

Voices from the Writing Center: Fall '95

The Game of "Splitting a Sugar Cane"

by Ching-yeh Hsu, San Chung City, Taiwan

I was one of the children who was very short, but stood among the tall and crowded adults. I was not only interested in how the game was going, but also in who won the game. If Uncle Kao had won the game, I would have a part of the prize— sugar cane. It was a magical fruit that provided the sweetness of candy as well as the chewy texture of gum.

The game was a physical game which tested whether a player could use a long knife fast and correctly. Usually, the day my grandfather gave the wages to the workers, if it was a hot summer evening, they would share the cost of a bunch of sugar cane, and play the game of "splitting cane." In general, a cane stalk was five to six feet tall. The first step was that these players stood around in a circle and took a number. The second was that a judge closed his eyes and picked up a piece of cane at random. The third step was that the person who took number one would lay his long knife down flat on the top of the upright cane. Finally, he would raise his arm very fast and chop the cane, but without holding it, and split the cane lengthwise as far down as he could. And the length that he chopped was his prize. Sometimes one man could gain nothing in the game if he could not catch the cane immediately with his long knife before the cane fell down. However, if a man could split a whole cane stalk down to the ground, he could keep splitting the next one till he failed.

It was a cruel game rule, I thought. However, I was happy about the game rule because when the game was over, Uncle Kao always won a lot of canes. And he would request us to call him "uncle" and fairly give the same length of cane to the children of our family. I would ask him to cut the crude and hard skin away and to cut it into small pieces. And then I would sit in front of our house, on the door step, and enjoy the cane, which was sweet and chewy. In my childhood, it was difficult to combine both candy and chewing gum. The chewing gum was imported from the U. S. A. I only could have it on New Year's. Thus, you could guess how happy I was when I chewed the cane. I always chewed till it was very, very dry like a brush.

Uncle Kao was a hero for me. Even though he was not very tall, he was agile. I asked him why he had such beautiful tattoos on his arm and breast. He only smiled at me and said when I grew up, I would understand. I was always amazed by the cool tiger's head on his breast because he only wore his pants when he was working, and he had a dragon flying around his arm. I had asked my mom why Uncle Kao had such beautiful tattoos, but my mom forbade me to ask again. Uncle Kao was one of the workers in my grandfather's factory in Bamboo Grove Village, but he asked my grandfather to be his godfather. There was a secret between him and my grandfather. I did not know it until I went to high school.

Before I was born, Uncle Kao fled to Taipei from his hometown Chia-Yi, which was more than a hundred miles from Bamboo Grove Village. The gangsters fought for the power of black markets in gambling and prostitution. He was involved in a killing, and the gangsters were looking for him to get revenge. His sister's friend knew my grandfather and asked him to hide him in the small village. My grandfather asked him to confess his past mistakes and to change his life style. At last, he regarded Uncle Kao as a son and took care of the revenge of the gangsters. I did not know how my grandfather had the power to protect him, but I did know that the village people respected him and even the local gangsters did, too. He was like a judge for local people's arguments. My grandfather was a charming gentleman. Next time, I am going to tell you my grandfather's own stories.

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[Untitled]

by Bashir Yamini, Dolton, Illinois

It's not as easy as you may think to be a good criminal. This is why people are in prison. They simply slipped up and got caught. Many tasks have to be learned and performed. Just like any other success in life, it takes practice. Hot wiring a car may be the first step in criminal activity. The whole way of life as a criminal involves knowing how to make drugs and sell them for profit.

Many times you may hear that street thugs and dealers are stupid. They may not be well educated but by no means are they stupid. There's no way in hell a person who measures grams, set up spots, and organizes lookouts can be dumb. Living around this kind of environment and life style tends to get contagious. Feelings of wanting to fit in overcome morals. Car jacking and assault become glamorous to youngsters.

Money begins to flow into pockets like rivers. Pouches and stashes catch the mumps, and the women are now sweating hard. One of the biggest myths is that you can sell your product anywhere and get paid. There are territories involved. In some cases I know people who pay a fee to sell in a particular spot.

Yes, it's fast money and a person can drive around with hammers on a Benz, but is it worth it? Either you live or die, it always keeps you guessing. Opposing gangs and weight dealers tend to get greedy and want all the respect. Sometimes they order disruption of another spot that's getting hot. Back at the pad I know fools with drop-top Lexus's, trimmed in gold with chrome bones. Some of these cats are only twenty years old. They be hurtin' them as they creep down the strip.

It's sad but I have a brother who's wrapped up in that street life. I learned things by watching. I first learned how to peel a car when I was in the eighth grade. As I became older I began to learn more and more about drugs. One day I watched my boys' brother cook up drugs by using baking soda and 7-Up to double profit.

I've seen guns all my life growing up on the South Side of Chicago. Most people I know either have a gun or have access to one. My ace down the street has a 30-30 automatic

assault rifle. His uncle gave it to him just before he went to prison. I've seen weapons from AK47's to 38's to 357 mag's. The philosophy was come strapped or don't come at all. Every party I went to in high school at least one of the homies had a mag. It's just that sense of protection. I've always been timid around guns because I lost six of my boys to them in high school.

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The Icefield

by Hueying Tzou, Taiwan

It was Sept. 4, morning. We continued our trip along highway 93 to the south of Jasper. The scenery became different gradually. Some mountain peaks were covered with snow and some tree leaves had turned yellow or red, which made the picture more colorful and beautiful. It was just like a picture that you always saw on a postcard. My friends and I felt we were angels and lived in heaven; therefore, we could see such peaceful and wonderful views. At that time I also had little doubt that I was really a part of the scene. Highway 93 was built in the Rocky Mountains along a river. When we drove on it, I began to think how hard it was to build this road. I really admired those people who worked for the road construction at the beginning and thanked them

for their contribution so people have the opportunity to see the great view.

Down south, we arrived at the Columbia Icefield. Before the trip, a friend who had just come back from Canada told me that the Columbia Icefield was the one thing that I shouldn't miss during the trip. Actually, I expected to see it and had a spectacular experience. Far away from the Icefield, I already saw that it lay in front of us, and a lot of cars had parked in the front of the Toe, which is the front part of the Icefield. We wanted to go to the Icefield itself rather than the Toe only, although "Toe" sounded like a new and interesting name to me. It was impossible to go there by ourselves not only because our car didn't have snow tires but also we wouldn't be allowed to do it. If every tourist could drive on the Icefield, it wouldn't be kept so well now. We might not be able to see it then. A touring company had some special transportation that could take us to the Icefield. From the company's introduction, I knew that the front part is called "toe", the middle part is called "glacier", and the beginning part is called "icefield", which was where we wanted to go.

We bought the tickets and waited for the bus about 30 minutes. A bus took us to the Toe and transferred us to the snowmobile, which is a special vehicle that could drive on the Icefield. Fairly speaking, the snowmobile was another viewpoint for me. It is like a giant monster whose tires are higher than an adult. Its speed on the ice is less than 30 km/per hour but it can climb up a 30 degree slope without effort. Before the drive, the driver asked us to buckle the safety belts to get ready for the trip. Every tourist looked around to find the safety belt. You know what, there was not any belt there. The driver just tried to make us think that the trip was a little dangerous. Apparently, it was not true; thus we couldn't find the safety belts. When the snowmobile started to climb the slope, I began to imagine the mobile out of control and slipping down to the Toe. Of course, nothing happened. In fact, I didn't feel anything, but my muscle was a little tensed when the snowmobile was climbing.

We were allowed to stay there for 20 minutes. The Icefield is just like its name; per se it is a field of ice. You see nothing there but ice. The Columbia Icefield is the original source where many glaciers come from. The glacier that I stood on is Athabasca Glacier. The guide told us that the Icefield was formed 1.3 million years ago. Because the air pollution and the temperature on earth is getting higher every year, the Icefield has shrunk each year. I stood there and saw many mountains around the Icefield covered with snow. There were some small rivers (or you could call them creeks) on the Icefield. Sometimes these rivers disappeared and kept going underground (or under ice) then came out from other places. There were some holes on the Icefield. When you looked at those holes, if they were deep enough, you would find that the water is pure blue. That's because the ice absorbs all colors of light and only reflects the blue one. I tried to imagine the picture of 1.3 million years ago but failed. I touched the ice and knew that I and the ice of 1.3 million years ago coexisted. It was a strange experience and I just couldn't believe it. Was the ice back to the future or I returned to the past?

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[Untitled]

by Brandon Burrack, Arlington Heights, Illinois

When I was a young boy, I thought I wanted to be a fireman. Didn't everyone? That is when something strange happened to me.

It was December 25, 1983, and I was seven years old. The family gathered around the Christmas tree, and we all opened our gifts. That year I asked Santa Claus for a camouflage remote-control car; it was really cool. The car came with all the cool stuff a seven-year-old would ever want. The car came all put together and ready to go. For a month or so I had a great time with the race car, but I got sick of it.

One thing I did was to start taking parts of the car off. A couple of days later, I wanted to know how it worked. The first thing that came off was the top of the car. Next came the engine. Before I knew it, the car was in pieces. My parents weren't too happy with the whole idea. I started thinking from my parents' perspective. They just bought a fifty dollar car for a seven-year-old kid, and now when they came down the stairs, they saw it in pieces. They made me go to my room and told me to think about what I had done. As I walked up to my room, I grabbed my disassembled car.

When I got to my room, I thought about it for a while. I said to myself, "If I took it apart, why can't I put it back together?" An hour passed, and I was half-way done. Another hour passed, and the car was finished. I was so happy that I ran down the stairs and showed my parents. After that display of great craftsmanship, I got off the hook and was not grounded anymore. At first I thought it was luck, but then I realized it was a talent. There was another point in my life where I showed my parents that I had a little more talent than they thought.

To this day, my parents do not give me any static about not reading directions when I put things together. Whatever needs to be fixed around the house, my parents expect me to do the job. On the other hand, when I left for college, my parents knew that they could not count on me to fix things anymore.

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A Starry Night

by Tan Leng Hoay, Malaysia

I can still remember that memorable night. It was a cool, clear night. My friends and I were resting cozily on the beach after our dinner. We were all on a vacation and none of us allowed a single problem to bother us. We stared into the sky and tried to count the stars above us. The bright, full moon was shining and the waves reflected its shine slowly, as if there were stars glittering in the sea.

One of my friends, Lock, started to play his guitar. The rhythm rolled by us softly and gently. Jie started also to hum, following the rhythm. Seng, on the contrary, ignored the music and continued to talk to Jacky about his new job. Feeling a little lonely, I followed the tracks of two seagulls flying across the sea. They flew so quickly that before I could tell anybody, they disappeared into the dark. Their wings were silver-colored and, for a split second, I almost thought that they were falling stars. From the beach, we could see a nearby port which was decorated with bright spotlights. The port workers, who were each as small as an ant from our view, were still very busy. They were moving back and forth from the ships to the cargo storage. Jiun was fascinated by the moving workers at the port, and her eyes followed the workers carrying tons of cargo onto the huge, blue yacht. They made a very beautiful scene because the workers were wearing yellow shirts while working on the blue yacht. It looked just like the sky was filled with moving yellow stars. Suddenly, a strong "boom" broke into the silence. It caught all our attention: one of the cargoes dropped onto the blue yacht. We complained a little how this sudden sound struck us and went back to our usual position.

Time crawled by us. As it was getting late, the temperature around us began to drop drastically. We decided to set up a bonfire with charcoal and wood to keep us warm. After spending a great effort to find some dry leaves and dry wood, we created a monstrous, bright moving creature. After a while, the creature became tame and we enjoyed its company very much. It became harder and harder to see the blue yacht due to the mist that was slowly surrounding us, even though the white light house stood out in the dark, wide sea; it blinked all the time and gave us hope no matter how thick the mist was. Waves, which were still slow and peaceful sometimes, touched the ships and yachts that were swaying beside the shore.

Following the smell of food, I saw a warm burger stall that stretched its welcoming arm to us. The stall had a bright yellow roof, which was decorated with a colorful fluorescent light, and the smell of butter and patties

leaked out from the stall. In contrast to the peaceful sea, this side of the beach was vigorous and lively.

It was warm. We mingled around and time just flew past us. We talked all night without realizing that it was already three o'clock in the morning. We were all tired and decided to gather again some time. It had been a long night. We put out the fire together and walked back along the shore quietly to the hotel so that we would not wake the soft, sandy beach that had fallen asleep

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My First Job

by Wen-Huei Chang, Taiwan

I had my first "decent paid" job as a tutor when I was 18. Before that, the only job I could get was to distribute flyers for grocery stores on the streets.

We have a very rigorous education system in Taiwan. I didn't have much chance to work during high school because I had to study hard for the Entrance Exam for both senior high school and university. Luckily, I did well on those exams and got into the best university in Taiwan. So I decided to get some work experiences right after I enrolled in the university.

With the advantage of being a student in the best university, the best job I could find was either to be a private tutor or to teach in a tutoring school. As I had neither had teaching experience before, nor had a tutor when I was younger, I thought I had better start with the easier one—to be a private tutor first.

My first student was a 13-year-old junior high girl. She was really a shy girl. She hardly responded to my questions and sometimes I wondered if she fell asleep during the lesson. I taught her mathematics and general sciences. After a few weeks' study, she made only a little bit of progress. As she was my first student, I really wanted to teach her well. So I asked her if there was anything I could do to improve her learning.

"Well," she said, "I am always wondering if those boys notice me or not."

"What boys?" I was totally confused at this time.

"The boys from the boys' classes. They always swing by our class on purpose, talk loudly in front of our classroom, and try to make us look at them."

Finally, I got an idea about what happened. My student had the "junior high school girl's syndrome." When she was in elementary school, the girls and boys were studying and playing in the same class. After she came to the junior high school, the girls and boys were separated and no longer in the same class. The hope was that the students would concentrate on academic work and not think about boys-love-girls-thing and vice versa. But what really happened was, the high school students were extremely curious about the different gender. The more you forbid them to meet each other, the more they want to know about each other. And my student, the poor girl, was one of the victims.

I didn't know what to do at first. Although her parents hired me to teach math, I thought it was also important to let her know that it was not abnormal for her to think about boys sometimes. But this idea was not appreciated by her parents and her school teachers, who recognized a high school student should think about nothing but textbooks.

So, what about me? Do you think I was going to quit in this situation? Of course not! As this was my first "decent paid" job, I couldn't bear to quit. Also, as her father went to pick her up everyday after school to avoid other boys' "annoyance" since the girl told me her problem, there was not much I could do. So I just went back to the same old life: taught her the same boring math and science, and left the love business to someone who claimed they had more experience to deal with it.

One month later, as my student didn't have any chance to meet boys in school, I became the only "boy" available in her life. She wrote me a love letter.

I quit the job.

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[Untitled]

by Mark Singler, Chicago, Illinois

There were now three vaulters left, and I was in the lead because I had made all my attempts on my first try while the other two had not. All three of us cleared the next height, which gave me a new personal best. The only problem now was it took me all three of my attempts while it took the others only two. In order to qualify for the state meet, I needed to place either first or second. The only way I could qualify now was to clear the next height, hoping the other two didn't.

My first attempt was extremely important. I was psyched, my adrenaline was pumping. There was a huge crowd watching with my entire team rooting for me. I was ready. I stood on that runway, looking at the crossbar, thinking and believing I could do this. They called my name. I took one last look at the cross bar, glanced over at my coach; I believed it could happen.

I ran as fast as I could down that runway with only one intention: to clear it. As I ran down the runway, I was focused, the wind felt great at my back, everything was perfect. I attacked the cross bar like I have never attempted before. As I attacked the cross bar, I pushed as hard as I could on my pole to get the most reaction, but it was too much. I was so aggressive that my pole shattered.

I landed safely on the mat due to my forward momentum. The only problem now was I didn't have another pole, so I had to disqualify myself.

Knowing I didn't qualify really didn't bother me; even though I fell just short, I had jumped my best. I was extremely pleased with my accomplishments. I set a new personal best, tried my hardest, and that's all you can possibly do. Qualifying for the state meet two years in a row would have been a remarkable accomplishment, but I didn't. I didn't let this get me down. I looked on the bright side: I set a new personal best and was proud of the way I ended my pole-vaulting career—with a bang!—the breaking of my pole.

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[Untitled]

by Brian Bill, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Thinking back upon a place where I would go to get away, I would remember an area around the pond. My

friend, John, and I found this spot one day while looking for a place to smoke a cigarette. We had found a pack of cigarettes on the golf course. Being as naive as we were, we decided to try one. We were walking along near the pond and found an area just big enough to fit the both of us. There were bushes that leaned in around us to cover us from the outside world. On one side there was a log lying on the ground. It was just big enough to fit the both of us. We made this place our own little home. A place where we could have a smoke and feel like adults. Nobody here was ever going to tell us what to do. It was our spot, our place, our home.

Neither of us could take the cigarettes home with us so we got a sandwich bag to put them in. We hid them by a bush so whenever we would come back they would be there. Leaving the cigarettes there overnight would put our secret place to the test. Was it just our secret place or were we sharing it with someone else? I knew that if we returned the next day and they were still there undisturbed, then it was ours.

We returned the next day to find the cigarettes in the same place we had left them. Luckily we had placed them in a plastic bag, because it had rained the night before. If our cigarettes were spoiled, there would be no reason to come to our spot anymore. John and I had another cigarette. I don't think that either of us enjoyed the actual cigarette, but just the fact that we were smoking. One of us finally said, "This is gross!" Both of us agreeing, we put out our cigarette. I knew what this meant. I tried to convince myself that I liked it. I didn't want to stop coming to this place, but the consequences (sore throat, smelling like smoke, and worrying if our parents would find out) outweighed the feeling of independence. Since we weren't going to smoke anymore, we stopped going to our secret place. We even left the cigarettes there under the bush.

John and I, even though we weren't there but twice, shared many thoughts and ideas during our cigarettes. At that age, when you smoke a cigarette for the first time, you create a bond with whomever you share it with. A bond that hasn't been broken to this day. If you ask John about our spot today, he would definitely remember.

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Dreams come true?

by Shunji Miyauchi, Osaka, Japan

"I can do anything!" When I was a child, I believed in my potential power because I was a daydreamer. In fact, I could do anything like Superman in my fantasy. I could fly higher than a bird, and I could see through things as if I had X-ray eyes. I could run faster than a bullet. I didn't lose in any kinds of sports. I had a super intelligence. I was a super hero, a super star and a genius. I was so excited and happy that I couldn't stop spending a long time in my fantasy world. However, the reality differed from my fantasy. I couldn't win the race of sports meetings during my elementary school days. I was a member of the table tennis club while I was in junior high school, high school and university, but I couldn't leave any splendid results in competitions. I wasn't smart enough to pass the entrance examination of the university in one try.

Although I have been eager to be a hero in the real world, I haven't had the chance so far. I have been looking for a field where I can be a hero. While I worked for a company as a systems engineer, tennis was my favorite. I like watching the professional tournaments on TV as well as playing tennis on the court. Because my wife likes tennis too, we used to play tennis together as long as time permitted. Even in winter, we went to a public tennis court on weekends unless snow prevented us from using it. Also, we often participated in local tennis tournaments. We loved the tense atmosphere; all players want to win the game. Whenever I applied for a tournament, I expected that I could win the game and would be a hero as I had dreamed in my childhood. But the severity of the reality was the same as in the other cases. I lost in the first round in almost

all the tournaments.

Because I'm very busy, studying hard for an MA degree, now I don't have enough time to play tennis, though. Will the day when I'm a hero in the real world come at all?

Union Rats

by Courtney Johnson, Waterloo, Iowa

Inside the IMU, in front of the red doors of the Union Station, out facing the Union Pantry. . . .

Ah, the sights and sounds and smells of coffees and cappuccinos being sipped by students meeting between classes for something to eat and vast amounts of conversation.

The black woman with braids is talking about upcoming choir rehearsals to a man wearing the tan jean outfit.

The two girls in the corner with wide smiles are discussing what's going on this weekend so they can begin getting ready.

The three guys that just got here, carrying red trays full of food, are talking about how their teachers are trippers. "I can't believe it's due then either . . . it's due when?"

Little by little, the students, "Union Rats," come scurrying through the door next to the Union Pantry facing me.

Here comes a woman carrying a book bag, full of books, with a Coke in her hand and a smile on her face. She's uniquely dressed, in blue jeans and black chaps, two long French braids down the right and left sides of her head, with a black turtleneck.

"All My Children" is on the TV, surrounded by some of the rats watching, inconsiderately commenting here and there about who's doing who and so on while nibbling their food. Ah, life among the "rats."

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Fancy Shawl Dance

by Candice Sanache, Tama, Iowa

I wait, standing in my full fancy shawl regalia. I made almost every article of clothing in this light-blue fancy shawl outfit: my light blue shawl with the multi-colored fringe dangling and swaying as I spin and dance; my shiny butterfly-shaped cape with designs laying flat over the shawl in the back with the harness-like cape coming in the front; my shiny light-blue long-sleeved dress covered with a diamond-shaped appliqué sewn on the lower front part of the dress.

As I am eagerly waiting, I hear the drum starting to beat at a fast pace. Next, the lead singer starts to sing, then the rest follow. During that time, the other dancers and I begin dancing. I start off doing different kinds of steps and moves, gradually getting the hang of the song. The steps just come to me naturally; I'm not thinking of the steps that I'm going to do. I'm just out there simply enjoying myself and having fun. After four verses of the song, or maybe three to four minutes, the song is over and as we are breathing heavily, we all go line up in front of the judges, and the nervousness of the whole weekend is over in three to four minutes.

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What It's like Being a Sister

by Jenny Smith, Dubuque, Iowa

Being that there's only myself and my younger sister in the family, my sister and I tend to fight a lot. Ever since we were young, Danielle and I have always fought about anything and everything. Because we are four years apart, I think our lives are so different. It's hard most of the time for us to understand what each other is going through. The hardest part to cope with is fighting on an everyday basis. I guess I've always seen her as my bratty little sister. The person that I really see now is an athletic, outgoing person.

Danielle has always been involved in sports. Ever since we were little, Danielle would look up to me and try to be like me. Since I was the one in gymnastics, she always tried to be like me. At times I hated it. I always thought that I could never be myself because she was always trying to imitate me. The funny thing is now I don't see her as that same person. I see her as a growing adult, trying to make her own decisions and taking on some responsibility. I never thought that was something I could realistically see happen.

I know my sister looks up to me, but sometimes it's so annoying. When we were little, my mom always used to make me baby-sit Danielle. I always got so sick of it. Whenever I wanted to go somewhere, I always had to drag Danielle with me. That's one of the reasons why I think we fought so much. Also, when we were little, my mom always made me include Danielle in everything. I can remember how many times when I would go over to the neighbor's house and my mom would make me take Danielle because she would be so bored sitting at home. I also think my mom always made me bring Danielle because she felt sorry for her since there was no one in our neighborhood that was her age. So, of course, she was always tagging along with my friends and me. When we were little, I don't think we ever got along.

Now that we have both have grown up, it has gotten a little easier. Now we actually have some things in common. Sometimes she comes to me for my advice. Things have changed since I've left home. I really think she misses me. The other night she ended up calling me at school for my advice. I think this was the first time she came to me to talk about boys and new high school problems and concerns. Let me tell you, she has never come to me for advice in the past. I thought that was so weird. That was the first time I have really talked to my sister on the same level.

This weekend I ended up going home. I really needed to get away for a little bit. My sister asked me to come home to help her get ready for her first homecoming dance. She's a freshman now in high school, so she's always worried about what she looks like. The whole time I was helping her get ready, I couldn't believe how much she has actually grown up. She ended up looking so nice. She wore a short, little black dress. The dress was plain and simple, but it looked flattering because it fit her like a glove. Her hair was done up in a French twist and she wore a little bit of make-up. I couldn't believe how mature she looked and acted. It was like she grew up over night and was a whole new person. I ended up feeling a little old because the high school dances I once went to were over. Now I felt as if I was on to bigger and better things.

The idea that my sister and I are now starting to get along and appreciate each other surprises me the most. Now I think we both see each other as friends rather than enemies.

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The Days at My Grandpa's Home When I was Young

by Ming-Ching Lo, Taiwan

My grandpa liked to plant flowers in his front yard. He had various plants in his garden. Orchids were his favorite. For protecting his lovely flowers, he set up a high brick wall to keep the neighborhood children away. But he did not realize we, his beloved granddaughters, were the big monsters of his flowers. During the hot summer noon, adults always took a nap. I was only seven years old at that time, and my younger sister and I did not like to waste our time napping. We liked to play kitchen in my grandpa's front yard. We picked up some leaves and pebbles as vegetables; we took some water from a flowering can; we picked up some twigs as chopsticks. But these alone were not enough. I decided we needed something colorful. The beautiful, colorful orchids were just perfect for "cooking." I chopped my grandpa's orchids with my toy knife! When my grandpa woke up from his sweet nap, he faced a nightmare. His face turned green, and he yelled at my grandma loudly for not keeping an eye on his lovely flowers, but he could not be angrier when he found my other masterpiece.

My grandparents were very rich before Taiwan's economic revolution in the 1940s. They kept lots of antiques at home. I found it was so interesting to venture in my grandpa's house. He had well-embroidered gowns, custom-tailored suits, a fine leather suitcase, and aesthetic neckties in his closet. His drawer was full of memorable fountain pens, which were sent by his old college friends. He had degrees in both literature and art. He kept good old stuff for memory, for hobby, and for the glory that had gone with the wind. For me, they were all out of date, but for use as our costumes or toys, they were just right. In order to make the gowns fit our height, I trimmed them in half. I put sand in his antique suitcase, I disassembled his fountain pens, I was a notorious monster to him.

But solemn as he was, he never punished me. He cherished me instead. It was easy to buy new stuff but it was not easy to buy the happiness of grandchildren playing around.

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Night Clubs

by Demosthenes Karanikolaou, Greece

The following piece is an excerpt from a longer work. The longer work is an autobiographical essay about several experiences that influenced my writing. I was born in the United States, but I grew up in Greece. The scene in this excerpt takes place on the island of Corfu, in Greece.

Going to night clubs was something I didn't engage in very much because I hated them, I still do and I still can't understand how people find entertainment in such places. Personally, I prefer quiet bars. Most people in Greece live for the weekend, to go to the night clubs. Whenever I go, it is against my will.

A couple of summers ago when I went on vacation to an island, I was dragged to the island's best night club along with three other friends. My friend Panos hates *florous* with a passion. A *floros* is the Greek equivalent of yuppie scum, probably better known in the United States as Eurotrash. The dominant crowd in night clubs

consists of *florous*. Therefore, it didn't seem that he was happy to be there either. The other two friends of mine had somehow managed to grasp the concept of having fun in night clubs. When we got there, things were worse than I had expected. I didn't know that this night club was meant to be heaven on earth.

At the door, the forty-year-old, gray-haired, balding, skinny bouncer seemed very reluctant about letting me in. He wanted to portray the image that he was being selective of the people entering this establishment, and he was determined to be extremely stringent about it, sort of like St. Peter at the gates of heaven. Dressing expensively is one of my weak points. That was one of the times I paid for it. The reason was that my tie-dye shirt did not look as appropriate as *his* short-sleeved, thin, white dress-shirt that had parrots drawn all over it. I knew I was unwanted, but he was not in a position to accuse me of not wearing a tie, because he didn't have one either. Therefore, he tried to exercise all the power he had over me by asking me for identification, something that never happens in Greece. I gave it to him and helped him sustain his pseudo-tough facade. After five minutes of negotiation with other staff members of the club, blessed St. Peter let me enter the gates of heaven.

When I entered paradise, I saw a guy leaning against a wall holding a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He was alone, staring into oblivion, looking bored out of his mind to the point of suicide—probably the reason why this guy couldn't wait for the weekend. Posing up against a wall with a cigarette in one hand, and a drink in the other, silent, while being deafened by repetitive, stoic and monotonous techno and European rap is not my idea of fun. As far as boredom to the point of suicide? I can reach that anywhere, any day of the week, and I don't even have to pay an entrance fee.

The choking atmosphere of people acting like statues, or in other cases, carrying out airy conversations became unbearable. "Hello dear! I love your shirt, where did you get it from, how much did it cost? . . . What, you only paid two hundred dollars for it, you shouldn't have been allowed in the club!" And, of course, it was unavoidable to see the scene of the typical *floro* girl racing into the club to tell her friends, "Oh I met this guy, he's soooo cute, he drives a Harley!" Shortly, she is joined by a young urban professional-looking man, whose looks I will not comment on in detail, but one could clearly see that his "cuteness" lay in the ownership of a Harley-Davidson. I felt like I was drowning in a pool of fakeness. About half an hour later, Panos and I left. We found refuge at a quiet bar about a block away.

Over a beer we got into a long and intricate discussion about music and anger, or something like that, and it went on for about three or four hours. Deep conversations were something I loved, whether they took place in a quiet bar, on a bench at the square near my house, over a gyro in a tavern, or on top of the Acropolis.

* * *

The Thing I Enjoy the Most

by Natasha Roland, Chicago, Illinois

Whether it's playing or watching sporting events, it is the thing I enjoy the most. I like the competition and strategies that are involved in sports. In high school, basketball was a very competitive sport. Our team was very competitive because we felt that we could compete against anyone. When we played against schools that were ranked highly, we gave those teams a tough time. We may not have won those games, but we hung in there; we didn't let those them blow us out. Also, the strategies involved in sports make the games very exciting. For example, when we played against Homewood, they had a girl to do most of their scoring. We played man-to-man the first half, and that girl had her way. She would beat her man to the basket. By

half-time she had fifteen points. The second half we played zone, so she didn't beat her man off the dribble, and she didn't score that much. Our strategy worked the second half and we won the game.

Another reason why I enjoy sports is because I'm very familiar with them. When I was little I played a lot of sports, and also when I was in high school as well. When I was little, I would play softball, basketball, and even touch football with my friends. We used to go to an empty lot and play all day long. I enjoyed this because it was good to know that I could hit a ball, shoot a basket, and score a touchdown on a bunch of boys. My friend and I were the only girls who had the guts to play with the boys, and I enjoyed the fact that I was better than some of them.

In addition to playing sports when I was little, I played sports when I was in high school, too. In high school I played a little softball and basketball. I had to stop playing after my sophomore year because of chronic asthma. Before having the asthma attacks, I would average about ten points a game, and in softball my batting average was about .315. Having played sports has made me so familiar with the game and is a reason why I like it.

Since I enjoy sports so much, I have many favorite professional sports teams. They include the Bulls, White Sox, Cubs, and Bears. It is not coincidental that they are from Chicago, because I'm a Chicagoan and I grew up watching them. My favorite team overall is the Bulls. Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen are the best players in the league and they are unstoppable. It was fun to see them three-peat, and they are going to do it again because Michael's back. Baseball and football are the sports that I watch when basketball season is over. The White Sox and Cubs are my favorite baseball teams because the White Sox have Frank Thomas and the Cubs have Mark Grace. In football, I like the Bears because they have Chris Zorich and Rashan Salaam. Watching these sports teams in action makes me feel very fond of sports.

While I watch many professional teams in action, I also watch collegiate sports—basketball and football. In collegiate basketball, North Carolina and Georgetown are my favorite teams. Last year I really liked North Carolina, because they had good players like Jerry Stackhouse and Rasheed Wallace. These two guys were so good that they left college after their second year and were drafted in the first round in the NBA draft. Georgetown is the other team that I like, because of Allen Iverson. He is a good player, and I like their jerseys. When basketball is not in season, I watch a lot of college football. I enjoy seeing schools fight to be undefeated and number one in the nation. I have a friend who plays football for the University of Michigan, and he plays wide receiver but will not get much playing time this year because Michigan already has two good receivers. He wants to play now, but he has to wait his turn.

In conclusion, sports are very important to me because I, too, was an athlete, and I enjoy seeing others compete to be their best. Whether it's watching or playing sports, it's the thing I enjoy the most. Every night before I go to bed, I watch ESPN because it informs me about all the things that happen in the sports world. Also, when I miss the show at night, it comes on about two or three times in a row in the morning, so that way I won't miss anything. Without sports, I don't know what I would do, because there is nothing else like sports.

* * *

[Untitled]

by Lakesha Sproles, Waterloo, Iowa

The summer of '94 was the first summer that I ever spent with my boyfriend. I mean, we were together so much that we even had our own little spot at the pond where we would meet when we just wanted to be alone.

Most of the time we only met there at night because everything looked more beautiful. The pond looked like a huge golf course. There was beautiful green soft grass, nice big trees with pretty leaves, which made a nice, soft sound as the wind blew against them. The unique thing was a little pedestrian bridge which we walked across to get over to the other side. The little bridge was wooden, painted white. On the other side of the bridge was where our spot was, right under a huge pine tree. We would lay a blanket down, then sit there and daydream, looking into the stars. My favorite part was when the ducks came around the pond and we would feed them bread. The pond was a very peaceful and lovely place.

My mind was at ease every time we would go there. It was special because, honestly, it felt like the world was just a peaceful place, with no worries or problems. I can remember it so clearly because it truly was a place to be with the person I care about.

* * *

Is Love a Circle?

by Jeffrey S. D'Alessandro, Orland Park, Illinois

I was in love once,
but now she is gone.
At least I think it was love.
Now, I must move on.
I miss her eyes, her hair, her lips,
I could give it all to feel a warm hug
by her; I need a kiss.
The future pulls, but my past gives a tug.
I can't get over her.
The fun, the love, it's what I miss.
Where has she gone?
Her look, her touch, her sweet caress.
But my destiny calls
and I must listen.
I don't have a choice.
I must forget what I am missing.
I will go out and keep searching,
I can find someone new.
It will just be time to find who's right:
Kelly, Erin, Latonia, or Sue.
As time passes, the list becomes endless.
I can fly with my new dove
But only because I have strength and courage
To get over the heartbreak of my first love.

* * *

My Old Partner—the Bike

by Khang-yee Lim, Malaysia

My bicycle was once an image of myself. It symbolized freedom, creativity, strength, and friendship. During my journey of growing up, I rode my bike to wherever I wanted, creating my own world. It helped me to build up my confidence. Because of its existence, I had many priceless friends.

In 1983, when I was ten years old, my parents bought my sister a bike for her birthday. I asked for one, too. But my dad disapproved because of my young age. So I went to my mum. I used the same old trick that many children use—to cry. The next day, I was in my dad's car going to the bicycle shop. I looked around and picked a bike which was similar to my sister's. I didn't know why I chose the same one. It might have been the genes within the family.

My new bike was a so-called "mini bike." It had a small, V-shaped body frame. Unlike a mountain bike, which has straight handlebars, my bike had chrome, U-shaped handlebars. Both ends of the bars bent out and pointed towards me like those of a Harley-Davidson. I also had a noisy, chrome-plated bell on the left side of the handlebars. The pedals of my bike were short, and its white cushion seat was comfortable because I could sit straight while leveling my body weight to the thighs. I had a big, white basket in front of my bike to hold my school bag. At the back, there was a metal carrier on which I could carry things or even a passenger. I felt that I could fly if I learned how to ride my bike.

It took me tremendous strength to learn riding, but, at last, it worked.

From that day onward, I proudly got on my bike and rode off to explore my "new world."

Gradually, my bike turned old. Its paint started to peel off and the metal parts became rusty. It even started to make noise when I cycled. We started to drift apart. In the late eighties, there came the craze of BMX in my country. BMX was the brand of a little Japanese all-terrain bicycle. It was fast, agile, and good looking. Every kid at that time dreamt of owning a BMX, including me. Again, I fought hard for a new bike. During the early 80's, there was an economic recession in my country. My parents' business was greatly affected. I was too young to realize the financial difficulties of my parents. I was too anxious to have my dream. Despite the difficulties, my parents just did not want to disappoint me. Although they were busily working and struggling all the time, they still cared for and loved me. And they made my dream come true.

After owning the hottest new BMX, I totally forgot about my old friend. I put it aside in the garage. All my friends who also had BMX's cycled together. We were the coolest group in the town. I was so proud of my new bike that I polished it everyday. We learned various cycling tricks from TV commercials. We piled up bricks and jumped over them using our BMX's. For each time we succeeded, we added one more brick. The bricks were our hopes. The higher we achieved, the more we were satisfied. At dawn, we used to arrange our bikes in a straight line facing the vast sea. We were a team with lofty aspirations.

Everything was perfect until one hot Friday afternoon. I came out of my classroom and prepared to meet my "teammates." As I approached the bike racks, I was shocked by the empty slot where I parked my bike. My bike was gone. Someone had stolen it. I was devastated and I felt that I had lost everything in my life. I walked home despairingly. I cried that night.

The next day, I cleaned the garage and found my old bike covered with dust and spider webs. I was sad to look at its torn and worn condition. Immediately, I recalled the precious moments we shared. I was sorry I had ignored it and went after a new bike. At the bottom of my heart, I knew that nothing could replace it. Guiltily, I pulled the bike out. I cleaned this old partner of mine and started repairing it. I put back everything that I had taken off and changed. I brought back its original appearance and gave back its innocence.

A few months later, I left my hometown for a new place. I said good-bye to my childhood playmates, and my old partner—the bike.

* * *

"Can you be proud of yourself?"

By Maeri Megumi, Kagashima, Japan

The other day, I was watching my face in the mirror and thinking, "Maybe, I don't look as bad as I think without make-up. But it means, I wouldn't be as good as I think with make-up either." I then thought if it is a good thing or a bad thing, and decided that it should be a good thing. By doing this, I felt that this is such a discovery—well, maybe not. But I always feel like I'm a great philosopher or something when I "discover" the secret of life! Aren't I silly!? Well, it doesn't hurt anything or anyone, so I say it's okay.

Being proud is not a preferable thing to do in Japan. We regard "modesty" or "humbleness" as something very important, and decent people are supposed to behave themselves with modesty. For example, if someone says to you, "You've done a great job," you are expected to reply by modestly saying, "Oh, not really, I was just lucky" or "I owe my success to these people and you who helped me." If you want to be one well-behaving human being, you might even like to add, "I, such a person with little capacity, couldn't have done this job without other people's help, of course." These phrases may be true and maybe being modest is a good thing. But I happen to be a bad person (and happen to like being a bad person) and often find these kinds of comments annoying, even deceiving sometimes. I wonder why people just can't say "thank you" instead.

My good friends are not this type, fortunately. One of my friends wrote me the other day, and she wrote "from someone you love" instead of writing her name, or things like "from someone who loves you," which is what you would write if you are a caring person, right? Of course I immediately knew who she was: there is only one human being in the world who can write such a dauntless phrase. You would see how far away she is from "being humble" but nevertheless how much I loved this message! She even wrote that I am very lucky because I have such a superb friend like her. Oh, no doubt. She is gorgeous, isn't she? Although not prototypically modest (or not even least-possibly modest), she made me smile and giggle, and she gave me such a warm feeling. The interesting thing is that by writing "you must be loving me" she sounded more like saying, "I love you, you know."

Well, let me make it clear that I'm not at all saying that being modest is bad. I'm just saying, when humbleness becomes too much, too much more than what a person really means, you sense that this person is not someone you can truly trust or feel comfortable with, as you cannot hear their real voice.

I remember that one of my friends (she is from Australia, and she is an artist) had an exhibition in Japan of her drawings. The title of her first exhibition was "Perfect Little Packages"; she attempted and succeeded in expressing Japanese people's perfect-little-packaged-ness. They look all the same from the outside; everyone is a "perfect little package" just like the way we wrap almost everything in Japan. Yet, if you come to know each individual, you will discover the different personalities hidden inside. She exhibited this idea

with an interesting "trick." (She may not like this word, but she's in Australia now. Well, forgive me, Pam.) The trick she used is that she presented her drawings with Shoji-frames that covered the drawings inside. You have to slide the Shoji-frame in order to see her drawing. The Shoji-frame is, I think, ideal to express Japan-ness: it's neat, not-disturbing, very smooth and looks organized. The important role of it is that it covers things which you want to keep somewhere inside. So if you don't open Shoji, everything appears to be the same, but once you slide the Shoji . . . here it is, her drawing (of course, all the different drawings for each Shoji-frame) is right there! I'm now wondering whether this "modesty" stuff is another form of Shoji-frame for them. "Modesty" is neat, not-disturbing, (usually white) and it's such a clean surface. I also wonder if it is a kind of shyness or shield to protect ourselves from getting exposed.

Although I stated that I do not really like being "modest" myself, I also know that I cannot really get rid of it, either. In some sense, it is very difficult for me to be proud of myself both overtly or covertly. (This is not modesty. Or, is it?) It is easy to exaggerate things and say things like, "Gosh, I'm really proud of myself to have done this. What a genius I am!" because it's merely a joke. (At least, these kinds of comments are shielded by a "joke.") To acknowledge myself in a right way that I have done a good job, to really feel this, is hard. I have tried—to praise myself, but there is always something that hinders me from feeling completely proud of myself. I don't know how to do it right. I feel shy about it.

Now, it does sound as if I am a "modest" person, doesn't it? It may not be bad (I'm sure you'll comment here, with a little arrow, say "<No! not bad!" Thanks for that), but you may know, too, that it is a way to conceal your own vanity, or to conceal that you have vanity. This concept has been deeply rooted within myself in the environment in which I grew up: vanity is bad. But you have it anyway, don't you?

All I want to be is "fair." Not to conceal, but not to expose either. To find out the right line to stick with isn't easy. I feel I am always either too close to the right or too close to the left. To be superficially humble is easier in a way, because it's safer; it gives you an excuse when you fail. But, for some reason, I want to be just "fair" to myself, and although I cannot adjust myself to the right position, I conclude it's okay as long as I keep this in mind. I should be swinging to the right sometimes, swinging back to the left sometimes— as long as I'm swinging, I am alive. Because when I stop swinging, I know I should either become God, or I'm dead (or could it be both?!).

* * *

The Boys and I

by Megan O'Malley, Des Moines, Iowa

Looking back in photo albums, I saw this little girl with a short, brown, bowl-cut hair style. She was very skinny, her legs and arms looking like little twigs barely hanging on to a tree. As I looked closer at the pictures I saw that it was me. I never knew I could look so much like a tomboy, but I could believe it. Most of my friends were guys, so of course I would try to be like them.

I loved my boy friends, but it wasn't like the love I would have now for a guy; it was different. I loved them because they were so competitive and I hated how the only thing girls in my class did was play with their Barbie dolls. I played games with the guys at recess instead of playing house with the girls. I wanted the boys to know that I was different, and I wasn't just the typical girl in my class that I described. The guys loved me to play with them. They thought it was cool that a girl would be so competitive.

I hung out with Kurt and Tom Lamb—they were my best friends. They both had short, dark brown hair and had sparkling blue eyes. The only difference between them was that Tom had glasses. To me, Tom and Kurt looked as if they were giants compared to me. We had gone to the same Catholic grade school, Holy Trinity, in Des Moines, Iowa. It was when we were in third, fourth, and fifth grade when we played soccer together, so we were always hanging out together.

We would play at each other's houses all the time. We had so much fun together. We would play soccer (as if we already hadn't had enough), tag, and many other games that involved competition between us. It was hard to separate us once we were all together; our parents would have to literally pick us up when it was time to go.

We had an unbelievable friendship—that we knew each others' moves on the soccer field. I had the best time in my life spending time with them and playing on the same soccer team. They were like brothers to me. They would stick up for me if another guy was making fun of me because I was the only girl on the team. So we proved to the kid that I wasn't the typical girl and to keep watch because there was more to come. The three of us were unstoppable when playing together; we could read each other's minds, and I think that's why our team did so well.

We covered the whole field: I played the center position and they had the right and left wings. It was like an invincible force coming down the field when the three of us were in. I'm not saying that none of the others contributed to the team because they did a lot for our team, too. We had about fifteen players on our team and we had a pretty strong line-up. Our defense was led by the rest of the team. The halfbacks and the goalie would make sure that nobody scored and they were pretty good at making this clear. Most of the time we had the ball down on the other team's side so our defense wouldn't even have to worry. We were destined to keep the ball on the opponent's side and score as much as possible.

The hard work our coach put us through in practice and in games really paid off. We had practice three to four times a week depending on how we played that weekend. And if we did play badly, then those practices would seem as if they dragged on and on. You were just hoping your mom and dad came early to pick you up. Our coach pushed us really hard, I think that is what made us number one. I was really glad that our coach was strict, and didn't treat me any differently than he treated the guys. He didn't limit the goals that I had set for myself; he was always there pushing me to me to do better and reach higher, above my goals.

The coach was a very caring guy. He reminded me of a tree because he was so tall. He would have to bend down to talk to me. I remember the times the coach would compliment me on how I did. It would make me feel so good. He would say such things as, "Megan you sure know how to maneuver around those boys don't you" and "That girl is as fast as lightning."

At all the games, rain or shine, there was always a big crowd, from what I can remember of that time. They would roar in excitement when we scored or made a good save. That is what made it so exciting. You would also see die-hard soccer parents who would run up and down the field, yelling at their children to do better.

There were so many times I remember the coaches fighting for the most stupid reasons. One time we had played the best we could and lost the game. Our coach said to us, "That's okay we're going to go for ice cream anyway." Normally, only the winners would go to this ice cream parlor after the game. The other coach got mad and told our coach that we didn't deserve it. It went on from there and finally some parents went up to them and convinced them how stupid they were for fighting over ice cream. In the end though, we ended up having ice cream. My favorite kind was double-dipped bubble gum ice cream. I liked it because even after I was done eating it, I still had the sweet taste of bubble gum in my mouth. It seemed as if we were at that ice cream parlor a lot since after all we won so many times. Our team had won the championship when I was ten and eleven years old. We received trophies, and I would show off my trophies by bringing

them to show-and-tell. I showed my trophies to practically everybody; I felt so privileged to have them. I had so much love for this game, it was unbelievable.

* * *

Border

by Ai-Lien Hung, Taiwan

border

where two sides connected

like

that pomelo tree west of our house

grandfather's legend

long time ago great-grandfather

rescued and planted it, between

up-yard and down-yard

great-grandmother also said that

to either side, the roots would penetrate

the fruits would extend

it's where brothers

connected

border

where two sides confront, too

like

that stump west of our house

mother kept silent

the day grandfather

cut it down, although
the pomelo tree was bearing fruit
now
no more picking
no more waiting
that stump on the strip
becomes where brothers
confront

* * *

The Story behind "Border"

by Ai-Lien Hung

I had hated my "hero grandpa," sometimes.

In my childhood, grandfather was a hero to us grandchildren, not inferior to the Master San in the serialized play *Seven Villages in Cel-Lo*. Not only did we, the younger generations, dare not argue with him even a word, but also my great-grandmother would never disagree with any decision he had made. Even more, the entire family of my great-uncle's in the down-yard dealt with us in a humble way, and I thought that was because of respecting and fearing my grandfather. We children were kind of satisfied with the "superiority complex." Grandfather was so authoritative but not as serious as other adults in our family, like my father. My father was so busy on the farm all year round that he rarely even spoke to my brother and me, not to mention teaching us folk-poems and whistling as grandfather did. Grandfather was like a childmate to us so we could request him to sing songs and show us the "kung-fu" of breaking bricks by a blow with the side of his hand. We thought that he possessed amazing power. What was more was that grandfather was one of the members of the "kung-fu" group of our village. Every Lunar March, we have a home-coming parade for Ma-Zu, the landmark goddess of my home town, DiGa. Usually, it was my grandfather who marched triumphantly at the very front of the group of "The Gathering of Heroes." At that moment, we would extremely admire and were proud of him. I thought we were deeply influenced by the "kung-fu" and acrobatic plays like *Seven Villages in Cel-lo* and *Bodyguard* that we used to watch on TV, and we reflected our admiration upon my grandfather

The admiration for grandfather also pulled us together to avenge him. Once when I was in elementary school, I had my bike repaired in the store next to our village. The store owner with a slightly built figure asked me, "Are you the granddaughter of big-headed Ray from the next village?" That was the first time I heard the disrespectful calling of my grandfather. I was angry at that moment but wondered all the way home, "How dare he call my grandpa that? Doesn't everyone respect my grandpa?" After that, I told my brother and cousins not to have their bikes repaired at the store again, because the man offended our "hero grandpa."

I had been admiring my grandfather like this, until the year I graduated from elementary school and he cut down the Chinaberry tree located by the bridge leading to our house.

I vaguely knew that was caused by the ill feeling between my grandmother and the neighbor east of our house. But I just could not understand what that had to do with the tree. Why the tree? The tree with its big trunk that could not be embraced by a single person had been the landmark of our house, where we swung and caught long-horned beetles, the source of soap for our game, and the post where my father and uncles would fasten the ox's rope. It had accompanied our days of grazing ox. Why was grandfather willing to cut it down? I complained, inside my heart, about my father for not standing up for the tree, about my uncles for not stopping the cut. But, all those days, I did not hear any word about the disappearance of the Chinaberry tree. That was the first time I hated my grandfather as well as his authority.

During the years I left my village for studying, I heard about these matters, one after the other: my grandfather had overturned the garden which my aunt had been planting for years, had cut down the BaLar tree which had been my brother's favorite, and had dug out the bamboo windbreak behind our house. . . I seemed callous to them, with no time for anger. But when he cut down the pomelo tree, I could no longer hide the feeling of hating him.

Every year, we have several festivals during the beginning of Lunar July until the Moon Festival in the middle of August. A couple of superb pomelos had never been absent from our offering tables. We did not have any spare money for edibles; the home-raised fruit was one of the few besides the cakes from offerings. Papaya and BaLar were easy to find in the yards in country side. But the pomelo tree of ours was one of the few in my village and it was significant and grand for its height of six or seven meters. We treasured it not only for the clusters, but also as a symbol of glory.

My grandfather liked to tell legends, and the story of the pomelo tree was one of my beloved ones. Long, long ago, before I was born, my great-grandfather unexpectedly saved a young plant from the ditch and planted it on the border between our up-yard and great-uncle's down-yard. The young plant had provided shading foliage year after year. Yet, great-grandfather passed away not long before the first picking of the pomelo tree he had planted years ago. My great-grandmother lost her authority in the family along with the death and, quickly, the two brothers divided the property. About the pomelo tree, great-grandmother had weakly said that, "According to your father, it belongs to you both." In fact, the down-yard folk had never come to pick the pomelos; the tree had only belonged to us up-yard folk.

After the first harvest from farms in Lunar June, it was about time for the pomelo tree to be in season. We were not able to hold ourselves back from visiting it, counting the unripe fruits on the branches and picking the petals up from the ground. The delicate smell of the pomelo flowers has reappeared over and over from my memory; that is the mood of waiting with excitement.

The first picking of every year usually was for the Seven Ladies. There were only five or six pieces of fruit. When grandmother was plucking the fruit with a pole, we were lifting our heads exclaiming and pointing excitedly. Down on the border strip, my great-uncle's daughter and sons, who are around my age, were waiting flushed with happiness. They were waiting for the pomelos my grandmother threw to them. Years later, when we all grew older, they never came to see the picking again.

My mother was the only one in the up-yard who had an intimate association with the down-yard, and my brother and I ran down to see my great-grandmother often. But the children of the down-yard had never been our playmates. Because they were too shy to join us in picking, my mother had told my brother and me that we should give them half of the picking. We were quite sure that would make my grandmother angry, so we would do it secretly. Stealing pomelos for the down-yard made us feel "chivalrous." That was one of our enjoyments during the season.

The real productive period of the pomelo was around the end of Lunar July to August. Sometimes, we found that the fruits on the branches became much fewer only overnight. And we would be told that they had been picked for grandfather's friends, like people in the local agricultural organization. Even so, the pomelo tree could still amply provide for us. Except those grandmother kept for the offering, every immediate family member could still get several. Those were our "private possessions" and toys. Always, we would put them on our own benches and sit across from them, and then say while pointing toward them "one-two-three-four-five, guess which one I'll take." Then we would pick up the one which was pointed to last and cut it up, and compare the size of the pomelo-cap and the number of sections. Finally, we would tear off the membranes and eat the pulp with full enjoyment. And again, we would be chanting while eating, "Eat pomelo pulp and put pomelo stool, eat pomelo pulp and put pomelo gas."

We played the same game with the same excitement, year after year, and never got tired of it. The pomelo scent was a smell full of festival atmosphere and it was the same expectancy of our family.

That summer, I returned from school and asked how the pomelo was bearing fruit. Actually, it had never ever disappointed us, but no one answered me.

I cried by the stump in the twilight, not knowing how much time had passed. . . .

* * *

[Untitled]

by Chi-yin Lo, Hong Kong

Have you ever watched the movie *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*? The fate of the main character, Gilbert, was similar to the one that my friend, Anthony, had experienced three years ago. In the movie, Gilbert was living with his parents in a town in Iowa. He had a younger sister, a mentally retarded brother, and an obese mother living with him in the same house. His mother was so fat and heavy that she could barely move her feet when she walked. His father and elder brother were no longer living with him. His father died when Gilbert was just a child. A few years later, his elder brother ran away from home and never came back again. It was mentioned in the movie that he couldn't bear the burden of taking care of his family members, thus escaped from them.

Gilbert had thought of leaving his family the same way his brother did. But he decided to stay with his family. He couldn't bear leaving his family and going somewhere because he was the only source of financial support to the family. He worked in one of the stores of his town. Moreover, he needed to watch over his younger brother everyday, day in and day out. He even had to instruct him how to take a bath. His mother, on the other hand, had been in depression since her husband's death. She ate a lot and gained a lot of weight. Gilbert described her as a whale in a house. She couldn't lift her body effectively in order to do any routine house chore.

My friend, Anthony, also watched the movie. He completely identified with the fate that Gilbert had gone through in the movie. Almost three years ago, he was just a senior high school student in Hong Kong. By that time, he needed to prepare for a college enrollment examination. This examination determined his chances for getting into a college in Hong Kong. So it was a very important exam to him. If he failed, he needed to spend another year in school to retake the exam.

However, such unfortunate things happened in his family that he barely could handle them. First of all, his

sister had a mental illness since she was born, and was getting worse at that time. His father suffered a stroke and had to stay home every day. His mother, who was a nurse and a housekeeper, didn't come back home very often after some of her family members ran into those problems I've mentioned above. So it was left for my friend to take care of the problems.

During those days, he needed to bring his father to the toilet and the bed, since he was partially paralyzed after the stroke. On the other hand, he needed to bring his sister to the hospital for health checks. On many occasions, his sister would slip away from home at night. My friend had to call cabs and search for her and bring her back home safe. He called their mother on the phone several times, but she always pretended to be busy and didn't come home to help him out.

He was also in deep financial trouble because he needed to pay his school fee and his father no longer worked. After going through all this, he didn't have time for his studies, and he eventually failed the exam. He had to try it the second time but it would take him another year in school. He thought that he couldn't come out of that situation and might have to go through yet another year of school. But things changed in the second year.

His father died that year and that meant he no longer had to take care of him. And his sister was being sent to the hospital for medical care, and would not be home for quite awhile. Although it was sad that he lost his father, he finally had time for his studies. And most important, it freed his load and burden from that time on. He finally passed the exam and entered a college in Hong Kong. It was still an unforgettable experience for him to have money, only enough to buy some bread each day.

Gilbert's mother also died at the end of the movie. It was a tragedy that he lost his mother. However, he and his brother could leave the town and go somewhere else to find a better job. He could also have time to meet other friends and have a romantic relationship with a girl, and didn't feel guilty about them. From that point of time, he could fulfill his own goals and enjoy his life.

My friend, who thought he could go nowhere, found some light in his life. He won the love of his sister during those years that he was with her every time. His college degree promised him a prestigious career. This meant he no longer had to worry about money all the times. He had also proved himself to be a responsible person for the family.

* * *

[Untitled]

by Patchara Roongphorchai (Pat), Thailand

I was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. My family moved back to Thailand when I was four years old. I came to the States again two years ago to continue my studies.

The first thing I remember about the first time I went back to Bangkok, Thailand was that I saw two steering wheels in the car. Really, there was only one, though. The reason I saw two steering wheels was because in Thailand the steering wheel is located on the right side, instead of on the left side like in the States. And plus, I was young and still not able to judge what was the reality. The weather in Bangkok was kind of hot compared to Chattanooga. My family and I stayed at my grandmother's house during the first few months of our return. Many weird looking trees such as guava and mango were in my grandmother's yard. I loved climbing mango trees a lot because they are very big, strong and easy to keep of track of while I went up and

came down. I fell down once. I injured my "khor-pubb," the backside of my knee, where my knee folds. In Thai, "khor" means joint and "pubb" means folding. Kind of makes sense, ha?

My family—my mom, dad, my sister and I—moved to a brand-new house about a year later. Nowadays, this house looks pretty ancient and old. The house has two floors, both front and back yards (they were not huge, about the size of four parking spaces) and two parking spaces. My parents sent my sister to an international school where there are many Chinese, Burmese, American, Afro-American, Indian, and Taiwanese kids. My parents were planning to send me there, too, but I was too young to attend. So my parents sent me to the best school in my country, an all-male school, Assumption College. This school provides many prime ministers, governors, and many successful well-known businessmen.

Assumption College consisted of many sections: primary section for 1st-6th graders and junior high school for 7th-9th graders. When you finish 9th grade, you had three choices: to continue your 10th-12th grade at Assumption College, to quit and transfer to Assumption Commercial College (ACC), which I did, or to quit Assumption's branch and find a new high school. ACC is co-ed. I felt like I was in heaven and alive, there. I had chances to meet women. Over at ACC, I studied business and commercial stuff such as accounting, salesmanship, economics, business math, and marketing. Assumption also includes Assumption Business Administration College (ABAC). It's a four-year college for those who finish 12th grade. ABAC is acclaimed to be one of the top five universities in Thailand. I attended ACC for 10th grade only, then attended 11th-12th grade in Mt. Vernon, Iowa, at Mt. Vernon High School. I moved because my sister transferred from Mahidol University, Thailand, to Cornell College in Iowa. She disliked the dorm, so my dad found her an apartment. In my culture, it's not very proper for a girl to stay alone, so my dad ordered me to come and stay with my sister.

I grew up in a family that values education. My father studied medical technology for his bachelor's degree and nuclear engineering and business for his master's degree. My mother studied the same thing as my dad for her bachelor's degree and at the same place. Her master's was an MBA (business). My sister just graduated from Cornell College last June—her major was chemistry. Now it's my turn to prove myself to my family.

During 3rd-4th grade, I did many foolish things. I hated to do my homework. I never completed my assignments. I lied to teachers, I fought my friends, and I threw away my homework notebooks and lied to my teachers and parents that my notebooks were lost. I was one sick liar and a troublemaker at that time.

I made a comeback with good grades during 5th grade. My grades went down during 6th grade, and they mostly stabilized or declined. I always got good grades in math and English, but in other subjects, C or D. I was one smart kid compared to my behavior at the time, 8th-10th grade. I hung out with bad friends. We smoked, drank, partied, fought, came home late, etc. My parents were always mad at me. They wanted me to change and become a good boy like I used to be. I told them it was hard for me to change. I didn't want to lose my (bad) friends. I always told my parents that I wished to change, I wished to go to somewhere nobody would know anything about me and my past so I could change. Then that opportunity came. They sent me to Mt. Vernon to stay with my sister and attend the high school there. I changed a lot: my grades got better, my face had radiance—wasn't gloomy and dark—I no longer picked fights. I started working out and I started to become responsible. My parents were glad about these results.

Nowadays, I've started to value education, too. Without education, I will not be able to be successful and survive in the business society. My parents might be rich, but one day the money will be gone if I don't help them out. The more education I have, the more people will give respect to me and the more success I will get.

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