and add it to your collection."

"Why's that?"

"To show it and your terrific accomplishment off in the high school office, of course."

Caroline laughed, very quietly this time, blushing a deep red. "Thanks, Mr. Lau."

"Don't mention it, Caroline. Congratulations again."

She changed the subject. "We're pretty loose now, huh, Mr. Lau?"

"Yes, Caroline, yes. You know, today was one of the best days of my life in recent memory. I had a blast with all of you. I want to thank you all for teaching me a lesson this weekend."

Faith overheard my last remark. "What, Mr. Lau, what did you learn this weekend?"

"Well, one thing for sure, Ms. Pagba. I learned that putting chili pepper water on ANYTHING would never really phase you."

It was always a kind of humbling experience. When I was an English teacher, it never ceased to amaze me how I could constantly learn new ideas from my students, or even remember ones I'd somehow forgotten along the way. No need
to say, I'm sure, that there is indeed a great deal to be said for being serious when the competition demands it.
He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him . . . . For he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.
Charles Dickens
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

ENTERTAINING CHRISTMAS PRESENT

"Excuse me, young man," came the words from the small lady on his left, "but what are you doing?"

He finished totaling up the strips with check marks next to them, folded the Sunday comics section together, turned to face her with a polite smile, and said, "Research, ma'am."

"Research? In the funnies!"

"Ah, actually just killing time till the stores open."

"What on earth are you researching in the funny papers?"

He shook his head, realizing that he'd engaged a perhaps too talkative stranger in what might turn out to be an interminable conversation. By the look of her, the cobblestone wrinkles, the flesh falling about her, flapping and rolling down her bony skeleton, she must be nearing seventy. "Uh, I have this theory. I believe that a theme runs through a lot of the Sunday comics. Each Sunday I figure the percentage—that's the number of funnies that follow that theme out of the total number of strips. Right
now the average is about fifty-five to sixty percent each Sunday."

The old woman turned from him and faced the mirror that ran the length of the wall behind the fountain counter. He watched her pick up her coffee cup. It shook ever so slightly as she reached it to her lips. She didn't bend her head; her neck was stiff. The cup wobbled a little on the way to her lips, and she blew a light stream of air over the coffee before she sipped. Placing the thick brown-banded white ceramic cup back in its matching saucer, she picked up her napkin and dabbed gently at her lips. Unlike him, she did not watch her reflection in the glass. "That's interesting," was her comment finally. "Can you show me what you mean?"

He nodded and smiled. "Actually, like I said, I'm just waiting for the stores to open."

"Please," she said, slightly turning her body toward him.

He made a mental note to remind himself not to talk to these odd old people ever again. "See, there are twenty-two strips in this week's section. But ten of them are not about Christmas. So that's--" he took his Cross pen from the pocket of his aloha shirt and scribbled--"fifty-five percent."

The flesh hung from her wrist and swayed as she cut at a bacon strip with her serrated butter knife. "How do you
know that?" she questioned, raising her fork and the quarter-inch square bit of crisp meat she'd carved to her bright red lips.

"Well, ten from twenty-two is twelve. So twelve divided by twenty-two is point-five-four-five, times one hundred equals fifty-four-point-five. Round up to fifty-five percent. See?" He pointed to each step, figure, and decimal with the tip of his pen so she could follow along.

She nodded her head slowly as she dabbed at her lips with the napkin. "You could have just divided ten by twenty-two, multiplied by a hundred and subtracted from a hundred." He nodded at her in the mirror. "But you would make a good math teacher," she said.

"Well, thanks."

"But I guess you didn't understand my question. Maybe I didn't make myself clear."

He reached for his coffee cup, fearing an old-folks-rambling type conversation coming on. She reached for her cup, too. He watched her sip in the long mirror. They could have been related. Both were right-handed. He looked closely at all of her jewelry. The steam from his cup fogged his glasses.

"Well, what were you asking me then?"

"I wanted to know how you could be sure of what you say is the theme. How do you decide what the theme is?"
"Oh." He nodded into the mirror. "Mind if I smoke?" he asked politely, trying hard not to let his voice sound as though he were on the way to bored stiff.

"Not at all--as long as you offer me one of those."

He watched her point to his pack of True blue in the mirror. Her eyes were focused on him.

"Sure. Hope you don't mind True."

"I don't mind any cigarette that's free, my dear."

He lit the cigarette for her. They puffed together.

"But you haven't answered my question," she said.

"You mean how do I know what the theme is?"

"That's right, young man. How can you be sure that you've identified the right theme?"

"Well, this week is kind of easy. Christmas is coming up on Wednesday, right, so I just used that as the theme. It's obvious. One of the easiest to identify all year round."

She tapped her cigarette on the rim of the black plastic ashtray. "Uh huh, uh huh," she muttered, seeming to ponder this deeply. Her fingernails, perfectly shaped, were the same bright red as her lipstick. He wondered if the fur wrap draped over the seatback were real. "What if Christmas were not this week?" she asked.

"Oh, then it might be harder to figure out. A couple of weeks ago, for instance, it was sports. About . . . um,
sixty-four or five percent of the strips were sports related."

The woman nodded. "I see." She stubbed out her cigarette in the ashtray. "Do the other ten this week have their own theme? Have you considered that?"

"Hmmm." He nodded and rested his butt in the ashtray notch. "Let's check that out." A bit irritated, he flipped open the section and went to Andy Capp. "See, ma'am, this is the first one that isn't Christmas related. Andy and Flo have an argument, Andy walks out on her with his suitcase, and she celebrates."

"That, young man, is definitely a Christmas theme," she said. "My husband walked out on me right before Christmas, oh, nineteen years ago this year."

"Oh, uh huh." He wanted to say that her own individual case hardly served to establish a general theme for Christmas, but she reminded him a little of his own maternal grandmother so he kept the thought to himself.

"Not to mention that, in general, many people share all kinds of feelings of depression at this time of year. I'm sure, young man, that you've heard about how suicide rates skyrocket during the holiday season."

He thought about asking her whether she'd celebrated like Flo, but the look on her face in the mirror stopped him from questioning her. "Oh, okay, I guess that ups my average this week."
The waitress came up to her, coffee pot in hand. "Refill, Mrs. Martin?" The woman nodded, the skin undulating slightly along her neck.

The waitress filled Mrs. Martin's cup. "Thank you very much, Yolanda."

"You so welcome, Mrs. Martin." She turned to him and asked if he'd like a refill.

"Free?" he asked.

"Of course, bruddah. All you like."

"Oh, thanks. Yes then."

After she filled his cup he thanked her again. Both he and Mrs. Martin blew and sipped at their black coffee.

"And here's the next one," he said, resuming their investigations of themes and patterns. "These two Far Side ones have to do with dinosaurs and cavemen. Now that's not Christmas, right?"

"Could you spare another cigarette?" Mrs. Martin asked. He tapped out and lit her another True blue.

"Those two come before Jesus Christ," she said, exhaling a thin stream of smoke past his face.

"Hmmm, yeah, so what does that mean?" he asked.

"I don't know, young man, but maybe that makes them impossible for Christmas theme comics."

"Oh, yeah, I see. You're saying that Larson is making a statement about Christmas--like maybe he's against all the commercialism--like lots of these others have to do with
shopping or spending money. By doing pre-Christian comics, he's saying, like, enough with what we've made this holy event into, huh?"

Mrs. Martin puffed at her cigarette. "Well, I don't really understand what you just said, but I can see that cavemen and dinosaurs would not be at home celebrating Christmas."

He nodded. "Anachronistic, you mean?"

The old woman laughed, then coughed, covering her mouth briefly with her hand, then smiled at him in the mirror when she'd recovered herself. "My, I'll bet you are very good at crossword puzzles."

He laughed, turning his attention to the next non-Christmas strip. "Here's Calvin and Hobbes. Now what goes on in this one is that Calvin gets his dad to read him a bedtime story--Hobbes' version of 'Goldilocks'--'Goldilocks and the Three Tigers'--where the three tigers divide up Goldilocks into three portions--big, medium, and small--and eat her, dunking her in their porridge. The dad gets so disgusted that he walks out."

Mrs. Martin chuckled softly. "Well, that is some little story. Jean Calvin and Thomas Hobbes. Definitely religious overtones, wouldn't you say? Although Hobbes certainly treats civil as well as ecclesiastical questions. Are you familiar with the work of those gentlemen? Have you ever read Leviathan?"
"Uh, yeah, some. I studied them some in college."

She sipped, looking at him in the mirror. "What kind of world do we live in? Is there room for Christmas spirit? Has Christmas become more of a social than a religious concern? Where does mankind draw the line--"

"Wait, Mrs. Martin. Are you saying that somehow this strip is a comment on Christmas too?"

"No, you just said that. I'm simply deliberating, spinning the ideas out and trying to decide if there's a theme that all of what you call the non-Christmas strips have in common. Think about it, young man. This is a deliberate subversion of the story of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears.'"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I see what you mean. And all of this commercialization of Christmas is a kind of willful subversion of the true story of Christmas."

In the mirror, Mrs. Martin finished off her coffee and set the cup gently to rest in its matching saucer.

"Well, let's test Ziggy next, Mrs. Mar--"

"I'd love to, my dear, but the stores are opening now and I must get my shopping done. Beat the crowds, you know."

He nodded, folding the comic section up again. Mrs. Martin, her hand shaking just a bit still, reached into her purse, produced her wallet, and placed a crisp ten dollar bill on the counter. Her tab came to $4.72.

He watched her pull her fur wrap around her shoulders.

"One last question, young man. If the other ten are all
anti-Christmas commentaries of some kind, does that mean that they do or do not share in the theme, broadly speaking, of Christmas? I wonder? Then she slid gently from her seat. "Nice to have met you, young man. Good luck with your shopping."

As she walked stiffly past the waitress, she called to her, "Merry Christmas, Yolanda."

"Ah, you too, Mrs. Martin. See you next Sunday."

While Yolanda cleared the place next to him, he said, "Wow, she's a big tipper, huh."

Yolanda shot him a look that said "none of your damn business," but then she smiled. "It's Christmas, brah. You know, da Christmas spirit."

"Oh yeah," he mumbled, realizing that he probably would have to tip well too. Not that he ate in Zippy's every Sunday. In fact, this was the first time he'd ever eaten Sunday breakfast there. But it was the thought that counted. He left more than twenty-percent. Yolanda waved, smiled, and wished him a Merry Christmas as he joined the mass of people streaming into Sears for another go round at filling their holiday gift lists.

On the escalator he quickly unfolded the paper and checked Ziggy. The whole strip had to do with Ziggy taking extreme pride in his brand-new high-tech kitchen. Not the usual sunset and singing birds with rainbows and flowers. A
Christmas theme running through this one? An anti-Christmas theme?

He remembered his mother talking about the microwave seeming to take longer than it used to, to cook. Stepping off the escalator, he checked his bearings, fought into the traffic flow headed right, and proceeded to the small appliance department.
"I'm gonna lose my job!" Sabrina started to ramble hysterically. "It's the second time this week I've dropped my tray. I should have never applied for this job. How could I even think that a klutz like me could carry trays of food and drinks without spilling anything? Just like in band class when I busted my clarinet! I don't believe this. I'll never work again for as long as I live, after I get fired from this job. My mother's gonna kill me. Dad will disown me! Why couldn't I just---"

"Hey, now, take it easy," I said calmly, considering the fact that I had an entire spaghetti dinner in my lap. "It's not the end of the world. Smells good, anyway. And did you say you play the clarinet?"

Sabrina nodded.

"Yeah? Wow, I play the clarinet, too!" I exclaimed.

"And I like your watch, by the way."

"Thanks," Sabrina mumbled, cheering up a bit. "Snoopy is the best!"

"Definitely," I agreed.

Junko Peterson
A QUESTION OF BALANCE

MANOA GARDEN

Alan, Barbara, Bill, Craig, Linda

Actually, I like Lanning-face [sip] cuz he give me da kine soun effecs. [clink sip]

[sip] Ahhhhh. I'm-way [sip] okay-way; ou're-yay . . . OT-NAY! [sip] Now, Lanning-g-g-g-g-g, you do it in pidgin.


What kind of colon was that again? [sip]

[bite crunch] Can you believe what we pay for puppy dicks and mouse heads? [bite crunch]
[sip] So I said, if you can't find the bus, you shouldn't be having sex, for Godsakes. [dip munch dip munch]

I mean, [puff] where on earth does all that money go? Here, here. [clink clunk clink clink puff puff]

[slurp] Sadly, even my boys are Brodie girls. [sip sip] I am hunkless.

I really gotta go. [blump, blump, blump, blump, blump] Well, maybe just one more.

And that [sip] would be Foucault in a nutshell.

[sip] I didn't catch all of that. [puff] Could you repeat it?

Are you kidding me? [sip] That was jazz.

[chew chew] And Derrida?

[munch] Translation problems?

Lacan? [Puff]

[dip crunch] HeeeEeeey! If you give him half a page, and you give him half a page, pretty soon I'll only have half of a half of a page. Wait! [sip] Is that right? [puff]

I forget already. [slurp] Whatever happened [sip] to the goddamn text?

[chew chew chew]

[puff puff puff]

[bite crunch munch]
I'm new in this building, and the first day this old guy from next door knocks on my door. He says, "Why don't you come over for a chat?"
Funny way to talk, but I say, "OK. Let me turn off my CD."
"No," he says, "I'd like you to hear it from my couch."
That's even funnier than "a chat," but I go along. There's a record spinning on his compact--low. I sit down on a puke-colored couch against the wall that separates our apartments.
"What are you listening to?" I ask.
"It's Mozart's forty-first, 'The Jupiter.'" His wife, I guess, sitting in a recliner near the couch.
"I don't know that group," I say.
The old guy says, "Are you having trouble hearing it?"
"Yeah, can you turn it up?"
"No, I mean your music."

Ralph T. Williams
NEIGHBORS

SHARING A LITTLE GIN WITH PELE

"Mike."
No answer.
"McGann!"
No answer.
"Commander!!"

"Huh? Yeah, Dad?" Twice my age, Commander Michael McGann had a funny way of calling all his friends "Dad." He raised his bushy white eyebrows and lowered the sports section of the newspaper. I hated to interrupt him. Tearing Mike away from the sporting news, his only vice, was a risky proposition, but I figured this was important. We were headed for a few days of yardwork on his property up at Volcano. I had wanted to make a sacrifice to Pele, both
because we were so close to the volcanic activity and because the Rainbow football team was opening its season against Iowa the following Saturday.

McGann and I were slouching side by side in the Banzai Air interisland terminal, anxiously awaiting our champagne flight to Hilo so we could cure our hangovers. Rosie, Mike's wife, sat next to him on the other side, studying her astrological forecast.

He inquired again, "What is it, Daddy-O?" His off-white eyeballs struggled to focus.

"I forgot to buy the gin," I moaned. He stared at me. "The gin; to toss into Halemaumau. Remember?"

The Commander meditated.

"We'll score some over there, Dad," he offered confidently. "They hustle gin on the Big Island too."

I sagged back into my hangover, relieved by his fatherly assurance.

The Commander rotated in his wife's direction. "Hey, Rosie, remind me to stockpile enough Steamlager to carry our team through the weekend."

"I'll make a note of it," she said. "And you boys know how you like to eat dry-roasted peanuts during those beer breaks. We should get a couple cases of Plunker's peanuts, too."

"Plunker's?" Mike questioned, clearing his throat noisily. "Are they contributing to Rainbow Fever too?"
"No," I interjected heatedly.

"Hmmm," he mused, smoothing the sports section with a contemplative gesture, his hands starting to shake a bit. "Maybe we should shop around for a community-oriented peanut."

"Well, dear," Rosie soothed, sensing Mike's rising temper, "we'll buy Plunker's--because you know it's your favorite--and then you can just fire off a substantial check to the University of Hawai'i Athletic Department."

This seemed to ease his mind. He nodded approvingly. "Should I wait till we come back, or should I shoot the check over from the Big Island?"

I tendered a suggestion: "They must have Epistolary Expresso or something like that in Hilo."

"Overnight delivery--now there's a plan-and-a-half," the Commander beamed with enthusiasm.

A voice came crackling faintly over the loudspeaker: "Ladies and gentleman, Banzai Air's champagne flight #321 is now ready for boarding."

The three of us slogged the half-mile to the plane, and though we moved briskly through the downpour, the heavy rain struck me with a kind of terrible foreboding about our pilgrimage. The worry must have shone on my face. As we toweled off before wedging our way into the seats, McGann said reassuringly, "No sweat, Dad, we'll get the booze."
Now I knew that Mike and Rosie were a bit skeptical about the idea of throwing gin into Halemaumau. But since they do own a home very near the caldera, and Mike is the ultimate Rainbow fan, he was willing to give it a shot. After all, as he put it, "We test a little of that gin for quality control purposes before we pass it along to Pele, right, Dad?"

I scoured the liquor shelves of every store we went to, and even after we'd sent off the check, bought all our supplies, including three cases of Steamlager and one case of Plunker's, I made them stop at every store on the way up to Volcano.

"Hey, Dad," Mike pleaded frantically, "how about we just wait till we get up to the commissary at Kilauea Military Camp. I'd like to make it up the mountain pronto. I want at least to see the yard before dark."

I was desperate. "Would they sell liquor at a military commissary?" I queried.

"Is the Pope Catholic?" Rosie rejoined, looking up from close study of her biorhythm charts.

"Get in the car, Dad," the Commander urged strongly.

I sunk into the back seat, and we continued forging our way up the mountain.

After we'd deposited Rosie off at the house and iced down the beer, Mike and I proceeded in hushed silence to the
KMC commissary. After the ex-Navy Commander flashed his I.D.
card at the door, we headed for the rear of the little store.

"Seeeeee," McGann exclaimed, as we stood breathlessly admiring the vast array of glistening liquor bottles, "I told you they'd have the goods." We turned to each other and shook hands. Then I selected a gleaming pint bottle.

"Better get two, Dad," Mike warned. "Remember, you're forced to drink some yourself before you toss what's left over the edge."

"I bow to your discretion," I agreed, nodding my head in deference to his wise suggestion. It was easy to see that those years of command had molded his mind into the proverbial steel trap.

After mumbling over the price tags, we strategically selected a single quart bottle.

Coming out of the commissary parking lot, we turned right onto the Crater Rim Road that wound around to the Halemaumau lookout.

Suddenly I gasped and pointed. "Mike!"

No answer.
"McGann!!"
No answer.
"Commander!!"

"Hmmm? Sorry, Dad. I was admiring the thumb on that
redhead in the red dress over there trying to hitch a ride." He nodded across the road.

"Yeah!" I seconded. "I bet she'll get a ride. Some dress, huh? What a wild looking woman! On our way back, if she's still there, maybe we could give her a lift?"

"You can say that again," the Commander grinned.

We parked the car, then embarked upon our solemn trek toward the crater. The sky was heavily overcast, and the sharp, freezing wind cut through us.

"Let's start sharing this bottle right now," McGann advised, his voice shaking from the cold.

"A timely decision," I agreed through my chattering teeth, nearly biting off my tongue.

We continued fortifying ourselves until we were safely enveloped in the rosy, protective glow of the medicinal gin.

The crater overlook was jammed with tourists. We kept weaving farther down the trail.

The two of us were slapping our hands together because of the cold. "Here," I slurred, raising the bottle with considerably less effort, "warm up those hands."

We had meandered quite a distance past the tourist lookout. To lob the bottle now, though actual weight was becoming less and less of a problem, might involve a bit of athletic ability. The lip of the crater looked to be quite a ways off.

310
"Should I walk over to the edge and drop it in?" I suggested brightly. It looked as if Commander McGann were reliving his naval voyages around the Cape. Lurching back and forth, he attempted to balance his camera for visual documentation purposes.

"No way, Dad. This'll make a better photograph," he discerned as he practiced his new juggling act with the costly Nikon.

"Here goes," I yelled, pausing briefly to further reduce the contents of the bottle and thus enhance my chances for a successful toss.

"For us and the Bows!" Mike cheered from behind the rocking camera.

Up, up, up went the bottle. Down, down, down, went the bottle. It obviously lacked about half the required distance. But at the last moment an updraft out of nowhere boosted the bottle up and over the crater's edge.

McGann and I fought to focus on each other in amazement.

"Did you see that?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," he replied. "Pele must've really wanted that gin."

"It's a miracle," I said.

"We must do this more often," Commander McGann affirmed.
By the time we staggered back to the car the wind had died, the air was warm, and the sun shone in a perfectly blue sky.

Back at the house Mike voted we commence with the yardwork.

"I'll get the tools!" I shouted. I opened the refrigerator and pulled out a frosty Steamlager six-pack.

"Don't forget the peanuts," Commander McGann cautioned.

"And the opener," I added, saluting him.

We sat down in the yard and began working on the beer. After a long, long silence while we stared off into space, Mike and I suddenly turned to look at each other. Without a word we clinked our bottles together, nodded our heads emphatically, and toasted Pele one more time.

"I do believe," Mike announced, "that those boys from Iowa are going to have a tough time of it."

"Yup," I chuckled, "those Hawkeyes had better look sharp. I don't think they really know what they're up against."

312
I still remember the day, it was a Friday night, all of us decided to have a few. You know what I mean when I say "have a few." Some people were playing trumps. I can't remember who, but someone caught a flying roach--grabbed it, and dared anyone to eat it. You know, one of those big ones that fly around your kitchen at night. I said, "If everyone pays a dollar each, I'll eat it." I think it was Spuds who said, "Burry up! Everybody pay a dollar. Manute is going to eat the roach."

Guy Mello
STRANGE FUN

TOO SMART TO SLOW DOWN

A one-roach play in one act

Scene: An aging cockroach, his long wings showing the wear of small cracks and a dulling luster, stands outside the screen door of a house in Honolulu. The stage is dimly lit, suggesting the nearly complete darkness of night--that time of night when humans have gone to sleep and roaches move about with the kind of freedom that they can never enjoy during daylight hours. Still, there are always risks for roaches, even in the dead of night. But this particular roach, called "Old McGann" by the million generations of cockroaches born after him, has lived long because he has learned from the fatal mistakes of others. Old McGann is as streetwise as any roach you will ever encounter.

Hungry. Always hungry.
Feel it feel it. Sniff it sniff it.
Under the door. Push push push push push.
Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.
Walk walk walk walk walk. Walk walk walk walk walk.
Step on a crack, break your mother's back.
Oops, sorry, Mom. Oops, sorry, Mom. Oops, sorry, Mom. Oops, sorry, Mom. Oops, sorry, Mom. Oops, sorry, Mom ...
wherever you are.
Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.
Walk walk walk walk walk. Walk walk walk walk walk.
Object.
Sniff it sniff it. Rubber object.
Sniff it sniff it. Two rubber objects.
Feel it feel it. Slippers. Unoccupied.
Sniff it sniff it. What a mess. All these guts. Must have known him.
Walk walk walk walk walk. Walk walk walk walk walk.
Obstruction.
Feel it feel it. Feel it feel it.
Concrete step.
Up, walk up, walk up, walk up. Up! Stop.
Clean myself?
Yes.
Suck suck lick. Suck suck lick.
That's enough.
Walk walk walk walk walk.
Sniff it sniff it. Feel it feel it.
Dog dish.

Up, walk up, walk upsidedown, walk upsidedown, walk up, walk up. Up!
Feel it feel it.
Check left, check right--

Hey, George, how's it going? Long time no see.
Who are all these new kids?
All yours?
Congratulations.
Cigar? Sure, thanks. Mmmm, bubblegum.
Chew chew chew chew chew. Chew chew chew chew chew.

How's the Missus? Recovered yet?
Dead, huh? How long?
One hour? Sprayed?
Slippered. Too bad. Thought I smelled her over there.

Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.

Brought 'um to the bowl, huh? Feeding frenzy.
Wanted McDonald's! Kids these days. Better get used to it.
Dog food's the best.
Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.

Seen Ed?
Dead, huh? How?
Slippered.

Seen Bob?
Dead, huh? How?
Slippered.

Seen John?
Dead, huh?

Seen Joe?
Ron?
Kimo?
Ralph?

All slippered! Too bad.

Hour ago? Too bad. Smelled 'um all.

Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.

These kids--name 'um yet?
Junior! All Juniors?
Oh. Junior-One, Junior-Two--good idea. Let 'um pick their
own names, if they grow up.

Time to eat, George. See ya 'round.
Down, slide down, slide down. Down!
Feel it feel it. Sniff it sniff it.

Munch munch munch munch munch.
Munch munch munch munch munch.

Eh, kid. You, Junior! Get your feelers outta my face. And
clean the crumbs off those things, would yah!
Jeez, what a slob.
Don't know how to do it! Whatayah mean you don't know how to
do it?
Some father. Some training.
Okay, listen.
Bend it down. Bend it. Not both of 'um. One at a time.
Now stick it in your mouth. That's it. Suck it. Pull it through
while you suck it. That's it.
Now you got it, kid.
So beat it.
And by the way, ingrate, you're welcome!
Munch munch munch munch munch.
Munch munch munch ... munch ... mun ...
Stop! Feel it feel it.
Check left ... munch ... check right ... munch ... check--

The jingle ... that bouncing. Vibrations. The jingle chain
jingle chain--

317
FIDO RAID!  FIDO RAID!

George!
Get your kids to the bottom of the bowl!
George?
Listen up! Everybody dig to the bottom of the bowl!

Dig down dig down dig down dig down.

Hug the plastic!

That mouth like a cave and those grinding white fangs.
Juniors being sucked up like whipped cream and chocolate sauce.
Sometimes I think Fido likes us more than his nuggets.

Jingle chain jingle chain getting softer. Vibrations fainter.

Up. Dig up, dig u--Jeez! Must have been hungry. Clean myself off.
Suck suck lick. Suck suck lick.

Up, walk up, slide down, walk up, walk up, slide down, walk up. Up!
They're all gone? Where's George?
Check left. Check right. Check up. Check--
Oh, George!
Down, walk down, walk down, walk upsidedown, walk upsidedown,
walk down. Floor.

Sniff it sniff it. Feel it feel it.
George! Jeez, George. Two feelers, half a head, one leg.
Too bad. No one left. Just me.

Water. I want water.
Dog dish? Uh uh.
Sink? Too high.
Dishwasher? Maybe.
Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.
Dishwasher? Yes.
Walk walk walk walk walk. Walk walk ... walk ... walk ...
Vibrations. Slipper steps. Getting louder.

Ahhhhh! Bright light! Blinding!

SLIPPER RAID! SLIPPER RAID!
Dishwasher! Dishwasher!
Run run run run run.

Slipper slap whoosh wind.
Run run run run run.
Slipper slap whoosh wind.
Slide, baby, slide.
Slipper slap whoosh wind.
Push push squeeze. Push push squeeze.

    Darkness breathe.

Check left. Check right. Check up. Check down.
Clean myself?
Not now.
Object.
Sniff it sniff it. Feel it feel it.
Wheel? ... Wheel? Rolling wheel! Bright light! Blinding!

Slipper slap whoosh wind.
Run run run run run.
Slipper slap whoosh wind.
Fly, baby, fly!

Upside down. Ceiling.
Clean myself?
Not now.
Walk walk walk walk walk.
Look for darkness.
Walk walk walk walk walk.

320
Ahhh! [cough] Death cloud.
Door! Door!
Run run run run run. [cough]
Don't breathe.
Run [cough] run [cough] run. [cough]
Run down, run down. Down!
Out the door.
Darkness.

Fly fly. [cough]
Fly fly. [cough]
Land. [cough]

Sniff it sniff it. Feel it feel it.
Tree trunk. Mossy.
Breathe.
[Cough]
Breathe.
[Cough]
Breathe.
Clean myself?
Not now.
Water.
Wash it off.
Stream? No.
Fish pond? Maybe.

[Cough]

Breathe.

[Cough]

Breathe ...

Breathe ...

Breathe ...
"Is that it?" I said, looking down the road at the large shape coming towards me. The shape became distorted as it passed through the curving heat waves that floated atop the asphalt, creating a hazy effect, almost like a dream.

Steven Ginoza
A DAY'S WAIT

MAINTAINING VOLCANO

"Sheee-it! Dammit, Ralph, what the hell is the matter with this freakin lawnmower?" Ralph's weedwhacker hummed on. "Yo, Commander!"

Ralph released the trigger and cupped his hand to his ear. "Eh? What's that you said, Dad?"

Lanning shook his head in disgust. "I said, what gives with this lawnmower?"

Commander Williams eyeballed him from behind a fast-emptying green beer bottle. His bushy white eyebrows knitted together into an expression of deep concern. "I dunno, Lanning. It's the top of the line model. Sears' best. Maybe it's Volcano, the altitude. Four thousand feet. Air gets pretty thin up here."

He tossed his empty bottle toward the garage door and walked over to where his sweating compatriot now attempted the all-American way of fixing machines: Lanning kicked the lawnmower sharply and ripped savagely at the cord. "Altitude, my ass!" he yelled. BRRRRRRRP! Nothing.
"Let me give it a shot, Dad," the Commander suggested calmly, taking the situation firmly in hand. Bending slowly, he examined both sides of the black plastic grip, flipping it over thoughtfully in his palm. Then, with more shoulder and back muscle than wrist or elbow action, he pulled smoothly, without jerking, at the ripcord. BRRRRRRRP! . . . BRRR . . .
BRRRR . . . BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR! The engine purred.
"Voila!" Commander Williams exclaimed, holding the gas feed bar firmly with one hand while saluting his co-worker crisply with the other. "Go hustle us up dos cervezas," he shouted over the roar of the engine.

"Cervantes?"

Ralph let up on the throttle and flashed a peace symbol. "Two more beers, Dad." Then the salute.

"Oh. Aye, aye, sir," Lanning replied, returning the thirty-eight-year precision salute with a blundering attempt of his own.
He turned back the way he had come, the rhythm of the engine pounding in his ears. He began to doubt the reality of what memory told him.

James Joyce
A PAINFUL CASE

20-20 NIGHT VISION

We'd parked on the Diamond Head side of the Aloha Tower complex and were working our way around to the Ewa end pier. I don't know. When it comes to outdoor lighting, I believe in a romantic hierarchy. Best would be a moonlit, starry night. Next, I'd prefer the old-fashioned streetlamps, those mellow, dull white bulbs that seem to exist primarily to let you know where the telephone poles are so you don't walk into them, or run into them with your car. Last choice, before stark daylight, would be halogen. Neon, I don't even want to talk about. It's funny. No matter how many times I've walked under halogen streetlights, they always seem like something recent—a brand new technological advance. Even if I'm traveling a route I've wandered a hundred times or more.

"Remember Creamsicles?" she asked.

I stopped walking and looked at her. "Yeah, I do. They still make them, huh? Don't they? They're called Orange Bars, or something pretty generic like that, right?"

This was not a test.
"Well whatever," she continued. "Just subtract the white swirls from the orange swirls, and here we are, right now. Creamsicle orange."

I contemplated what she'd just said. "That's orange sherbet. That's right, here we are, blindingly electric, albeit low-voltage--" I paused and looked into the dark-centered amber eyes examining me. "Bulbs. At least on this end. And we're definitely artificially colored at this moment. Right now."

She laughed. The hollow sound echoed off the concrete barrier, solid enough, according to some engineering major, to prevent us from dropping into the dark, greasy water.

"And to top it off . . . " She dropped my hand and rubbed at her chin, thinking about the next move.

And to top it off, I continued silently, our hands must be melting--the kind of sweat that comes from new love? Drunk love? Maybe? Maybe not?

She interrupted my mental monologue. "We wonder if someone's gonna close the goddamn freezer door before we disappear."

"Ahhh, maybe not," I said. "And the report states that there were only two small pools of a chemically engineered liquid to be found on the scene. Unfortunately, . . . " I stared off into the harbor, searching for a good finishing line. "Unfortunately, all that remained of the two friends was . . . " My mind had trouble clicking. "A rainbow-like
puddle of discolored, previously refrigerator-dependent ooze. They were definitely two members--in their transitional state of existence--of the 'I-guess-I-helped-rip-a-massive-hole-in-the-ozone generation."

She shook her head, a little confused at my stuttered reply. "Man, I don't get drunk often enough anymore. This is great. How 'bout you? You drink a lot these days?"

I scratched at my hair. "Depends what you mean by a lot."

"You know," she said, beginning to skip and bounce a bit, throwing my mind back to embarrassing days all those years ago when disco was the dance everyone was supposed to be able to move to, "memory is actually divided into individual scenes."

"Uh huh," I mumbled without wondering about it, checking the way my feet might trip according to her lead.

"It's a kind of freeze-frame reality, like a photo album."

I pictured a spinning mirrored ball. "Yeah?" I encouraged, wishing she would continue, blinded by the light I vaguely pictured glinting off hundreds of tiny, revolving mirrors into my eyes.

"Or maybe a plastic carousel of slides."

"Uh," I grunted, nodding at the feet I knew were mine as they shuffled clumsily along the sidewalk.
"Sooooo, imagination--" She stopped and faced me, swinging my hand too fast for standing still, back and forth, back and forth. "Are you following me?" she asked.

"Of course! College grad, you know," I muttered, smiling at her belt buckle before returning attention to my clumsy foot movements.

Her pace returned to normal. "Sooooo, imagination, I think, is what makes those still snapshots move."

The lecture stopped. I raised my head in time to catch her wiping at the one dark brown-amber eye I saw almost in profile. "Just like those little flip-books we used to show each other. So excited, remember?" She chuckled. The eye looked across to Sand Island. "We used to show them to each other and say, 'See how it looks just like it's moving?'" She whipped my hand forward again. "But it's not just the video once imagination moves in." Our hands banged against the concrete wall above Honolulu Harbor. "It's the audio, too. Imagination supplies the dialogue, the good old conversation that works out in the way we wish things had happened. That's how memory actually fools us. Like the flip-book, maybe. Except with sound."

I nodded my head, fending off an orange termite that wanted to fly up my nose. After I'd slapped at the winged intruder, I actually thought about what I guessed she'd just said. I broke the silence. "What the heck are you talking about, Kathy?"
She laughed out into the dead water. "Too much beer, too much wine, too much tequila, and definitely not enough champagne. Eh, Lanny, just let me know if this gets boring, okay?" She laughed even harder and leaned over the edge.

Suddenly her profile seemed to rise up and out, like mountains building, a collision of tectonic plates.

"Well, uh--Man, Kathy, you grew, or what?" I jerked twice at her arm. No response. "If what gets boring?" Our fingers slipped a little in their sweaty slots.

"Aren't you listening to me?" She dropped my hand. Her hand shook up and down in the humid waterfront air. A temporary drying, I realized. A brief evaporation reprieve.

I was about to apologize; somewhere way off in the thick air a cannon boomed. My subject shifted. "Is that a ship coming or going?"

A momentary guilt complex, not knowing what she'd just been talking about, made me not shake my hand in the damp air. Instead, as I dropped my hand to my side, I ran my fingertips over the hot palm, a subtle, undetectable move.

Our hands drier and a little cooler, we reached for each other again and walked silently for a while. I could feel the sweat trickle down my back. A termite landed on my neck. I reached up and gently rubbed it away, hoping not to kill it. We were walking on the wooden pier now. We came to the water's edge. I could hear the tiny wave pulses lapping
at the underside of the structure, but I couldn't focus well enough to see the water actually move.

"Look," I said, stooping down and picking up a small cardboard spool. It was an empty streamer roll. Some of the crepe paper remained attached, crumpled and limp. The dye transferred instantly to my fingers.

"Wow!" she exclaimed. "Score! What, brah, we goin t'row pahty, o wot?"

Very funny. I said, "I used to be afraid to throw these things when we saw someone off down here."

"Deadly weapon?" she asked, letting go of my hand.

I tried not to sway, closed my eyes, and smiled at the joke. "Yeah, but not really." Opening my eyes, I stepped to the edge of the pier, took a massive windup, and launched the cardboard cylinder out into the ocean as far as I could. A vision of going head first into the dark water shot through my mind. Recovering, I said, "You know, way back then, I was a tiny, little kid. Even my sister got into tossing those streamers. She could toss 'um far enough so that they reached the railings and hung over the side. But not me. I canna tell you how many of those spools, fully loaded, I threw into this harbor. Or banged off the hull. Dudly weapon, maybe. I don't ever remember getting one to hang from the rails."

I squatted and looked over toward Sand Island. She rested her hand on my back. "Yes," she murmured, "yeah. I
think more people were sailing on Matson than were flying in airplanes back then. You know, Lanny, no matter how often my parents brought me down to see someone off, it always seemed like the first time. Coming down here was so much fun, a big event, right? Almost like a holiday." She stopped.

"Like Christmas," I agreed.

"Or New Year's Eve," she added. "So damn colorful, what with all those streamers. Chinese New Year's, or something like that."

"Silent fireworks."

"Blowing around in the wind."

"Dragons churning."

"All that happy noise."

"You know, Kathy, my folks have this 8 x 10 photograph of themselves and two other couples sitting in the lounge of the Lurline, or something." I reached in my pocket, pulled out a cigarette, and lit it with some difficulty. Finally, exhaling into the windless air, I said, "And they're all dressed to kill. Tuxedos, evening gowns. I don't even know who the heck these other guys are, but they must have meant a lot to my folks, because that picture is one they framed and hung up on the wall in their bedroom."

I swung my feet over the edge of the dock. Kathy sat down next to me. That's what I like about her. She's not one of those women who worry about whether clothes get dirty.
"I never asked them who those people are. I don't even know if they'd remember. That must've been so long ago."

She elbowed me. "Of course they remember. You was listening to me, right? Pictures. Mem'ry. Das it, Lan--"

"Actu'lly," I interrupted, "those sailings weren't really like a holiday. I mean, we never went any place. Did you? We were always staying put. Everybody else was going off on these great romantic cruises."

"Yeah, man, depressing, yeah, Lanning? I never went on one either. Oh, sniff sniff, boo hoo. We so deprived." She chuckled, then reached for my cigarette, took a drag, and coughed. "God, Lanny, I can't believe you're still doing this to yourself after twenty years. This shit'll kill you."

She flicked the butt into the water.

"Eh, Ms. Ecology, you shouldn't do stuff like that."

She looked at me, coughed again, and laughed. "Oh, but it's okay to dump cardboard streamer spools into the water, huh, Mr. Aloha Aina?"

I didn't say anything, just nodded.

She put her hand around my wrist and squeezed, hard.

Ah! My mother has arthritis, I thought. Time for me to go back to the dermatologist and get all my moles checked.

"Look," she said, pointing into the gently rippling water.

I leaned over a bit and stopped swinging my legs. My eyes fought to focus. "What?"
"Fish!" she exclaimed.

A school of tiny silver-orange fish waged swimming war against the mightiest of tides. I looked over at her Creamsicle-minus-vanilla profile, that one eye peering intently at the harried little group. I tasted again the woody, splintered texture of the ice cream bar stick, like a doctor's tongue depressor, only narrower, thinner. All those times I bit the stick to pieces just to suck and savor every last drop of flavor, ice cream or wood.

"They look jes like a flock of birds," she said.
"Going south for the winter, or something."
"Flying under water," I agreed.
"Wet feathers."
"Hard to breathe."

Off in the distance, the cannon fired again, farther away this time. The percussion, the rush of sound, echoed, bounced around in the harbor.

"Definitely leaving," she said.
I sucked in a long breath. "Did I ever tell you how much I used to hate going to the doctor?" I asked.
"The time you bit the thermometer in half?"
"Yeah, that's right, how'd you remember that?"
She tapped at her head with a dark orange forefinger. "Mind like one steel trap."

"That was the worst, man. I mean, my mom grabbed my cheeks and pinched my mouth open, just like she does with the
dogs if they’re chewing on something she doesn’t want them to. Then she forced me to spit all the glass pieces and mercury into her hand. Geez, da nurse was scared shitless. But my good old mom got her to snap out of her coma by asking her to get me a drink of water so I could rinse the last of the stuff out."

Kathy said, "Do you ever wonder if some of that mercury is like settled in your body someplace."

I shook my head and reached for another cigarette. "No, not really. I hope."

"At least you’re still alive."

"Yeah, when last seen," I agreed.

Suddenly she bounced up and began skipping down the dock. "Argh, Charlie Brown." I stood up, knocked the lit tip off my cigarette, and dropped the butt into my shirt pocket. By the time I could lope after her, she was dancing in circles fifty yards away, her hands swinging at her sides. I slowed to a walk. Supposedly in training for the Honolulu Marathon, I didn’t want to risk injury by running in my slippers.

Just as I came within a few feet of her gyrating body she stopped and threw her hands up. "Ah! I can’t see!"

Shaken, I stopped. "Huh? Why?"

She put her hands on her hips, cocked her head to one side, and said, "Because I’ve got my goddamn eyes closed."
"Very, very funny, Katherine. You shoulda been a damn comedian." I took a step toward her.

"Don't move," she ordered, then dropped to her knees. I half-laughed and took another step.

"Don't come any closer," she warned.

"What? Are you kidding me, or what?"

She looked up. "No, I'm not kidding you Mr. Lee. I lost my stupid contact." She continued inspecting the ground.

I looked down too.

She stood up and examined the front of her dress. "Hah! Here it is." After she'd carefully plucked the contact off her dress, she stuck it in her mouth. A moment later she balanced it on the tip of her finger, tilted her head back, then popped it in her eye. "Ah, that's better." She blinked and looked around.

"May I approach you now?"

"Only if you can catch me!" she screamed, about to run away again.

"Eh!" The sound of his voice froze us in our tracks. "What da hell you guys stay doing?"

The flashlight beam flickered over our faces. Kathy looked at me and grimaced.

"Well, ah, we're . . . . We just came from our twentieth high school class reunion, er, officer, and we were looking at the water."
"You canna read?" he demanded, shining his flashlight at the no trespassing sign.

Kathy tiptoed back to my side.

"Oh, yeah," I said, "sorry, sir. We didn't see that, sorry. We're leaving right now."

The security guard spat a huge wad of something at the ground, mumbled something about fuckin' kids, and disappeared, melting back into the shadows.

"Geez," Kathy murmured, "that was pretty scary."

We reached for each other's hands and meandered back the way we'd come.

"So what did you think of the reunion?" I asked.

"Well," she laughed, "the girls are definitely holding up better than the guys."

"Eh!" I let go her hand, stopped, and faced her. "I think some of the guys look pretty good."

"Oh, yeah, Lanning Lee. Like, uh, oh, let me guess maybe you, huh?"

"Well, yeah, maybe me, huh? For one."

She smiled. "Look at all that gray hair, man. You look so old."

"Kathy, like I said, you shoulda been a comedian."

"You ever heard of Grecian Formula, Lanny?"

We resumed winding toward the highway again.

"Kathy, do I actually strike you as a Grecian Formula kind of person?"
"Well, this is the first time I've seen you in a long time."

"Then did I ever strike you as a Grecian Formula kind of person."

She was snickering now. Serious again, she said, "Not until I saw you tonight."

"Shit! I am not a Grecian Formula kind of guy."

"Then why don't you do what I do, Lanny? Pull'um out."

"Oh yeah, pull'um out, huh? Eh, at least I got hair. If I were to pull out all of my gray hair right now, I'd be bald."

She reached up and ruffled my gray-brown hair.

"Ooooh, Lanny, but you really do look kinda old."

I pushed her hand away, but I didn't argue. "You sure it's not the light?" I asked.

She smiled, but not in a very cheerful way.

Agreed. We both looked older than we used to, but I was too polite to say anything more about it.

By the time we reached the parking lot my legs hurt, and I could feel a pounding headache coming on. The breeze had picked up and my shirt had dried. My underwear was still damp from all the exercise, though, and I felt uncomfortable, all in all.

Between the cars, I reached in my pocket and pulled out both sets of keys. I gave hers to her.
Reaching up, she plucked a handful of plumeria blossoms. Before handing them to me, she nuzzled them with her nose.

I asked, "So is your husband going to fly in and join you?"

She put her key in and unlocked the door. "Nah. I told him this was my vacation. He's taking care of the kids. We don't spend enough time apart. Sometimes you need a break from each other, you know?"

I nodded, but I didn't really know. I've never been married. Somehow, I thought, if I were married to this woman, I would want to be with her all the time.

Kathy slipped into the driver's seat, closed the door, and rolled down the window. "Well, thanks, Mr. Lee. This was a great idea."

The engine roared to life, then settled down.

"Kathy, do you think we can get together again before you fly home?"

"Why don't you call me," she suggested.

"You staying with your folks?" She nodded. I went over and leaned on the window. "You know, Ms. Friendly Skies, if you were, uh, single, this would be a fine time to ..." It was a joke.

Finally she smiled, then shook her head. "I guess," she said. She threw the stick into first.
I stood up and stepped back from the car. "Call me," she repeated. I waved as she disappeared onto Nimitz Highway.

"Damn." I jammed the key in the lock, threw myself into my car, and slammed the door. While I sat there, staring straight ahead, I gunned the engine, over and over. Grecian Formula. Her plumerias sailed out the window. Then, opening the door, I leaned over and carefully picked them up. Not really sure we'd be able to recognize each other the next time we met, I wanted something to remember her by.
"I know there is nothing to say. I cannot tell you--"
"No," I said. "There's nothing to say."
Ernest Hemingway
A FAREWELL TO ARMS

DIGGING OUR PITS

Jim, I'm dying out here. Where the heck are you?
He squinted out into the hot parking lot, shading his eyes from the bright sun.
Fruit juice. Jim brought some fruit juice this morning.
He went over to the ice chest and pulled out a pineapple-orange drink.
Yuck!
He checked all the other cans; they were all the same.
Finishing off the awful brew in three long swallows, he checked the empty asphalt lot again.
Geez, Jim, I'm dying, man. What's taking you so long?
I need some help here.
No beat-up, rusted-out blue Datsun wagon appeared magically. He grabbed the pick and continued hacking away at the hard ground.
I can't believe it. All this for horseshoe pits?
Well, if Jim doesn't come soon ... What was that line? He with the best ... No. That's not it.
His lungs felt like they would explode.
Oh, yeah. He who dies with the best tan wins.
He wiped the perspiration from his face with the dirty back of his hand.

Jim, I'm dying. Where's the cavalry? By the time he comes back, he could just throw me in this hole and toss the dirt back in. Kind of a memorial. Castle Memorial. Yeah. Just roll me over and in. I couldn't kick. Yeah. For one brief, shining . . .

He could taste the dust in his mouth and tried to spit. But his mouth was too dry again, too warm, too sticky. No more talk.

Come on, Jim. Where are you, buddy?

No, no more talk.

No more Jim.
CLOSE . . .

Eh, so I get one mo riddo fo axe. 'Kay? What da monkeypod wen say to da tree doctah? Geev up? Well, da monkeypod wen say, "Eef you no tink you can cut it, Doc, no go put yo' self out on top one limb." Catch? You folks catch o wot?

HOURS OF OPERATION

342