



the art issue

C - The Art Issue

This issue was conceptualized as a means to display the varied talents of expats living in Japan. They come from many different creative backgrounds and develop many others still while in Japan. Enjoy their work, and check out each contributor’s links for more.

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Contact information for each contributor has been provided at the beginning of their spread, so please address each contributor individually with inquiries.

Cover Photo

Hannah Killoh

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Tim Nguyen **Hyogo**

Self-Portrait

SwordBot

PunchBot

Email

Instagram

Website







Jordan Oxborough **Akita**

夜の祭り・東北

Night Festivals of Tohoku

Website

Blog

Flickr











Mathew Cartwright Chiba

Bali

Cambodia

Kyoto

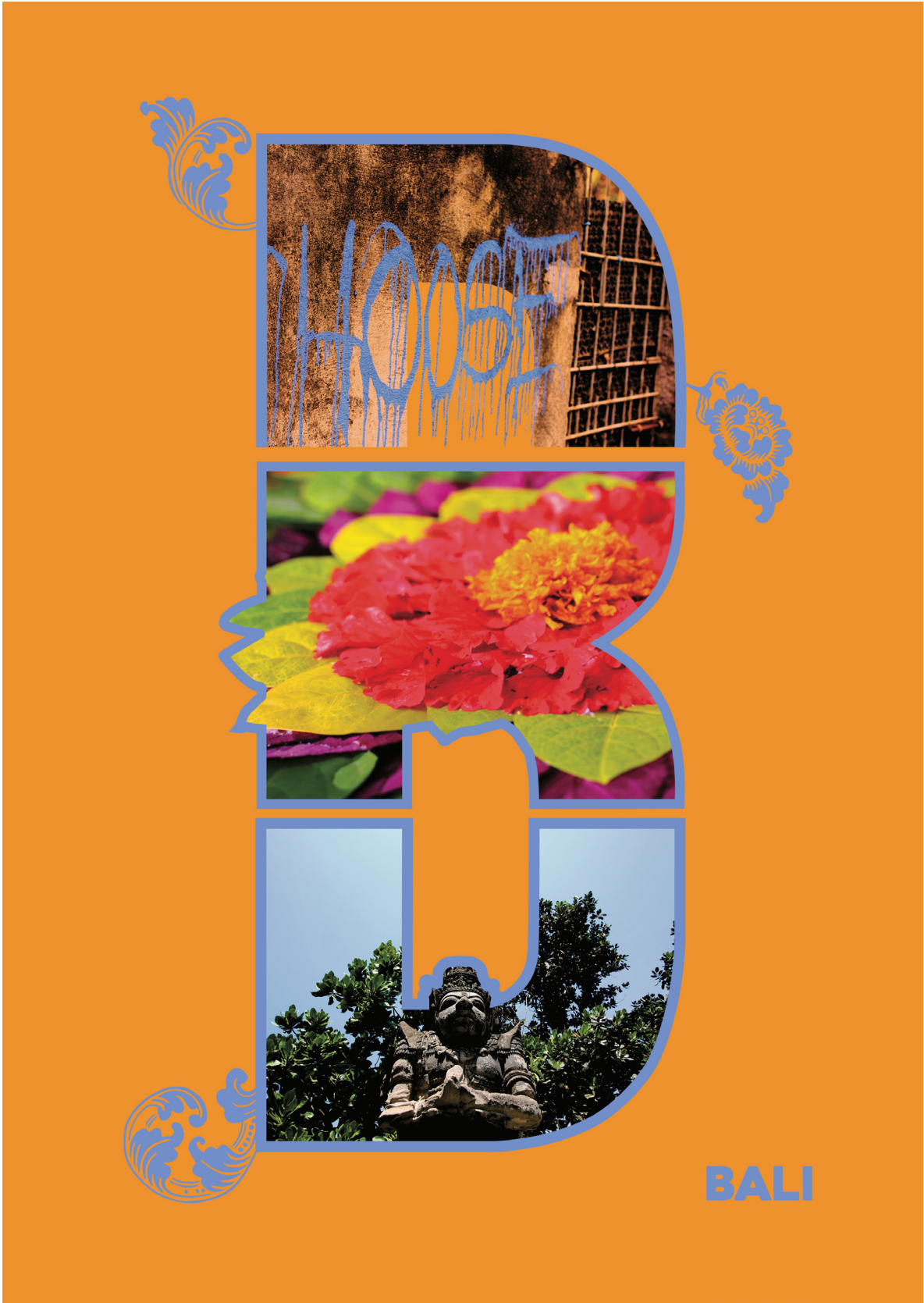
Tokyo

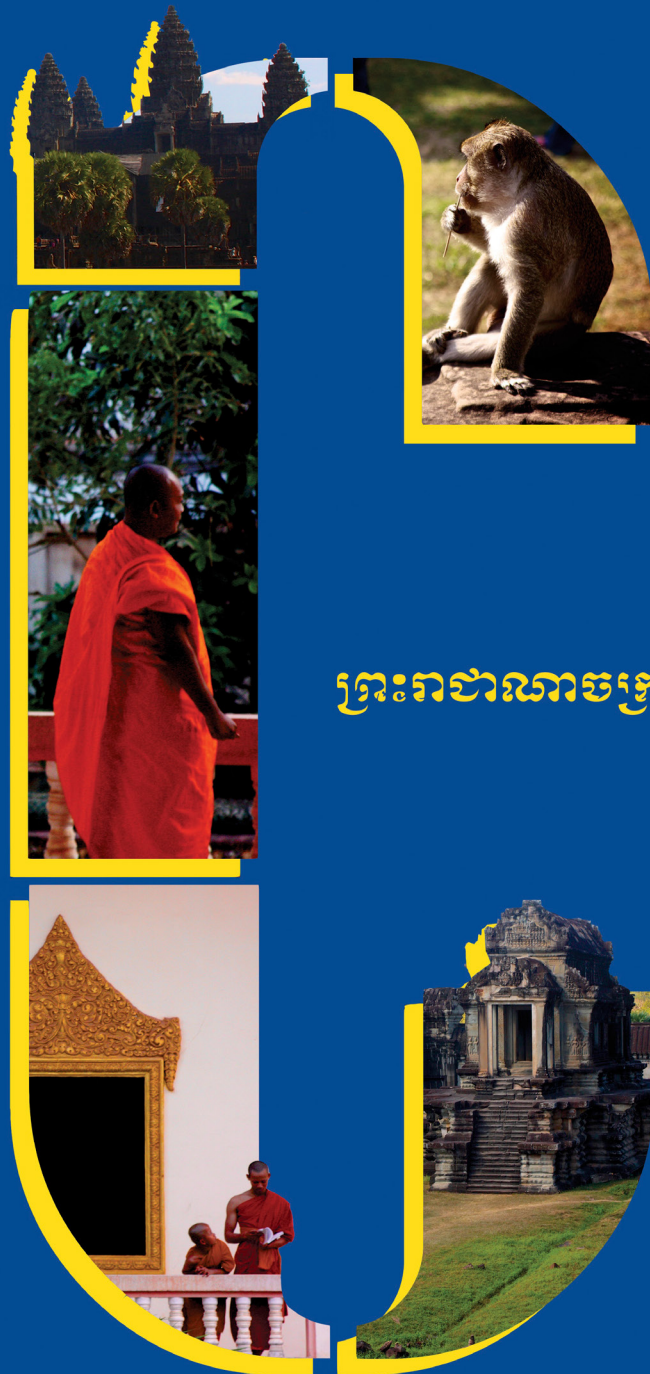
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京都



東京

My time on JET and with Connect magazine has quite simply flown by. I have experienced so many wonderful things here in Japan, and in my travels around Asia, that I felt I had to honour them here in these design pieces.

I am very proud to have been involved in the creation of this issue. My time on Connect has inspired me to move forward with my career in graphic design, and I am excited to see where that takes me in the future!

Many thanks to all the contributors for the art issue and to the wonderful design team—I wish you all the best in your future endeavours and I shall miss the monthly meetings with you guys.

Anisa Kazemi
Okayama

Sakura Carpets
Ramen (Haiku)
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Miso in Lurve
Kanji
Kotatsu
Hotaru

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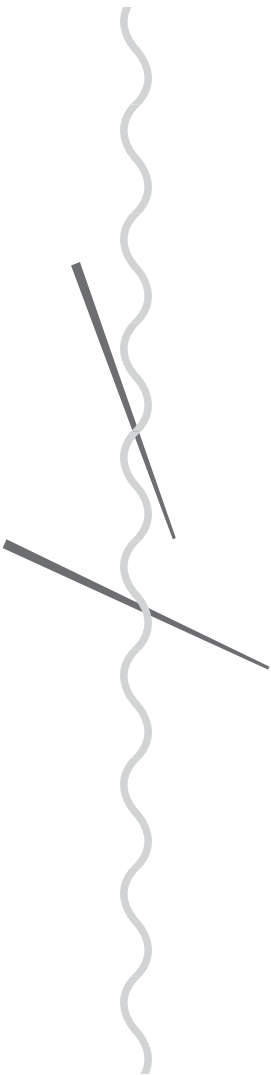
Sakura Carpets

Although all eagerly await
the rare
and swiftly-passing
days of April
when cherry trees blossom,
seldom boast
the fairy-tale charm
of a sakura carpet
fashionably furnishing
country grounds, pink
the weeks after.



Ramen (Haiku)

All day I await
for the clock to chime midday,
signaling: ramen.



Happish

Puzzled in Happish
surrounded by aisles
of unidentifiable items
marked with squiggles,
serves as motivation
to make it past 'konnichiwa'
if wanting to eat "outside the box".

Also literally,
beyond instant noodles.

Miso in Lurve

Can I be
the bowl of miso
routinely held
between your palms
and gently pressed
against your lips
each and every dawn?



Kanji

I stuck my neck out curious,
peering down the lobby

BANG

BANG

BANG

Builders?

Nope.

Sensei

Chalk

Blackboard

KANJI.

Kotatsu

Ok, I lied.

Singledom is horseshit.

All I want

on this bitter night

is my defrosting feet

brushing against yours

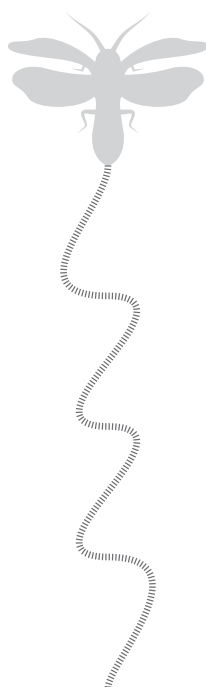
underneath the *kotatsu*

While you read Tolkein

and I Murakami.

Hotaru

How can one stress
about boys
weight
money
and deadlines
when there are
billions of fireflies
sporting lit bums?



Johnny Anderson **Hyogo**

From the collection 'Capsule Nature'.

Tumblr







Brittany Teodorski Hyogo

The Cat's Crawl

Email 1

Email 2

Hyogo Times

The Cat's Crawl

Though no lightning cracked the sky, electricity still hung heavily over the city's residents. Snowflakes drifted lazily to join their fallen brethren covering everything in sight. Atop a freshly blanketed rooftop crouched a cat with long, dampening fur that stood starkly against the white of the snow.

It began padding along, leaving soft indents in its wake. Leg after trembling leg inched forward. Violent shivers wracked its large frame.

Soon, it came upon a house whose chimney was belching out smoke. Its trail led the cat's eyes up to the moon. Tonight, it was full. The face looked down upon the pitiful creature. Light seemed to bleed out of the moon's edges, bathing the house in more light than seemed natural. The cat inched closer to the warmth from the fire below and curled up near the chimney. Trying to assuage itself, it began to purr. Sleep crept in.

Hardly a second had seemed to pass before a grating shouting match summoned the cat back into consciousness. Garbled shrieks pierced its ears and made its frozen fur stand on end. Thud after thud after thud resounded throughout the house's walls. Together with the yelling and the wind that had suddenly swept in, it created a cacophony that set the cat hissing and bolting as fast as its chilled legs would let it. After it, a burst of flame erupted from the building.

The cat followed where its paws went, hardly paying any mind along the way. Exhausted, it collapsed next to several mounds of snow. Gazing up, it saw the pitch-black sky, with light from neither moon nor stars. The

darkness permeated the cat's surroundings and converged at a single window. Curious, it limped forward. It jumped for the ledge, but had to scrabble up, shaking with the effort. Above, icicles dangled threateningly.

A family sat in silence around a dining table. Two young children sat with their hands folded demurely in their laps. An elderly man wheezed, his eyes glazed over. Beside him was a woman, watching him with a bored expression smoothing over her features. She began to speak as the man's chest began to rise shallower and shallower. It was a low, chilling, monotonous inflection. And though the voice was next to inaudible, the cat's ears flattened.

As she breathed out her final word, the children looked up at her and the man, their breath bated as his chest stopped its movements. The woman rose to her feet and shut his glazed eyes. Still holding their breath, the children began to turn blue, matching their surroundings. The woman sighed and turned to scold them. As she turned, she caught sight of the cat crouched upon her window sill. The woman's eyes narrowed and her spiteful stare sent shivers down the cat's spine. It turned and fled into the night once again.

After what seemed to be hours, the cat crawled to a stop. Overhead, the moon was half-full and, together with the stars, softly lit the falling snow. Drowsiness overtook the cat. After a blanket of snow covered it, a door creaked open, followed by heavy stomps through the freezing precipitate. One foot trudged on the cat's whiskers. Stirring, it meowed pathetically. The lead-footed being made gentle coos before bending down to wipe away the cat's blanket. Shushing its feeble protests, the being cradled the dying animal in its arms before turning back, its original purpose forgotten or

discarded.

Inside, the cat was placed beside a fire. The ice in its fur began to melt, seeping down into its skin. Beside it, a saucer plating a syringe, a woolen rag, and two pairs of eyes rested. Out of its field of vision, the cat could feel one of the beings' hands wicking water away. The other extended its palm as a friendly greeting. Still exhausted, the cat took a quick breath and closed its eyes.

Waking up once again, one pair of eyes had left, as had the rag. The remaining pair's owner was scratching behind the cat's ears, murmuring in a serene voice. Hesitantly, it grasped the syringe and brought it to the cat's mouth. It accepted the liquid food. The being helped it swallow by stroking the cat's throat.

Outside, the snow continued its lazy barrage of the city, though it was no longer joined by the static that had been by its side. Inside, a fire injected warmth back into its watchers' bones. Content at last, the cat slipped into a long-delayed dream. Bouts of insanity plagued its visions before it crawled into a deep sleep.

Originally published in the Hyogo Times.



**Patrick Finn
Toyama**

OTONASHII

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Instagram
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Working with National AJET and Connect for the past two years has definitely been a learning experience. I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel overwhelmed at times, especially when I first started. However, with constant input from the team, especially my fellow designers, Connect has grown into something I'm proud to share.

As the four of us leave the magazine this year, we wanted to do one final project together, just the four of us. Everyone poured their heart into this issue and after countless meetings I promised would be short (sorry about that), we can proudly leave behind something for the community, by the community.

Even though my time with Connect is up, I'm excited to see where it goes next.

Megan Soon Tottori

The White Kami

Tumblr
Facebook

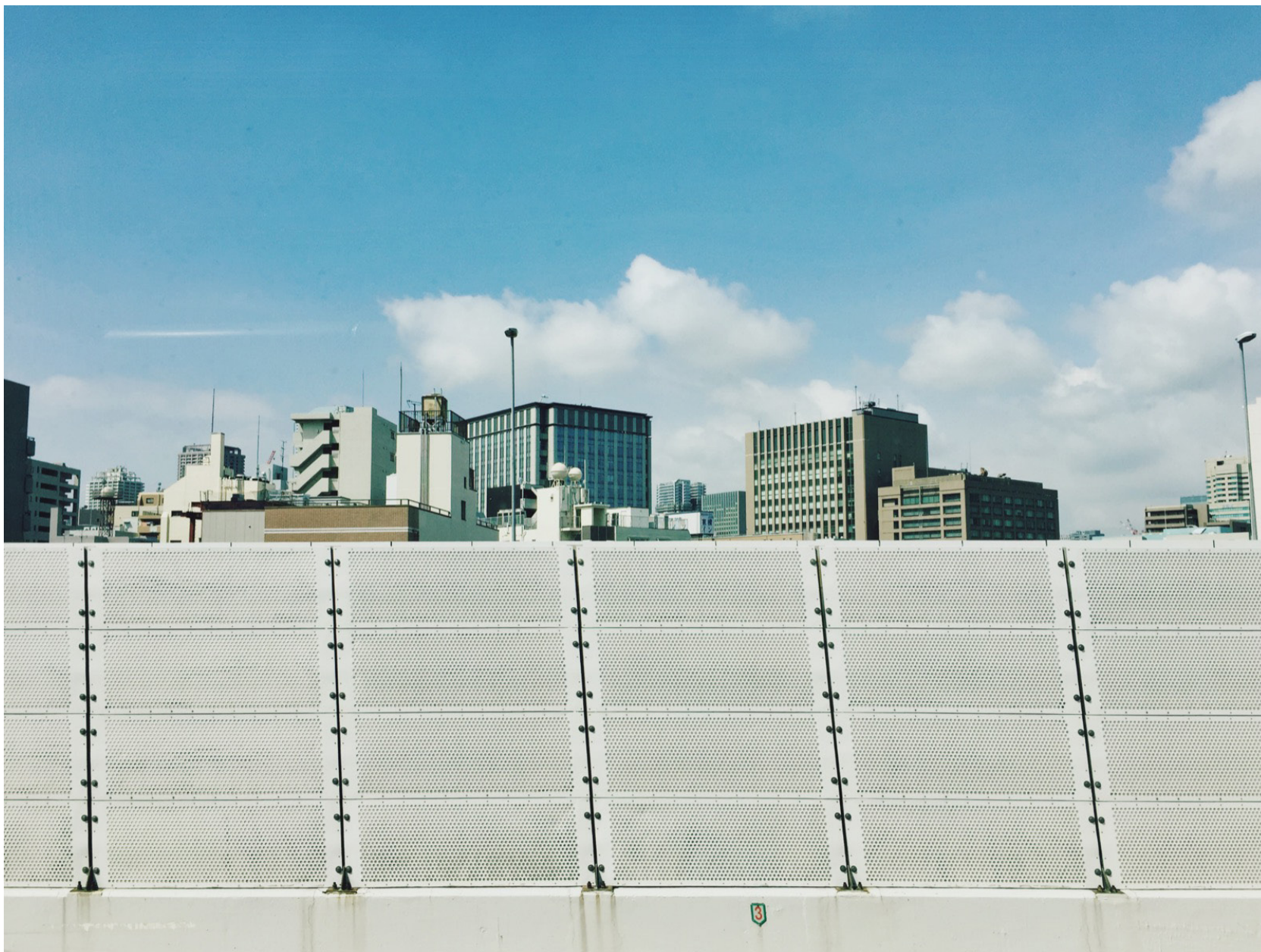


Annika Davis
Shiga

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Twitter







**Korellia Schneider
Miyagi**

Softly

WordPress

Softly (Excerpt)

The light flashed green. Second only to a balding man in a tweed suit, she stepped into the street, ahead the inpouring wave. At the corner across the way, she spotted the place she'd been searching for. The tan-bricked diner was shouldered by sleek skyscrapers on either side, an orphan to progress. The loop-de-loop curvature of neon filaments, aglow at half-past noon, displayed the name *Delancey's*. In mindful steps, she walked by the Help Wanted sign and through the door. A bell chime, the gatekeeper to tumbleweed guests, announced her arrival.

He was standing there, standing up, waiting for her, before she'd even cleared the entry.

"Saw you through the window," he said, arms open. "Good to see you, Jeanie."

"Good to see you, too, Robbie." She felt the grip of his embrace tighten for a moment, before releasing. "Did you order already?"

"Just a coffee...didn't want them to think I was free-loading." He sat down and slid back into the booth.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting."

"You got here just in time," he chided. "I was just about to try my magic on the waitress." He pushed the fold-out menu toward her. "Have you gotten skinnier? Or blonder?"

"Both," she confessed with a laugh. "The beauty of break-ups."

"I thought Jeremy was the one."

"He was just the last one...How's your mom?"

"Debbie's good. Still living in the care home. I try to make it out there once every few weeks to see her. How's yours?"

"She's taking an art class. She's actually not half bad."

"Ah, you did get the good parent."

"Maybe. But you were driving by the age of 14."

Robbie feigned a wounded look. "I also had to eat bologna sandwiches for dinner, without the bread. You got braces and birthday parties. I got police calls and food stamps." He watched her shrug and fiddle with her engraved watch, rotating over her slender wrist. The few pounds, more than she had to spare, had been carved from every part of her frame, omitting only her face, which preserved a certain full-bloom beauty, though her current expression colored morose. "Hey," he offered. "I didn't mean anything by it."

Jeanine looked him in the eye. "It doesn't take away from what you've made of yourself."

"I know. If anything, it makes me more of a catch. Overcoming adversity makes me more handsome."

"Does that explain the tie, too?"

He gave the argyle number a good tug. "This is my battle gear. I had an interview this morning."

"Where at?"

"I'll tell you when I get the job," he said with a smirk.

The waitress came by, pen in hand. Robbie cautioned her with a not yet glance. Between

sips of dwindling coffee, he explained how he had seen the chosen tie in a dream and had embarked upon a three-week quest to locate it. At last, he uncovered the corporate noose in the sale section of a department store. "The interviewer even complimented me, so it was definitely a nod from fate. I miss my ponytail, but the gods have delivered me both a gift and a task. Things are looking up, I feel it."

"Did Odin tell you to pick this place?"

"Of course not. That was Hoenir. With telepathy." He finished the last gulp of coffee and let the mug land on the unpolished table with a light thud.

While he spoke, Jeanine reached across the table and removed a napkin from the plastic bin. Robbie, engrossed in another tale, made no effort to push the bin closer. The paper felt coarse, was an odd shade of beige. Not quite the sort of textured brown found at revolutionary pop-up restaurants that tried to revitalize neighborhoods and the world, nor the shade of pure-white that drew the laughter of children in sub-zero suburbia. She broke the seal on the misfit serviette, unraveling the silver instruments tucked inside. Mimicking a surgeon, she laid out the utensils, spoon to the left, fork and knife to the right, arranging them on the table.

"We've actually been here before, you know," he said, shooting the waitress another glance when she hovered too close.

"I don't remember that."

"One summer when you were still in diapers. Or those toddler trainers anyhow. You threw up your cheerios and wouldn't stop crying."

"Are you sure that wasn't somehow your doing?"

"Never. I was always the best. Dad even tried to win your compliance with a stuffed tiger...you had an unhealthy infatuation with tigers back then, but you were inconsolable that day. You made all the other babies start crying."

"Ha."

"I, uh...I met him, Jean. He got my address off one of Debbie's old friends. An ex-con, as it were, but that doesn't matter. He wrote me, and we met."

"And?"

"He moved to a small apartment over eastside, not far from the old neighborhood."

"I'd have thought he ran off somewhere, anywhere that stank of dirty money and debauchery."

"He says he's been sober for eight years now. He seems well. And he asked about you."

"So? What about the twenty years before that?"

"Look, he's cleaned up and all. But he's dying, Jean. He says he'd like to meet you."

"Are you...are you going to order anything or -not? I'm calling the waitress."

She has overcome 20 autumns. Her world has grown bigger, but she feels ever more beneath a microscope. She is alone but surrounded. A library stranger and simple lunacy perfect the jinx to lure her. In a house of cracked walls and

plastered ceilings, people are packed together, holding cups and conversations. Bottles with peeling labels and companion cups line every inch of flat surface. One chair somehow fits three women.

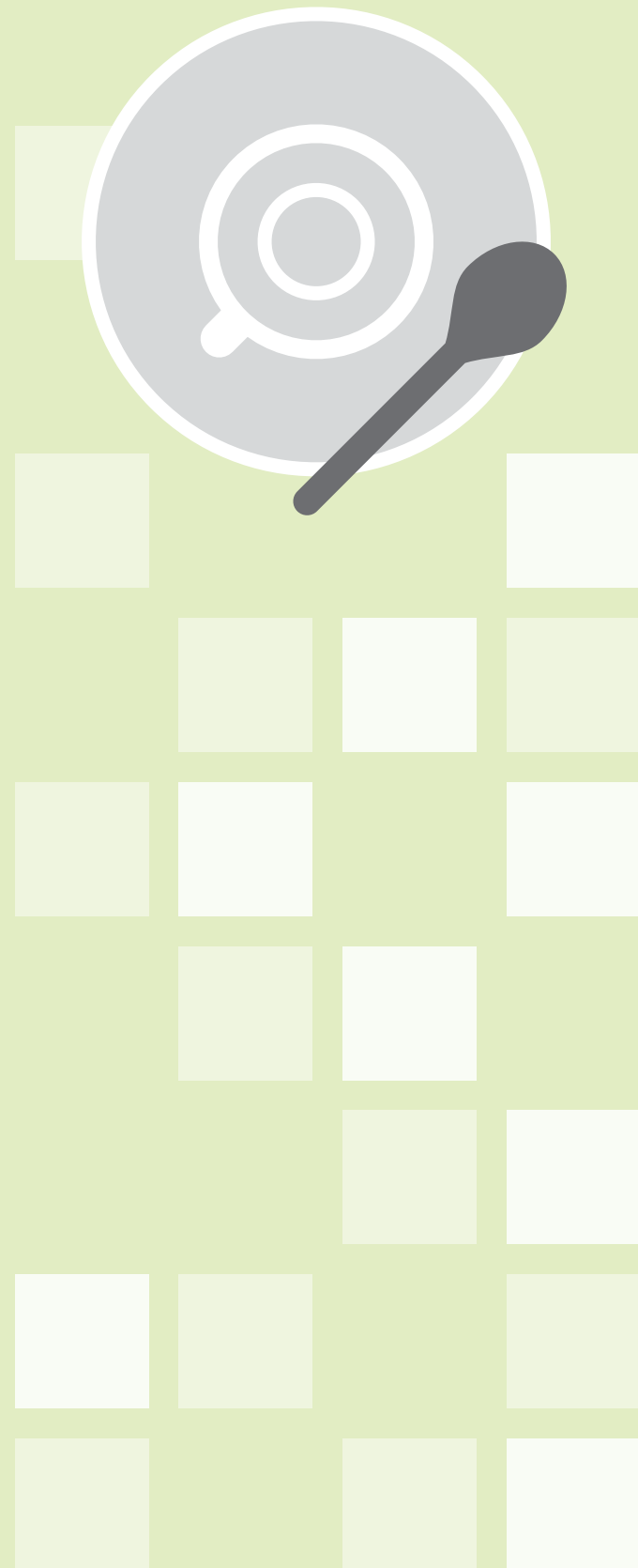
Gingerly, she shuffles, outmaneuvering pairs and pods in the hallway and kitchen. Each step further, she questions the time she can comfortably tolerate the scent of close-quartered bodies. Before she can think of leaving, a glass appears in her hand. A proper glass, presented by her stranger. "Glad you could make it, Jean."

They end up on the staircase, planted four steps above another migratory pair who have flocked here for half-peace. He tells her about "the classics" while she struggles to maintain a smile, disguise the asterisk that divides her. She conquers the brew, and he offers her a refill. For the first time, she has acquainted herself with a thief.

Sound and motion begin to move in different wavelengths, as though she is watching a film with delayed audio, his lines dubbed in a different language. He wants to ask her something about music, but she excuses herself to the upstairs bathroom.

She retches up poison, wonders pitifully if this is truly her inheritance. The mirror shows her a clean face. A hard, merciless look at her reflection, she tries to fish out the other half.

Read the full story on [WordPress](#) or [Google Drive](#).



Tanya Zolotareva Miyagi

Expectation

Flip

Sinking Sun

Website

Instragram

Email







Hannah Killoh Tottori

Tokashiki

Website
Email
Instagram













“If you feel safe in the area that you’re working in, you’re not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water than you feel you’re capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth. And when you don’t feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, then you’re just about in the right place to do something exciting.”

David Bowie

David Klug
Chiba

Central Plaza
“Music Museum”

Album Artwork - Patrick Finn

Bandcamp



Ryan Scullin

Tokyo

Mejiro Rooftop

Website
Instagram



Lenny Benologa

Nara

Just Another Story About Some Brown Kid
The First Shisa
Mysteries of the Heart

Society6
Twitter
WordPress
Instagram
Facebook

This kid is brown.

He grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. He never realized a difference between him and the other kids until one day, one of his classmates asked him, "Hey. You're black right?" in which he inquisitively looked at his skin and retorted: "No, I'm brown." Growing up, he never gave it much thought, but he was one of fewer than 5 black kids in his elementary school, in the inner city. As he got older, he slowly began to realize that being half Filipino and African-American, he was never "black enough" for the black cliques and was never "asian enough" for the asian cliques. He was just... different, which frustrated him as he got into his teens and wanted nothing-more than to 'fit in'. He was called a 'nigger' for the first time during middle school and it confused him beyond belief. He wondered how, or why, anyone could hate him just because of the color of his skin. Despite this, he continued to live his life and, fortunately, (something that still sticks with him, even today) was actually said to him in 8th grade. A fellow student told him that he should be proud of the person he was, as she sincerely believed that he was born to 'stand out' and that he should never, ever change.

This kid grew up fatherless.

He never thought of it as strange; At least, not until he came to realize it while he was in the 5th grade and playing on the playground. At that instant, he felt so overwhelmed with feelings of abandonment that he began to tear up, and the kids around him called for his teacher, Mr. Meyers. Mr. Meyers, who was a very stern-looking man, a man who struck fear into students due to his serious demeanor and New York personality and accent, came to his side and took the time to console him. He let him know that his father was missing out on a great kid and that this kid would grow up to be someone any parent would be proud to acknowledge as their son. It was enough to make him stop crying at the time, but wasn't enough to make him stop asking the question: "Why doesn't he want me?" He wrote him countless of letters, and even in his twenties, he managed to find his father's address and phone number but was turned away when a lady answered the phone and refused to give the phone to the man he was asking for.

Despite being fatherless; however, this kid had an amazing single-mother that gave up and sacrificed so much of herself to ensure that this kid (and his little brother) grew up with a better chance at life than she did. Not only this, but as he has gotten older, he has realized that there have been a multitude of father-figures that have been outstanding role-models to him throughout his lifetime who have demonstrated, to an extent, the type of man, person, and human being he desires to be.

This kid had (and often-times still has) very little self-esteem.

This kid has spent most of his life overweight. Even today, despite the fact that people tell him that he no longer looks like the 19-year old in the photo to the right, deep down he feels as though he's still the same, fat, unattractive person in the photo. He often wishes that he was more active during his youth, but wishing these things wouldn't have helped to shape him into the person that he is, today. He often hides himself behind his smile, and people can rarely tell when he's in a bad mood because he's learned how to wear the mask so well. Granted, there are some times when he can no longer hide behind the mask, and his true feelings and emotions are revealed. It's during these times that he feels the most vulnerable, as he fears that if people see him in this way he'll be rejected.

As a form of discipline that his mother learned from first-hand experience herself, he was also spanked as a child. After further research into the topic, he came to learn and understand that one of the few long-term effects/repercussions of spanking consist of a low self-esteem. After learning this, he has vowed that should he ever have kids, he wants to avoid this type of discipline at all costs in order to ensure his kids grow up with a greater feeling of self-worth than he did.

This kid lives to please others.

Growing up as an only child, this kid always found the concept of 'sharing' a very difficult task. The concept was almost surreal as his closest relatives lived on the other side of town and didn't visit him 'frequently enough' for him to grasp the idea of sharing. Not only that, but out of all of his relatives he was the only one that didn't have any siblings; at least, not until he was twelve years old. Until then, he was spoiled rotten by a plethora of gifts, toys and money that he was able to do whatever he wanted to do with, making the task of sharing a bit more difficult than it could have been.

When he turned twelve, however; his little brother was born, which turned his world around a bit, as he was no longer allowed to be selfish and the center of attention. Instead, as he grew into his teenage years he actually had to sacrifice much of the time he would have spent with other teens and potential friends so that he could stay at home and watch his younger brother. From the time before he left for school, to the time he got home, he was the live-in nanny. Or, "manny"? His grades seemed to plummet, the most, the closer he got to graduation day, as he found it difficult to balance his task of taking care of his younger brother while also completing his homework. Regardless, he believed it was the fact that he was needed in order to raise his younger brother that he did things for the sake of others; Regardless of the burden it may have implemented on him, his own life, and his own goals. As long as he knew that it was beneficial in the long-run, despite it hindering in his own personal affairs, he was almost always willing to compromise.

However, this perspective of his changed when he came home one day to multiple

police cars in front of his home, and police tape blocking all access to the house. He walked frantically towards the scene to see a printer lying on the front lawn with the front living-room window shattered. He immediately tried to rush to the house, but the police officers stopped him. His mind was going a mile-a-minute as he thought about the terrible things that could have happened to his mother, or his little brother, as tears flooded his eyes. Thankfully, later-on, he was relieved to find that his mom's boyfriend was taken to jail and his mother and younger brother were fine. It was at this time that he came to realize he was compromising too much of himself, and needed a way to ensure that his family was safe, and far away from this lunatic. They all packed their things and left for his aunt's apartment in a different city, but it was only a matter of time before his mom contacted her boyfriend and reconciled. Despite the fact that he voiced his concerns and told his mom that he didn't want her to go back to such an abusive relationship he stood his ground and decided to continue living with his aunt, rather than return to that abusive home. Until this day, he feels remorseful, as he felt as though he was leaving his little brother in a dangerous environment (in order to get away), but there was nothing he could do to convince his mom otherwise. It was the only thing he could do at the time, and despite his hopes that his mom would choose to keep their family together, rather than continue to be in a relationship with such a loose cannon, she chose her boyfriend over her son. In the end, he felt as though his mom had abandoned him and chose to be with an abuser over her own son, which created a rift between them for years.

During all of this mayhem, however, as a parting gift, he received the surprise of a lifetime as several people came together to give

him a prepaid cell phone so that he could keep in contact with them no matter where he moved to. He hadn't received such a meaningful gift, like this, his entire life, so suffice it to say - it literally brought him to tears to think that people cared about him so much that they bought him a cell phone in order for him to keep in touch with them.



This kid was unofficially adopted.

Despite being over the age of 18, this kid was blessed by a family he had met while attending church during his teenage years, who (throughout the course of time) invited him to every holiday they celebrated from the Fourth of July, Easter to Thanksgiving, to Christmas and New Year's. Every holiday you can think of, he was being constantly invited, and he was eventually no longer being introduced as a friend, or a family friend, but as a 'son' and even as a 'brother'.

It was through this bond and through this relationship he formed with people that despite the fact that they lacked an immediate bloodline to one another, strong bonds could form. Not only this, but he also learned that he had some control over the people he wanted in his life, which inevitably helped him to form some strong bonds with people he invested time and effort into/with.

Over the years, it has become apparent to him that it was actually through some of his hardships (via past relationships) that he's learned to appreciate the good that comes from friendships and bonds he has formed with people. For the longest time, he wouldn't let people close to him due to a fear of being hurt or abandoned, but after forming such a tight bond with the family that adopted him, he also came to learn that people are willing to treat you just as close, if-not closer, than some of your own relatives treat you. It's a lesson he has learned and chooses to cherish to the deepest part of his core (even today).

This kid is a Marine Corps veteran.

This was actually quite the milestone for this kid, as he never wanted to join the Navy due to the fact that his father was a deadbeat that worked for the United States military; However, at the age of twenty-three, he had enough of his retail job and wanted the chance and opportunity to travel the world and commit to something bigger than himself. Not only this, but he didn't want to join just any military branch, but he wanted to join the Marine Corps specifically as an indirect way of raising a middle finger to his father, as well as inadvertently telling his dad that he was (in a sense) a bigger, badder, and tougher man than his father could ever be. Not only that, but he wanted to put himself in similar shoes so that he could prove to himself, once and for all, that he wouldn't make the same poor decisions as his father did, all those years ago.

The interesting thing about the Marine Corps that this young kid didn't know, however, was that during boot camp, he would be broken down as an individual, and put together again as a strong-willed, confident, and distinguished human being that worked in conjunction with his respective unit. It was through this process that he actually gained self-confidence, despite his upbringing and lack of self-esteem, he came to realize that he had courage that he didn't know he had. It was through traits that were instilled in him through his Marine Corps service that he was able to learn to stand up for himself, stand up for what he thought was right, and stand up for what he believed in. This only fueled his passion and his drive. Although he was able to create some strong bonds with other military personnel, he was also trying hard to change a part of himself, which he inevitably came to realize could never be changed.

This kid was molested when he was young.

The kid on the right was molested at such a young age that the memories of molestation are almost the most dominant memories of his childhood. He can't vividly remember when the molestation started or who it was exactly that molested him, but he does remember it was a male family member or family friend and occurred in the house he lived in at the time. Not only that but he wasn't even sure if he was the only one that experienced it, as he was living in a house with other young, extended male family members. He felt so ashamed. His molester told him that if he told his mom, or anyone else for that matter, that she/they would disown him and be disgusted of him, so he never told her.

There are only a handful of people that he's told throughout the course of his lifetime. Interestingly, one of the most influential male figures in his life actually cried with him as he was able to empathize with his situation, as he was molested by a man when he was younger, as well. This only allowed him to form a stronger bond with this figure who he sees as a father-figure, even today.

The molestation left the young kid confused for most of his life. His molester taught him how to masturbate at an extremely young age, and forced him to do things that he didn't know other kids weren't exposed to. There was actually one time, near the end of his molestation days, where he remembers something happened where someone other than his regular molester straddled him down on a bed and whipped his penis out and wouldn't get off of him until he put the penis in his mouth. Once he did, he was called a faggot, laughed at and mocked. He buried himself under the covers and cried, wishing his mom

would come home. His mom worked a full-time job in order to provide for him, and naturally, she thought he was safe at home (with 'family') but little did she know he was being tormented while she was gone.

This made for a very confusing childhood for this young boy. While in elementary school, he was approached by a blonde hair, blue-eyed boy, his own age (1st-2nd grade) who expressed a sexual interest in him. He didn't initiate anything himself, but he soon found himself engaging in sexual contact with this neighborhood boy named, Jesse. They found hiding spots around the neighborhood and no one knew what they were doing. This continued until one day, Jesse and his family moved away and out of the neighborhood. In 5th grade, this kid developed his first crush on a boy in his class. He found himself spending more time on the playground with the girls, rather than the boys, and collecting Lisa Frank stickers like it was something boys were supposed to do. His mom didn't seem to bat an eye, and indulged him in his desires to collect these ultra-feminine, fuchsia, glittery stickers.

He recalls one summer, he went over to a neighborhood friend's house and randomly entering their living room to sit down and watch tv with his friend's older sister (who was in high school at the time). At some point, the tv started to talk about gays and homosexuals when he came to the realization of what he was. After the short program, he turned to his friend's sister and inquired about what 'gay' meant. She explained to him that it was when people of the same sex liked each other. After hearing her explanation, he proceeded to ask her - 'Is that bad?' and her response to his question would haunt him for most of his life, as she said: 'Yes. It's very bad.'



This kid has been hiding in the closet for most of his life.

This kid has been ashamed for so much of his life. He felt like he was an anomaly. He was the dark-skinned family member who never really quite fit in. He wasn't white, he wasn't black enough, he wasn't asian or Filipino enough, and he wasn't straight enough; and this ate away deep down inside of him (without his knowledge). He began to hate himself. There were times he cried himself to sleep because he wanted to control how he felt and how he looked, but regardless of how hard he tried, he felt perpetually 'stuck'.

When he was sixteen, he escaped his real life and used the internet to interact with others like himself. It was through these interactions that his typing skills excelled and before he knew it, he could type faster than most of his family members. One night, at a family get-together, one of his uncles asked him to log onto AOL (America Online), enter a chat room, and type for him. He did so without thinking twice, and before he knew it he was typing out everything his uncle had asked him to, and was hitting-on some random AOL user. His uncle then asked him to find out who we were talking to, and to both of their surprises, they realized they were hitting on another guy. His uncle freaked out and proceeded to laugh, point, and announce out-loud that his nephew was hitting on a guy online. Everyone laughed.

Later that night, while he sat at the computer, chatting, his Mom entered the room and asked him a question, using her angry and stern voice: "Who are you talking to? You better not be talking to another guy! Tell me now: Are you gay?!" He wanted so badly to tell her yes, but knowing the tone and the inflection of her voice, he cowered and said 'No'. In a response

that felt like it took less than a split second, she retorted, 'Good! You better not be!' From that point on, he felt even more ashamed. He didn't choose this life, he didn't choose to be attracted to men, he didn't choose to be born into this family, he didn't choose to be biracial, he didn't choose to be a minority; nor did he choose to be molested by a family member. Nonetheless, it all felt hopeless.

Feeling as though he was nearing the end of his support system, he reached out to the family that would later adopt him, and hand wrote a long letter about his homosexuality and asked them if they would still love him even if he was gay. He gave Robin the note, moments before he was about to leave to go home, and to much of his surprise, Pat and Robin were both fine with it. He felt such a strong sigh of relief, as though a huge weight and a huge burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He couldn't help but shed a few tears that night. Had his final support system given up on him, he would have likely been yet another suicidal statistic of the times. Little do they know, they saved this kid's life as all he really wanted was to know that someone out there would love him unconditionally, despite the various flaws he felt he had.

After telling them, however, they all shared concerns about who they could and couldn't tell, with regards to his sexual orientation, as the church they belonged to wasn't as accepting as their family was. Regardless, he felt loved and accepted for everything that he was, and still feels this way about the Kagi family, today. As a Christian, however, he still had a desire to be "like everyone else" so when he considered joining the Marine Corps, he legitimately believed that the added testosterone levels would help him become more interested in the opposite sex.

During his time in the service, he didn't participate in sexual relations of any kind. He did, however, indulge himself in trying to watch straight pornography and even lesbian pornography in hopes that it would get him more interested in women, but that didn't work either. There was even a point where he became quite close to a female Marine, but despite his desire to engage in something more with her, he wasn't even remotely sexually attracted to her as he was to other men.

When he was home on leave from the Marine Corps, it seemed as though he even managed to fool most of his own family members regarding his orientation. Most of them found out that he was gay, during high school, after one of his cousins told all of his relatives he was gay after she thought he had betrayed her trust by narking on her to her father, about a party he knew nothing about. His relatives asked questions behind his back, like, "Is he still gay?" as though, he didn't know they were talking about him. Sure, he went to a countless number of straight bars and clubs, flirted with a variety of different women, but it didn't change who he was inside, nor did it change who he was naturally attracted to.

As a Marine, he served during a time of DADT (Don't Ask, Don't Tell) and he didn't mind that. He felt as though the DADT protected him from being asked whether he was gay or not, so he had no qualms with the policy. The Marine Corps had an interesting play on words for DADT, however, as Marines would say "we can't ask, but we can tell..." To be completely honest, though, even he could tell who some of the gay Marines were, based off of some of their mannerisms and how they carried themselves. He even knew of a few Marines that suspected/knew he was gay, as well. They kept their general distance from him, but that's

kind of what he preferred at the time, anyway.

His idea of the policy was shattered, however, when one of his mentors personally asked him if he was gay. He answered openly and honestly, and his mentor chuckled and said, "I knew it!" His mentor didn't care that he was gay, so long as he didn't go around hitting on other Marines and making them feel uncomfortable; So, naturally, he felt so much relief in this new bond and friendship they had formed that, even today, he tries to keep in contact with them as much as he can.

It wasn't until after his time in the Marine Corps, and once he entered college that he met some extremely open-minded people. It was actually due to this supportive group of friends that he was able to eventually find himself in his first relationship with another man. He introduced his boyfriend to his friends and to his adopted family. Life was great and life was grand... for a short while. The relationship was moving fast, but eventually crumbled when he was given an ultimatum in which he had to choose whether he wanted to stay in the area and raise a family, or attempt to leave for Japan and work his dream job. Suffice it to say, he chose his dream job over a man he legitimately loved, simply because he couldn't see himself live a life with such a huge regrettable decision. Most of his actual family members don't know about Reid; except for one of his cousins who had lunch/dinner with them a couple of times. Being in a relationship with a man for the first time, felt very fulfilling to him. He finally felt happy, and accepted, but a part of him also wished that he wasn't so closeted; However, at the time he was a bit afraid of losing some people in his life.

Today, however, he finally has all the courage he needs to let the world know his story. He

wanted to wait to tell his mother and younger brother face-to-face, but he already knows that they know. He knows that his biological mom and his aunt have talked about him, and his aunt has tried to convince his mom to love him and accept him for who he is. A part of him also feels like his younger brother already knows, as well, but that's merely speculation. To be sincerely honest, growing up, a part of him felt as though he needed to keep his distance from his younger brother in order to prevent him from becoming gay, too; But he knows better now.

This kid was (and still is) me.

I started writing this after watching a very fascinating TED talks video, recently. Suffice it to say, on my very last day (while on vacation) in Seoul, I hit a wall that seemed impermeable, at the time. I had a stew of emotions inside of me that consisted of feelings of homesickness, heartache, anger, jealousy, regret, sadness, and a myriad of other things. I'm usually quite exceptional when it comes to controlling these emotions, but they all managed to pour out all at once, and I just needed a way to vent all of these frustrations out.

After a few days of sulking and some uncontrollable tears that escaped my eyes, I decided to make a change. I wanted to take the time to assess my life for all of the bad things that have occurred, and in doing so - I was also able to acknowledge and recognize and understand how all of these things have shaped me to become the human being I am, today. I think one of the biggest hurdles for me, most recently, was the self-realization that I have some very strong feelings for a guy out here. Despite the fact that we engaged in a tryst, it turned out to be a bit more difficult for me when I realized nothing more would come from that experience except for a platonic friendship. Honestly, a part of me found it difficult to conceptualize that the feelings I had for him wouldn't be returned, and that left me feeling unwanted, ugly, and rejected. These feelings, coupled with the idea of homesickness, the weight I'm still trying to lose after the breakup I had with my ex, and other self-esteem and self-confidence issues that I have, all crumbled on top of me and I just couldn't hold it in, anymore. I'm sure that some of the things I said will probably cause a bit of conflict and confusion amongst my friends and family members, but this was all burdened

inside of me; festering for nearly three decades begging to come out - and now that they're loose, they are no longer my burden to bear.

I finally know who I am, and I have so many supportive people around me that to lose a few people in my life due to their intolerance to who I am, really doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. I've always wanted the best for others, but likewise, I also want the best for me and my life. With that said, I finally feel free.

Yes... Finally. I'm free.

Temu Moore Kagawa

Flying in the Yard

Website



Tyne Mester
Kagoshima

Sonora

Website



Kimmisha Thomas
Shizuoka

Mellow

Email

Mellow

He calls her mellow

Sneering as he says it

A word people don't even

Use much anymore.

Her serene stillness incenses him

Once he pushed then shook her

His fingers squeezing her shoulders,

He urged her to look alive, to move.

She smiles her Buddha smile now

Fingers curling into her palm

Taking pleasure in knowing

People see mellow outside but

Inside abandon runs riot

Splashing passion everywhere.

Amy Koller Tokyo

Proverbs

Website





As my time on JET and Connect finishes, I'm so honored to have the opportunity for all the experiences that have been given to me. Connect has pushed me to a new level with my design aspirations and I can't wait to see where I'll go next in the near future. Even though my time on Connect was short, I have learned so much from working with this amazing group.

A special thank to the contributors and my fellow designers. I wish you all the best of luck as you move on to your next adventure in life.

**Magdalene Castro
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