

Ola's Son

Lisa Linn Kanae

Tin Fish Press

I told your receptionist
I did not want to talk to a haole.
I hope you understand.
I'm having a hard time trusting people.
It's my eldest son. He needs help.

Palolo Valley Homes is a post-World War II "housing" project of 424 units and 1,500 residents. Forty-eight percent are Laotian and Vietnamese immigrants; the rest Hawaiians, Samoans, some Tongans and Micronesians, and a few Filipinos.

He won't talk to me.
He is growing more withdrawn and depressed,
hardly comes home, hangs around
that basketball court.
He won't listen to me.
He'd rather throw metal folding chairs.
Last night at the dinner table,
he picked up his fork and threatened to stab me.

*He started getting agitated when
the guns were drawn,
maybe because he was frightened.*

His brothers and sisters,
they mimic everything he does.
They slam doors. Punch walls.
My ten year old shoves his sister around
for the hell of it.
My three year old girl,
Jesus, I'm afraid for her.
She won't talk at all anymore, period.

*The Internal Affairs Lt. declined comment
on the number of casings recovered at the
scene except to say that "more than five
shots were fired."*

I want counseling for my kids,
but all the therapists are haole.
How are they suppose to instill
Samoan pride in my children?
These problems in my house
are about being Samoan.
These problems in my house
are about what happened to Uncle.

POLICE BARRAGE
KILLS KNIFE-WIELDER

Today's UV index: 9: high
Use a sunscreen of at least SPF 15
when risk is moderate or above.
Trade winds are expected to
decrease throughout the weekend.
Skies will be partly to mostly
sunny today with a few brief
mauka and windward showers.

It was in all the papers.
Me and Uncle, we were cousins.
He used to watch my kids when
they were in diapers. My babies.
They can't understand why Uncle had to die.
When we heard our name on the six o'clock news,
we wept.

*I know I could have gotten him
to put down the knives,
and others there could have, too,
if they gave us a chance.*

My son, he is big for a fourteen-year-old.
I mean physically large:
Five feet, ten inches tall, at least 175 lbs.
He took it the hardest.
You see, I'm a single parent.
My son really took to his Uncle.
No. My children's father is no longer in the picture.

PHOTO #1: the sky a receding gradient
two adult males with POLICE printed in
yellow across the backs of their dark
uniforms behind the officers five squad car
lights pop white to the right of the officers
is the front of an ambulance firecracker
paper litters the street screens peel from
windows and doors two civilians one adult
male and one adolescent male stare at the
ambulance one horizontal line police tape
curling divides the photo in two

Me? College grad. Just completed
my undergrad degree: Ethnic Studies.
I tell you, this whole thing is the result of
hegemony. colonization. misrepresentation.
If you're big and brown in this State, you're condemned.
If Uncle were an Asian man
the cops wouldn't have shot twenty rounds.

*They just left him there, face down
on the road in the rain.
We had to go get a blanket to cover him.*

My son looks half white. Hapa.
I hate to admit it but maybe that's a blessing.
He could pass for white if he needed to.

Have you heard the one about the Ambulance and the Samoan? There was an ambulance with its siren on rushing to the hospital that passed by a tenement. After they passed the tenement, they saw a Samoan man running quickly to the ambulance. The drivers were questioned by his presence behind them so they stopped the ambulance and asked the Samoan what was his problem. The Sole ran up to the ambulance and asked, "Eh, U still get ice cream?"
<http://www.e-hawaii.com>

The cops are patrolling the projects.
I tell my son, if the cops stop you,
tell them you can't talk and run.
Trouble is he can't run away from his last name.
We can't hide from what everyone has
seen on television,
from what everyone has
read on the front page of the paper.
He is ashamed of being Samoan;
everything Fa'a Samoa.
He is already ashamed of the man
he has yet to become.

POLICE: Catch flak for shooting man to death in Palolo

Police are trained that anyone armed with a sharp-edged object within 21 feet of an officer is in the a "kill zone."

New Year's Eve night.
The cops get a call from the housing projects.
They had to have been wired on the way over here.
I know Uncle was drinking that night.
Might as well. I mean, another year goes by,
Same ole story.
So we party, pop firecrackers, eat, drink some more.
Somebody started an argument.
Things got out of hand.
My Auntie Ma'a yelled for the Matai,
but the cops showed up instead.
Next thing you know, squad cars
pull up to the center courtyard
in front of my screen door.
I run outside.
Yell for my boy to come home.

. . . it is probably true that officers might be more likely to draw their weapons in a housing area instead of other areas. . . . Officers have more of a chance of getting hurt here. It can be intimidating.

The police started to corral the men.
Arms up, faces and palms pressed against the wall.
The cops told Uncle to drop
his weapons -- two fishing knives,
Uncle didn't respond. Fuck, he was drunk.
Next thing I know I hear,
"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

PHOTO #2: adult Polynesian male six foot five almost three hundred pounds wide-set sleepy eyes rests his chin in the space between his left thumb and forefinger as if posing for an electric shaver commercial well-groomed goatee frames his smile big smile lots of teeth

Then there were gunshots.
White blue lights
punched through all the smoke.
My son saw everything.
Sometimes I think I see
the smoke in my son's eyes

He was already shot, face down in the pavement gasping for air, and the cops were just standing around not doing anything for him. The Fire Department, which responds fast to dumpster fires here, never came.

I don't want just anybody to help my boy,
treat him like he is some stupid moke.
Did you know that they left Uncle in a
stretcher for two hours at Queens ER?
I don't care if I sound racist.

PHOTO #3: a hazy courtyard eyes look out of the surrounding screen doors and windows four boys eight to ten years old walk alongside five police officers one boy smiles and waves directly into the photographer's lens second boy looks up at the officers' faces third boy stares at their holsters and guns last boy's head is thrown back in laughter he aims his finger and thumb like a gun directly at the photographer

My son wet his bed last night.
Fourteen years old and he is pissing in his bed.
Can you imagine what it's like
to see

They shot twice, and he went down on his knees and dropped the knives. While he was on his knees, they shot three more times.

a fourteen-year-old boy weep
because he's ashamed that he wet his bed?

{ Italicized text taken from Honolulu Star Bulletin, January 23, 1998.