



CHOOSE TO THRIVE

LIFE'S VIEWS FROM HIGH CAMP

STACY "BODE" TANIGUCHI

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Base Camp

For years, my friends and students have encouraged me to write this book. Every now and then—sometimes in the classroom, sometimes around a campfire, or maybe while traveling—I’ve shared a personal life story, and those listening have seemed intrigued. Because I seemed to capture their attention, I realized I could teach more effectively by embedding my life lessons within the stories I tell.

Storytelling has a way of grabbing people’s attention, and the technique can make a teaching moment more interesting. So I use my stories to do some teaching in this book. I hope my life stories will enhance your attention to the lessons I have learned.

Why is it that life lessons seem to come much later in life? As I look back on the events in my life, I can see now that there really is a plan in place through what seemed to be serendipitous at the time. My parents and guardians did all they could to give me a heads-up about the challenges and trials I probably could’ve avoided if I had just listened to them. But I think most of us find an exploratory nature to our being that encourages us to figure it out for ourselves. I do think the viewpoints I have seen from my life’s high camp might be more resonating for you if I teach them through the experiences I’ve had. Those vicarious experiences may drive the lesson home more deeply so that you can incorporate them into your life sooner and not have to wait until you discover those same lessons on your own.

My brother-in-law Kenzo Shinsato was married to my second-oldest sister, Grace, and when my father died, he and Grace took my mother and me into their home and family. Ken took my father’s place and raised me as if I was his own. For years, my mother and I traveled with them and their three children to Japan, Illinois, and eventually Alaska because Ken was in the military.

The one thing he taught me that has stuck with me throughout my life is the concept of respecting my elders and assuming that anyone older than me is wiser because they’ve experienced life more. It’s important to note that I’m not advocating you do everything that people older than you say or tell you to do or not do, but at least listen to them and consider their wisdom. I’m also not saying that people older than you are smarter educationally, but wisdom comes from having lived longer and having more life experiences to draw from. His advice, although not always followed at the time given, served me well when I followed it later in my life.

Another person who has influenced me for the better was Dr. Lewis Haines, an academic and educational leader. When I was a college student, his son was my best friend. We did a lot together, and because we hung out all the time, Dr. Haines and his wife, Toni, invited me to live with them while we attended school. Dr. Haines taught me to push myself and take advantage of opportunities when they arose. I remember one time when I was offered a job, and I wondered if I was given that opportunity just because I was a minority. Dr. Haines, realizing how much this job offer meant to me, said it didn't matter; once I would start working, I would prove to them I was well worth the chance they may have taken on me. He would say, "Once you get your foot in the door, then you can blow their socks off." I have taken his advice to heart, as you'll see in the following chapters.

Finally, there's Al Hanna. I'll tell you about him in the Goon Squad chapter. He opened my eyes to the world, and without his friendship and support, some of the stories I tell would not even exist.

Of course, there are many others who have positively influenced my life for the better. My other brothers-in-law, Herbert and Hiroshi, took a turn at raising me for a time. Even though I lost my father when I was very young, I had all of them stepping up to show me what a true gentleman is like. My sisters took their turn helping our mother show me the ropes of life. Pearl, Grace, and Sophie have been great examples to me, showing what sacrifice and love mean by living their lives in those ways.

My wife, LuAnn, is the reason why I have these stories. She has supported me throughout my adult life as I have pursued my dreams and work. Not until recently had she ever told me I could not do something I was passionate about, whether it was climbing a mountain that had never been climbed before or pursuing a graduate degree late in my life. Having her support with selfless persuasion allowed me to do the things you will read about in the following chapters.

Finally, my mom instilled in me a sense of adventure and perseverance. I know this because I've heard stories from my sisters about how our mother lived her life and did what she had to do to keep our family together and happy. She sacrificed a lot for her kids. She was born in Hawaii but lived her early years growing up back in Japan. She and our dad had an arranged marriage by their parents, and they lived on the Hawaiian island of Molokai to raise their family. They both worked for the Cook family on Molokai; my dad was a dairy and ranch worker, while my mother was a housekeeper for the Cooks. They worked long hours to provide for our family. I never was wanting. My mother once asked why I did some of the adventurous things I pursued (she used the words "silly" and "dangerous"), but one of my sisters replied that I got it from our mother who climbed the papaya trees in the morning so we could have fruit for breakfast. My dad, who was afraid of heights, never did that chore.

All in all, I came from a great family, had many opportunities to make something of myself, and saw a lot of sacrifice in our family for my benefit. I have much to be grateful for.

If you decide not to read the rest of this book, don't fret. I, for one, would not be offended. But I will leave you with a quick summary of my life, and I hope it entices you to read the rest of this book if you want to learn more.

I've been around the world a few times,
Met a lot of people I don't like, and a few people I want to be like.
Took a leak in the Yukon River, almost drowned in the Nile,
And watched a cremation at the headwaters of the Ganges River.
Slept in a snow cave once for fun and too many times to survive.
Climbed the highest mountain on six continents
And ignored the seventh because it was too small.

Paddled a kayak in the Mediterranean Sea,
the Pacific and Arctic Oceans,
And the glacial fjords of Alaska,
Where I touched a whale swimming by.
Surfed the waves of Hawaii,
Went scuba diving in the Great Barrier Reef,
And snorkeled in the crystal blue waters of Fiji.

I've skied A-Basin's double black diamond Pallavicini run
On cross-country skis
And made the first turns after a powder snowfall at Snowbird.
I've hunted the wild animals of the forest for food,
Many times with little luck because they were smarter than me.
I was a seasick commercial salmon fisherman on the open seas.
Ran a few marathons for fun
And ran up and down Mt. Marathon several times,
But I ran the fastest when chased by Masai warriors in Tanzania.

I hiked for thirty days to circumnavigate the Gates of the Arctic,
Climbed the steps on the Great Wall,
But didn't climb Uluru out of respect for the Aborigines.
I've shaken hands with a US president,
Was appointed to Annapolis by a US senator,
Spent time with the Rinpoche of Tengboche,
Shared a DC with Chechen rebels,
And drank kumis with a Cossack in the Pamirs.

I've climbed the frozen waterfalls of Keystone Canyon
And slept on the big rock walls of Yosemite Valley.
I've skydived out of flying airplanes because someone dared me to
And landed a plane on a glacier and a lake because I had to.
Soared in a glider and a Rogallo to see how birds feel
And crawled and swam through the Waitomo Caves
Just to see worms that glow.

I built a house in one summer and lived in it for fifteen.
Seen the Northern Lights dance multiple times
And the Southern Cross in the Andes and Outback.
Straddled the equator in Uganda and the tectonic plates in Iceland.
I'm the first mountain guide
Who has taken a transsexual to the top of North America
And some Boy Scouts as well.

I lost my father when I was one
But met three great men to stand in his stead.
I listen to anyone who is older than me
Because they are wiser than me.
My mom and sisters raised me well, and I miss them dearly.
I love my wife, my kids, and my grandkids.

I am a proud member of the Goon Squad
And call all the Squad members my brothers.
I'm also proud to be an American
And grateful to everyone who has given of themselves so that I can be.

I'm a lover of adventures, a lifelong student, and to some, a teacher.
There's not much I wouldn't try at least once,
And there's a lot of stuff I wish I hadn't tried.
I've been there, done that, and want to go back for more
Because moderation is for cowards.

Life is relatively short when compared to the eternities.
All of us will experience the pains of loss and will eventually die,
So I have chosen to thrive in this life and live each day with passion,
And I thank God for every minute He has given me!

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