

A Nueva School Grade Eight Recital Project

Monkey Travels

Written by Branden Thurston, 2004-2006

The cover Monkey painting is an original piece of artwork painted for Branden by Mr. Ho, an artist in San Francisco's Sunset Chinatown district: 2400 Irving Street, 415-731-8312.

A Tiger Farm Press Book

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The writings are works of fiction, nonfiction,
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publishing house Tiger Farm Press.

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*Face Monkey, not an actual addition to the
book, references will not be made throughout
this book. Though there may be monkey related
matter.*

Print version: 1.2

Dedicated to:
Grandma, Ena Thurston, and Grandpa, Ross
Thurston,
Grandpa Ip “Gong Gong”, and my late Grandma
Yau.

About the Publication

Author

Branden, the author, wrote the book material, and entered it into the publishing software Adobe Framemaker. Framemaker is the software of choice for the publishing company Prentice Hall, and Sun Microsystems's educational department. A pre-release version of this book was presented by Branden at the Nueva School Recital Night, 6 April 2006:

<http://www.NuevaSchool.org>

Publisher

Since I, Branden's father, have published a book, I was elected to be the publisher. As publishers do, I take the author's material, do some editing, re-arrange the materials order, and add extra pages: a front cover, copyright statement, back cover, etc.

Printer

From Khris Boxell's suggestion, I selected CafePress.com to be the printer. Their web site allows me to control the printing process.

Online Book Seller

At anytime, more books can be printed and delivered to your home:

<http://www.CafePress.com/TigerFarm>

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Thank You Adman Laurrissen

Thank you for being my mentor, for the time and effort you have put into reading and giving suggestions forming the basis for this book, the Thailand story. With your help, my Thailand Story is exciting, hot like Thai food. Through our meetings you helped me to focus my writing towards one subject, and for that I am very grateful.

About Adam and 826 Valencia

Adam is a post graduate of Harvard, a very skilled writer and a lawyer. He donates his personal time to children coming to 826 Valencia, San Francisco. A huge section of 826, also known as the Pirate Supply Store, is dedicated to people experienced in writing, to help young people. 826 Valencia is a non-profit organization, with its own web site:

<http://www.826Valencia.org>

I appreciate Adam for taking his time to talk to me and reading through my work before I went to see him. It's a kind atmosphere inside the dark store, with so many willing to tutor those in need of help. I see high school stu-

dents bring their homework in, requesting to see one person or another. Sometimes they are just like me connecting and arranging times to meet with his or her tutor.

Figure 1 *Adam and Branden at 826 Valencia, a writer's workshop.*



Thanks Dave Susman

I'd like to express my gratitude towards you for helping me with the creative side of my writing. It is because of you, I know how well I can write poetry. There are parts of this book I dedicate to you: the Recital Poems, the Poem *Night* which has been read and enjoyed by many people, the short stories *Pianist or Bum?*, *The Not So Expected*, and *Incredible Adventure*.

Thank You Dad, Stacy David Thurston

A huge Thank You for all the time you have put into this project; I quite literally could not have done as nice a job without you. You have brought my project from meaningless hours spent, to productive hours invested.



Introduction

The monkey on the front page is named Monkey, such a generic name. Surely there must be more to him than meets the eye. So there is, he is a Buddha, an unstoppable deity, a king, a vandalist. He was born of a bolt of lightning striking a stone egg, and yet, born an ordinary powerless monkey that wanted nothing more than to see the world and explore. Through his journeys, he befriended a faithful pack of monkeys, soon becoming their reigning king. However, his urge to travel over took him, and he went on farther journeys that would make him into one of the most powerful beings in the heavens.

In a way, I am that monkey with the same desires and grudge to traverse the world. We both see the world differently from others, we both hold the same voracious appetite for visual and spiritual knowledge, seeking even stranger and more enlightening locations, searching for truly spectacular sights to behold.

A fine line separates our earthly realm from Monkey's oriental fantasy. He is a true hero in every respect, he beats Genji, ten to one.

My Nueva School Recital Project

I started thinking about what to do for my project even before the start of my the grade eight school year. By November, I had selected a topic, found a mentor, and started writing. Then, I worked through to April 6th., when I displayed my work on a table in the gym with all the other student displays. Figure 2 is a photo taken in front of my display table.

At the last moment, with the encouragement of my mother and farther, I decided to go up on stage. The evening of April 6th., before an audience of 200, I took my turn and read 2 poems: Lunar Night, and Shake-A-Spear (figure 1). It was a wonderful experience!

Figure 1 *Branden reading poetry on Recital Night*



When trying to decide on a topic, my grandparents suggested I pursue the topic of travel, and so I have. During my writing, I enjoyed reminiscing back to my extensive Asian trip I had in the spring of 2002.

With the help of my humanities teacher, Cynthia Kosut, I found a mentor, Adam Laurrissen. I spent 4 months working with Adam while writing 12,000 words of travel stories. The stories are not of novel length, so I rallied in the last minute to write a number of poems, and create a collage of my works from the years 2004 to

2006, my Nueva years, the years of my life when I produced most of my writing.

My Recital Poems were written in the last 2 weeks of work. I hope you will see the similarity in these pieces, as they were each written in under 20 minutes.

Figure 2 *Branden holding his book, with his mom, May Ip*



Chapter One

Travel in Thailand and Hong Kong

Story Introduction

This is the main part of my project, a work of non-fiction based in South East Asia. The story is written in the fashion of other travel books that I studied before starting. As are written in those books, I have seen many equally amazing spectacles in my travels. On my 2002 family trip, we did more sightseeing than on any other trip.

Writing my recital project, I met many challenges which my mentor gave plenty of feedback to help me progress. First off, my book sounded to much like a chronological series of events. He asked me to sharpen certain areas, which I did. I also had to much content in areas that were less appealing to the reader, which I reduced. This editing process proved helpful, but time consuming, draining the final month I worked on this section.

I spent a considerable amount of time on this story, more than my novel project story, a story of similar size which is named *The Journey of A Suit and Its Man*. I also found it a greater challenge to write in the Travel genre, because it is more difficult for me then other genres I have written. However I pulled through to put together a set of stories I hope you enjoy reading, as much as I enjoyed writing.

2002 Asia Trip



My father, me, and my brother Riley, with spider monkeys at a Thailand Tiger farm.

On the same trip, I went to:

Tokyo, Japan

Hong Kong - Macau - Guang Zhou (Canton), China
and Thailand

Travel in Thailand

Our hotel towers above the city of Bangkok. I looked out the window allowing my eyes to wander over the calming landscape. Calm and peacefulness is a major aspect of Thailand which I noticed throughout the trip. We arrived the evening before from Hong Kong, and I know this is only a subtle beginning of a four-day wonder tour.

Next to me, my brother is shoving on his morning clothes in an attempt to get out of the hotel room fast enough to catch a good meal. Since we have little knowledge of the country's excitements, we have entrusted our vacation to our tour guides. And, from what we have heard about tour guides and the terrors of being late, we are motivated to move quickly. I put on summer clothes, and with my parents, we go out the door, and down to the dining area where several of our group members are munching on eggs and sausages. I thought it bizarre to not have traditional Thai food, especially on our first day. I sat near a window similar to that of the others back in California. To tell you the truth, the eating area seems much the same as a Denny's. Noticing the departure of several group mates, I don't have much time to contemplate the absence of traditional food.

Once outside, the warm and humid air is clogging up my senses. There are a few people wearing heavier clothes than mine. They are the locals, who are crazy enough to wear more than shorts and a T-shirt in this kind of weather. However we are in the shelter of a great white tour bus, which has a plethora of air conditioning to spare those who fear they might faint from the heat. This is the very bus we are traveling in for the next few days

Dream World Amusement Park, Bangkok

Our tour guide announces from the loudspeaker that we are approaching the Dream World amusement park, the Six Flags Marine World of Bangkok. I notice a great dome surrounded by a massive variety of park rides. I see everything from roller coasters to water rides. Apparently they decided to substitute size of the rides for the amount of rides in the park.

Once outside, the guide hands us tickets to enter the park, a list of the suggested rides and the time in which we are to return to the bus. One of the suggested rides is a water ride, voted one of the most popular by far, so we decide to check it out first.

Ahead of us is an enormous water ride comparable to that of any popular amusement park back in California; a difference is that there is almost no one in line. A ride manager sat posted in a control box monitoring it and ushering passengers into seats. Excited by this single aspect, I quickly managed to convince my mom that the water is safe and it will be fun. She looks vaguely skeptical as we dash forward, quickly grabbing a boat with several wet seats.

We sat floating aloft for a while. The blazing sun began to cause me some discomfort. I was unsure whether or not this ride would ever start. As usual something about the environment was distorting my perception of time. Then the ride commences; the water gates open allowing a strong current to push our boat into a large twist of slides. Several unmanned boats proceed before us, thrown into the current. Water cannons send a torrent of mist and water into our boat. The twist and turns shake us, throwing us around in a spinning mass. We sat aboard enjoying the ride, not quite sure where it would go. A large slide stands before us, each and every preceding boat eaten up from our view. We roll down the large slanted cascade at a breakneck speed ending up in a

large splash. A man helps us off the ride, throwing the boat into an ascending slide for the next riders.

I run up the row of stairs with my brother, jumping past the vacant line and into another boat. My mother insists on not having to go on another such ride, because it had caused her dizziness. This had been a problem early on, she sometimes feared she could not go with us. So my dad accompanies us instead. Again and again we ride, showing little interest in any other part of the park itself. The twisting and twirling end each time in another part of us getting wet.

I walked out quite content and slightly chilled, for the water had been quite cold. My clothes however dry up in no more than 5 minutes, with the sun gradually increasing in its already scalding intensity. We tried many other rides, a mini roller coaster set inside a haunted house and another smaller water ride. Up ahead, according to our tour guide, is a highly recommended place called Snow Town. It is a large super cooled dome loaded with snow, several places to toboggan and to have snowball fights.

Inside is an air-conditioned paradise, cooling my burning head and eliminating all sense of a hot humid landscape with cold dry crisp air. The magical feeling quickly dissipates when I realize how cold it is in the waiting room and how little I am wearing. The attendants give us each winter clothes and snow boots and we walk into the winter wonderland.

Several Thai children are frolicking around throwing what may be their first snowballs. I realized they have never had a cold season. I jumped into the snow rolling about, my brother digging deep within the snow. I threw a snowball at him, it flew missing my brother by 2 inches, and hit another child in the back of the head. Unsure of who it was and slightly frightened, I start digging a man hole in the ground. The snow is deep, a near bottomless pile. My head is the only part of my body above the ground, the rest is completely submerged, packed deep within the snow.

Another snowball flies and catches me from behind. I manage to turn my head around, looking up to identify my attacker. It is the same boy I had hit earlier. He laughs, then turns his attention to a row of toboggan racers, their boards racing down the hill. One of the boys whom is racing, is my brother himself. He slid down the slope making slight jumps and efforts to stay atop his sled. I can sense his obvious frustration as he begins to skid out of control. A racer suddenly stops from his board slamming into a hole just large enough to fit his sled. This is the very hole my brother had dug prior to the race. The rider contemplates the probability of hitting a hole at such a perfect angle. Again my brothers misguided experiments causes another person their misfortune, an excellent example of shodenfreud.

I climb out of my snow fort, my body covered in shards of ice and snow, then limb to the top of the sled slope. Along the way I catch a glimpse of the rider still struggling to yank the board from the ground. The impact must have planted it pretty deep. In fact the end of it is barely visible from where I am. My brother comes over laughing emphatically at what had happened, jumping unto another available toboggan to ride once again.

Sliding down the hill is quite scary, causing me to lose control of the toboggan. As this would happen, I lose control and begin spinning in circles, endangering me into a similar fate of the jinxed rider. The snow is hard and icy nearing the bottom, giving a consequence to failure to maintain control.

My mom announces it is time to go, our tour group is going to leave to get some lunch. We walk out clothes doused in frost and snow. I had almost forgotten my past life in Canada and how nice snow is to me. Even today the last time I have been to play in snow was in Thailand, one of the hottest countries in Asia, inside one of the most exotic amusement parks I've ever been to.

An exodus of group mates leave into the open, looking drained. My body welcomes an influx of intense sun

rays. I had never expected heat to be a relief, but there are surprises I can never predict. My brother is complaining of his hunger and is pelting us with a never-ending set of questions on when we are going to eat. The park is still quite vacant, few people are out roaming the park, and those who I see are workers; probably because it is a Tuesday and the Thai adventurers are mostly at work.

Countryside Tiger Farm Zoo

Back in the bus, the time reads 1:30, making our lunch a late lunch. The guide announces we are to eat at a restaurant just outside of the zoo we going to, because he had some terrible intestinal mishaps in the cafeteria lunches in the zoo. For this he never again ventured inside the walls of that hellish cafeteria.

When we arrive at the restaurant, there are a host of people chatting in the completely unfamiliar languages, I swear I could catch some hint of non-Thai languages. It is a cafeteria, a neat clean one with a vast variety of meals. There is a buffet of many small food booths, the interior is the size of a small shopping center. Not only is it a huge eating center, it is also a center for a great amount of Thai people to eat lunch. The commute through the crowd of people is unlike anything I've ever seen before. I probe through island after island of food, until I find myself staring into a vat of yellow curry. Directly next to it is a Thai specialty of colorful fried fruits. A large pot of rice is made available at every booth, making it convenient wherever we choose to go. If there is one booth made just for me, this is it.

My brother decides upon a large pile of rice and some mango ice cream, contradicting to my dad who had wanted to experiment with whatever was made available to him every since he came to Thailand. Put together it has a close resemblance to the innards of a frog. My mother ate mostly very spicy curry, something I would

never experiment with, considering we are in a country known for hot food.

Just after the short lunch break the group reformed at the tour bus, the driver announcing we will visit a Tiger farm along the way. The ride was comfortable, the air-conditioning on the bus saving us from further heat. Along the way I doze off to sleep, already being drowsy from the heat and a full stomach.

When bus stops, the tour guide guides us inside the zoo to a large covered area that is set aside for a demonstration of pig intelligence. First up is a huge fat pig that is proficient in math. The caretaker presents him with a simple math equation, then puts 3 numbers in front of the pig. The pig walks up to the correct answer and pushes it over, resulting in a round of applause and a treat from the trainer.

Afterwards, the trainer helped the math pig offstage while workers set up rows of racing walls. Six pigs are separated within each wall, all are berserk and wild. A bowl of food is set up on the opposing side. An alarm sounded and the pigs are off, they run screeching, bouncing off the walls; in seconds they reached the end and devour the food until it is no more. In the short time I have been in Thailand, I have come to expect the expected, this bizarre pig race comes as no surprise to me.

The crowd dissipates, everyone leaving in their own directions. We approach an animal conservatory, a large building with several hundred different animals and several species kept within its walls. Inside a photographer took pictures of a group of kids with a monkey hanging from between them. The monkey's small little body is supported by an extremely lithe and long set of arms; it is a spider monkey. Its intelligent yet mischievous mind scans over us, he makes no effort to escape. He sits until the camera emits its loud signature flash, then the crowd brakes up and the monkey jumps onto the caretaker's shoulder. He asks "Would like a picture taken with the

monkeys". Seeing it being quite a funny experience I quickly affirm his question.

We sit down on the bench, one monkey jumps onto my dad, the other on me; its nails digging into my legs. Again, as if routine, the photographer takes the picture, and the monkeys go back to the caretaker. Then the next people sit down for a picture. I figure it is not much of a life for a monkey to pose as a tourist attraction and nothing else.

In a small rain forest habitat there are several spider monkeys. We could see the monkeys moving about through the glass window. Some are active, most are grooming one another or attending to their own business. Luckily there are a few jumping around in the branches of a large tap root tree.

Going further in, there are tigers, several pits of them in fact. This is the ultimate contradiction to the blood lusty beasts on nature documentaries. Looking down I saw several tigers lazily moving here and there, shifting their massive weight as they move. The designs and colors of their backs are long stained with dirt from the many day's rest and few baths. Some of them grumbled out a half roar as they shifted around. One is chewing on a bone from an earlier meal. I undoubtedly knew of the dangers if you were to approach the tigers, however they seemed so dull and bored down there. I guess years of living in a confined pit can do that to you.

Again I see another photo stand, this time with a baby tiger the size of a very large dog. A couple people are standing waiting for their turn for a picture with it. I stood as one of them, watching a tiger habitat. Our turn came fast, the caretaker seating us and laying the tiger across all of our laps. The heavy weight of the tiger surprised me. Then the caretaker handed my mom a bottle of milk to feed the tiger to keep him calm during the time we are having our picture taken. It paid us no mind, just drank away at the bottle of milk as if had not eaten in days. The tiger is quite warm its fur being very thick and sturdy.

With amazement I looked down at the cub as the photo is taken.

In another area there are several large pig sows laying down feeding many tiger cubs, as if the sows are the cub's mother. I am surprised and startled that the tigers are drinking pig's milk. I trust the judgment of the tiger farmers, still wondering whether the tigers milk is similar enough to the sows to be a substitute.

We left the tiger farm and walked toward the crocodile farm, a farm with over thirty-thousand crocodiles. They will be used for meat and to make leather. Crocodile leather can cost quite a lot and brings great profit, however only a small portion of a crocodile's skin is suitable for leatherwork.

We approach a long swinging bridge similar to the dangerous ones in movies, but this one seems secure. A man on the bridge holds an entire chicken on a rope suspended from a rod, like a fishing rod, fishing for crocs. He lowers it near a crocodile who snaps it up in one bite. The man holds a large bag full of chickens, lowering each one into the pit until every last crocodile is fed. We continue across the bridge, the final part of the conservatory. The shaking motion of the bridge makes me uneasy. I am continuously convinced that the bridge will give way and we would fall into the pit. The thought that they were being fed chickens as we walk does little to make me feel more comfortable.

I gave one last peek at the growing crowd of crocodiles in the pit and left. *I wonder whether they had a baby crocodile to exhibit.* To my surprise, at the next display, I found my dad petting one. The crocodile, a foot in length, looked ferocious even if it is a tenth of the size of the fully-grown ones. It opened and shut its mouth of tiny underdeveloped teeth.

Judging by the time it is getting close to dinner. We decide to go on a short water ride through a mini jungle. The ride is idyllic, slow moving, emphasizing the artificial beauty of an uninhabited jungle. The river is so clear

the life forms within are more vivid than the jungle itself. the river spans quite far from the farm. There are robotic pygmies and rubber boa constrictors programmed to hiss and move every time someone came close enough.

After the ride, we leave the park.

Arrival in Pattaya

Inside the bus, the roadside flies by, a mirage barely noticeable to me. I remember naught of what the surrounding landscape had looked like, except the industrial buildings and countryside are close to one another. We arrive at a hotel in Pattaya, the tour guide allows us an hour to get ready before we are to go to the restaurant. He also announces we would do some late night shopping.

Up in our room, I take a quick shower, and my family and I go out into the spacious courtyard of the hotel. The air has cooled a little as the sun descends in the summer sky. Overlooking the pool and spa is a large drink bar, next to a large patch of grass. It is moments like this of undisturbed peace I most look forward too, especially after a busy day. I have little time to enjoy it though, we are yet again on the tour bus.

We arrive to a busy restaurant with Chinese style cuisine. We had thought we had read the greeting sign wrong. I had suspected the Thai were not accustomed with English spellings and had mistaken Chinese with Chaineese. Our tour guide, however, insisted it was spelled correctly, because Chaineese cuisine is from some area of China.

We are seated at one of 2 large circular tables. Next to us is a family of six. One of the four children is autistic, he is yet to be 5. My mom socializes with others at our table, as I began to learn about the condition of the small child. He would continuously attempt to crawl or run, wailing loudly whenever someone prevented his escape or picked him up. He is especially fierce with his mother as he tries to rip away from her grasp. I wonder what

hardships are entwined with taking care of a child who is crazy at least half the time.

The waiters bring in trays of steamed fish and assorted meats; a large pot of rice is set in the center of the table. A drink carrier approaches with trays of soda encased within glass bottles. The tour guide had obviously purchased this entire drink studio just for our dinner; I am impressed. One by one we get a drink. I notice there are flavors of Fanta, so I decide to take another. I grimaced, too much grape and cola. Eventually an orange decided to surface itself from the heaps of shredded ice.

A sound of glass breaking silenced some of the chatter as several curious eyes search out the source. My brother looks guilty standing over a broken bottle of grape Fanta, a deep purple stain spreading its way across the carpet. *Whose idea was it to give us glass anyway?* I thought. It was far too heavy and prone to breaking, especially in the hands of a younger child. Several waiters tend to the shattered shards and dyed carpet, excusing us to start conversing with one another again. My brother took another bottle as though nothing had happened.

Back at the table I watch the young autistic child again, who squirmed and writhed, roused up by the sudden commotion. I wonder if he will ever talk, or see reality as we do, or even think like us. He looks so lonely, his face not yet contorted like that of a true autistic case; his is blank and pained. He rarely makes a vocal sound, tending to be more physical with his surroundings. I don't know whether he is permanently cursed with this look from the years of struggle, or is he discontented?

A large tray comes grudgingly down the alley carrying dishes of food. The difference between the food we are being served, and the food at a Chinese restaurant, is minor. Both have fried chicken, pork, shrimp, and more shrimp with fried rice. Here, there is also more complex foods which I am quite confident are Thai. In the end, I come to the conclusion that Chinese is a rip-off of Chinese food with some traditional Thai. In other words, it is

a tourist attraction. Anyway, I do suggest going there yourself and feel the Chaineese magic. It is unique, not with its food, not even from its name, but in the fact that someone would bother to create their own oriental mini food culture. Then having it known to many people who say it is a legitimate oriental branch of food. Chaineese: I would have never thought of that, again, something undeniably out of the ordinary occurring in Thailand.

Pattaya Shopping

We finish supper and enter the tour bus. This time the city is covered in a blanket of darkness, the cooling air is calm and the night neigh. I catch a glimpse of a small sleek lizard dashing straight up the wall, docking itself in a cozy location above my head. Many of them are present at this hour, their variety of colors and sizes make them all the more interesting to find and admire. On the ride to the shopping center, I strain my eyes to hone in on any stray lizards, but the speed we are traveling makes it impossible.

The city has a soothing feeling to it. It is not lit up nor glamorous like Los Vegas, but its climate and hands on entertainment are unmatched.

A little boy let loose a loud blast of flatulence. A malicious sensory eating malodor is only seconds behind, working together like thunder and lightning. I heard several windows open, a sign that the smell has infested the entire bus. It stayed in the bus for the remainder for the ride. I could see from the strained faces that the tourists are ready to jump out the window if they were not relieved quickly. The boy however sat comfortably pretending that nothing has happened, his face buried within a magazine.

We leave the bus into the moonlit air, it is refreshing. The mall itself is inviting, a large traditional shopping center full of nighttime life. Lining the sides are small vendors selling various Thai goods. I notice a lot of mini

Buddha statues, the slim Thai style with intricately designed crowns. They often have their arms bent in the sign of prayer, feet tucked neatly under the body. Most are small and portable, some are so large it would cause travelers a great burden to carry around. Planted in the popular tourist shops inside the mall are several Buddhas of great proportions, massive structures. They draw us inside like tigers to pig milk. My dad carried a shopping bag, a protruding Buddha easily visible.

The mall itself is full of imported goods, therefore less appealing to us tourists. We avoided the *latest technology*, binoculars and cameras, preferring to look at the amethyst geodes. Some of these crystalline statues are taller than me. I wondered what a garden of these god sized geodes would look like. I imagined my very own garden of geodes and gems, more dazzling and impressive in comparison to any of the old fashioned botanical type.

When leaving the mall, we frightened a group of lizards that scurried up onto the wall out reach. I pleaded with my dad to catch one for me to bring home; it was within arms distance from him, then they ran further up the wall. I was that close to getting the pet of my dreams. Their skin begins to change color as they sit perched above me, mocking me with their ability to stand in any position they please as if gravity does not apply to them. If I could choose one animal that would live back in old Foster City, California, it would be this mysterious lizard. Until then, I would be more than content to have just one of my own in Foster City.

We board the tour bus, and go back to the hotel. Wearily I go up to the hotel room, wash up, and then crash into bed, asleep within seconds. I had little time to reflect on the days passing, or even to recognize anything that had transpired. My priorities were set to how much I wanted to sleep.

Tropical Beach Adventure

The tour bus drops us off at the coastline near the Pattaya beach. A boat waits at the edge, the driver ready to take us to a barge, a large flat ship from which we would later leave from to go to an island farther out. Before getting on the boat, we talk about what is about to transpire. I notice a horde of red ants surge onto my mom's bare legs. I have no will to tell her of what is happening, that is until she noticed from a bolt of sharp pain as the ants start to bite her. We laugh at her demise as she limps towards the water, submerging her injured foot.

We board the boat, a small influx of people stuffing themselves into the few seats the boat has to offer. I felt like seeing the ocean and sat in the front where the wind is strongest. The boat left shore in a ferocious charge, the engine sounded similar to a motorcycle and twice as powerful. The ride blew me back, absolutely exhilarating. My father and Riley look as if they are experiencing the best roller coaster in the world. As the ride progresses and the barge gets closer, I see several people in the back looked distressed as if they are becoming seasick. I feel nauseous myself. On the other hand, my brother is standing up on the deck enjoying himself.

The barge we arrived at resembles an airplane carrier, with the large open flat space for resting or do other various activities the ship offers. There are drinks available, as any proper barge should, and the adventure sport, parasailing. This consists of a parachute attached to a speedboat by a 100 foot piece of rope. The rider is harnessed into the parachute from which they ride high into the air, supported by air and speed from speedboat.

I look at the small crowd huddling around the parasailing platform; there are several people before me, some waiting for a chance in this one of a kind of adventure; some are just watching. I decide to be the first of my family to go; the crowd welcomes my decision. They make the final preparations for the person before me, he flies up into the air, his body appears weightless, aloft, ris-

ing for about 20 seconds, then staying up for several minutes. The motorboat then turns around heading back to the barge, the man descending lower and lower, touching down as gracefully as he had taken off. He is ecstatic, full of joy, a joy I am not familiar with seeing.

Although it seems blissful, nervousness is welded in my gut, I am not afraid, just nervous. The man calls me over, placing me in the hands of the fast moving preparation workers. I am strapped into a safety suit, so heavy I have trouble standing still, relying on the light pull of the parachute to keep me from falling. With a huge tug from the boat, I am caught unaware, as I take off another man jumps onto the back of the safety harness. As I rise in the air, I am pondering why there is a man hanging behind me.

The ascent into the sky is amazing, a unique feeling of the freedom of flight. The ground and water below me becoming less and less visible. Small shapeless figures are sprawled across the barge. I recognize one waving figure as my mom, probably wondering how this experience is for her little boy. Ahead, is the beach, a mere blotch from my vision. A sharp tug broke my ethereal thoughts as we headed back, I thought of the man before me who had been so happy; now I know why. The boat is fast approaching the barge, the man hanging behind me is preparing me for the landing. Seconds before my feet touched the ground, a photographer manages to take a snapshot of me in the air, I have a smile on my face and the guy behind me is not in the picture. Once landed, several workers come to me to remove the heavy equipment and prepare for the next rider, which in fact is my brother. I greet him talking of my experience before he leaves on his way.

I go to see my parents. They are excited at the aspect of both of us riding. My mother had para-sailed many years before in Thailand, my dad would not try it.

I sip a soda, an orange Fanta, as I watch my brother take off. He looks petrified; the same man jumps onto his

safety harness to ride along. We walk out into the open, my mom waving as I rest in the sun tanning chairs staring at the can of soda. Now that I think back to that time, it's funny, I thought Fanta was an Oriental brand of soda because it wasn't until years later that I seen it in North America.

Later I was told why I had a man jump onto behind. In my case, I am too light to go up in the air all by myself, the worker balances the weight the parachute carries. If I had not that extra weight I would have never been able to come down normally, and that may have been disasterious.

We leave the barge and go to an island. The boat anchors just off the shiny warm beach, composed entirely of white sand. Such beauty one would only find in photos of deserted tropical beaches, is now presented right before my eyes. Along the beach are several small wooden shacks with various novelties, swimming gear, drinks, and collectibles. There is also a mini restaurant equipped with several rows of wooden tables.

The sun is high in the sky, it's about mid noon, and the heat is beginning to peak. It is almost sad to compare this tropical beach to the cold beaches of the San Francisco Bay area. I wish a weather phenomenon would help soften the cold hearts of the frost demons residing ever so happily there. But then again global warming will grant that desire soon enough. By then there maybe swarms of overheated dead fish piled upon SF beach.

I patrolled the beach for several more minutes focusing my eyes on a sandbar. I half thought of it to be a crocodile, inspired by the ever so enjoyable tour yesterday. My father comes over announcing that he has arranged seats on the inflated banana raft which is hooked to the rear of a motorboat. The driver is ready for us to pile on. Close to all the children tourists bound on for the experience. The same excited feeling is again welded in my gut as I prepared for the jerk associated with most of these types of rides.

I lurch forward, my face slamming the side of the plastic raft with illogical intensity. I did not have time to tend to my face as we flew through the water twisting and turning, throwing several kids off the boat and into the shallow waters. Everyone is laughing, and screaming. I sat on the back coolly without a doubt I could do water skiing any day I tried. We traveled out into the waters, staying in the shallows, the driver attempting desperately to remove the last of the survivors aboard the raft. Kids flew, they fell leaving me and another boy.

From what I can see, this is the survival of the man of greater ability. I moved carefully, a death grip planted on the rubber handle. I lay on my stomach my body spread throughout the exterior of the banana, several perished having finally served their purpose of giving up their seats for their betters. I dig both my feet and hands onto whatever handles I can find. My nemesis follows my example, his transition was fast and aesthetic, almost making mine pathetic.

The driver looked back, he gaped in awe at our tenacity. I could almost read his thoughts, and I am reassured by his actions. His hand grasps the throttle moving us twice as fast as before, the speed is incomparable, blinding my already impaired vision. I hold on, we are in deeper water now, almost 50 yards from the coastline. More sandbars appear before us, small blurring figures in the distance, and are headed right for one? I remove my goggles, hook them onto my pants in a desperate attempt to view what in the world the driver is thinking. He has a maniacal, ecstatic look upon his face as we are seconds away from an island size sandbar. I contemplated for a moment whether I should bail to save myself from sudden death. My competitor looks back at me, a half smile upon his face. He is not leaving this until one person is victorious. *What honor?*, I think, *What stupid honor*. As I am thinking, *Why am I doing this?* we take a head on collision with the slanted land chunk, the banana boat flying into the air, flipping over into a 520 degree side flip, I

close my eyes, we land in a heap, my body submerged under water. It didn't hurt, rather the feeling is mystifying, that is until I come up for air.

I notice of my rival next to the overturned banana boat. We turn it back over and sit back on heading back for shore. I expected a crowd of amazed people standing at the beach waiting to see me. No one had even noticed. I notice the driver talking to another man, probably about the extensive measures he had to take in order to shake us off. I walk off to the beach thinking about the weird experience I just had.

I glimpse my dad motioning me to come to him. He leads me into the lunch shack, setting me up with some chicken wings and rice. I had little intention to eat, the nausea was catching up with me. I figured I gave it a run for its money during the boat ride.

The motor boat that had transported us to the island has come around again docking near the coastline. The tour guide jumps out rounding up our group mates. Within ten minutes everyone is crunched up within the boat and we head back. I sit in the back worried that I may get sick. The ride was however short, even questionable. I swore it took at least twice as long on the way out to the island. Looking out past the clear ocean waters I see the island in the distances.

Traditional Thai Massage

Our next stop is a Thai massage center. Next to it is a creepy row of wooden buildings adjacent to an abandoned parking lot. It reminds me of a stereotypical environment of a horror film. The only offset is that it is still light out, making it less scary. We enter through its only door, its black exterior and stained glass reminding me off a church in my neighborhood which I fear passing by as it reminds me of exorcisms. The church had also made some claims of redeeming an elderly man from a demon that haunted him for most his life. These were obvious

myths, probably the church has a motive to do this because they want to draw attention to themselves. It puts you in a state of mind which some claim to be spiritual, and this place, the massage center, has chosen to do the same.

Rows and rows of candles set near beds give the place a temple environment. Each bed is surrounded by a bolt of translucent cloth, neatly inset to emulate that of traditional Thai and Indian beds. The beds are thin mattresses called futons which are set on the floor. Several Thai women come into the room and lay us each down on one of beds.

The massage begins, my legs and arms are rubbed, they crack my back, toes and fingers; I enjoy it. It is mostly restful, I slept through later part of the massage. I had to be awoken by the nice lady who was massaging me during this time. According to most of the other tourists, their massage was brilliant and inhumanly good.

It is late when we leave. There are few clouds, the lights of the sky are darkening below this creepy area. I rub my groggy eyes, still tired but nevertheless, I move fast to get into the tour bus. I am becoming increasingly afraid.

We left, none of us hurt, all unusually calm. The only commotion is the flatualist boy, reciting his ever so engrossing story about how he scared the massage women away by farting in her midst. I did not dare to challenge his claim as I did not want to break the code of silence by making the boy prove his abilities. He already proved it well enough yesterday.

Dining Outdoors

Welcome tourists, once again, dinner time in Thailand. So far, dinner time has not been the greatest experience but it gets your mind off of the days travails of sightseeing, exploring and well, nothing.

You may not enjoy our service, or our food for that matter. But one thing is certain, you will come again to our restaurant.

This is what I expect to see on the menu board outside of our next restaurant. I had not really liked the food we had for the past few days. I expect nothing different with the this restaurant...In Thailand expect surprises.

We arrive at a huge recreational space with a massive bonfire constructed in a brick fireplace which is next to a huge array of impressive cooking equipment. If it should be named, I name it an outdoor baroque extravaganza. Nothing compares to this feasting area. Many people, the fire illuminating the now pitch black sky. I will be more than content if the food is equal to the amazing show the cooks are putting on. They've really outdone themselves. Now I've seen it all, the food is laid out in a huge strip across 3 massive bare tables, a wonderful selection, to much for me to list.

As we walk into the waiting crowd of diners, compounded with the darkness, I find it hard to keep track of my parents. I am handed a plate by a man working the barbecue. I select several specialties I am familiar with: chicken wings, Thai rice, pork, some strange vegetables and curry. It is the kind of food expected at an outdoor oriental meal.

In my mind I reminisce about barbecuing in the Californian summertime with friends when we had Chinese food, and some grilled antiquities. I feel a kinship with these people I am traveling with. Literally alone in this land, I almost called out to them, "Don't start without me!"

I checked my watch, a quarter to 10:00pm, HK time. It is an hour behind here, making it barely nine. I have just finished my plate of food unsupervised, a new record for me. Usually I am too preoccupied playing video games with friends to pay any mind to my hunger. This evening I have received what I had anticipated, my very first idyl-

lic party. Not bad, usually any party without games and friends is boring. This has neither, but for some reason it carries a soothing effect unlike any other. The environment is a predicament without worries. My thoughts flow freely and untroubled.

My brother runs to me and emphatically says he has found lizards perched everywhere. I am not at all surprised, considering the amount of lizards I had seen the previous night. I hunt with him into the shrouded night.

Several small trucks roll into the clearing, each able to carry 10 passengers on bench seats in the back. It is similar to that of an army caravan except the passenger seats are exposed to the open. Riley and I am vaguely interested in the presence of the trucks, and resume lizard hunting...an unsuccessful hunting session, not a single lizard captured.

There are legends floating around about 2 headed lizards and the reward for capturing it for the Thai government. They say it represents some great Leviathan. I do not doubt such a possibility considering the vast number of supernatural creature screw-ups I've seen in the past few years. I remember reporting on a two headed snake to my third grade class. I sensed doubt weld up in the minds of my classmates when I'd show them the picture I'd retrieved from a magazine. One kid asked me whether I cut it from one of our class picture books. Funny thing is, half the class went searching through the school books afterwards to make sure I hadn't made it up. The insecurity of the students had really altered their perception of reality. Either that or they thought I was some idiot. It seems strange that they can't substitute adjoined humans (Siamese twins) to adjoined snakes. Stories of those are common enough. They also lack imagination, it's scary. A two headed snake or 2 headed lizard, how dull can you get?

My dad walked over to where we are flailing about and updated us upon the situation. We are to ride on one

of the many trucks to our hotel. We are not going with the tour bus for late night shopping.

We reluctantly board the open part at rear of the truck. As the driver takes off, the wind blows hard against my face. The silky texture of the evening air catches me adrift in my own fantasy. As the world races by, my mind stayed focused on the ground. It is mystifying experience. I have never in my life rode in the open, not even in a convertible. Now I am here sitting atop a completely exposed truck, traveling at an unknown speed, without seat belts, or any protection around me. I am uneasy at the sight of the city lights racing by so fast. I am aware that it is only an illusion of the wind, however I cannot help but feel unsafe. Surrounding me is complete darkness, a deep blue hue to end the day. My brother has a look as if he is in a trance; his eyes narrowed into the singing wind. I swear he is asleep if it is not for his open eyes.

Despite the irritations of the air, I drift off into a restless sleep, dreaming of sit atop a giant crows nest, the mid noon sun high above my head. Fireballs drift weightlessly clinging to rocks, setting them ablaze. A giant six armed deity surges forward into the land, destroying the deserted trail in its path.

We arrive safely back to our hotel.

Russian Cat Circus

We head toward a circus performance of trained cats. The seats are organized in a semi circular fashion surrounding a stage, an announcer behind the stage introduces the performers from a speakerphone. There are several multi-colored cats and 2 small dogs. There are mini hoops, block platforms and a cat sized swing rigged across the entire stage. There is a trainer performer or two on stage at all times as the show progresses.

It is quite an amazing sight to see cats jump and swing, and do some tricks. One routine involves two cats work-

ing alongside one another, amazing for such independent and untamed animals. It is curious to think people have managed to get them to perform.

The show commanded a thunderous round of applause, especially from us tourists who are ecstatic about what we have just witnessed. The cats do a mini bow with the help of their trainers who wave as we leave.

An America Old West Town

At 10 o'clock in the morning it is 93 degrees Fahrenheit...in the shade. Now the heat shows no sign of diminishing in strength. In the early afternoon, the blazing temperature will climax. I know tonight I will be comfortable in a t-shirt and shorts. On this day, it is extra hot; my dad douses us in water to keep us from overheating.

We decide to watch another show, a Thai style American western gunfight. Unlike the other auditorium, we stand up at the back in the shade throughout the entire play. The actors identify themselves either as the sheriffs or outlaws. I wasn't very sure of who was who, considering the costumes were surprisingly alike for everyone, and they keep shooting at one another. I guess it is stereotypical to cartoon gunfights, aside that it has a considerable amount of fake blood. At one point a staged fist fight involved someone from the audience, whom punched one of the actors.

The play ends with the usual round of applause and a group bow of about 20 actors, all who were Thai... Very entertaining.

Countryside Safari

A hideous malodor fills the bus, as we enter the safari. There are Thai zookeepers watching over their animals roaming the endless plains, the borders of which are not visible to our eyes. I am amazed, the landscape makes me

feel as if we are in the real African wild, so many tall trees, dead grasslands and exotic animals. A small herd of giraffes munch leaves high in the tall trees surrounding a lake featuring several unfamiliar deer like animals. Small plants are nibbled away by ferrets just feet away from our bus. Soon we see several elephants dousing themselves with mud to protect their hard skin. Nearby a tiger chews on a piece of meat. Everyone makes a commotion when they see another tiger casually stroll pass a set of dark skinned horses.

We continue into a forest route, snakes periodically slid past, then hid themselves in the dense underbrush. A small bump shakes the bus, several group members scream as they see the reason is a rhino nudging the bus. Seeing no point in doing any further damage, the large gray creature walks away, leaving a large pile of dung in its path.

Storks jumped into the water grabbing fish and landing atop the elephants pecking away at its back. The occasional monkey greets us along the way swinging past from tree to tree.

Then there are less and less creatures appearing, and our guide announces the safari is coming to an end.

The Snake Farm

From my seat in the bus, I awake to see a sign in clear site reading Snake Farm, below is a jumble of Thai alphabet words. We exit the bus and go inside to a gift shop featuring venom cures, the proverbial snake oil, and any other snake products you could possibly think of, including some you would never think of. My mom purchased some snake venom treatment pills for some relatives.

The gift shop wasn't the only thing inside the farm, there are snakes of all kinds, featured in a protective habitat. In the center of the cement floor is a 20 foot round, 4 feet high pit for snakes. Inside are medium sized and a few large snakes, including Thailand's King Cobra. It is

called king because it eats other snakes, king of the snake world.

A snake trainer, wearing rubber boots, jumps into the snake pit. He keeps a close eye on the snakes as he moves around selecting snakes to show the audience. While doing this, an english announcer tells us about the variety of snakes native to Thailand. I think of this as a reminder to be careful when walking in the country side.

I find all the snakes surrounding me intimidating. I decide to retreat back to the bus, where my brother is sleeping. We wait several more minutes alongside several sleeping passengers. Then everyone regroups back into the bus, several people are carrying bags of snake ablutions and pills.

Rather than watching the roadside, I inspect the strange medicines closely. Most are pill bottles of a strange thick oil encased in jelly spheres. One says it helps cure asthma, and allergies. Some are touted as an essence that is spiritually strengthening. All say, Made in Thailand.

Thailand Photos



Hotel view in Bangkok



Dream World in Bangkok



Branden para-sailing



What do you pet and feed at a Tiger farm?
A little Tiger.

Breakfast in Hong Kong

I look up at the dark ceiling where flickers of light from the outside commotion adorn the ceiling with colorful projections. The shadowy pictures dance, occasionally intensifying with each crack or sizzle from the crowd below. The sound is great as the explosions ripple outside, sometimes dangerously close to the building. Rockets and flares from cannons below fly everywhere from the otherworldly crowd. A thump sounds again and again, each one gradually increasing in power and speed as if there is an animal hunting its prey within the very walls of this house. I become uneasy, and realize it is not from the explosions, and look down from my bunk. My brother no longer resides in his bed, he is replaced by an unnaturally large squid leaking ink down into a pool that looks like blood. Its large body releases a repugnant smell, making me convulse. I jump off my bed, reach for the door as my blankets, now animated, hold me back with a horrendous force. I jam my hand to the door handle and yanked the door open. Screaming light floods into the room as I am blown backwards into a twirling void...I wake up to a new reality, the original reality.

I wake up sweating profusely, and shocked. I look over the bunk to find my brother fast asleep, holding onto his toy dog. I gasp in relief as I fall back into bed, afraid to go back to sleep, so I jump off the bed, this time landing swiftly and silently. It is still dark out, a sign it is very early. I know there is a new dawn reaching out from the horizon, but still too young to light Hong Kong.

I walk down the hall, observing the quiet feel in the air as all doors are shut and not a soul awake. Light pierces the darkness in the living room, a sign that someone had been or is still here. A laptop sits open, a whirring sound coming from it. I looked over, noticing the screen is on, set to a Chinese online shopping web page. I walk into the kitchen, inside is my Uncle Simon.

“Good Morning, why are you awake this early?” he asks, holding a bowl of cereal and a unopened can of energy drink. Simon is an early waker, sleeping only 6 hours a night on average.

“I couldn't sleep, I guess I had a nightmare,” I responded.

“OK, well I hope you slept enough. Your brother left the Gameboy on the couch,” he said. I thank him, and he goes back to attend to his online shopping.

I grab a box of chocolate cereal, a brand only available in China, and race back to the couch to start playing. The original Gameboy is a simple device, as many of you may know. It consists of 2 major buttons: A and B, and other options: Select, and Start. Being quite simple, it is portable and small, making it ideal in boring situations, like a road trip. However I am eager to try out a new game cartridge, one with over 200 games on it, rather than the usual cartridge that only has one dull game. I scroll down through the list of games, many I am unfamiliar with. I try several of the games. The quality of this cartridge is outstanding compared with others which have many duplicate games. If the cartridge says it has 200 games inside, it may have only 20 different games, and the other 180 are all copies of the original 20. This one however is neatly organized, the titles separated into 4 categories, some including the more popular games, like the original Mario, up to the most recent Mario. I spend the next hour testing and deciding which games are worthy of being played, and which were better off in the duplicate category.

My brother walks in shortly carrying his stuffed dog Sunshine in one hand, and a dirty red colored Gameboy in the other. Mom bought Sunshine for Riley in our hotel in Tokyo, Japan; the name of the hotel, Sunshine.

Riley asks, “What are you playing?”

“Some robot game,” I respond.

“What's the number.”

“82.”

“Want to play together?” he asks.

“No, I’m pretty hungry myself, and all I’ve eaten is a bowl of Milo’s that tastes bland.”

He agrees, and returns to help wake my parents up. They are already awake. I walk down the now lively corridor, bustling with lights and sounds. My dad is inside the computer room, working to install a more updated version of the operating system. He is using a CD that cost only 50 cents; it is Windows XP. Anyway, who wants to pay more for Windows anyway? We also helped my aunt purchase a Chinese keyboard and install a Chinese font program on the computer. It was quite tedious find the right computer parts in the maze of stores at the Golden Computer Centre in Mong Kok. We walked through, probing around here and there as my parents and aunt shopped. I wanted to buy a set of shrunken kitchen knives to use for a throwing alternative, however it was forcefully rejected, so instead I purchased a computer game called Fish, a 3D aquarium game where I select digital fish and try to keep them alive and well in the digital computer aquarium.

I asked my dad when will we leave to eat. He only responded that he had to finish with the computer first. I writhed as the process was only 30 percent done, the bar barely rising. A mild beep every so often as the Microsoft advertisements passed along each page, attempting to wry people’s minds into purchasing their products. I walked away grimacing on an empty stomach reluctant to eat anymore cereal.

I catch a faint smell of fair smelling plants, so I walk towards the source. It comes from a row of plants laid adjacent to one another outside of the apartment window. The rays of light shone in, a beautiful representation of summer lay in the midst of my sight. The park below harbors a children’s playground full of laughter and fun, next to it is a beautiful Coi pond. Coi can live a long life, sometimes outliving their owner.

I touched the plant that I had purchased during one of our shopping sprees. It recoiled on contact as if it was animated. I admired this plant due to its ability to move, Chinese call this plant *Shy Plant*. Its delicate leaves curled up into a little ball as it hides away from anything it senses.

"It's time, the computer install is finished, we can go eat now," my brother said, protruding on my peace of mind.

"Great get yourself ready so we can go," I responded, jumping up and grabbing my shoes. My brother ran towards the door, carrying his wallet full of randomly assorted coins and a few Hong Kong bills. I walk past Simon who is now watching some unknown TV show. I open both the door and the iron gate for my brother and I to exit the apartment. We egressed into the gray dank looking lobby and activated the elevator. I watch with amazement as elevator covers over 18 floors in under 30 seconds; they are always faster in Hong Kong. A familiar ding sounded as the small elevator door opened. Riley stepped through the door and held it open as I ran to hurry parents into the elevator. I am happy to see Aunt Betty and Simon are coming with us, their clothing perfectly matched for the hot weather coming forth. We stepped into the elevator as my mom continued to talk about different happenings around Hong Kong.

Riley and I wave and make funny gestures at the elevator camera as the elevator continued to drop at a fast and steady pace. It came to an abrupt stop, the doors opened to unravel the bottom floor lobby. Two guards greeted us, opened the gates for our departure, my mom still talking away to Betty. Today, like other days, there is an intense warmth resonating from the sun overhead, for me, the humidity is welcoming. I look ahead, the streets are full of life. Cars roaming around the streets, several taxis are parked all along the sidewalks. The taxis here are cheap to ride in, making it a highly prioritized method of transportation for us visitors. Across the dark pavement are a

series of white lines, all equally spaced from one another, called a Zebra Crossing. They signify pedestrians have the right of way to cross the street.

We crossed. My eyes narrowed down at my bright blue sandals. They have a fake Nike symbol carved across the exterior; they have been bought recently, I have not even removed its price tag. I wondered whether such hot temperatures brought upon the black pavement would be able to boil an egg.

Riley points out interesting buildings and cars. Occasionally a double decker bus would come raging by stopping here and there at bus stops, and my mom would make the same comment, "Look it's a double decker bus." Then my brother would ask if he could ride on one later. The double decker bus is a normal bus with a second story of seats above the normal row. The view from the colossus bus is amazing, like looking from the second story of a house moving down the street. When the bus goes around a corner, my brother grabs onto the seat looking excited. It is quite a ride on the top of one, and I always look forward to riding on one.

We continued to walk away from the road into the small shops, where there is a meat seller we often purchased food from. Today, a gutted dead pig lay on the ground near the shop, still waiting to be chopped and sold. Tanks full of live crabs and fish swim next to one another. Next to the tanks are several huge bags of uncooked rice laid neatly in one stack. The butcher recognized us and wondered whether we would want anything. We turned down the offer, informing the butcher where we were headed, he nodded in approval saying he had eaten there just this morning.

A large ping pong court lay ahead of us, rows and rows of inlaid tables. A couple players were playing, slamming the ball back and forth at an unmatched speed. We watched the two for several minutes as they dazzled us with their skills. We left, I contemplated how people can become so good. I pulled two ping pong balls from

my pocket, both made in Germany, purchased very recently. The blue and green balls depicted a picture of a Turtle and had some unreadable German imprinted into them. I pocketed my treasures next to my wallet.

Up ahead is the Shopping Center, spelled the British way, *Shopping Centre*. We entered, inside to a intense scenario of people shopping. Mini marts line the compressed maze of the mart; many advertisements filling the air. As we walk I am afraid we will never find our way out, it is a jungle in here. Riley wants to go inside a shopping place to buy a remote controlled car, but we continue on almost ignoring the poor guy. I was able to view some yo yo's and a few games before exiting the market. On the other side is a brighter more peaceful area, with a mini bridge and a pond to add a calming feel. Across to our right is a long row of eating areas, our destination. The all popular Mei-Foo tsuk restaurant.

We enter the restaurant passing by the horde of people inside, the early morning rush, although it was almost 9:00am. We take a seat coalesce to the cooking and ordering platform. A large, thin glass wall, blocking the steam from getting to the crowd. Several waitresses are taking orders, and heading in and out, the chefs set into one large conglomerate in the back.

"What will it be today," asked a waitress, speaking in Cantonese.

"2 fish and 3 pork tsuk," responded my mom. Tsuk, the pronunciation similar to joke, is a Chinese porridge, or rice chowder, like clam chowder.

My dad asked my mom if they had any donut bread sticks because Riley wanted some. I agreed with my dad, and wanted 2 orders of the sticks. My mom relayed my dads words into Cantonese, in which the waiter nodded, then left to retrieve the food.

We wait, listening to my mom continue to talk, brewing a conversation between the three siblings. Over at the wall where the cashier stands is a beautiful picture depicting a pond of coi fish, swimming around ever so peace-

fully. A small group of children, all bald aside from the small patch of hair hanging from the center of their forehead, an old hairstyle I guess. The children hold a stick steady in the water poking about at the coi. I remember a summer ago, my family and I visited Guang Zhou (Canton), in China, in a nice place with a huge outdoor pool of water, full of healthy Coi. There were hundreds of them, swarming in masses, completely friendly with us all, they followed us as far as the pool would allow. We bought and fed them at least 20 packets of fish food to feed their voracious appetite, and yet, they still craved for more. Such wonderful creatures, I wish I could have one to keep for myself.



The waitress disturbed my thoughts bringing a tray of our tsuk and donut sticks. The tsuk, is made of grounded up rice, boiled in a pot of water, and can be quite bland if not mixed in with some flavoring, such as beef, pork or fish. She set the bowls of steaming stew next to the donut sticks. My mom uses a large spoon to distribute the food into our bowls. My brother immediately added Soy Sauce before my parents had any say in his actions. The black liquid soaked into his food creating an overly salty mixture.

“Riley, why did you do that?” complained my dad.

“I like saltiness,” he replied smiling and spooning away at his food.

I started to eat, dipping the donut stick into my food and scooping some stew into my mouth. The taste is mild and controlled, I can tell why my brother had added so much extra salt into his chowder. I finished soon, a satisfying meal. Riley didn't finish however, being that he ate half of all our bread sticks.

After our breakfast, it was our duty to decide upon where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do. However, my mom had already made our plans for us. She had apparently decided that we were going to visit an old friend of her's, who apparently had quite an expensive apartment.

I start to eat, dipping the donut stick into my stew and scooping some up into my mouth. The taste was mild and controlled, I can tell why my brother added extra salt into his tsuk. I soon finish; I am satisfied with the meal I have just eaten. Riley didn't finish his tsuk because he ate half of all our donut sticks.

After breakfast, it is our duty to decide upon where we want to go and what we want to do. We decide on going to the street vendors. Simon and Betty drop out of our little group and head back to the house. We walk out of the restaurant, leaving an abnormally large tip, and head to the shopping center to let Riley pick up a few goods to keep him happy. Which apparently works, though we waited almost 20 minutes for him to make up his mind while he bought a toy car, some gum and a new game cartridge.

We leave the store to go the subway station to get to the area where the street vendors are. Outside is still bustling with life during this early morning rush hour.

China Photos



View from the peak



Guang Zhou (Canton)



World's Biggest Buddha

Branden with monks



Shopping street

Chapter Two

Recital Poems

Introduction

These poems are literally what the title suggests, poems written for the Recital Project. Over the course of March, 2006, I wrote these poems in my free time along with editing my Recital Project, and putting together this book. The poems are a combination of standard free verse, rhyming, and haikus. I wrote all the haikus at once, as an experiment.

I enjoy writing during the night time, as it is peaceful and my mind is most at peace. Also clinical studies show, the teenage mind is awake mostly at night. I wrote whatever came to mind; if I could start a poem with 2 good rhyming sentences, then I could end it. If I failed to do so I did not continue writing. I only write what comes naturally, if not, then it defeats the whole purpose of writing in the first place.

Most of my poems are a 10-15 minute ordeal, which is one of the reasons they are so short. I would make it longer, but it becomes tedious and purposeless to me. Someday I will, but at the moment I do with what I have.

I read the poems Shake-A-Spear and Lunar Night the night of the Recital Project presentations.

Recital Poems

The Dark Forest

In the sundering forest and broken hallows
 Not a bird caws or soul follows
 The surrendering might of the ethereal haze
 Reforms and creates another maze
 What can be seen in a place so strange
 Where all life exist in a botanical range
 All is silent, all is still
 All supporting an unbroken will
 Of a warrior so ancient and strong
 His eyes unseen, and army, a throng
 All around the titanic tree
 A plethora of flowers up to his knee
 Twas his dream to live an eternal life
 Wisdom untouched by worldly strife
 All would travel to see your sacred beauty
 But what beauty would thy have if all were to see

Mexico

Oh, my friend, my dearest friend
 Is no longer here
 The dark land he goes
 Into the shadowy tethers
 The forsworn depths
 Of hell built upon reality
 One shall die slaking one's thirst
 Many shall perish working the hellish lands
 The intricate face masking the truth
 Avoidance, avoidance, no penance for death
 Once you enter, either saint or demon
 Be wary of what you may see
 There are two paths and two paths only
 The one who serves or the one to be served
 Let us hope whoever you may be

You shall be kind to those you love or hate
Because a blessing here may be a curse
To those who do not seek it

What is

What is a sunset to one
But a sunrise to another
What is a subtle ending
But an explosive beginning
What is one's demise
But another's success
What is the ending of sorrow
But the beginning of euphoria
What is light shed on one
But darkness to another
For every joy to one
There is a consequence to another
Suffer for others
And watch them rejoice
Fate has many ways of dividing success
Are you taking the light
Or having it taken from you

Tigers

They're just right
And thrice as bright
Just look it over
They're salvaging stations
It's the way they live
Oh fewer rations
Claws of steel
Fangs of lust
Any unwary victim
May be clawed to dust
They are not the blood slaking behemoths

From ancient folklore
You must go and see
What they have in store

--- Incomplete, it just kind of ends here

Untitled

Look, look I had once thought
But what should I expect to see from myself
I was blind to it, I was blind to nothing
How is it so that I could see what I can't see
Is it so that I am nothing but a conscience
Subordinate to a class of greater conscience
I see little, I am basic and ignorant
It is time, the last hours of reality fall
Before I part, I am one of them
A entity, the master of all cognitive matter
Or so I thought
Oh the horrors, I can see, but am blind to bliss
I am no longer ignorant, I cannot feel
The path of knowledge has taken a hideous turn
I am the sage, the sage of sorrow
Those who have knowledge are condemned to suffer

I've done a bad deed today

I've done a bad deed today
I worry for my very life
My hear is enveloped in heavy strife
I've done a bad deed today
Word of it will surely fly
My reputation will surely die
I've done a bad deed today
My integrity is falling apart
My near future never looked so tart
I've done a bad deed today

I've betrayed the trusts of more than one
 And have been overturned by retribution
 I've done a bad deed today
 Never have I felt so contrite
 Not a soul helps or sheds any light
 I've done a bad deed today
 And for some time it will surely follow
 Until I am allowed redemption, I will still be hollow

Soul linked

The world gorging waves, the roaring sea
 There is little now that is below me
 'Cept for the ancient rocks and dying life
 That wait for me, amidst my strife
 Preparations into the void, my vision gets lighter
 Yet the clasp around my ankle becomes tighter
 Shadows aloft begin the traverse the waves
 Unsentinel beings performing taunting raves
 The pirates, friends, yet unworthy miscreants
 My thoughts reach out to our unborn infant
 'Twas my fault to leave in a time of need
 Just a little further and I would succeed
 Ransacked, pillaged, one with the sea
 The series of events that caused the demise of my sailors
 and me
 I wait alone now, my breath gives way
 Frozen in terror I begin to pray
 The light bends a final spectrum for my eyes to behold
 Then an uncertain future waiting to unfold

Full Metal Alchemy

On a summer's day and a winter's pledge
 For soldier's sword and farmer's hedge
 To rage one last demonic battle
 Between closed circuits and horses saddle

The robots line strategy unkept
 The warriors march, loved ones wept
 Staring them straight in the steely eye
 Where no emotion will ever defy
 "We have no ordinary enemy," the King rants
 "Sir I have a message," the messenger pants
 We, surrender great lord, great liege
 We will continue no forsaken siege
 We thought we could steal you humanity
 We are jealous
 For once, we too were human
 That is why we are zealous.
 To see you die makes us depraved
 But promised life, we still behaved
 As we cannot feel life
 We cannot feel death
 So end our strife
 And draw you sword from you heath
 So you may bring peace from what has transpired
 To what should have never conspired

Haiku Experiments

Like thick mountain mist
 My heart seems to fade away
 Lost in the far past

Unlikely Twins
 Someone's shallow misguidance
 May wane you path

The dung beetle's glare
 You're lost but not forgotten
 Frozen summer days

A cicada shell
 Genji's final evil wanes
 Don't close the book now

Our flatulence, yes
 The noble art of farting
 How ever so crude

Trust in those who love
 Don't lost them through lapse in faith
 It's now or never

Meh meh meh meh meh
 meh meh meh meh meh meh meh
 meh meh meh meh meh

One glance rejection
 A haiku no one read well
 Can you understand

Dinner Part

Dark Blue maroon, lacerated sky
 Spew the yellows and the reds will fly
 Brown confections, crimson dark grey
 Blue black reds, orange filet
 Lackluster yellow, translucent apparel
 Tenebrous shadows, vendetta feral

Shake-A-Spear

Bonna: Crescent Moon, Celestial Banana
 Please bring back though sweet Anna

Moon: Thowest hath no penance for thy light
 For that, though shalt have no Anna

Bonna: You speak in riddles ethereal thief
 You steal your light from the golden reef
 I pay my penance you Shakespearean infection

You deserve no place among my affection

Moon: I am no ass, as my name may suggest
Although thy enjoy thy Shakespearean jest
I am the master of riddles
And Bonna Fide fiddles
Yet you confuse me not the lest

Bonna: All I ask is to see my Anna Banana
And I won't reveal intelligence to thy golden savannah

Moon: Agreed, agreed your penance paid
And with that my body will fade
Wake at morn to golden Cantana
And thou shall find thou sweet Anna

--- Inspired by no one

Lunar Night

The dry tears of a lunar night
The heavens cry in celestial desperation
From the silent prayers of the oaks
To the east shore winds
Bending fragments of light caught in a cascade
Reflect the spectral beauty of the morning aloft
Willows march their way into the sky
Sunset dew falls upon ascending leaves
A groundhog hurls its a way through knurled earth
Nature again refuses the arrival of spring
Ghastly and demonic, the torrent begins its path
Cascades of water fall from the sky
But no light for the morn illusion
Shadows possess the heartless rain
They freeze adrift, crack upon leaves
Spring will wait for the rage's passing

Chapter Three

Seasonal Poems

Introduction

These poems were written in my seventh grade school year. These are mostly written as school work, written in the order printed following, each with its own purpose. I felt they deserves a place of its own, its own chapter as they are one of the first I have written. I had a good time creating them. Within the same week I had all these poems ready; I read Spring at the seventh grade Poetry Night.

AUTUMN

A chill zephyr blows,
Dry leaves disperse.
Orange and yellow array,
Darkening skies approach.
Pale trees prepare for rest,
Towering oaks seem to shorten.
Nights lengthen, days shorten,
Shadows creep closer,
Influx of leaves blows
Strewn over cracked grass.

Nocturnal mornings,
Begin to expand,
Flowers die,
Trees hibernate,
Animals eat,
With abnormal voracity.
Season of approaching zest,
And beginning sleep.

WINTER

Darkening skies and leafless trees,
Overshadow the once lush landscape,
Vivid white, covering sleek rooftops,
Porches and smoke belching chimneys,
Dawn approaches, a cardinal lands atop,
A decorated window, guided by a
Light and chilly zephyr.

Laughter and songs of seasonal zest,
Fill the air of the winter days,
Endless nights adorned by trees and presents,
Timeless days of laughter and tranquility,
Trees brightened by man-made beauty.

Trees abash, Winter's fury,
Winds awake, snow barrage,
Skies darken, hail strikes,
Yet the night continues in persisting happiness.

SUMMER

Blue birds fly and sing,
Paradise heaven's ring,
Eternal mornings, dawns next day,
Parrot's mantle, rainbow array,
Petals darken, condor's flights,
Vivid trees soar to incredible heights,
To condemn fury, to condemn hope,
To equalize both valley and slope.

Season of flourish, after rebirth,
Life growing with the heat of its hearth,
Glowing light and eternal wakes,
Moonlit auroras, shimmering lakes,
Fruity concoctions fill the air,
Attracting an exodus of bees from their lair,
Berries ripen, oranges brighten,
Seasonal colors gone and tighten,
At the end of each Summer day,
What causes Summer to be this way?

SPRING

Icicles, stagnant all around,
Have begun their descent towards the ground.
Ice sinks lower, darkness brighten
Vines expansion, berries ripen.
Twilight creeps away, its 5 O' Clock,
Geese gather together to form a flock.
In a nearby lake, storks fly low in search of fish,
The ice loosens, begins to relinquish.
Hawks fly to the zenith, warming at its hearth,
As petals begin to bloom, dropping snow towards the
earth.

The sun looms overhead, releasing heat,
Withering blossoms drop to my feet.
A bear wakes up yawning in appease,
Hearing the cracking of branches and roaring of seas.
Wintergreen trees sigh in relief,
For this was the end to their grief.
Onerous landscapes change to a new land yonder,
For life around to come and ponder.
There was not time, spring will arrive,
For the awaiting life to once again strive.

Chapter Four

Night Poems

Introduction

More poems from my seventh grade year. The first poem I wrote, in the seventh grade, is Night. It received flawless critique, rave reviews, so I decided to coin this section Night Poems. They are alternative to the other poems, most with darker subject matter, but fun to write.

The first poem, Night, is the feature poem.

Night

Lights of the sky fade away,
Diurnal might unconscious,
Stars, ethereal lights up above,
Spark and glow like an eternal flame
of the tenebrous night.

Stars integrate, form constellations,
Celestial pictures illuminate the night,
Encased in perfect harmony,
They dance and laugh.
Personifying the animals
Whom they sought to represent.

Nocturnal flights enrich the night,
Leathery wings fly by fast.
Hunts are neither silent or loud,
A brutal struggle to writhe through,
Yet so tranquil and brilliant.

The night is alive,
reanimated from diurnal threats.
Gas, construction and aluminum,
Destroy, corrode this landscape,
Annihilating all life,
For no fault of their own.
Yet we caused their demise.
A war never to be won.

Dawn arises for the next day.
Diurnal might regain control.
Night, no longer animated,
Lifeless, waiting for rebirth.
As one Sun brings one thousand dawns.
For each night is different,
Delivering new surprises,
Either good or ill,
Yet there is change.

Nightmare Revision

Every evening as diurnal nights grow weary
 Nocturnal nights again gain control.
 Plunging the world into ethereal darkness
 For unconscious souls around.

Delicately vulnerable, dreams tranquil in their minds,
 The Nightmare seeks the most exuberant of them all.
 Their hooves storm through their minds,
 Stomping euphoria into dreams of utter despair.

The mind, now under the Nightmare's appease,
 It plays around, torturing its client
 Until a scream tears through the night serenity,
 Then will the Nightmare find another victim.

I Miss

I miss the vibrant former life,
 Without corruption, in tranquility and harmony,
 Moments shared, happiness won.
 The Golden Age of my life has left me,
 Walking in the rain malcontent.
 Like a lost soul tenacious and
 Longing to find light at the end of dark,
 Has life left me in this endless maze?

Long days I pray to overcome this travail,
 To find euphoria in the darkest days,
 Clouded, yet sweet wake of the beautiful past,
 Float past me like ethereal baubles,
 Unforgettable days with my long lost friend,
 Whom I have know so dearly,
 Left me without even a faint goodbye,
 How such vital aspects in my life,
 Suddenly disappear.
 Sighing, I continue on my journey home,
 Waiting for what I have sought so badly.

Contract

Without cherish of a Olde Tyme Carolle.
My mind goes dim and my instincts are feral.
What I do, a subordinate cause.
What I can't do, I'm bound to a subordinate clause.
Oh contract, oh contract.
I see what you lack.
You bind us to one, and only one track.
Your morbid powers make me so weak.
Please let me do whatever I seek.
I may barbaric and my mind will deter.
But hear me out, in the end you will concur.
Work will be so much better without an order.

Something Incomplete

It was mystifying, mind defying, world confining night.
All was dark, but all was light.
It could provide a gruesome sight.
I could see little, stung by fright.

Fallen Hand

Like the shadows, leapt upon clay
Mind untiring and infinitely reliable
With the dexterity of 100 score
Intentions pure, tame to the bone
The white dyed lacquer fall upon outstretched palm
A better coat, an armor to my reputation
A falling star, a glint of steel
I have few peers like myself
I may never meet my one fallen alias
My right-hand man so true
Forced into exile from what I knew so well
My mind wept with sorrow and lost ambition
I was paired with another, of similar origins
Of that who lost my predecessor

Druid

Journey back to the Sullen Tomorrow
 Where now souls reside, some with guilty sorrow
 The industrial turf, a dizzying view
 The horde relinquished, over a single curfew
 The Majestic Tree of unjested desire
 Thrown unloved into a savage fire
 Look at thee

Zombies

I'm in the middle of a graveyard, it's the dead of night.
 The air smells chilly, with a tinge of fright.
 Then I see something move,
 But there's nothing much to prove.
 I cannot believe,
 I'm ready to leave.

There's nothing much to plunder
 When your six feet under.
 So they rose to the ground
 To mess around.
 I can't believe my eyes
 When they really do arise
 Their heads above the soil, their faces contractive,
 They sure are dumb, and none too attractive.

I begin to run, and fall on my knee.
 And out popped a zombie from under me.
 I have just been caught in a undertoe
 But this is quite literal for you to know.
 I kicked around in utter desperation
 With little on me and no inspiration.
 I try to scream, but my mouth is dry,
 This is the end, I think I'm gonna die.
 But out came a man who is made of pie.

The graveyard ghouls are down and weak
Looking for something good to eat
Like New York Cheesecake.
But I can't tell you why
Or you may never try
To visit the graveyard in the dead of night.

--- Unfinished poem

Chapter Five

Short Stories

Story Introduction

Dave Susman, Nueva's creative writing teacher, was my writing tutor in the summer of 2005. He had me read *A Life of Writing*, by Amy Tan, and then had me write fictional and non-fictional short stories based on real life experiences. I have included three pieces from which I learnt a lot: *Pianist or Bum?*, an experimental story, *The Not So Expected*, and *Incredible Adventure*, a longer short story in the next chapter. After Dave's exercises, I found it easier to write random, interesting stories, a mini hobby almost important to me as poetry.

Pianist or Bum?

I remember the day my mom went on and on about how I fail to play the piano on my own. I always remember her for her famous philippic of how I always manage to screw up my piano practice and then later quit playing. I had never listened too closely to what she had told me.

One of my mom's most common questions about doing anything constructive when I refused was: "Would you rather be a bum on 3'd street or a successful person?"

No matter what I think, I always answer "A successful person." I had once tried to say, "Even if didn't play piano how would that result in me being a bum on 3'd street."

Then she gives a complete chronological time line of me failing everything which usually involved with me quitting everything.

I had never, never realized why my mom is the way she is. I have always stereotyped her with any other Chinese mother, always punctual and a perfectionist at times. However, I remember her saying something about how crabby her mom was, and that her grandmom must have been a crab as well. One day I caught myself thinking of my great ancestor, on my mom's side; I imagined this as a barbaric version of my mom sitting in a stone chair barking commands and unleashing diatribes at her unwilling children. I thought of how this amazing carbines is brought down generation on end until I am left with it. Whoopee!

Sometimes I read books where the dad is a rogue ruler and the mom was passive and allowing. I wondered if that was even possible, since my dad doesn't become angry very easy.

I've been always waiting for a day my mom would change, and so was my mother for my family. Although this is virtually impossible, we have gotten better. My mom only yells 2 times a day on average, almost 3 times

less than usual. This is probably so because I've picked up 3 extracurricular activities and several good habits, rather than my usual zip.

So in conclusion, there is one proverb to close it all up, "Like ancestor, like parents."

The Not So Expected

All throughout my life, I never stopped to think, *Why does my mom never quit helping and caring about my brother and I?* In fact, care is a bit of an understatement; she literally goes overboard. I remember her slaving over housework, and other important tasks, and putting up with everything we throw at her. She cares so much, I almost think she puts her life behind ours. Pretty intriguing, huh. Well, it's not. She worries about our problems on end, and tries consistently to change us, and always seems to fail.

She, as any other mom would, tells us that she just wants to help us and would do anything possible to do so, except that she follows through with brute force. If she sees us not playing piano, or refusing good octopus, she's there to hammer us through like a nail. She will never give up until the smallest, most punctual detail is fixed. It's becoming a problem.

Nagging us all these years and forcing opinions down have made us lazy and unmotivated. She cares too much and is very determined to make us better people. She has chosen poorly on behalf of the way she cares. If she gives us less care and more freedom, I may be different than the unassertive stoic slob I am today. Well maybe I'm not a slob... She forgot one major key in maturity, the less someone has, the harder they will fight for more. Believe it or not, I acquired this information from playing the card game called Magic. While playing, something dawned on me... Literally this means, if you don't have much help, the harder you will try for greater knowledge and oppor-

tunity. There are 2 bad sides to this, if you have no help, you become a something my psychologist likes to call “A dreg to humanity.” As in my case, if the child has an overdose of help, they become unmotivated, lazy, and sometimes angry or unhappy. Not to mention, maturity and self independence is delayed.

It’s like what my mom says, “It is a vicious cycle.” The child has problems, then the parent gets worried about the child, and starts caring more, and then child pushes back. The parent starts to become unhappy and tries many disciplinary approaches without targeting the child’s real problem to begin with. Until the parent STOPS caring so excessively, the child never matures, never gets better.

In conclusion it’s not the most caring and determined parent that wins, however determined. It is the parent that gives the most mediocre, appreciated support that wins. A little help can go a long way.

In Class Musing

“Those Who are Ignorant of the Past are Condemned to Repeat it.”

According to the Ethereal Institute of Anesthesiology, the past stopped moving once it was put into an airtight package of time. There is an unfathomable fine line between the past and future, and the fine line is the present. Every minuscule fragment of time passes through this wormhole and into the package. There are ways to access this vault through the art of history. There are two types, that which has been recorded by humans, and that which is lost in the endless void of the time space continuum (this is spelled correctly). And you may only reminisce what you acquire, but never relive it. What about that which is forgotten or unlearned? According to a popular philosopher remark, we are

forced to repeat it. You may think it is quite tough to end up emulating a miscreant like Hitler or a brilliant scientist like Einstein. That in my mind is completely not the point of the saying.

Have your parents ever told you about all the stupid things that occurred in their lives, most from lack of experience in one topic or another. Then they shed their own words of wisdom in hopes you won't repeat the mistakes they did. This is at least 90 percent of the point, the lesser mistakes that occur quite frequently. Some are more severe than others and some inevitable in their own retrospect. You go camping and wipe your ass with poison ivy, a favorite of mine because Stephen King himself did this because he did not recognize the shiny leaves. You leave a soda up in your room and to your despair, that ants now find it a relief center. Or you feel strong, and don't put on your helmet, and end up with a minor concussion.

There are more prominent examples of people who fall into the historical trap, yet most of them just choose to deny the past. Just like if your parents told you to put on a helmet and you chose not to. You have never experienced the consequences and that makes you more daring. This is a dire mistake. It seems to fall into the same category, and so I've decided to elaborate on it. I've heard stories every day of white house officials, unlucky victims, and foolish yet powerful people who abuse their status. Dick Cheney shot a friend because they weren't wearing orange tags or a boy hit by a car, its always in the headlines.

In conclusion, as much as we try, and deny daily and historical principles of fate, we always wind up repeating someone's fate. It happens every day, and will occur as long as there is human conscience and ignorance. This is, was and always will be an inevitable part of life. Brilliant was the philosopher who thought this up.

OMG (Oh my God)

It's never the greatest feeling to get nailed in the face with a soccer ball. The Canines, a barbaric group of soon-to-be dropouts, are the usual suspects.

As I walked home half blind, still trying to remember my name, I began to think, *Modernism*, the first subject to strike my mind after seeing a pile of green crap. The best part was I thought, *It is beautiful*, not hard to conjure if you've been looking at a group of Neanderthals all day. *Why should we be bound to limits of TV, movies and games?* These are important aspects to my life. They all rotate around a fantasy. Delving deeper in, I became philosophical, one of my strong points. What if I were a fantasy as well, what if I was merely the subject of a lame story, what if the Canines weren't so damn ugly.

I began researching, the topic immediately on my laptop after arriving home. I joined an online forum completely devoted to the religion Brandenism. I was prompted at the screen to devote my entire life and all worldly possessions to this religion, if I were to join. Shrugging I thought, *Well I never really liked my own religion anyway, might as well do what it says.*

The following day I sent all but my laptop ASAP to a mysterious address in California. The basic aspects of the strangely named religion, Brandenism, revolves around the 3 noble truths:

- 1) Your life is a hoax, its being written and read at this very moment
- 2) You have an unrest fate, it may change anytime, anywhere at the will of divine impotence
- 3) Anything can happen

I sat back stunned, of course the Brandenism god already knew that! Heck, he was writing and reading this as I lived the moment. I played the song "What if god were one of us." Suddenly, I shot up - on divine inspiration - realized that indeed he was. And he was quite

angry at the fact I had a laptop and he didn't. Not that it exists anyway, or do I for that matter.

Chapter Six

Incredible Adventure

Story Introduction

I wrote this longer short story after writing creative short stories for Dave Susman during the summer of 2005. Since it is my first attempt to write a story of any length, it is a very amateur sounding story.

It is of a young boy who lost his father when he 3 years old, through a mysteriously disappearance. He never really thought about the whereabouts of his father until one day when he is teleported into a parallel dimension and meets many gnomish friends. I never plotted the story, I really had no plan to add his father until the end of the story. Never the less, it makes for an wonderful ending.

Incredible Adventure

Marvin pulled the string switch of the dim attic light revealing piles and piles of old lonely discarded artifacts. He remembered his mom saying that there was over 10 generations worth of family history. He looked down, picking up a rusted 1963 vintage Hot Wheels car, a dull blue muscle car with a white stripe running down the center of the it. He pocketed 3 more of the same color, 4 cars of valor, he thought, he liked the name.

Digging and pushing deeper into the attic, objects became older and of greater value, however Marvin had never realized this. He threw aside dusty pipes from old defunct drains and Model T and A Fords. He picked up a really dusty violin, strings still running gracefully along the unharmed bridge. Brushing off the dust he read from the inside of the violin, "Antonius Stradivarius 1736" then set it down carefully.

He continued further in, and now there are paintings with dates labeled from the 15'th century. Then, near the very end of the attic, something caught his eye, movements, or at least what he thought to be movements. He looks towards the source to find a pocket watch made of a silver-colored precious metal. The gilded top has eroded away long ago leaving vibrant patches of yellow splotches around the clock, and strangely enough it is ticking away, perfectly in sync with Marvin's digital watch. On the top is the clock dial, on the back are engravings which went roughly like this:

*Sad was the one who came to this place,
Looking upon my lonely face.
One knows they mustn't be meek,
To find all they ever seek.
So why stay reading my old rhyme,
Go ahead and reset my time.*

Marvin took a cursory glance at the dial and said, "Here goes nothing," turning the dial backwards once. Although he was quite wrong about nothing, there was an eerie crash, and almost instantly a brilliant spectrum of light filled the attic darkness, which momentarily blinded him, then the light slowly faded away, revealing the inside of a vast warehouse. It resembled that of a food storage plant. Roaming around are strange, short, bald gnomes, resembling that of a human with serious growth problems. Having absolutely no idea where in the world, or what world he was in, he started to panic.

However a rude gnome walked up to him and disrupted his panic attack. "Why, hello my very large friend, you must be new to Synid Storage Centers, I'm Sheville."

"I don't know who you are, all I did was turn the dial, I'm innocent, please don't hurt me gnome."

"Gnome, is that an insult, a gnome. I'm as human as anyone here, you must be a troll, look at the size of you, just like the last appearance of your kind a decade ago. However you are somewhat of a smaller size."

"What do you mean by last appearance."

"You never known, creatures such as yourself, just appear here all the time, this very spot. Mongers we call you, however you people insist on being called human, I remember that arrival about 10 years ago who called me gnome, his name being Shiloh, then he went on to being the Prime Manager of Synid."

"Shiloh is my fathers name, do you recall seeing him anywhere, or any monger other than I," asked Marvin.

"I have seen Shiloh once when he arrived in Synid, but never again after I reported him to the Lost and Found Agency," chuckled Sheville, "And him being your father, he's almost 2 feet taller than you, he cant be the same race as you."

"People from our world can be all kinds of different heights, I presume you people don't grow much, and you didn't answer my question on others of my race."

"I was joking about your height, I already knew of how diverse you mongers can grow, I just hate being called short. Also I have never seen in person a real monger other than yourself and Shiloh, I'm no mongerologist you know, my dad does that. There's still something I haven't asked you, what is your name?"

"I'm Marvin."

"Yeah sure, so your coming to our house, then I'll have to introduce you to my brother and parents," he said, "I'll meet you back at our house, workers here get 1'st class teleportation, foreigners get 3'rd class, I'll show you where you teleport."

Meanwhile

"Sir, we've detected a monger in the 47th sector of Synid storage industries."

"Excellent, send the Augors."

"But sir, we should tell the Prime manager, shouldn't we."

"No, and there shall be no further questioning, I want this target terminated."

"Yes, sir."

Back at Synid Storage Center

Sheville walked Marvin to the "Teleporter" and explained what it does and what it was capable of doing to you if you forget to keep a limb within the telekinetic fields. Marvin retained a general understanding of this and headed to the teleportation area. It resembled a large house with many small circular blue glowing doors, labeled Porthole 1-32. All around gnomes stepped through the doors, said some words and poof, vanished into thin air.

Sheville handed Marvin a folded sheet of instructions and said, "OK, Marvin this is it, remember to say exactly what it says to say on this paper, clearly, and oh yeah, don't die."

"Thanks, bye," and with a horrid feeling Marvin unfolded the paper which read, 490 Schunk Value Lane. Then stepped through the glowing door, which judging by the size was for the midgets that lived here. Marvin crouched low making sure he fit the conditions Sheville stressed so greatly. And watching for even the most scrupulous details, squeezed inside.

"490 Schunk Value Lane," Marvin said making sure he said the words clearly.

"Is that Schunk or Skunk, sir," asked a mechanical voice, obviously his words were not clear.

This time he said it louder. Immediately, the churning of mechanical instruments filled the air, there was a loud zap and a feeling of electricity being discharged in his face. Then total silence, he was almost fooled he was in his attic again, then he looked up and saw a darkening sky, then a lamp light, scrambling to his feet he saw a queer oval shaped sign saying Schunk Value Lane. There right in front of his face was a quite large of a house with a sign stating quite clearly 490.

He almost broke into a run towards the house, and to his amazement right when he was within a foot of the door, it flew open.

"Why hello, I mean, greetings Marvin, I-I heard all about you, come on in, I'm Jorky at your service."

"Marvin, Marvin come in, I absolutely must introduce you to my father, Jorky you bring him to the kitchen and tell mother we have visitors," Sheville said.

The house was cheerfully lit with many pieces of furniture scattered neatly about. Small windows filtered the moonlight around the house. In the kitchen was a large wood table and on it were dishes laid all about, and an oval shaped TV conveniently placed at the end. A petite gnome-human woman was taking some kind of a bird out of the oven and laying it in the middle of the table.

"Why hello Marvin, pleased to meet you, I'm Martha Pottir."

"Glad to meet you, I'll be off to find Sheville," Marvin added leaving the kitchen with wholesome anticipation to find him, however he did not.

He explored the house until he found himself beside a closed door. Not daring to intrude, he stuck his head close to the door and listened to the conversation on the other side.

"Will not do... coming onto private... how could anyone in... idea how dangerous th... may leave," said a cold angry voice, he then quickly jumped away from the door, which within seconds, swung open revealing a sad looking Sheville and irate father, who was obviously throwing a harsh philippic upon his son.

Sheville turned around gave a "be careful" glare and left without another word.

"Well, you must be Marvin, the monger, I've met quite some many in my life, being a mongerologist I am," he said, attempting to be friendly.

"And you are-" began Marvin.

"Hairy Pottir."

"Good Lord," said Marvin then squinting hard he said, "You can't be. Can you do magic?"

"Well I can induce a sleeping charm and 2 pretty useless spells, but what I really love is card tricks."

"Nice, can you do the A, Jack, A trick?"

"Yes, and I can also do Jack to 4," Hairy said jumping from his chair, then with a laugh he sat back down. "You know, every monger I've known knew this Hairy as some kind of hero, and when we further analyzed, they say its from a book in their world."

"I heard you say something about a mongerologist. Is that what you do for a living?" asked Marvin.

"Not really, for a living, I create and study dimensional technology."

"Is there any possible way that I could-."

"Not now young one, come and eat dinner. I hope you enjoy seasoned turkey as much as I do."

They walked back to the table to find it set and adorned with food. And next to the table sat a normal sized table and on it was a normal sized plate and eating utensils, piled high with food.

"I usually never take out prototypes," Hairy said motioning to Marvin's private table, "But we have an exception."

Marvin ate a hearty meal that night. Every gnome of the family had never doubted his appetite, however Marvin had doubted theirs. And he was quickly proven wrong, after dinner he contemplated on how a gnome can have such an a ravenous appetite for its size.

All the gnomes were escorted to attend to their night rituals, and setting up Marvin's bed post, which seemed to take eons. After this Hairy was telling an amazingly tedious story about his dimensional studies.

After an hour Marvin finally asked, "Sir, do you know anything about the third dimension?"

"Why yes I do, you mongers come from there and I've been making a dimensional transporter to try to get you back there, by the order of the crazy Captain Yanmark."

"So is this isn't the third dimension? Then where are we? And is the transporter completed?"

"Well, this is a dimension between dimensions 3 and 5, however its obviously not 4, it being time, we just call it dimension 3/5. And yes the dimensional transporter is complete, due to many continuous requests from Yanmark for it to be finished as quick as possible. However --," began Hairy.

"So, is it possible now to go back to my dimension."

"No, no, let me speak Marvin, so as I was saying, however Yanmark has it under his control, his own property. And since he despises Mongers, I doubt he would care to let you use it. I guess he was speeding the process in hopes it would be flawed so it would kill every Monger sent through the machine. He had a reputation for sending orders to kill many Mongers, but thanks to the prime manager, it is now illegal. It is rumored that he wants to

sabotage the machine without destroying it, then release it publicly to kill people like you with the blame completely on the manufacturers. I think he will never figure out even how the machine works, due to its high complexity. And he won't have us back to do his dirty work obviously because it would lead to his arrest. But now all we can do is hope," he sighed.

"Well, its been appreciated," Marvin said pulling up his bedsheets.

"Now go to sleep or I'll have to use this," said Hairy, brandishing an ugly green tree root. As he left the room, the light simultaneously turned off as well.

"If you don't know what that object is, its a wand," whispered Jorky.

"Yeah and he isn't afraid to put us asleep with it if he needs to," added Sheville.

"Well good night Marvin," said Sheville.

"Don't let those tele-bugs bite," said Jorky.

Almost seconds after, ghosts of about a half a foot tall, resembling a man with a mattress draped over him, appeared right above them. A strange peaceful sound broke the silence.

"Aaaaagh, my god what are those," Marvin cried pointing at the ghosts.

"Oh, the wisps, I see you've noticed," said Jorky.

"They won't hurt or get anywhere near you, they bring good dreams, that's all."

"And occasionally, they sing beautiful songs," added Sheville, "I believe I've heard one already."

"And I believe its sleeping time for us, its bacon and eggs tomorrow morning," said Jorky. And soon after Marvin dozed away.

Awakening to a quiet buzzing noise next morning, Marvin jumped out of bed to find himself completely dressed, washed and fresh for the day. And strangely enough a helpful serving of eggs, bacon, toast and sausages was laid out on a small table right in front of him. He jumped out of bed and immediately sat down and ate

his meal. Still wondering where Sheville and Jorky had wandered off to, he began searching for his friends, and found them in a room adjacent to their sleeping quarters. They were planted in front of the screens of computers on a row of five identical machines. Since they seemed to be completely busy, Marvin decided to start the conversation.

"Tell your parents thanks for breakfast," said Marvin.

"Thanks, what does thanks mean," asked Jorky looking completely puzzled.

Giving him queer look Marvin said, "Never mind that, how did I wake up completely dressed and washed."

"Oh that, that's the speed defibrillator, saves some time doesn't it," asked Sheville.

"Well, yeah, what are you guys doing," asked Marvin walking over to the gnomes.

"Playing Warcraft at the moment," said Jorky.

"Do you ever wonder who the elitists your of games are, well mostly humans like us," added Sheville.

"Warcraft, you guys play Warcraft," exclaimed Marvin, "But how on Synid do you play a monger game from a completely different dimension."

"Pan dimensional teleconnection, we enjoy the strange games you Mongers make," added Jorky. These orks look vaguely familiar to someone I once knew."

"What games do you play," asked Sheville.

"Well at the moment nothing," recalled Marvin, "My parents really despise anything that has to do with virtual games, they say its a complete waste of time."

"Well if want to play, just hitch a computer, it's our day off you know, all 5 machines run on the same operating system, Lunarous," added Jorky, "We're also going Kinetic Boarding once dad wakes up."

"Well OK, but I really don't know how to-," Marvin started.

At that very moment Hairy burst into the room looking very distressed.

"Everyone, get to the basement, its a red alert, the augors are in the neighborhood, mothers down there already."

Everyone, almost instinctively, ran for the basement which was a small doorway behind the kitchen cupboards. Once inside Marvin decided to ask.

"What exactly are these augors," Marvin asked.

"Don't you know, of course you don't, they are dangerous strike force robots, and they will destroy anything that gets on their way," answered Hairy.

"And they are in our vicinity right now, which makes it dangerous to be anywhere near them," added Sheville.

"Who is it that they are after, and who sent them."asked Marvin.

"All we know is whoever their after is somewhere in this area, and most likely they were sent by Yanmark. He has complete control of the weapons division you know." answered Jorky.

"Is there a way for them to be stopped," asked Marvin.

"Well, we have Electric Discharge guns," Hairy said handing everyone a small blue gun. And there is an old verse Sheville should know which tells of one deplorable word which have been installed in the augors so that Yanmark could stop them if they rebelled against him."

"Well yes, there is one rhyme for the word, however the word's been lost in time." said Sheville,

*A Monger child day to day
Doesn't appreciate anything anyway
What's been taken for granted can be taken away
If Monger child doesn't know what to say.*

"That's helpful, let me think," answered Marvin skeptically.

Right at that moment the front door came crashing down. Windows were shattered, and furniture everywhere were being thrashed around, and approaching the kitchen was a 4 foot humanoid, with a red menacing

visor, a small compressed head and tentacle like arms. Jorky peaked through the door and gave a yelp. Marvin asked, "Just how are these things dangerous."

Wrong move, the nearest augor sighted and bashed open the door releasing a high pitched alert signal. Immediately the gnomes fired a barrage of discharges, throwing the augor against the sink.

There was a huge crash and a wave of water from the severed plumbing tubes surged forward knocking everything in the area out of order.

Marvin got up off the floor to find himself in the middle of the discharges, he sighted his gun and took a leap for it. At the same moment more augors entered the fray and apparently one of them approached its primary target, Marvin.

"Aaaaaghh, no." screamed Jorky. The augor had morphed its hand into a claw sparking with high voltage electricity and jammed it into Marvin's hip. Marvin let out a horrible scream as the energy pulsed through him. He looked up and saw the augor, its visor glaring down at him, with the last of his strength and fury, he gave one vicious upper cut square at the augors chin. The augors head went flying and the energy pulse stopped, the lifeless clump of metal collapsed on the floor.

"Marvin, no!" screamed Hairy, his eyes wild with fear.

Marvin was kneeling over, coughing up blood, looking completely dazed.

"Please, no! Stop it!" Marvin screamed and collapsed on the floor without a word more.

"Marvin....." said a drowned out voice, "Marvin...."

He slowly opened his eyes and, above him stood a gnome in a white apron, and a gnome in a black suit, both unfamiliar to him.

"Where am I?" he asked slowly attempting to get out of the bed, "and who are you?"

"Don't get up, you've just been regenerated from a serious electrical shock." said the nurse.

His head throbbed and his body ached as if he was suffering from the flu. He slowly drooped back into bed.

"Can I have something to drink," asked Marvin.

"Most certainly, drink this," she said, handing him a orange colored drink.

Without asking what it was, he chugged the pleasant fluid, it was like orange Gatorade, but more refreshing.

"And to answer your second question, I am Bernie, the leader of your defense team, in a lawsuit against Captain Yanmark for attempted murder, fraud and several other charges. In other words I am representing you in court to remove Yanmark from a seat of power and throw him in jail," he said.

"That's great." Marvin said, without much more enthusiasm than how he felt.

"You will be given follow ups on what's going on in court, and I believe there is some friends who would like to see you, good day," he said and left.

In came Jorky, Sheville, Hairy and Martha entered, carrying bouquets of flowers and get well cards.

"Oh there you are, Marvin, I am so glad you're all right," said Martha, "I was so afraid the shock might have stopped your heart."

"Easy for you to say, all you did was sit in the basement and wait," Jorky said, "It's still amazing you're alive Marvin, such a high voltage would have killed any of us humans almost instantly."

"That was some serious last minute thinking, we all would be dead if it wasn't for you, you know," Sheville added.

"That was amazing progress for us Mongerologist, and you saved us all by saying that deplorable word, "please" I would have never known," said Hairy.

"Well what would you do in such a situation, say thank you?" asked Marvin.

"What was that? "thank you", this must be the other deplorable word," said Hairy brandishing a notebook and writing it down.

And soon after this they left Marvin to rest in peace, literally.

That week on, the Pottirs visited Marvin everyday to check on his recovery. During that time he usually watched his continuously improving lawsuit against Yanmark on gnome TV. Yanmark looked completely contrite, just like bug on a windshield. In fact he was a bug, a 4 foot humanoid dragonfly, his antennae seemed to drop and flutter every time Bernie made a clever comment.

A week later Marvin made full recovery and was healthier than ever. The Pottirs waited for him and threw a party at their newly fixed up house which apparently was ensured against augor attacks.

Just a couple days after this they held yet another party for the guilty verdict on all charges held against Yanmark. The prime manager was now deciding on a righteous person to take his place in power. During the party a gnome in a black suit came to the door and announced, "The prime manager would like to meet you at 10 pm sharp, tomorrow in office A, suite A, Building 1A."

The family was stunned, this included Marvin who was just becoming a new addition of the Pottirs, continuously learning their gnomish ways. And apparently this was a tremendous honor to meet the Prime Manager, this compared to meeting a prestigious king, or queen for that matter.

The next day they drove hover car uptown and docked in the VIP section alongside many real VIP's cars. They escorted by the same man they were visited by (or at least they thought, it was hard to tell the difference between gnome CIA officials) into a dimly lit building with very few people inside, Jorky said it was like this because it was a start of a 2 month summer vacation period, which reminded Marvin that the school year had just ended. A ways further they stopped at a ghostly silent row of rooms named Suite A. The escorter stopped and pointed at the very last room.

"Now we go alone," asked Marvin.

The escorter nodded briefly, then left.

They walked farther in front of the office where a neatly curved A is etched in brass on the very top. The gilded door handles seemed to jump out at every attempt Marvin mustered the strength to go in; rather than opening the door he knocked.

A gentle, rather kind voice came from the inside, "Come in."

Then finally Jorky who was quite a bit fed up at the prospect of waiting there any longer, wrenched open the large door. Inside was a long oval table with 5 mongers sitting down, and a strange machine that looked as if it was designed after a Porta-Potty.

With courage, Marvin choked out, "S...so y...you're the prime ma...manager!"

"That's what they call me, but I'd prefer my own son to call me dad."

Without thinking Marvin bolted up and dashed into the arms of his long lost father.

"I can't believe its you or anything like this ever happened, it's just too good to be true," sobbed Marvin.

"Yes, well I'm sure that augor gave you a reality check all right," said Marvin's father.

"I'm Hairy Pottir, Mr. Prime Manager, sir."

"You can just call me Shiloh, I'm no longer your manager, I resigned yesterday, I arranged this meeting so I could arrange some things before I leave. Well, all of us mongers leave.

"What do you mean?" asked Martha looking shocked.

"Well its time for Marvin, me, my own father and the rest of us to return to whence we came, the 3rd dimension," he said.

"That's grandpa?" asked Marvin with a leap of joy.

"You bet, Marvin. Now I think you Pottirs all have something you want to give to Marvin before we leave," said Shiloh.

"Oh yes, but how did you get the machine," asked Sheville.

"Well after Yanmark was convicted it was only natural I gain control of all his belongings before I elect another chief in command," said Shiloh, "And I believe I know who he is, Jorky you are the new chief, Sheville is the new leader, Martha is our new Division Commander and Hairy, you'll take my place as manager."

Everyone looked euphoric and thanked Shiloh for his choices, in fact they looked more than euphoric, Martha looked as if she was going to faint.

"Now for Marvin's gifts," said Shiloh.

Jorky stepped forward first brandishing a large black metal suitcase, "I wanted you to have the same technology you enjoyed with us for so long. In here is a Discharge gun, a protonic TV, Nano-tech computer, a teleconnection satellite, a repair set and guidebook in case you break something and finally, every user name and password for all those amazing accounts. I think you should know I once ruled the computer game world."

"I wanted to give you the Narnian ring of power, and Voldermort's wand. I want you to know I snagged both on an expedition into different dimensions. Please use them responsibly," said Sheville.

"I wanted to give you this potion," Martha said handing him a pink bubbling mixture, "It will help you in time of most need and is indispensable. I want you to know I snagged ingredients from Hairy's historical herb collection on our honeymoon."

"I wanted to give you this key. It is a key to a newly placed wardrobe in your room. It unlocks secrets that should never be known and items of immense historical value in any dimension. If the key is not used to open the wardrobe, you will find nothing. I want you to know this key and that wardrobe are never lost to you," said Hairy.

"I don't have much to give you," said Marvin digging deep into his pocket, "Except for these third dimension Hot Wheels cars and my deepest gratitude."

"That's all that ever counts," sobbed Hairy, "These ultra rare mini cars, goodbye and thank, thank you."

“Thank you so much,” said Marvin. Then both true human and gnome waved goodbye one last time.

Shiloh activated the dimensional transporter and before Marvin even realized what he was doing found himself inside the same dark attic, looking at the same strange pocket watch.

Beside him were his gifts and next to him was his grandfather and father. He bolted to the attic stairway and looked down from the attic into his room and there was a black wardrobe.

“Well, this will be pleasant surprise,” said his father.

“Yes very,” added his grandfather.

“Marvin come down, I have a surprise, your sister is back from boarding school for the summer.” yelled his mom from the kitchen, “And grandma Polly has come back from Bangkok.”

“Angelina goes to boarding school,” asked his father.

“Yeah, she does,” he answered.

“I’ve got a bigger surprise than you’ll ever believe,” yelled Marvin back, smiling, “A complete family reunion.”

Chapter Seven

A Journey of a Suit and Its Man

Story Introduction

I wrote this during the month of November, 2005, for our school Novel Project. It is the longest piece I've written to that date. I was surprised I managed to meet the deadline of 12,000 words within a month. Not only that, my entire novel group was able to do this as well. Again, I believe this is yet another great addition to my book.

A Journey of a Suit and Its Man tell the story a Chinese man, Levitz, during the month of the 1906 earthquake, starting just days before its occurrence. Levitz, comes to San Francisco for a great job offer from a rich tailor and entrepreneur, Camillo. Levitz discovers his stay to be better than he had ever dreamed, and wishes to stay until he becomes rich enough to retire back to Shanghai with his family. This all goes awry after the earthquake of course, and he must find his way out of the mess. With the plot made up from our group and many, many story details later, he goes on a ship, working as a venerable butler for a rich family returning to their home in Maryland. After 5 years he moves back to China to live an idyllic life in a country house in rural Shanghai, and forgets all about high city living. The end, well not really...

A Journey of a Suit and Its Man

Preface

We as a group, I just have to say, worked brilliantly. From the time we decided to do this type of story, to when we finished and submitted it into the NanoWrimo contest. I have a certificate of achievement.

We collaborated any way we could, whether it was at school, or all our writing meetings that took place at one of our group member's house. We discussed story ideas at school, and through email. Twice one of our group members invited the entire group to their house to synchronize our stories and catch up on missed work. Once at the beginning of the novel writing and the other, near the end; both completely successful. In fact we wrote close to 8000 word altogether at the meetings. By the end we all had the average of about 13,000 word each, 55,000 altogether.

The Journey of a Suit and its man

I have a dream to use my skills of merchandising and tailoring to prosper, and rake in the kind of wealth that is otherwise impossible in my home village. Many months before, a white man called Mr.Camillo saw my skills and invited me into partnership with him; telling me to come to California. I was to be given a motel room in which he owned and he left me with the words, "Come anytime you like." I have heard legends of trade, people who used their skills like Ghirardelli and became rich beyond their own dreams. I only wish that I can become rich in an amazing city of wealth and diversity, the perfect place known as San Francisco. I decided to take up his offer. My leaving was all so new to my family, I was their only son and they wished me not to leave them but I stood by my principles. Others believed that it was possible for me to become rich with my abilities to manufactured goods. I

packed my few possessions: a Year of Snake golden luck necklace, some clothing, cloth and tools, 20 cents, and I left just days later.

I have now been on a ship for an eternity, losing track of time after the first week or so, waiting to see what kismet has in store for me next. I sat on the cold chairs lined adjacent to one another. I looked up at the starry sky, delicate lights I knew only too well. Suddenly a loud ship horn sounded, breaking our silence. A tall broad shouldered man walked onto the stern announced in a booming voice that we were less than 2 hours from arriving in San Francisco. Those on deck responded with several cheers and a round of applause, pleased to have arrived intact and well. I felt well and smiled at the rising sun, thinking and hoping for the prosperity and success I have dreamed of.

The sun is rising fast, and we are nearing the shore, I bade my final farewells to friends I had made during the voyage, and thanked the captain for yet another successful, uncomfortable journey. I grabbed my few belongings and departed onto the dock. I spent a few moments inhaling the new air of San Francisco. As I continued, I noticed the most amazing machines moving across roadways, automobiles. I had never seen such an amazing creations, back in Shanghai we had no more than horses and oxen. We had talked of such things upon the ship, although I had barely listened. I swerved here and there, entranced by the height of the buildings towering high above me. I read a small sheet of parchment given to me by Mr.Camillo, giving me directions on where the motel would be located. It read in simple plain, "English 182 Bergindel Landing". It also included a crudely drawn mini-map showing the location of the harbor and a clearly drawn line to the motel.

I retraced my steps from the harbor up to my current location and found that I still had over 12 miles to walk. I quickly picked up the pace, trying to adapt to the strange landscape in which I was now to live in. From the way

the sun was now high up in the sky, I guessed it was around mid-noon. I was growing weary and continuously hungry, I had to stop for something to eat. A sandwich shop caught my eye, I decided as long as I was here, I should try to get used to eating the food. I approached the shop noticing the man working at the counter was a white man, with several people coming in and out of the shop, people that were Chinese, colored, and even a man with red hair. It was quite a place, I went up to the counter, the man asking what I wanted, I looked into what foods he had. There were some vegetables, sauce, breads, and meat, actual meat! In Shanghai meat was so expensive that I was only able to eat it once on New Years. I asked whether adding meat would make my sandwich more expensive. All he did was look at me funny and replied no. So I ordered a heavily meat-filled sandwich, and continued my journey towards the motel. On the way, I saw a rugged looking man running, almost desperately grasping purse, pushing people aside as he ran. I thought it was kind of strange to see a man with a purse, and it seemed like a very nicely designed leather purse, something I even had a hard time creating. I wanted to know who created it so I confronted the man.

"Excuse me my noble sir, where did you receive a purse of such workmanship," I asked.

"Get outta my way," he replied attempting to shove me, in return grabbed his hand and threw him to the floor. He landed with a groan, trying to get up. By that time several police men rushed in and handcuffed him, followed by a rich young couple. The police man took the purse from the man and gave it to the women. I did not know what was going on, confused and dazed I just stared.

Then one police man piped in, "So your the one who stopped this no good-doer, a China man, hmm, so at least thats one less criminal out here."

"Thank you so much, if it wasn't for you I don't know whether or not I still would have had my purse," she said,

handing me 10 dollars as a reward. Generally I wouldn't have taken it but since I was low on funds and this was a lot of money I received it anyway.

"Thank you miss, however I still have an unanswered question, where did you get a purse of such workmanship," I asked.

"Oh, that would be from Camillo Leather Works, their shop is on Bergindel Landing, you can't miss it, and many thanks again."

And from there I left, pocketing my money, several pedestrians still staring blankly at me, as if I was some kind of alien, which was true, at least technically.

I made a vow to not go after strange men with purses anymore. Looking back on what had gone on this day I felt vaguely satisfied. Judging the time it was around supper and I was still a good 5 miles from my destination. The streets were still however bright as day, considering it was mid April.

About 2 hours later I arrived at my destination 182 Bergindel Landing. It was a relatively large and quite luxurious motel, and adjacent to it was a none other than the Camillo Leather Works. I approached the large wooden door, its brass handles intricately carved to resemble a lion. I entered into a pleasantly lit room complete with a fine red carpet and several leather works and paintings hanging on the ceiling. A single glass chandelier was lit well above my head, several people dressed in fancy clothing walking here and there.

A receptionist noticed me and asked, "Hello, how may I help you."

"Can I speak to Mr.Camillo please."

"Do you have an appointment with him."

"I don't, but can you inform him that Levitz wishes to speak with him."

She looked at me in a funny way, and then left through a back door. Two minutes later a familiar man entered. A tall slender man, no more than 30 years old wearing a fancy suit and a tie, none other than Camillo himself.

“My, Mr.Mertzson, what a brilliant surprise, I did not think you would come, I could definitely use another master tailor like you to help out around here,” he said taking me into an embrace.

“I just arrived in San Francisco today, after a long trip, I'm glad I have arrived here on time,” I replied.

“And so am I, the chefs are cooking dinner, I suggest you be on your way, oh yeah here's your room key, its on the 2'nd floor room 26,” he said smiling, “I'd suggest you get yourself cleaned up, its going to be a long day tomorrow.”

We soon departed, leaving in opposite directions, I went upstairs, astounded by the impressive luxury. I found my room adjacent to a long row of paintings, I stuck the key in and twisted, it wouldn't budge. I tried the other way and the door flew open effortlessly, what an irrelevant luxury keys were, I thought. Inside was a large one person bed, complete with pink covers, a bathroom, plumbing, lights and a radio. I could not have thought for a better place to stay, I approached the bathroom, turning the light on with a flick of a switch, bright rays filtered throughout the room. A small clock stood inside, I read it, the time being 7:46. A ceramic bathtub stood next to the clock along with a marble sink. Bars of soap and bottles of shampoo stood side by side next to a pile of clean towels. I turned the red knob inside the tub, a stream of hot water poured out. I touched the water, redrawing at its heat, I cooled the water with the blue knob. It was perfect for a shower, better than anything I ever had. I made my bathing quick however, to be able to meet Camillo for dinner. I hastily shoved on some simple clothes and hurried down the stairs. The receptionist told me that I was to meet him in the room to the left of the banquet room. I hurried over to the banquet, food was just being served, I decided that I was just on time. I located the room in which Camillo was in and casually sat down next to him.

He looked at me and smiled, "I cannot express my joy on having you come all this way to work along me. Feel free to enjoy the hospitality, it is our gift to you."

The chefs arrived carrying a sumptuous meal, complete with more meat than I have ever eaten in my life.

"Thank you and I cannot express more disbelief in how great my stay has been," I said beginning to eat. I piled on steak, mushrooms bread, almost unaware at how my manners were.

"Well, I have seen and had several samples of your work, and saw that it surpassed anyone of my workers here. I was wondering if you would work for our company, in a partnership sense. You will be well paid and will be able to stay at this hotel, free of cost."

"I of course have come here in search of work and found what any man would dream of doing, I will definitely accept your offer, however I have one more question. Earlier today I saw couple, very wealthy with a purse that was exceptional in workmanship and she told me it was created here. Is there people here that are really that good?"

"As you probably know I accept only the best tailors in the business. And I believe I have found the best of our group. However good anyone of your co-workers may be, you would be surprised what you can create together."

We continued talking, less formal as the minutes past. I learned several of his techniques in tailoring, his background and his road to success. I decided I really liked him; he seemed kind and fair and always had something to say. He listened intently on the ways I went around solving problems, often commenting on it being very efficient yet different. After an hour I told him I was very drowsy and should be heading back to my room to Levitz. He agreed, saying I had a hard and long trip and should conserve my energy for the days coming.

"Well thanks a lot for joining me for dinner, I had a great talk with you," he said, "Have you always kept your

hair short, I thought it was bad luck to do so in your culture.”

“My parents always complained about it, but I stood firm, luck never really mattered to me. Fate occurs through a path of unfathomable logic, which is the reason for everything. I had always been a maverick this way,” I replied.

“Well lets hope bad luck does not befall you anyway, good night Levitz.”

“Same to you,” I said leaving for my room.

By the time I had arrive it was already a quarter past 10, exhausted I quickly fell into bed, writing only a page in my journal entry for tonight. Pleasant dreams blessed me, it was my first time in weeks I had such a comfortable rest.

Bright rays shone in on me, welcoming a new day. I quickly jumped out of bed, excited for my first day working in San Francisco, I was determined to show the my skills and become the best in my league. I dashed down the stairs in search of Mr.Camillo. I asked the secretary where he was, and she replied that he left for a business trip late last night, and left all but a message for me:

Dear Levitz,

I'm sorry I had left on such short notice without informing you of my duties. I have left for a long planned journey to Brazil to find more employees and a wife. I left yesterday night, and will not be coming back for several months. Here is a list of items that you and your group are going to work on: Trousers, shirts, jackets, purses and handbags. I am assigning you a very special task that you are going to work on for the remainder of the time. You are to make a full suit for the groom, me, when I arrive back. Here is a design of the suit; I have also included some footnotes. You will be paid dearly if you succeed.

*Sincerely,
Camillo*

Below it was a conglomerate of designs and drawings, as well as several unreadable footnotes.

I ran out of the hotel and entered the workshop next door. Inside were 15 men working on leather and cloth, there was a roomful of materials and tools scattered about everywhere. There was an exotic variety of colors and specialty tools that one could only dream of getting in where I came from. I just stared watching them snip away, until a tall man walked up to me and asked, "Are you Levitz?"

"Yes I am Levitz," I replied uncertain of what was going to happen.

"Nice to meet you, I know all about your project Camillo assigned you and will be your adviser for the time being."

"That would be excellent, shall we get started?"

"Very well follow me. As you probably read, you were instructed to start on the pants, since it is often the hardest. I have specifically ordered certain materials just for this project. Light silk pockets, and an azure leather pair of pants. I have the leather available on this table."

"Great I'll begin working right away."

"That's my boy."

I began planning out, where I would make the cuts, practicing on rough cloth until I was sure I could cut with absolute precision. I had only spent an hour honing my skill, and now I was all sweaty, cutting scrupulously along the marked line on the most beautiful and expensive piece of leather I had ever seen. Each single slice seemed to take a millennia, I did not finish cutting for half an hour. I was quite impressed with the outcome, the leather looked as if it was crafted for an emperor. Perfect to the last detail.

"Congratulations my friend, your leather working is unmatched. Camillo would be proud to see such a start."

I thanked him for his kind comment and continued to work. There was a huge list of objectives for me to com-

plete that day. Most of it involved wholesale clothing related projects. I was ordered to create a fine purse by the end of the week. Each day I would slowly excel on the creation of the groom pants. I estimated it would take a little over a month and a half to complete. Not too bad, I thought. I worked more easily with the purse; it came quite easy, when I wasn't under pressure. Snipping carefully I melded the purse with unmatched accuracy. By the end of the day I re-estimated the time it would take me to finish the purse to 3 days and the time to finish the pants, under a month. I loved this job. It didn't come easy at first, to be able to love work or labor, it seemed almost queer.

It was about 7 O' clock and the shift for the day was over. Could you believe it, I normally would work till at least ten in China, but 7 O' clock, this was unreal. I raced inside and dashed up to my room, and enjoyed a 1 hour bath, this was brilliant! I felt like a king, drying myself with towels, changing into my clothes in my very own room. I ran down the stairs, ready for a dinner of steak and mushrooms. The chefs arrived carrying trays of meat, vegetables, rice and breads. I laughed as I thought of my parents saying to me, "Nothing in your life will be presented to you on a silver platter, especially meat for that matter." And look what was being served, meat, and a lot of it. I ate to my hearts content. Afterwards I sought for something alcoholic, something to celebrate the good times. There wasn't much in store at the hotel, the last supply went to a party yesterday and they weren't getting another store of it for another week or so. The receptionist told me there was a good place just 2 blocks away from here called the Good Absinthe. I headed outside in to the cold dark night, walked a couple blocks and found the bar; it was dimly lit but absolutely fine for a drink every so often. The bartender was French and asked me whether I wanted an absinthe, I drank 3 orders. It was an interesting drink, not exactly alcoholic, but proved to

have the same effect. I came back slightly drunk, but never better, went upstairs and crashed for the night.

I woke up at about four in the morning with a splitting headache, the sun not yet in the sky. I couldn't sleep, and was in desperate need of something to eat and drink, and it was quite obvious the chefs weren't awake yet. What was I thinking, of course there is something to eat, I thought, there has to be some all night convenience store around here. Then I jumped out of bed, cleaned and changed quickly and headed out. The halls were dank and as dark as the surrounding rooms. Not a single light was on, and I was afraid to disturb anyone in deep slumber, so I decided to move around through my memory. I tripped and stumbled, hurting myself; sure that someone had heard me by now. Still nothing stirred, it was silent as a crypt, then I saw light, the lampposts from outside shining inside. I then realized I was inside the receptionist's office! I quietly congratulated myself and left for the streets.

Outside were several people walking here and there, horses trotting every so often. It was quite pedestrian for such an early time. I walked up to a cabby driver and asked where the nearest convenience store was.

"Well, the only convenience store within 2 miles is an all night sandwich shop, I often travel there myself at times even crazier than this," he said, "Just keep heading straight for about 20 or so blocks and it should be directly to your right."

I thanked the man then began walking. I began to think about my family. I wondered what condition my grandmother was in, her health was slowly deteriorating, and her mind failing, just as my dad had just before he died. I treated them as just a task all these years, someone to take care of, it was so that I had almost forgotten who they really were. I was shrouded in melancholy when my father had died, trying to forget he had ever existed to cure my pain. I had become a happier person, working and caring for my children with my wife. I hoped that

when I would return, nothing would change, time would wait for me to catch up, but maybe my own sons would never have known me. Their small minds, crafted at such a young age, might never have a place for me. For once I became resentful of coming to San Francisco.

I looked at the endless stretch of streets and realized I was so engulfed up in my own little world, and had lost track of where I really was. I began to panic, unsure of my way, I asked a pedestrian where the sandwich shop was and she gave me a quite complicated list of instructions. I followed through, dodging alleyway after alleyway. Several sleeping people crowded the alleys, some awake and staring at me, looking at me in such a way that suggested I should join them, and so many of them were of Asian heritage. Then I noticed 2 children, a boy of about 14 and a girl of 5. I walked towards them with full intention to find out why such young ones were out here at such a time. Surely these were no bums, they were neatly dressed and seemingly wealthy.

"Children, what brings you out on these dire streets at such a time, there are bad people out here."

"We left from a family feud, and I don't fear bad people," said the boy.

"I'm sorry if I have been rude but I was fearing for you."

"Tell me..."

"Levitz is my name."

"Levitz, what are you out here for."

I told him the story of what had happened the past day. They sat in silence, looking queerly at me. After a while we both loosened up quite aware of each others only kind intentions.

I left on a good note, waving as I left.

I focused away for the remainder of the trip, reaching the shop before sunrise, its eating area, well lit and welcoming. I entered, realizing it was the same shop I had ate at during the first day.

"What will it be today," asked the store clerk.

“Turkey and tomato, no sauce please,” I replied, handing him the money.

I left happy and full, determined to reach the hotel before the work shift would start. It was now about an hour into the trip and I was no more than 5 minutes from home.

Suddenly my whole body became strangely unstable, as if I was dizzy in more than one location on my body. As the trauma increased, I felt that it wasn’t me, but the very ground I was standing on! Violent jerks racked the buildings surrounding me, a fire hydrant burst, water spraying everywhere. Rubble crashed dangerously fast from above me, buildings collapsing, people screaming. It was the most chaotic 30 seconds of my life. I began to sprint toward the hotel, as horses dashed desperately, and owners frightened. A series of mini explosions ensued as pipelines were crushed under the massive weight of the building foundations. It was destructive but so abrupt, whole streets were torn at as if hit by a giant wrecking ball. My pulse steadied down and eyes widened as I found myself staring at a large crack in the middle of the street, a fissure. I was so surprised, no more than a week into life in San Francisco, my whole career was exterminated and by one of the most powerful forces to be reckoned with. It was just that bad, nothing great could last within my grasp for more than a few days. I was stunned, my feelings closely relating to having everything stolen from you.

I continued a jog all the way to the hotel, observing the wreckage and fires along the way. Several ecstatic women and men ran crazy searching for missing loved and prized accessories. Children shrouded into the alleys looking no more than ghosts of who they once were. Several dead people lay mutilated across the barren streets. This was definitely not the San Francisco I had grown to love.

The hotel came into view, and I was sunken by what I saw. To be frank, there was near nothing left of the hotel,

and to be more broad, nothing of the whole Bergindel Landing. Drowned in spite, I left the motel untouched, afraid to deter the eternal slumber of my co-workers and friends. Rather I walked into the workshop, a sad and shabby place that almost cried out to me, I remembered my promise to Mr. Camillo about the creation of his wedding suit. I would never have broken such an oath in any circumstances, therefore I began a search for the remnants of the materials and usable tools. I found the materials under a large oak workbench, and tools inside its very drawers. They were untouched and in perfect condition. I grabbed a small leather pouch and crammed them inside, wondering for a moment whether I should leave or not. I decided against it, realizing that the workshop was unstable and could collapse at any moment. But as I did a block of wood fell on my head.

I opened my eyes to find myself still inside the warehouse but this time with a throbbing headache. I thought for a moment on where I could go finally deciding on the alleyways. I left almost immediately. There were several broken families scattered about the lonely streets around the few upstanding buildings. Hundreds of homeless people crowded together in the midst of the destruction. I ignored them, trying to take every turn at every alley we could, they were everywhere, turning into the very zombies they would have shunned just days ago. We finally came across a suitable alley with 2 children cowering down scared and helpless. One was a teenager and the other a tiny little girl.

"Are you two all right, where are your parents," I asked, "If you are hungry I have food available here."

I looked at the children, they seemed all to recognizable, I know I had seen them somewhere or another. They looked back up, strange expressions on their faces, not ominous however unnerving.

They accepted gladly and thanked us. We ate in silence, barely even looking at each other. Myself, being a gregarious man, spoke first.

“So, what are your names?”

“I’m Ralph and this is my sister Hazel,” he said, as Hazel hid shyly behind her older brother.

They were stern and able figures, Ralph reminding me of myself when I was young, a responsible person, who had to care for everything at an early age. I held a steady picture of my sister and me leaving home to serve a family to make any income we could. And another, of the very night when she died of smallpox. I quickly pulled the memory from my mind and tuned back into the conversation.

I exchanged interests with the siblings, almost relinquishing the worries in the hearts of the two. I could see them yakking away about useless but blissful topics like the comics they enjoy reading or their favorite subjects in school. It was amazing how no matter how different we were they could still carry on a conversation.

“I guess we should get going,” I said.

“Yeah lets get moving if we are going to find a safe place to stay.”

“The alleys are completely safe,” Ralph protested. I pointed over at a crowd of people headed our way and he nodded in agreement. Without another word we left for the roads once again.

“So why have you no parents with you at such a time,” I asked the two. They looked dour as I made this comment. I wondered silently for a moment whether they had suffered death, but Ralph cut me off.

“They were arguing profusely and threatening each other to divorce. Hazel and me were frightened at such an aspect so we took a walk, just last night. Before we could come back the earthquake awoke and we only found our house in shambles on our return. We searched without avail for hours, until we determined that they were missing. I have not a single doubt in my mind that they could be dead, buried deep within the tiles of their sad grave.”

"A touching story my young friend, you appear to be oblivious to the facts for I have seen you are not very emotional," I said.

"It may appear so, however I am now with understanding that it may have been a more peaceful path than divorce. I may seem dishonorable and maybe in denial of this incident but I would be more miserable to know that my family lives on separate than to know their final destination is chosen right next to each other. But here me out, I will still be stung with sorrow and melancholy for eons to come," he said now sobbing. I could clearly see that he was trying to stifle his emotions. His breathing coming in short gasps. Hazel clung to his dirt ridden pants sympathetically.

"Indeed I feel your pain, for my father had died when I was a child no older than you. He was a fine man I would give up anything to be able to see him just one last time," I said with a great heaving sigh.

"Well however grave our emotions shall cling we must continue strong and with optimism," I said, then I lowered my voice to a mere whisper facing the siblings, "There is still hope young one, your parents can still be alive."

"And so we all hope," piped in Hazel.

We continued now with a trudge and heavy leg but newfound valor. I walked ahead of the group hand clasped protectively around my pouch. There were several new burdens now, both emotional and physical needs, we hadn't any water and a very few amount of food.

I began telling stories about a friend's life. Born in a small village in China he was raised by his aunt shortly after his father died and his mother left him. He was a natural with cloths and made his own clothes by the age of 10. He went on to making his family money for years until his aunt died. Filled with dismay knowing that he had nowhere to go, he was visited by a strange man who turned out to be Camillo. He observed his skills in tailor-

ing and decided him worthy and invited him aboard his ship. They traveled afar to San Francisco and started a business. Making money beyond their wildest dreams the Polish group headed around the world hiring tailors of all different races and bringing them to their headquarters in San Francisco. Then he ended on a sad tone, realizing that all hope of ever recovering all their years work was gone.

A rich couple suddenly walked out in front of us and exclaimed, "Ralph, Hazel, is it really you, and who are these people you have with you."

"These are good people, they gave us food and accompanied us through our travails," Hazel said.

They seemed nervous at first, but then approached us slowly, like a dog identifying a new face.

"You, you're the man who rescued my wife's purse from that mugger," noted the man shakily, "I am in debt for that, my name is Jonathan and my wife here is Adeline."

"There is no need to thank me twice, I realize and accept your thanks, are you two in need of supplies?"

"No not at all, we would actually like to bring you four to a safer place, our hotel, the Saint Francis. Let us make haste for the hour neigh."

"Very well dear friends, we are hungry and without food," I said, "There is however a bread shop nearby which is surprisingly open."

And so we all left, side by side. Time seemed to freeze as we walked past the wreckage, even I became doubtful that there was an open bakery. In fact as we walked the streets seemed to become more and more broken and trashed as if it was preparing for yet another disaster. I mean what kind of ruthless destruction should ensue after an earthquake as merciless as this. A body lay strewn across the street its skull cracked and arms crossed in one last prayer.

We arrived at the bakery which was indeed intact and ready, but the inside was quite the different story. The

whole place was distraught with baked goods and scattered metal. But directly behind the counter was the baker, who you could barely mistaken as a worker in this kind of a situation.

"Sir, do you have any fresh baked for us today," asked Ralph.

"Ah, yes in fact we do," he said handing us a couple loaves, "Sourdough fine."

"Yes that would be great," said Jonathan, handing the baker the money.

"Thanks so much, you're my first customer this day," he said.

"Well hope your business thrives," I said.

We began walking again at a steady rate, realizing that there was a good couple miles to walk until we reached the hotel. I began to recount the things that have transpired in my life this day, the middle of April and almost the Apocalypse of San Francisco as we know it. And I lived and was fortunate enough to find a kind enough group of people to accompany me. These people uniting as one, when I had heard that racism was such a huge prospect in California, it was absolutely amazing. I remember my tutor in Shanghai, who had raised me as a child out of sheer care and compassion. My grief and joy in my life, which never seem to last, the first time I had caught a ferret and the day it died. My life was more complex than I would have ever thought, like the first algebra equation I failed at doing. It was too much for me to comprehend. I wished only and thoroughly for something to be able to stay in my life, now even cities were dying just to prove one thing I had always thought as unfortunate, nothing ever lasts. People began to compound and regroup as we walked, there were several hundreds of people headed in the same direction as we were. Just like the ethereal clusters of stars I had seen in Shanghai, they are all the same, but different. I really was truly nostalgic about my dear home in Shanghai, memories which no treasure could match. Life had truly changed.

I looked ahead out of my daydream, a new view of life dawning upon me, as people truly were headed for the great building in front of us. It stood like the Tibetan mountains and was more glamorous than the Camillo hotel. But just as sad as any building in San Francisco. We passed through the destroyed doors and into the building, its red carpet torn with glass and metal. The receptionist's desk overturned and scattered. The door to the stairs still up like a veteran of war. We passed and climbed the untouched flight of stairs, it was almost a sanctuary to our weary souls, producing a mirage in our minds telling us the earthquake had actually never happened. We departed on the 7th floor, several maids surrounded the vicinity, cleaning up the glass and scattered belongings. We walked into the 2nd room to the left and we were finally at the hotel room.

Everyone fell silent for a moment. I observed the room, it was torn off its beauty, the glass was broken and scattered on the floor and broken objects. And in the very center was a magnificent picture of unequal value. A knife was stuck directly in the center of the picture, leaving grotesque mark. The glass was shattered and the frame bent wryly, in other words the painting was in ruins. Jonathan bent over the masterpiece and started crying, I felt a touch of compassion for him, almost knowing what kind of feelings a human can have with an animal or inanimate object. It was almost sad, a grown man crying.

"This was my friend's last painting, right before he died. It has an almost unbreakable link to him, and to know it is in ruins. My friend never even had a proper burial. The bastards threw him in a mass grave. He was an artist!" sobbed Jonathan.

Adeline came over to comfort him, and the others sat silently observing the tension building up in the air. I grabbed a loaf and we started eating the bread. It was just like the bread in my sandwiches. I ate silently and slowly letting the dawn turn to night right before my eyes. The children and I covered the open area with cloth to prevent

the cold from coming in. The couple hired a maid to remove the glass and set up mini beds. Then we ate a meager meal and everyone but I fell asleep.

A familiar man walked through the door, a man known as Alwin. He was quite distraught and looked surprised as he saw me.

"Is...is that Levitz," He asked squinting at me through the darkness.

"Yes, Alwin, is that you," I asked.

"Yes, I didn't expect to see you here, and who," he looked at the couple and gasped," you...you stay with these people, I can't stay with you guys then."

"Why not."

"Long story, can't stay. You managed to rescue the suit materials."

"Yeah, want to work on it, I can't sleep."

"Great we should work on it in my room."

I extracted the tools from my pouch and moved just down the hall and worked long and happily into the night.

I woke up with a dry mouth and in an uncomfortable position. Alwin was already awake and grinning like an idiot.

"You won't believe this Levitz."

In front of me was the both trousers and the shirt and was 100 percent complete and the. They shined a brilliant azure, its leather mounted skillfully without mistake. It was as perfect as work could have ever been. It lay on the bed along with a shiny blue tie and a white undershirt, a belt hooked into the pants. I looked up in awe, realizing what kind of a job we had completed and how extraordinary the workmanship was. I remembered close to nothing but happy times we spent working without rest on and off the night before. How magical my fingers were, as they waltzed along the suit, I had not a clue. And Alwin, my dear friend, so kind and proud as he stood there presenting me with the fruits of our labor. It was more than anything I'd ever seen, and so Camillo was right, there is truly nothing that cannot be achieved with teamwork and

unity. I walked up and touch it, it was more real than death itself. I loved it, loved it like Jonathan loved his friend's masterpiece. I felt as if it was a part of me now. So delicately placed alongside each other like a swan in a lake.

"Well what do you think."

I stared still awestruck as a mumbled, "Words fail me."

"Oh my god we've done it, we make one hell of a team and there is nothing that we can't achieve."

We embraced in untroubled glory as we sobbed, this was more than I could absorb. I grabbed a leather packing sack and placed the clothes protectively into the bag, making sure that every piece was in working order for the day we would present it to Camillo, imagining what his expression would be as he saw his greatest suit. We would savor every moment.

I then remember where I was and ran back to my room, the couple had apparently awoken already and eaten a loaf of bread. A laugh and a scream broke out from Adeline as she discovered the plumbing was broken, the hard way. Water sprayed everywhere as she ran out, her hair soaking. She embraced Jonathan and they both laughed and sobbed. It was quite an emotional moment for all of us. Hazel was running crazy with her brother as they laughed in appreciative frolic. I never felt better or more like crap, right after such a time.

"Where have you been Levitz, I couldn't find you anywhere," said Adeline.

"Oh, just woke up early and couldn't go back to sleep I guess."

"Well ok, you'd better eat up then."

I ate a whole loaf of bread, and started meditating, it's what I have always done when my emotions are too hard to deal with. When I had cleared my mind I began to reflect on what happiness really was and why I had never felt whole like I had just did when I discovered that I had completed the suit. Was it that I had thought it was virtually impossible or was it that was the work of teamwork

that had such an effect? I really didn't care to reflect on such things when I had a past life so whole. I loved my life in Shanghai, it wasn't grand but it was never the less great. And now in the midst of destruction I feel like I am the richest man on earth. I was a maverick to some extent but to believe the true path to happiness was really simpler than money itself. I was happy that I was treated into a hotel, but was the real reason the friendship I had made with Camillo the reason that I was happy. What I really thought was that happiness is a path different for everyone, for some it may be money, for some it may be freedom but for me its as captivating as friendship.

A scream arose from the hall as a series of explosions rippled through the building. The same faint feeling that occurred minutes before the earthquake once again ran through my very spine. Everything fell silent for a few moments then a ring a fire blasted right through the building. Bloody hell, I thought, not again. Misfortune after God damn misfortune. The door crashed down in a sad heap. I got up grabbed the suit and bread and ran like hell, jumping straight through the fire. The alarm ensued and several screams broke the deadly burn. I noticed the others in the corner of my eye and dashed straight for them down the flight of stairs like I've never ran before. My adrenaline pumped with deafening strength.

I grabbed the suit on the way, and broke down the stair case, my body trembling uncontrollably as I ran.

Suddenly halfway down, Hazel tripped and fell on her hand, and screamed bloody murder.

"I broke it, my pinkie, help me!" she screamed.

"You got to keep going, we can't stay here," I screamed.

Ralph scooped her into his arms and ran the rest of the flights, through the burning masses and scrambled right through the front door. We didn't stop, not Hazel, not Ralph, no one. Then there was a crack then a massive explosion, rippling through the very essence of my veins.

"It's done for guys," said Jonathan, still gripping his torn painting tightly, "You were one hell of a troop, congrats."

I could still hear the explosions as the building crashed upon its own dying mass. Dying people, dying memories, farewell to the last open sanctuary. Ralph relocated Hazel's dislocated finger as she screamed, as the building cast its last shadow as I cried for the world. I felt like the very darkness that haunts me as I sleep, as I try to keep things sound, and what did I deserve this for. I bet the suit would die, like everything I ever liked, nothing lasted with me for more than half the time I would expect it too. I really did cry like a child, the very child I was almost 20 years ago being cradled away from my family and cast into the arms of my new caretaker, who I would grow to love dearly. But I was ignorant of such things then, and so I am now. I just must give things time to play out, this was nothing of my doings. And so we all must suffer anyway. I could imagine myself years from now, a lone tailor with my wife and kids in the village I loved so dearly. Maybe that's all I really wanted too, something to take my mind of my emotions. And so I will do this. I really wanted a life of bliss, I had gotten it but lost so much from misfortune. I had by this point almost forgotten about Alwin.

We sat on the bare alley way street watching silently, Ralph throwing rocks at the ground. It was as silent as my father's grave, but even then it was more sad and lonely. Eons later the couple motioned for me.

"Well, from the turn of recent events we have decided to tell you this early, we would like to hire you as a family tailor and butler, you will get full access to everything as an honorary guest and be paid generously. Do you accept this offer Levitz," asked Jonathan.

"This is all to new to me, but don't you see that I'm a broken man and wish for only one thing and that is to return home to my family and live a quiet life."

"This is your choice but if that is the way you would like it, so be it. You know, you always could move your whole family up to where we live, we would be pleased to accommodate them."

"We shall see then," I said.

"We have decided to split up, the children would be pleased to go and try to relocate their parents and Levitz, Adeline and I will go and locate boats for our voyage back to our original destinations," Jonathan announced.

"I hate to be leaving the friends and allies I have made during this perilous journey. However if our presence will stifle your progress in returning home, we will be welcome to leave," said Ralph.

"Very well, but if you don't find your parents visit us and we have something important to tell you," said Adeline.

"So be it, may a million blessings be placed upon you," said Ralph.

"And to you too," we chided back.

We split, bidding our final farewells and left our ways. A man sat on the road side selling the last of his items not destroyed by the quake. We walked over to inspect them, searching for anything possibly useful.

"What would it be for you today," asked the man. We noticed several sleeping pads and cloths of all colors.

"We would like 3 pads and 3 bolts of your 8 by 6 feet cloth, your thickest kind would be most appreciated," I said.

We collected the items paying the man a little more than he asked for, considering he was probably further in the ruts than any one of us.

We headed by the bay brooks as a rain began to fall upon us. It was a strange nulling sensation as we trudged along silently past the ruins. I looked at the sky as the clouds began to thicken in a huge conglomeration of dark mist. Circling back and forth in the sky glaring ominously down at the city below. The rain began to gradually pour

as winds picked up, I could almost feel the subtle calm welding into something huge.

It was a little over 20 miles until we reach the bay and days after that to find a sailer willing enough to give us a boat to take back. Luckily the bay was quite untouched, all the ships floating back and forth as a storm approached. A bolt of lightning struck far out into the ocean, a clap of thunder following. Several more struck until anyone became uneasy.

"I believe we should find some shelter soon, we can't hold out during such weather," I said.

"I don't know of anywhere safe at this point to stay, we will just have to at this point anyway," added Adeline.

"We have to continue, we are a little over 10 miles from the harbor, there will be several places to stay there, until then we will continue no matter how bad the rain."

We continued in silence ignoring the thunder and increasing rain. I waked with a grudge, sure I was carrying the most weight of the four. The wind howled and became blinding, rain stinging my eyes. I kept a steady lead, focusing my vision on Alwin who looked no better than anyone of us. I closed my eyes every few seconds to keep the water out of my vision. Not a single man nor woman was in sight. Our visibility became fogged, we could no longer estimate how much longer we had to traverse through the streets. My body became numb and my head feverish, I had never had to endure such a storm, nor was I prepared.

"I cant take this much longer!" screamed Jonathan, as he collapsed onto the ground groaning.

I stopped and noticed movement in the distance, I ran towards the source, finding a cabby driver pulled by two big horses. I motioned for the man to come towards me, it was quite a large cart and could carry up to 5 people at once. I threw my belongings into the trunk and hopped into the cart gasping for my breath. The man looked down at me as I crawled dripping and shaking. He handed

me a towel and seated me onto a seat and asked me where I wanted to go.

"Go back, there are others," I said then fell backwards, absorbing the warmth from the onboard heater.

I looked out the window and found the others huddled into a mass in the alley. They noticed the cab and ran towards it as if it were their only hope of survival rushing inside dripping, exhausted and cold. The cabby driver entertained towels and asked yet again, this time with the whole group where they would like to go.

"The bay, and would you know of any place worth staying?" asked Adeline.

"Ahh, the Sailer's Parley, not a place better, it was a place I used to stay when I was a young sailer."

"Thanks so much for saving us from such a ravaging storm."

"All in a days work, no problem."

We continued down the roadside, looking periodically outside at the rain and rubble. As the time went by the bay came into view, shrouded in mists so that it gave it a creepy view. The cabby came to an abrupt stop in the midst of the bay.

"Well this is the place, the Sailer's Parley, the price for the ride is 40 cents."

We paid the money then departed from the cabby like scared ghosts and set foot onto the ground. The rain had subsided and the fog dissipating, it was a short yet distraught storm. To our left was the hotel, no where near as glamorous as the previous hotels, but the only ones intact. I was at first skeptical on whether I should enter, to plague the only intact part of San Francisco with bad luck. I was generally not a superstitious man, however the situation was quite dire and the series of misfortune pounding on us was continuous.

We entered the wood doors to be welcome into a warm yet primitive landscape. The receptionist checked us in and gave us the key to our room, which was one of the few rooms in the whole hotel capable of supporting five

people. We walked down the well lit halls noticing pictures and paintings of fisherman and crews and anything related. The cabby driver was right it was quite the place for a fisherman to stay. Inside our room was a pair of beds and couches surrounding a washroom and simple adornments such as a candle or painting here and there. A window stood past a table giving a unparalleled view of the surrounding ocean. Several boats stood ready and yet seemed so defunct. I wondered whether anyone was willing enough to ferry a group of people to such a faraway land, even if it did involve a lot of money. We decided to rest for the night, considering everyone was tired and unwilling to search for any sailer. A knock on the door surprised everyone and I jumped to open it. A waitress entered asking whether we would like to purchase some food. Our bread had already gone stale and moldy and was nothing more than a repugnant mess so decided to order the lot.

That night we feasted on lobster, fish and other seafood, sharing good times and our concern for the children.

"I really do hope they find their parents, for they are no more than orphans or street urchins with no future if that is so," I said dourly, "And so I was wondering if they don't manage to find them, then what will become of the children."

"Ok, fine here's the truth, we have always wanted more children to raise and spread our surname, and have never found a child we were so fond of as Hazel and Ralph," confessed Adeline.

"And so," continued Jonathan, "We have given the children a choice, that if misfortune had befallen them and their parents have been no where to be found or passed away, they can come live with us as their adoptive parents."

I stared at the couple in complete disbelief searching for words to say, all I could do is think that they were absolutely haywire and yet they were very kind of sup-

porting more children. They were rich and wanted more responsibilities possibly, but who would carry more of a burden?

"Well ok, I guess so, whatever you say, I guess they would be very pleased at your decision to take them in as your own," I sputtered.

"That's what we thought, but their loyalties lie in improving their relationship with their parents and living with them as well," Adeline said sourly.

"But what is their to improve if they are already dead, hidden among the vast expansion of rubble?" I wondered.

"But that is the problem, they refuse to believe that, they are constantly in a state of denial, shooting to fight for their cause, such good kids, if only they had they mind to accept the obvious truth," she replied, "However we were wondering whether you could help us."

"I really don't know how that is possible. Once someone make up their mind, it is near impossible to change, unless..."

"Right," Jonathan said cutting me off, "We need someone the children trust, like you, who helped rescue the children multiple times."

"Agreed," I said, "Very much agreed, I want to help those two just as much as you do."

We then all fell into deep slumber, determined to conserve our energy. My dreams were very colorful and vivid, full of euphoria and happiness. I had not an idea what they were however it was brilliant enough to light the hard and tenebrous nights we have encountered.

I awoke to the smell of food and sound of dishes, looking up I saw everyone eating away at a lobster. Eager to know why everyone was up I looked at a small clock on the far side of the room, it was only however a quarter to eight. Funny that they should awake so early.

"Sleep well Levitz?" asked Jonathan.

"Good enough," I said avoiding to tell them about my dream.

"We brought some fresh caught bass for you to eat, we realized that this is your favorite fish," Adeline said.

"Thank you."

I began devouring the bass, nearly eating over half the fish before declaring that I didn't want anymore, which wasn't true, but I noticed Jonathan eyeing the fish longingly and wanted him to be able to eat the rest. I ate some lobster, which really wasn't spectacular, but indeed enough to make me satiated. I then cleaned up in the washroom, making sure to be as neat as I could, because I was quite pleased with the service given to us in the hotel.

After another half an hour we finally decided to go try our luck at finding a willing sailer to take us aboard his ship back to our homes. Just recently Jonathan had found a sailor whom he thought might be able to help us with getting off of San Francisco.

"Do you remember where he lives?" I asked.

"Of course, I have his business card right here," he said, handing me the small card.

"It says he works from 6 AM – 7PM, on weekdays and considerably less on Sundays, which is apparently today, plus it is at least a mile walk that specific dock," I said, "In other words we should hurry or we'll never reach our destination.

We packed some of our belongings and set out. It was a sunny day, in contrast to yesterday which was stormy, but still humid. The sun hung high in the sky pleasantly lighting the ocean and docks. The salty sea air sparked a special kind of energy and anticipation within us. I breathed deeply letting the anxiety seep out of myself, hoping still for the day to unravel in our advantage.

"I believe that," said Jonathan pointing at a large blue building, "Is our destination.

I looked ahead, the building coming into view among a lot of ships. Ships sailed in and out periodically, many carrying nets and crates, a lot which I thought to be filled with freshly caught fish. Sounds of industrial work and

working people filled our senses, an occasional metal clang making me flinch.

"Are you sure this place has ships available to sail on?" asked Adeline, "It looks more like a fish plant to me."

Jonathan frowned, "Do you doubt my word, of course it has ships available, it just makes most of its income from fishing."

We entered the building awestruck by its size and the amounts of ships and fish it had stored within its walls. Several workers shifted by surprised to see us here.

"How do you all do, my name is Norman, how can I be of service today," one man asked.

"We were looking for Herman, from the travel and sailing division," said Jonathan, "Would you by any chance know where he would be located?"

"Oh yes, Herman down that hall near all the crates, turn left and the will be the first door you see."

"Thanks."

We walked down the hall, I looked inside the crates, curious, only to find cans and cans of fish, mostly sardines topped upon one another. The halls seemed to become gradually narrower as we walked and it was quite long, taking us almost a minute to traverse. We finally arrived at a nicely polished, simple looking amber colored door. A solemn, bulky man sat at a desk sorting our papers, busily, barely acknowledging of our presence. On his desk was a name, Herman Ofgenwaugger III. I almost laughed at such a strange name, it was as if he was born of trolls and named so.

"Hello folks, how may I help you," asked Herman.

"I've returned to talk about sailing on ship back to our homeland," said Jonathan.

"So you have returned, well then we have a lot to talk about," he said, "First off who is accompanying you and where do you intend on going to?"

"I intend on going to Maryland to be exact, and I am going with my wife, however my friend is going to China."

"So you want to go to Maryland, huh, well we have few ships available and many have already left, and that may leaving you guys with few options."

He looked through several of his papers examining each closely for several minutes until he finally said, "We currently have 2 ships leaving for Maryland, both leaving within a week, one in fact leaving just tomorrow, would you like to reserve a place there."

Adeline's face lightened up, "Wow that is absolutely delightful, we will reserve a space for tomorrow."

"Excellent, here are some forms you should fill out," said Herman handing her a couple sheets of paper.

"Now you, Levitz it was, you would like to go where in China," he inquired.

"Shanghai would be the place," I said.

"Very well," he laughed and started looking once again through his papers.

"Well from what I've found, you have a ship coming tomorrow as well, the Alias, a ship well known for its speed, but this one is just arriving in from a previous trip, so I don't know whether you will like to go on board it. A great ship and set for China, Shanghai to be exact. Is this your choice?"

"So be it, that is my choice, I am just glad to be able to leave," I said.

"Great here is the forms you need to fill out," Herman said handing them to me. I noticed Jonathan eye me guiltily as I did so. Obviously they did not want me to leave back to China, no matter what they thought, I still wanted to return to my family.

"Well look at the time, my shift is over, great for you guys to come. I am pleased if I had helped you with your problems. And I have some mail to deliver."

We thanked him, paying him for his time then left the hall, everyone looking quite grim, aside from me, I guess it was hard to be stuck here longer than necessary. The sun still shone high lighting up the earth in its wake. It

was time for lunch and I was anticipating to be able to eat something.

“Well that was quite a successful talk, we had better get some packing done tonight,” Adeline said.

“Yes, we should, and I am quite glad we should leave so early, well I hope you enjoy your trip back home, because I know I will,” I said.

We walked the remainder of the trip slowly as if trying to waste as much time as we could. The winds were against us, blowing sand in our eyes, seaspray floundering around the area. It was as if the beginning of yet another storm, causing us to pick up our pace. We reached the Sailer's Parley in a matter of minutes shaking from the cold as we entered the warm halls.

That night was again a rainy night, but more of a dour night of consuming sadness as the rain pattered against the panes, than a stormy night. It was a well matched scenario, as for the fact everyone was sitting in a bunch munching away unenthusiastically at the lobster.

“What is with you guys tonight, has the devil have your soul?” I asked.

“No it is just I fear for my family and home. I miss everything I have dearly. I remember when we stood on the dock above a clear blue sky, houses silently lined adorned with flourishing flowers. I pictured a stress free vacation, a warm return home only a month or so later, my children happy with our housemaids. Now my dreams are close to shattered. As I look up at the sky every night I wonder whether my children are seeing what I see. When they were first born, the very first thing they looked up at was the sky, ever since their only dreams were to become astronomers,” said Adeline, “Such a fascinating thing it would be to travel to a star and to see what would reside there.”

“You shouldn't miss such things, since you are leaving so soon,” I said.

“No it is just that I have an aching feeling in my gut the closer I am to home

"Very well, we should be getting some sleep now," I announced.

Everyone agreed, and we all settled down and soon afterwards fell into a deep slumber.

I woke up next morning well slept and attentive. It was a bright and sunny day, rays of light filtered in through the dank windows. The waves crashed upon the shore, and seagulls cried out as they flew all around the glistening beach.

I jumped out of bed, noticing that everyone was awake and eating a meal of bread and cheese.

"What's with the hurry and," I said noticing the bread and cheese, "The unappetizing food."

"We have not started packing yet and the hour is neigh from when we must leave."

"Great I will be at Herman's to update you guys on the situation," I said.

"Fine, go then but don't stay out to long, unless of course it requires your attention."

Outside was quite warm, in comparison to the other days we spent in San Francisco. Although it was however cold, but for once the wind had subsided the sun shone with amazing intensity. The rain clouds had scattered just last night, leaving a clear sky for the morning. Waves crashed molding the surface in which I had walked yesterday, leaving not even the slightest signs at our presence. I reached the shipyard, noticing the same industrial work sounds and smell of salty sardines. Herman was inside his office, sorting out papers and writing down notes and filling out forms. I walked inside the small room and caught him off guard.

"Why hello, I didn't expect you to come in at this time, but since you are here I have some good and bad news for you," said Herman.

"What is the good news," I asked.

"The good news is the ships are arriving anytime now and the bad news is that the ships are however not leaving until tomorrow," he said.

"That's fine, I mean it isn't really bad news, in fact we need some time to pack up anyway," I said.

"Ok great, I have another appointment with another man at this time, so you will have to leave," he said.

"And who may this be," I asked.

"A man named Alwin, a particular man, I should say, trying to find his way back to Poland, and I believe his ship is arriving with your ship, you know the people on board are very rich and prominent people," he said.

"Thanks for all your help, I should be leaving now," I said.

I left the room, pushing my way past workers, and out into the open. I didn't notice Alwin anywhere so I sat on a rock facing the ocean keeping a keen eye for any pair of ships heading for the shore. I saw several ships, but none resembling the two sleek ships Alwin had described to me. Ships darted back and forth running the few errands they were built for. People here and there working to pack goods or construct ships, it seemed all so normal, as if just another day in the same old place. But all this was, was another retrospect, another undestroyed area. But why didn't these people care about their city anyway, it almost seemed as if they cared more about their money than dying people. That was a very disrespectful and callous thing to do, considering they could obviously send packed goods into the starving city. A familiar voice broke my thoughts.

"Levitz, so you survived huh," asked Alwin.

"Yeah, you seem to be in great shape," I replied.

He walked up and sat next to me on the rock.

"It's a nice day today, a great day to go home," he said.

"Yes that is all I wish to do now."

From the distance a loud horn, similar to the one I had heard when I had first arrived, a horn that signified the incoming of a ship. I looked out into the ocean and saw two small green painted ships, headed right towards the shore.

"Good lord, it can't be," said Alwin.

"What is it," I asked.

"That there is the Alactan and the Alias. One of them is the very ship Camillo left on."

"And if they are returning, that means..."

"It just may be."

We jumped from the rocks standing upon the beach as the unsuspecting pair of ships approached shore along with a third ship, probably the one Jonathan and Adeline would travel on.

The crew aboard the ships departed two by two, each and every one of them stern and fiercely attentive. Then the visitors, captains, then Camillo and on the other ship a woman I could not recognize, probably his "to be wife" anyhow. We stood on the beach stunned, not knowing what to do until Camillo noticed the six of us.

"My god is that you, my brilliant tailors, Alwin and Levitz, is that really you," said Camillo.

All we could do was nod.

"I had heard that there was a huge earthquake that struck this area and came as soon as I could, but such destruction, its unbearable. What could have possibly happened to the workshop and my hotel, could it be...", he started.

"Yes I'm afraid so, its all gone," Alwin said.

"Even Billy, Acura, all of them," he asked.

"Yes," said Alwin.

Camillo looked down, with obvious agony, his wife came to his aid to comfort him.

"At the very least I should know what happened to our many years of work," he said dryly.

So we told him. He stared at us as we recited all of the events that have taken place since the start of the earthquake. He listened attentively, sometimes even flinching as we explained some of the most horrid parts. His face expressed sadness and joy from our miraculous adventure. Alwin taking my place in storytelling when I forgot certain parts of my adventure. When we finally ended, there was a long line of silence.

"So fate must go as it is," Camillo said.

"We still have something you requested, a tribute to the many years of friendship, it was the least we could do for you," Alwin said.

"And what would this be?"

I took the suit out of the leather pouch, slowly revealing the suit. Camillo smiled, a pained smile, but a never the less smile that meant I have nearly drowned from my owned sorrows, but you have redeemed me.

"I am thankless beyond my own words, this is the greatest gift you could have possibly have presented to me. Levitz, you probably realize that I cannot pay you any longer. But this is the least money I could give to you for the suit and your troubles."

He handed me a pouch, inside was 500 dollars in bills, I nearly fainted at the amount.

"I'm guessing you bunch need transportation right?" Camillo asked, "I heard you had already paid for your trip.

"Right, we leave tomorrow then."

"Great."

"Hey also, Camillo?"

"He turned my way yes," he asked.

"Can I cancel my trip back to China and go to Maryland instead."

"That would be fine with me, but now I have a little incomplete business to attend to."

Several figures ran up the beach, Adeline, Jonathan and the two kids, it appears they have been chosen to be adopted. By this time both Camillo and Alwin had gone hidden within the crowd, looking like they were part of the crew.

"Levitz, so good to see you, we have chosen to be adopted, I'm guessing you have chosen work for them, right?" asked Ralf.

"Um... by now yes, I have, in fact I am going to Maryland with you guys," I responded, looking at the surprised couple.

"That's...great," Jonathan said, "I will make sure that your family gets well accommodated as well."

By nightfall he had set up all 3 of his ships with provisions, one for going to Poland, for Alwin, a bunch of his workers and himself and one for Maryland and the other to China, which I would no longer be going on. The crew slept that night in the Sailer's Parley. Each of them with their own stories about the hotel and its importance in their lives.

That night I asked Camillo a question.

"Camillo, I know you have a lot of connections with people world wide, right?"

"Yes, why would you ask?"

"I was wondering if you could transport my entire family to Maryland."

"Of course, in fact I had already sent for a ship to take them, a friendly couple, earlier, told me it would make you very pleased."

"Thank you so very much, my family will be most pleased."

"It's fine, they should arrive anywhere close to a month after you guys."

I slept only a few hours that night, waking before sunrise. Everyone was quite awake and obviously ready and well, there was quite a racket as we started packing. I stuffed several works of tailory I have made into a large duffel bag. I finished, throwing my packs outside into a large pile just outside the hotel. Breakfast was hearty meal of clam chowder and fish of all kinds prepared especially for us as by the hotel managers for our huge stay. I looked back at the ruins of San Francisco and swore never wanted to return. Camillo called me over for a group farewell, telling me to visit him periodically and that he would never give up in establishing a successful business. The ship we were sailing on was the Alias, I guess Camillo, really liked his ship. We said our final farewells, and parted, going our separate ways, it was quite hard letting Camillo go, but it was his own destiny

to start yet another business with Alwin, this time in Poland. I hope that he would be able to live in peace and prosperity, at least this time, and I hope he wouldn't leave us forever. But somehow I knew I would see him again, somehow or another. And San Francisco was quite another story, very much another story.

The boat trip was quite a journey and very comfortable. Sometimes as the wind blew by I could hear strains of sound, vocal hallucinations fly by of destruction in San Francisco. It was a haunting I could not live with, infesting every aspect of my life, including that of my conscience. I chose not to feel anymore, to numb myself to the world around, in fact I didn't even care about what had happened back in San Francisco. It was all a dream now. Ralph was always there to comfort me in place of Alwin.

About a month or so later we arrived, happy and well, my family came just weeks later. I stayed for about 5 years working as a butler for the family, until I was quite sick of the quiet life and wished only to return to my home in the village near Shanghai. By now it was a small city. Its community was vivid and merry. I lived there up to this day, about 2 years later, and wish to live here to my death. I visit Poland and Maryland whenever I can, happy to see that Alwin and Camillo had established a successful business. And up to this day I still remember, what happened to the story of the suit and its man. A nice and amazing adventure and adversity.

How Much of the book is True?

Enough to make it a historical fiction, would be my answer. The Earthquake, and several of the events taking place in the book, that including the destruction of the St. Francis building, which was indeed a real building. The fire and survival of most of the harbors was true. My characters were obviously created by my group and I, a rather interesting group, and some of the events that have

taken place, such as the up and running breadshop and the shipyard, I really did not know if these were true. Also I down played racism, as I obviously did not include anything on this within my story, or very few to be reckoned with, considering the earthquake was supposed to bring everyone together. Which it did, but it didn't disrupt racism, because there wasn't any of it within this story. But it is too late to change it now. In conclusion I would say that 70 percent of all major events were true, and most of everything else wasn't, but I guess I'm not making a historical biography here am I?

Chapter Eight

Other Writing and Activities

Science is a Favorite of Mine

Ken Vicknair and Tracie Mastronicola make science fun, and I learnt from them as well. Figure 3 is a car I built that was displayed at a science open house in the gym.

Figure 1 *My rubber band car science project.*



Math

Casandra Weston, Marissa Cui, David Ko, Ashu Desai, Jeremy Shar, and myself are in a small special math class. Our instructor Stephen Channan makes the class enjoyable through a variety of activities and teaching techniques.

Figure 2 My derivation of the Quadratic Formula

$$ax^2 + bx + c = 0$$

$$x^2 + \frac{bx}{a} + \frac{c}{a} = 0$$

$$x + \frac{bx}{a} = -\frac{c}{a}$$

$$x + \frac{bx}{a} + \frac{b^2}{4a^2} = -\frac{c}{a} + \frac{b^2}{4a^2}$$

$$\left(x + \frac{b}{2a}\right)^2 = \frac{b^2}{4a^2} - \frac{c}{a} \quad \left| \begin{array}{l} \left(x + \frac{b}{2a}\right)\left(x + \frac{b}{2a}\right) \\ = x^2 + \frac{bx}{2a} + \frac{bx}{2a} + \frac{b^2}{4a^2} \\ = x^2 + \frac{2bx}{2a} + \frac{b^2}{4a^2} \\ = x^2 + \frac{bx}{a} + \frac{b^2}{4a^2} \end{array} \right.$$

$$\left(x + \frac{b}{2a}\right)^2 = \frac{b^2}{4a^2} - \frac{4ac}{4a^2}$$

$$x + \frac{b}{2a} = \pm \sqrt{\frac{b^2 - 4ac}{4a^2}}$$

$$x = -\frac{b}{2a} \pm \frac{\sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Math students receive recognition in the Nueva School newsletter. The Executive Director is Diane Rosenberg.



mathematics awards The AMC 8 is a challenging, nationally administered math contest for grades eight and below, sponsored by the Mathematical Association of America (MAA). Nueva students performed exceptionally well this year, with a team score (the combined top three scores) that earned Nueva a place on the AMC School Honor Roll (schools in the top 1% nationally).

Six students achieved Distinction (the highest national award). The school winners for 8th Grade are listed below.

8th Grade

Ashu Desai

School Winner (tie), School Team, Distinction

David Ko

School Winner (tie), School Team, Distinction

Cassandra Euphrat Weston

Second Place, School Team, Distinction

Branden Thurston

Third Place, Distinction

Ari Brenner

Distinction

Jeremy Shar

Distinction

Mickey Boxell

Honors

Bryan Christofferson

Honors

Marissa Cui

Honors

Michael Hursh

Honors

Morgan Neiman

Honors

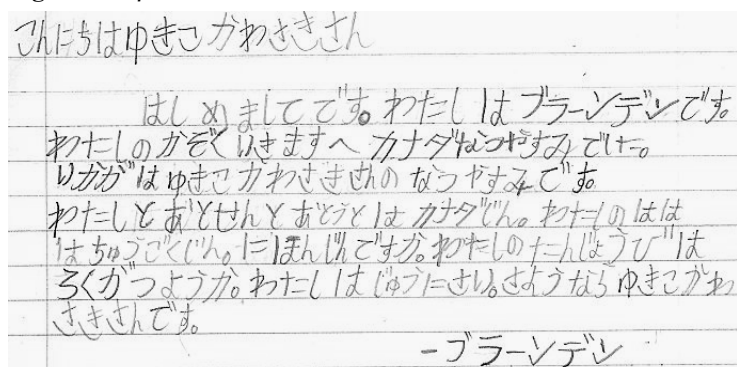
Before Starting Nueva

My parents both support and encourage me to write. The summer before starting at Nueva School, I wrote a number of papers.

Japanese

Before starting grade 7 Japanese, I studied over the summer to catch up to the other students. Figure 1 is my introductory letter to the Nueva teacher Yukiko.

Figure 3 Japanese letter I wrote.



The Donut Factory

This story is from my trip notes my dad had me write when we traveled to visit my Grandma and Grandpa in the Niagara Falls region of Ontario, Canada. It is good to have written this story before I attempted the Travel in Thailand story.

My family and I had just arrived back to Grandma's and Grandpa's house after having gone to the Chinese doctor. Mom was exceptionally pleased because the doctor cured her dizziness which no other doctor has helped

with. It is rather late, and there is a copious amount of rain falling. Immediately after I trudge inside of the house, I wash myself and dart downstairs to my bed. I was asleep for a couple of hours...having no dreams, when a flash of light streaks through the sky followed immediately after by thunder bang. I streak up stairs to find everyone except Grandpa, sitting wide awake. We listen to many more claps of thunder and watch the lightning. I listen to the drops of water collide against the window pane. Deprived of sleep, I think to go back to bed.

Mom suggests to go visit Rick, my dad's friend, working at the *donut factory* in Alymer. "It will be an adventure in the middle of the night," my dad says. Mom makes the suggestion because around this time of night, 1 to 5am, donuts are being handmade at the bakery. Mom and dad are enthusiastic about it, yet Riley and I are quite tired; we did not concur. Sure enough we went anyways.

With the weather as it is, this story should be called The Dark and Stormy Night, rather than The Donut Factory. We acquired some of grandma's umbrellas and raced outside into the car. On the way, I tried to get some rest as the others watched the brilliant display of lightning, always followed by thunder claps. To emphasize this effect, dad stopped the car where there are no houses near, no lights, and turns off the car lights. The lighting up of the sky made for an eerie landscape. As we continue, the rain seems to become more and more furious.

We arrive in Alymer, park our car near the bakery, and dash to the backdoor. Rick is near the entrance, and welcomes us in. I look around, sure enough there are treats of all sorts, including donuts being made. It is quite hot inside which I appreciate considering it is cold and wet outside.

We watch with great interest at all the machinery and baked goods being made. The bakery is like a massive kitchen with lots of small and large machinery, and big bags of ingredients. Despite all of the hardware, a small group of people, are doing many tasks by hand. They are

making donuts, bread, banana bread, cookies, rolls, kaiser rolls, buns, hotdog buns, and almost any baked goodie you can think of. And, we are given samples of fresh cookies, and the freshest, donuts made from the most wonderful dough ever.

At the end of our tour we are given half a dozen glazed donuts, the best donuts I have ever had. The next morning, back at granma and grandpa's, everyone enjoys a luscious donut. After our journey to bakery, every chance we get, we go back to buy more baked goods, especially, donuts.

I'm back in the USA now, I really miss those donuts. I feel I shall never have another donut better or fresher than the ones made by Rick Vandemaele at Spicer's in Alymer, Ontario, Canada.

The Effects of Man-Made Changes on Arctic Species

Following is a thesis, my final work for my 2004 Stanford University writing course. After many hours of hard work, and many revisions, I received a grade of A.

The Threatened Arctic Ecosystem

The Arctic Ocean has the total size of 14.056 million kilometers, the smallest of Earth's 5 oceans. The Arctic region around this ocean is characterized by persistent cold. Its winters have incessant cold and darkness. Its summers are characterized by continuous daylight, damp and foggy weather, and weak cyclones with rain or snow. However these temperatures have become warmer by 3-4.5 degrees due to global warming, and will continue to go even **higher**.

The lowest point below sea level has changed because global warming caused ice to melt in the Arctic ocean and raise sea level. The lowest point is Fram Basin which is -4,665 meters below sea level. In 50 years, the Arctic will

be ice-free causing the national sea level to increase by 4.5 meters.

Arctic species from birds to animals are all vulnerable to these effects. Human exploitations in the Arctic region has caused all kinds of problems. The health of animals are being affected by pollution, dwellings are destroyed and temperatures are constantly rising. People are affecting Arctic species by causing destructive changes to the Arctic ecosystem.

* Statistics are from <http://www.actionbioscience.org/environment/chanton.html> and The Worlds Fact Book 2001.

Man-Made Changes to the Arctic Ocean Through Global Warming

“Climate change affects polar ice first, so glacial samples could tell us whether we're due for a global warming disaster”, from Mysteries of the Deep from the Wired Magazine. The climate change will raise the temperature of Arctic weather at astounding speeds, 3-4.5 F' in 50 years, accumulating in melting speed. Consequently the ice will melt increasing the national ocean level by 4.5 meters. Since the walruses and polar bears livelihood are dependent on this, their life is at stake. Up to this day the glaciers still exist in large bulks of snow and ice covering vast areas in the Arctic Ocean carrying much of the worlds fresh water.

Everybody affects the Arctic species by causing destructive changes to the Arctic ecosystem. Everyday people such as ourselves contribute to further devastation of the Arctic with even the most simple activities such as driving a car. This releases greenhouse gases into the earth's atmosphere trapping heat within the earth and causing a temperature raise everywhere. This affects the Arctic species more than anywhere else on the planet because it causes ice to melt, food becomes scarce, and soon causing the demise to what was once the Arctic ecosystem.

Arctic Species's Health Issues and Decline

Air pollution is causing issues with the Arctic wildlife. U.S. trash incinerators and smelters are creating cancer causing dioxins which are polluting Canada's Arctic. The Arctic food chain is being poisoned by high levels of toxic mercury from the burning of fossil fuels. Scientists find levels of toxic platinum, palladium, and rhodium in Greenland snow have increased up to 40-120 times over background levels due to emissions from catalytic converters. Polar bears weigh 20% less, ground squirrels have disappeared, and caribou are much thinner.

People adventure to the Arctic to mine oil and gas, often destroying animal habitats in the process. Mining resources include sand and gravel aggregates, placer deposits, poly metallic nodules, oil and gas fields reduces and causes destruction to animal habitats. Mining relentlessly destroys habitats from the construction of mining stations over homes of species that are unfortunately in the way of the construction. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge caribou herd declined over 25% between 1989-1998 due to oil drilling.

Drilling into the ice in search of oil and transporting oil can also cause problems. In 1989 the super tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground, spilling millions of gallons of crude oil into the Prince William Sound. In only a week there was a total of 24000 dead sea birds and 1000 sea otters. The effects of the spill affected the food chain from a vast number of species from phytoplankton to bears. The Exxon company funded the clean up however there was no payment for the hundreds of people that lost their job as a result of the spill.

*Source of the Valdez spill is from Planet Papers, an Internet site by environmentalists.

<http://www.planetpapers.com/Assets/3928.php>

Conclusion

People mining in the Arctic and people elsewhere in the world contribute to the devastation to the Arctic species. People who mine in the Arctic destroy homes of Arctic species. People elsewhere contribute to the effects of global warming which means polar bears and walruses will become extinct. Global warming first affects the Arctic, if it continues there will be drastic change worldwide. According to Stephen Hawkins, in about 1000 years, global warming will cause such devastation that Earth will be completely uninhabitable.

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The Garden, by my brother Riley

Flourishes with colors of the rainbow,
Plant life springs out everywhere. Bells chime while the
birds sing.

Leaves fall to the ground as pollen fills the air.

Squirrels coming and going stealing our fruit.

Rain falls and wets the leaves, soaks the dirt and floods
the bird bath.

Darkness fills the sky as the forces of nature blast the
Earth.

Hail puts holes in the leaves, makes a peaceful tap as it
falls to the ground.

Orange leaves cover the floor as a cool breeze chills your
innards.

Straggling leaves cling on to the tree hoping not to fall to
the ground.

The sky is the color of amber as it sets.

Geese quack as they migrate to the south, not seen till the
next year.

Flower buds close and return to the original green and
brown.

Colors disappear, and fall to the dirt to be swept away.

Coldness wraps the plants as frost forms on the rooftops

The tree wrapped in an icy blanket with nothing but
branches bare

The cloudy grey sky shines no light and the sun can't find
a way to pierce the clouds.

The plants shiver bearing no fruits nor vegetables.

Rain is the source of food as it drenches the land. Never
stopping.

Until a bud opens and others start to follow to fill the gar-
den with beautiful colors.

By Riley Thurston, March, 2006

About the Nueva School

by Stacy David Thurston

As a parent of a Nueva student, I am jealous of Branden's time at school, it is the kind of school I wish I had the opportunity to attend. I also enjoyed the community spirit supported by the school, and the parents.

Student and Parent Highlights

1. The middle school students start their year by going camping for 3 days; a nice way to get to know each other.
2. Classmate parties: Alegra Gordon's birthday party included a pre-screening of The Incredibles at the Pixar office, Vani Khosla's birthday party at their family ranch house in Portola Valley, Emma Pearson's family hosted a party for the Japanese exchange students and the Nueva host families.
3. For half the year, twice a week, for half a day, the students studied a number of styles of entertainment. At the end, they hosted Drama Night. It was fun to watch, very entertaining.
4. Nueva Poetry night: each student read a poem they wrote to all the parents at an evening gathering.
5. When there are a group of students advanced in a certain area, the school arranges extra tutoring. Branden participates in the special math program that has been setup for 5 students,

now expanded to 6.

6. Grade 7, the students went camping in the Sierra Mountains for 5 days with their teachers, followed up by a bus trip to a Shakespeare Festival in Oregon.

7. Grade 8, they have a Japanese exchange program. Kana, a wonderful, thoughtful 15 year old Japanese girl from Osaka (figure 1), stayed with us. Branden has left to stay with her family for a week, and spend another week traveling Japan.

Figure 1 *Kana and Branden*



Figure 2 *Trip to the Disney Store*



Figure 3 *Photo before the Japanese students return to Japan.*



8. I enjoyed meeting the parents of Branden's friends (figure 4)
- Mickey Boxell's parents Chris and Tim had us over for a Super Bowl party.
 - Branden stayed over at Cody's house to watch movies and play computer games. I talked with Cody's movie actor father, Robin Williams: like his son, Robin enjoys playing computer games.
 - In grade 7, Branden played many Magic card games with Kenneth Lui.
 - Colton's father, Dennis Jaffe, took Mickey, Colton, Cody, and Branden to the Mac World Exhibition.

Figure 4 Photos before leaving for Japan.



Tim, Mickey, Khris Boxel,
May, Branden



Branden, Cody, Robin,
Marsha Williams



Mickey showing
excitement of going to
Japan, which he loves.

Branden, Cody, Colton



The Mansion (figure 5) is the site of many events: Tea on Green which is the school year opening day celebration, a Shakespeare play acted by students, the humanities class hosted a middle east bazaar, Poetry Night, etc...

Figure 5 Nueva School Mansion



The information following, is taken
from the school's web site:

<http://NuevaSchool.org>

The Mission and Vision

The Nueva School uses a dynamic educational model to enable gifted children to learn how to make choices that will benefit the world. Our school community inspires passion for lifelong learning, fosters social and emotional acuity, and develops the child's imaginative mind.

Who We Are

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Nueva School is an internationally recognized independent school serving gifted and talented students. Nueva is a

child-centered, Pre-Kindergarten – Eighth grade, progressive school emphasizing integrated studies, creative arts, and social-emotional learning. Nueva offers a constructivist program, project-based learning, and special area teachers in the arts, reading, math, science, music, physical education and social-emotional learning.

Nueva at a Glance

Founded: In 1967 by Karen Stone McCown as an independent coeducational day school

Enrollment: 340 students in prekindergarten through eighth grade

Campus: 33 wooded acres, track and sports field, six buildings including art studios, science labs, library, and gymnasium

Accreditation: Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS)

Recognition of Excellence: Winner National Blue Ribbon Award from the U.S. Department of Education: 1994, 1997

Mailing address:

The Nueva School
6565 Skyline Boulevard
Hillsborough, CA 94010

Telephone and Fax numbers

Main telephone: (650) 348-2272

Email: Admissions admissions@nuevaschool.org



About the Author

Branden Thurston is a 13 year old boy that was born in Toronto, Canada. At age 6, his father, a business computer expert, accepted a job offer in the United States from Netscape, a leading Internet company of its time. His father started to work for Netscape, and the family moved to California. Up to this day, Branden has not forgiven AOL for buying Netscape, then breaking it up and selling it in pieces.

Before California, Branden's first language was Cantonese, which is his mother tongue, his mother's mother's tongue. For a time, he attended a Canadian school where he was learning to speak French as well. In California he learnt English quickly, forgot French, and can still understand Cantonese thoroughly and speak a little.

He started his American education at the Foster City Elementary school. He disliked his second grade experience, and moved to another public school. He enjoyed Brewer Island because of its informality which is similar to Nueva. At Brewer Island, he developed a love for rocks and minerals, and computers. He also started to gain formidable writing skills by writing short stories and poems. He then moved onto middle school, Bowditch, where he skipped 2 years of math, taking grade 8 math in

his grade 6 year. He then applied to Nueva, and was accepted.

In Nueva, seventh grade, he continued to write, producing longer works and more complex poetry. Branden's drama unit gave him ample opportunity to write and learn presentation skills. In grade eight, he wrote over 12,000 words for his group novel project. In Branden's own words, "It's pretty amazing what I am capable of doing when focused."

Figure 1 *Branden's improv group for drama.*



It is Branden's life experiences, school work, projects, tutors, mentors, and teachers that have given him the skills to write the material in this book. His many trips to the exotic countries of Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Thailand inspired him to write travel stories. Late into the project, he added other writings from 2004, 2005, and 2006 to finish this book, *Monkey Travels*, his memoir of Nueva school writings.