

## Life is Beautiful

When I was 3 years old, I came to Okinawa with my little sister, my mother, and my father. At the time I was so young, I really didn't know what life was. But, to this day I still remember how brutally my father abused me. I have that embedded in my head as one of my childhood traumas.

After an abusive life with my father, our family moved out and started living off base and going to Japanese school. That is when I first experienced racism. I was an American kid in a Japanese school, and I stood out. I didn't speak the language very well while also suffering from two mental disorders: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – better known as ADHD – and Asperger's. So, I wasn't the best at making friends or communicating with others. Those were a few of the many struggles that I had.

Going into middle school, we had more kids joining. To me that meant more bullies. Dealing with bullies was probably one of the hardest times I had to go through.

Then high school. I was nervous at first, but things started to lighten up. A lot of the kids at school were very interested in American culture, especially hip hop. And for the first time people started talking to me with interest and good intentions. I started making friends. I was delighted by the fact that some people actually liked me.

After high school I entered OCU. At the time I was a cocky and obnoxious kid that thought he knew everything. That caused me to lose some friends. I had to learn the hard way. Bullies weren't a problem at that time. But now that I look back at it, I realize, I was the problem.

I decided to take a break from school. Not because I didn't want to go to school or anything. But I wanted to search for myself. I wanted to search for a purpose. I wasn't even sure why I was going to school

I was hopping between different jobs, from being a server to making burritos, to being a bartender. After that I started working on base as a part time member of staff. I was working 9-5 and it felt like being an adult.

In those times off school, I experienced a lot. I had my heart broken, I was betrayed by the people I trusted, I learned what being a responsible adult was, and so much more happened in those two years.

I also went through a phase where I attempted what I think is the dumbest thing a person could ever do. After waking up, I saw my family crying and that made me wonder, "What am I doing with my life." I'm grateful that I had my family, that I had people who cared about me. Noah was one of my best friends who had my back at all times. I got to experience what true friendship was.

And in this process of getting back up. I lost a friend too. His name was Ashton. Ashton was only 18 years old.

Me and Noah still go see him every year thinking about how we could have prevented this outcome. We would always joke around, tease each other, and we were like brothers. But you can't take back what has already happened. I miss Ashton very much. I hope he is here listening with us today.

So, what have I learned? I've learned that life is so tough that sometimes it'll kick you in the butt so hard that you can't get back up. But I've also learned that life is beautiful. Some of you may be wondering, "How is life so beautiful, with all of the things you've been through? "

Well, life is beautiful, but you have to accept the good and the bad as being beautiful. You can't just accept the good and say "ahh life is beautiful" but then we lose someone and say "ahh life sucks."

Life is beautiful because life gives us the ability to have known people even if we lose them on our journey of life. Life has allowed us to love, to care, to learn, to grow, and to forgive one another.

I want to thank you all for being alive today.

I want to thank the people who have given me the opportunity to experience such a life.

I hope I've influenced you all to approach life differently, to appreciate what you have.

This is my life and why I think life is beautiful.