

PADDY JULIAN



TENGOKU
(ZEN"Z)

Tengoku

My hand glides across the old desk, over markings, scribbles and smudges made over the years. It eventually comes to a mark which reads てんごく (tengoku) written in red pen. What does that mean again? It's been a while since I studied Japanese. I search for the word online and come across three meanings: *heaven*, *kingdom of heaven* and *paradise*. I wonder why I wrote it on the desk?

Five months ago, I went to Hopkins Creek with my friends Callen, James and Michael. In a crater in the otherwise desolate Australian bushlands, the small artsy music festival played host to thousands of people escaping their 9 to 5 jobs for a weekend of blissful dancing. The wintery weather didn't stop people from expressing themselves by wearing whatever they wanted without judgement. Everyone smiled. Everyone danced. Everyone had a good time.

We drove up from Melbourne and arrived at the gate where we joined a long line of cars waiting. It was tricky to set up our big tent amongst the hundreds of other tents snaking up the side of the crater. Michael lost his glasses. I lost a shoe. Callen was getting on my nerves and it was all becoming overwhelming. With the sun disappearing over the horizon, we drank warm, cheap beers around our camp table and slowly, every frustration in the world began to sink away.

Tents of different sizes and shapes popped out of the sea of foggy darkness around us. Lights looking like strokes of stars with an eerie yet mystical glow led down into the crater where the music was playing. The music was pulling us further into the crater and as we inched closer and closer, we started to fall deeper and deeper into it.

As the night went on, we were drawn to a circus-like tent positioned near the creek called the Moroccan Lounge. It was an ambient tent packed with silhouettes lying down on pillows under a dark purple light. We joined a bunch of familiar faces; my two older sisters, my cousins and their friends. We piled on top of each other chatting and

smiling and laughing. We listened to the soothing music perfectly accented by the comforting lights, drinking warm tea of different flavours. I felt like I was floating on a cloud with everyone talking to each other. It didn't matter if they were strangers, acquaintances, best friends or family.

When life is weighing you down and down that you might just melt with stress and worry, finding your てんご
く can help you through it. The time I spent in that crater at Hopkins Creek will always be one of mine.