



Sarah Eisner and
Randy Quarterman

THE REPARATIONS PROJECT

A Story of Friendship and Repair Work
by Linked Descendants of Enslavement

Black Studies

Collection Editor

CHRISTOPHER MCAULEY

LIVED PLACES
PUBLISHING



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Dr Christopher McAuley



This book is dedicated to truth telling. It was written with love for the next generation, and with hope for healing in America.

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Abstract

This book tells the intertwined history and life stories of linked descendants of enslavement, Randy and Sarah, who met and developed a unique friendship and then organization. In the summer of 2019, Sarah Eisner made contact with Randy Quarterman, the great-great-great-grandson of a man, Zeike Quarterman, whom her great-great-great-grandfather, George Adam Keller, had enslaved. They quickly realized that they could work together to preserve a plot of land deeded from Keller to Quarterman in 1890 and still held by the Quarterman family but in danger of being taken by eminent domain. In this work, the two developed a close and mutually healing, as well as simultaneously challenging, friendship. This friendship enabled them to rediscover their family histories and reckon with their own individual life paths to explore the ways in which they were both similar and vastly different.

The book is written in alternating chapters by Randy and Sarah as they explore particular age points in their lives and so illustrate the ways in each of their individual experiences—both vastly different and also sometimes similar—uniquely positioned them to be able to create a community between their families and further work within broader communities toward repair.

Keywords

Reparations, personal reparations, friendship, racial repair, memoir, African American, Black studies, Black history, enslavement, racism, slavery, family, ancestry, whiteness, Georgia, Savannah, California, Bay Area

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Introduction

Whiteness

As a little girl, I knew where my mother was from—where I was from—even though it was far south and east of where I was born and lived, in northern California. Forever and ever, my mother has gifted me with the sweet, gritty truth of her Savannah, Georgia roots. My roots. Sometimes these roots have been all that kept me tethered to the surface of this earth and other times they have threatened to pull me under. I don't remember a time when I didn't know that my parents and grandparents loved and cherished me unconditionally, and I don't remember a time when I didn't know that some of my ancestors—some of whom had lived long enough to love my grandmother well—had enslaved others, and I don't remember a time when that conflict wasn't part of the hole in my heart, or the opening of it. I am a cis-gender woman, a mother, straight, and white, but I learned to fight against thinking that my identity is normative or black and white. I live in the questions about my family history and about the future of this country, because when it mattered most, I was encouraged by people who love me to ask them.

"Who are your people?" the Gullah Geechee people ask when one of them meets you. My mother's people are my people, even though I come from other people too: my father's Swiss family from Seattle, Washington; my mother's father's family of

musicians, teachers, and Union Army soldiers from Carlinville, Illinois. But my maternal, Southern roots, running through my mother, her mother, and through all our mothers back to the 1700s are the ones I know. These are the people who have chosen me as their own, made themselves known to me, and given my life a larger purpose.

I was a college student at University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) in 1989 when I took my first Black Studies course and asked my mother how many people our ancestors had enslaved and how much land they had owned and how could they have done so. She could not answer all these questions, but she gave me everything she knew: a lot of land, dozens of enslaved humans, and she supposed they existed within and unfortunately embraced an evil system because “that’s how it was”. I couldn’t accept that. For two decades, as I worked my own way through school, career, and motherhood, I carried this knowledge of my family’s large part in America’s shame, as well as what I saw as my grandmother’s conflicted Southern love, trauma, and pain, with the knowledge that I was privileged to have a family that told me the truth, and with absolute ignorance about what exactly to do with it, other than not deny or ignore it. I knew I needed to uncover it. My people inflicted pain and felt it too. I felt it. If we don’t face and move through our shame and pain, we pass it down the line.

In the summer of 2019, when Ta-Nehisi Coates testified to the House of Representatives and our nation finally re-entered into semi-serious discussions about reparations for Black Americans, I didn’t need to understand what, exactly, was being

proposed—money, acknowledgements, land, legislation—to know in my bones that they were due. The ways in which wealth was built on the backs of Black folks but kept well out of their hands, and the ways in which slavery and its long legacy of trauma still affected us all, were facts my body carried and knew. Then, I knew it vaguely. Now, I know it more intimately.

In 2019, after a career in tech and a return to school for an MFA in creative writing, I was working on a fiction project loosely based on Harriet Keller Keller's, my great-grandmother's, life, lived with mental illness. To write the story, I tried to conjure up the place she had lived in the early part of the 1900s, Drakies Plantation, and the places her parents had lived on the nearby inland plantations, Salem and Coldbrook, both then and back to the early 1800s. I wanted to write about the ways in which I imagined "Hattie" had suffered back then that mirrored some of the ways I thought I had suffered too. The question I wanted to reckon with in writing this novel was *why* there was so much suicide, so much madness, so much eccentricity in our family history. What wounds did we suffer and hide? But working on a novel about a white girl, then a white woman—a descendant of people who had enslaved other people—"trapped" or "suffering" on a former plantation in the Jim Crow South, while I was living in Donald Trump's (or any) America felt superfluous and solipsistic, even if it wasn't. I knew that the lives of the white women in my family, and their stories, were valid and worthwhile. I knew that mine was. I even knew by then that I was, in part, writing about the ways in which white supremacy strips all people of their humanity, and often sanity, too. Maybe I just didn't think I could ever

write the damn thing. I was afraid, but it was a safe fear: one of failure, not survival.

I sat at my desk in California, looking at the creamy magnolias blooming on trees outside my window in my beautiful yard. The redwood tree, taller than the whole town, lifted my gaze up to the sky and then back down. I looked at the land and thought about the land—about who owned it and why and why not and how much—and returned to the questions about the true lives of my Southern ancestors again and again, not to the fictionalization of them, as the national conversation about reparations grew. I had no delusions about who owed reparations for slavery and its legacy: the entity that created and legalized the systems that resulted in the Black–white wealth gap, the federal government, owed reparations, just as it had paid to Japanese Americans, to 9/11 survivors, to the Iran–Contra hostages, to Native Americans. But that fight had been going on for far too long. I decided I wanted to make some sort of personal reparations, a concept I naively considered I might have thought up before I learned how many people across the country were already engaging in this work. I could, at least, know my own history and tell the truth about it. I could offer up all the information I had about whom my ancestors had enslaved. I had also been lucky in Silicon Valley. I could and wanted to redistribute some of the wealth I had accumulated to those who had been held back from opportunities to accumulate it, specifically those whom my own ancestors participated in holding back more than a century ago and whose descendants had lived through slavery’s legacy, one that continues today.

I started looking back through the wills I had found copies of online, reading all the family stories I could, and asking questions of the one distant cousin I knew who lived where the Kellers had lived, in Port Wentworth, Georgia. I knew him to be fascinated by family history and open hearted, and when I told him what I was trying to find he mentioned that he believed George Adam Keller had deeded two plots of land to two formerly enslaved families after the war. One plot, he thought, was given to a couple with the last name Quarterman. Bill said that Quarterman descendants still lived in town, just down the street, and he believed they also still owned the land. He didn't have their contact information. I searched them up on Google right away.

In July of 2019, I'd had no idea that the Quarterman family existed. In August, I reached out to Randy Quarterman with an email and attached the one document I had that included their family: an 1880 census that showed Isaac (called Zeike) and Grace Quarterman living on the land between two different Keller families and listed their children. Randy had not seen it before, nor the names Isaac and Grace Quarterman, and he thanked me for it, and told me he had just retired after 20 years in the military, including four tours in Iraq, and recently moved back to Port Wentworth. He also told me that yes, his family still owned most of that land given to them by George Adam Keller in 1890, but they had recently lost two acres of it to the county for a parkway by way of eminent domain, and because of the cloudy title, they had not been paid. I was stunned. I wondered: How much more would the county take? What does it mean if we allow land given to descendants of formerly enslaved people, back in 1890, to be taken away in 2019? A small spark of hope in my ancestors'

humanity caught in me. Had Keller given Quarterman that land as reparations?

The truth is I had, and still have, no idea if the land my ancestor gave to Randy's family was meant as reparations or with any intent to be kind. Perhaps the land was given in exchange for a contract for completed work done *after* emancipation, additional work that hardly seems fair to require, considering the former enslavement of Zeike and Grace. Either way, I know two things are true. First, that land transfers, especially those without an exchange of money, were extremely rare from white to Black landowners in the area and that it was even more unusual to see Black women like Grace included on the deed. We could not find any other local examples of either case. And second, that even if this land was given to the Quartermans as an act of repair with no post-enslavement work as negotiation, there is no way in which this land was simply a magnanimous gift. It was hard earned. Had George Adam Keller felt that?

People often ask me whether I was afraid of the response I might get when I reached out to Randy. Of course, I was nervous. But when I honestly think about whether I was afraid, the answer is no. This is partly due to the privilege of overinflated presumption I often carry as a white woman that I am doing *the right thing*, partly due to the experiences in my life that led me to engage in deep self-reflection to be sure I *was* doing the "right" thing, and what I had taken the time to understand about what I was doing. I had taken a remarkable course called "How to Hold Whiteness Responsibly" from Laura Brewer and had begun to attend Coming To The Table meetings to learn about making

connections between linked descendants. Both were key to my readiness to make a connection with Randy.

I began with humility, and quickly an apology. Although Randy (who confirmed this later) and I both understood I was not personally guilty of the offenses I apologized for, I could still start our conversation by apologizing sincerely for what people I was related to had done to people Randy was related to, *and* this apology could happen even when positive things had happened between the families too. Both families are huge and multi-branched, and each member is, of course, an individual. We both understood that none of those things negated the things I apologized for.

I knew from belonging to groups such as *Coming To The Table* and *How to Hold Whiteness Responsibly* (and I like to think also from common decency and kindness) that just reaching out to say “Hi, I’m a descendant of your ancestors’ enslaver, can we talk?” was not appropriate, nor desired. I knew that I needed and wanted to offer something potentially valuable to whomever I was reaching out to rather than to ask for something that might only be valuable to me. I was lucky I had the census to offer. I was luckier still that it was Randy in particular who received it.

People often call what I did “brave”. In the ways in which we’ve begun to call the willingness to be vulnerable “brave”, it was, and I don’t want to minimize the work it took to get to the point where I could reach out to the Quartermans, nor what it might feel like for other white people who decide to take similar paths. Creating human relationships, especially between those connected by generations of trauma, takes courage, and involves

work and discomfort. It is also true that I hold many other kinds of bravery in higher regard. I understood that I was not in any actual physical or emotional danger when I reached out to Randy via email. I was not scared for my life or my livelihood or even of my failure. Even if the outreach hadn't gone well, it wouldn't have been me who was harmed by the intrusion or response. I simply did the best I could do with all the knowledge I could find and humility I had. Thanks to Randy, I opened myself up to rejection that never came.

I also knew that an apology or offering of a census to Randy wasn't enough: I could do more to work toward collective healing and take action. I understood quickly that doing more would be possible because of the particular person Randy is and the humane way he received me, and because of my privilege both in terms of contacts and finances, and in terms of complete support from my husband and my entire family. In the following months, as Randy and I worked together to try to find attorneys to clear title on the Quarterman land and litigate the eminent domain issue, Randy and I wrote personal narratives to swap and admire. I learned that he was born in Okinawa, Japan and had spent large parts of his earlier life there, and in Korea, Iraq, and Savannah. We discussed everything from Southern strictures to national politics, from organized religion to parenthood, and war. I began to see the threads of external and internal forces and experiences that had allowed the two of us, connected in history through enslavement and its legacy, to follow very different paths in life but to arrive, in 2019, on common ground, back where our connection began, in Port Wentworth, Georgia. As I got to know Randy's heart, I felt more optimistic about the future of America

than I had in a long time, and about human connection in general. Randy echoed these sentiments, but I also knew that as we began to work together on broader goals and as we established an organization focused on racial repair, he was giving me an enormous gift at what might be a great personal cost to him. We all need healing. But Randy didn't need to make reparations. The federal government does. I felt that I, personally, could and wanted to. Randy deserved to retire from serving his country and rest. Instead, he jumped into work for the benefit of his family and for others—to serve his country in a different way—that could be retraumatizing for him and was, at best, often emotionally exhausting. That includes writing this book.

I will never be able to thank Randy Quarterman enough for answering one of the biggest questions of my life back in 2019, or for the work he has done alongside me for the past four years, or for the willingness to write our stories together. Is racial repair—are reparations for slavery and its legacy—possible? Randy and I do this work with the hope that it is, day by day, and with the understanding that we may not live to see the answer on a national scale. But reparations are a transformation, not a transaction. I am thankful for every step of both of our lives that has led us here to live in the questions and be part of a transformation together.

Learning objectives

This book tells the intertwined history and life stories of linked descendants of enslavement, Randy and Sarah, who met and developed a unique friendship and then an organization in 2019–2020. The book is written in alternating chapters by Randy and Sarah as they explore particular age points in their lives and so illustrate the ways in which each of their individual experiences—both vastly different and also sometimes similar—uniquely positioned them to be able to create a community between their families and to further work within broader communities toward repair. This story offers an opportunity to reckon with the ways in which the legacy of slavery affected descendants of two families, one Black, one white, and to see the larger systemic issues at play. Themes of societal opportunity and expectations for Americans from different socio-economic, educational, gendered, regional, and racial backgrounds are explored through the lens of the possibility for reparations in America today, both on a national scale and on an interpersonal repair scale.

1

Half

Okinawa is a small island located in the southernmost part of Japan and is known for its rich culture and history. It was also the site of a major battle during the Second World War, and the presence of the US military base, established there after the war, has been a contentious issue in the area ever since. Until 1972, the US military controlled local laws, currency, and politics throughout the Ryukyu Islands, of which Okinawa is a part. On December 5, 1975, I was born to a Japanese mother and a Black father, a combination that drew attention in both cultures. Being “half” meant that I was not full-blooded Japanese, and this was frowned upon in Japanese culture. My father was a native of Savannah, Georgia and graduated from Tompkins High School, which was an all-Black school in the period of Jim Crow segregation until the mid-1970s. In 1968, my father received a draft notification for the army and, following the advice of his father, he went to the Air Force recruiting office to sign up. He chose the Air Force because his older brother had been sentenced by a judge to join after having been found guilty of auto theft. The deal was worked out by the lawyer whom my grandmother’s employer, a descendant of George Mason, found for my brother. College was not considered an option on my father’s side of the family, and it’s still not a priority today. The best that my family

could envision was to graduate from high school and get a job at the port of Savannah or, like my father, at the Coca Cola bottling plant where he worked before being drafted.

My mother was born on Miyako Island, where the Shimoji name dates to the 1650s. However, due to the Second World War, the Shimojis became so poor that my mother never graduated high school and most of the clan migrated to Okinawa, where they became carpenters. Because not much money was put into rebuilding schools in the post-war reconstruction period in Japan, only the wealthy could send their kids to high school in Okinawa. My youngest uncle, Hideki, was the first in the family to graduate from high school in the post-war period but he still ended up going into the family's construction business. My mother was the only girl of five children. One of her brothers, who was born after her, died in childhood from pneumonia. We lit incense daily to remember him at my Ka-Chan's house at the traditional Japanese altar, which was hand crafted from wood. His cremated ashes were in a bowl where the lit incense would stand along with fresh fruits and sweets for the spirits. Ka-Chan's house always smelled like burning incense.

My parents met at a bar while my father was stationed in Okinawa as a member of the US Air Force in which he would make a 20-year career before retiring. In my father's early years in the military, he would hang out in bars off duty and enjoy Japanese nightlife. Most GIs would mingle with Japanese women who would accompany men for entertainment and were paid by how much the customer would spend on drinks. I can remember as a youth walking down the lit alleys at night where women were standing and encouraging men to enter the bars and thinking, "Is this

what my mother looked like, standing out here doing the same thing?" The thought made me feel ashamed and angry that my mother would do such a thing. I envisioned some drunk men passing by and my mother using her sex appeal to lure the men inside the bar. But it was my mother's decision to go into this type of work and she was young.

Around 1972 my parents fell in love and eventually got married after my father returned to Japan after station duty in Montana. My father was desperate to be stationed back in Okinawa after a year in Montana. My father felt like a man in Okinawa, where he wasn't seen by the Japanese people as "Boy" or "Nigger" but as "Scooter", a nickname given to him by the local Japanese because of his quickness on the basketball court when he played for the base team.

Still, my father had witnessed the transformation of Okinawa, which was the US military's last foothold in Japan. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Black groups that had formed within the US military during the Vietnam War started protesting and challenging the US-imposed segregation in Okinawa. Okinawans were catalyzed by the protests of Black soldiers and adopted their own protest strategies against the US military. This resulted in the Koza Riots in December 1970, which enabled the Japanese government to negotiate its reclaiming of Okinawa from the US military.

As a child, I spent much of my time with my Japanese family, learning about their customs and traditions. I attended Japanese math classes to learn *soroban*, which is an abacus developed in Japan from the ancient Chinese *suanpan*, which was imported

into Japan in the 14th century. I also learned *shodo*, a Japanese calligraphy, which was like a high art class. The *shodo* teachers were very strict and would often scold me for not dedicating myself to it. Finally, there was karate class, which I only did to be a part of something when all I really wanted to do was to play outside with my friends. What I didn't want to do was stay at home alone.

My grandmother, whom I called Ka-Chan, taught me the importance of respect, discipline, and perseverance, which were values that would later shape my character. She took the time to show me the ways of life, whether it was just showing me how to pick the right sashimi at the fish market and testing me the next week by having me choose the fish. She was the person who really explained Japanese culture to me, which is based more on body language than is American culture. Although I only spent a few weekends a month with her, I could tell that she just enjoyed my company.

My uncles, Hideki and Shungi, who were only about 10–15 years older than me, also looked after me and gave me some of the happiest times of my life. They would take me everywhere—to the beach, amusement parks, on drives across Okinawa—and just allowed me to be part of their lives.

I also had a strong connection to my father's culture, especially through his love of music. My father would often play soul music by performers like Marvin Gaye and Earth Wind and Fire, and, for jazz records, he listened to a lot of Spyro Gyra. We would dance together in our living room, being entirely free-spirited. It was a feeling that I can't put a name to, but it was the effect of the

rhythms that the musicians created with their instruments and voices. I never knew about my father's experiences in America as a Black man, nor did I know of his hurdles and struggles, which he wanted to protect me from.

My father would always tell me that, as a child of the segregated South, all he wanted for me was the "freedom" to be a child without any boundaries. There is one story that I remember him telling me that makes me cringe a little since I am a parent. He told me that when I was about two or three years old, I was outside playing and eventually drifted off so far from home that a strange woman saw me and went looking for my parents since they were the only interracial couple in the area. This was evidence of my adventurous and naïve nature and that my father got his wish for me. I was also a kid with a deep sense of empathy and loyalty.

It was around July 1979, when my father received his next assignment, that I got my introduction to America and its culture. The air smelled like salt from the ocean and the sun was bright as a summer. The cicadas in the trees that all the kids would try to catch were making their buzzing noise. While I was outside climbing trees, my parents were inside with the movers packing for our next destination, Albuquerque, New Mexico, where father was assigned for 18 months. What I can remember is Ka-chan and my parents waiting for our flight at Kadena Airport. This was the first time I was getting on an airplane, so I was very excited and not thinking about the changes that were about to occur. Our first destination prior to New Mexico was my father's hometown of Savannah, Georgia, where I would be amid his family and culture. This would be my first time around my Black family.

At this point I was unable to speak English, so the only person whom I could communicate with was my mother. My father was there to translate the best that he could to his family, but considering that my household was not a very vocal one, which was normal in Japanese culture, he did not have much to translate from us. Silence in conversation is quite commonplace in Japan, where people read between the lines and understand others through non-verbal cues, like context, body language, and other such social indicators. This training gave me a way to navigate this new world, but it didn't always help me to understand Black American culture.

This was the first time I saw so many Black folks in one area. Being with Black people was not an entirely new experience to me because my father had Black friends in Okinawa. However, this would be my first time around Black people for 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. I can remember the gathering over dinner and thinking to myself about how much meat there was on the table and how big some of the adults were. In Japan you were ridiculed if you were overweight. Also, we didn't have individual plates in Japan but shared the entrée among ourselves. The only individual dish we had were our soup and rice bowls. Seeing how my family ate made me feel even more out of place. I could only look to my mother for guidance, and she always looked to father for some.

I can remember my aunts advising my mother to take more of an assertive role as a wife but what they didn't understand was that my mother's behavior, which they took as submissive, was simply that of a Japanese woman at the time. I could see in my mother's eyes that she didn't enjoy any part of the US but she

supported me and my father because she understood that this was our culture as well.

I would often hear my paternal grandmother tell my father that I was “wild”, a word that I didn’t understand at that time but would later realize that she meant that I was untamable or free-spirited. One evening I heard my cousin getting into trouble and saw him being disciplined with a belt. This was the first time that I had ever seen anything like this, and I was so afraid that I ran to my mother and asked her why this was happening and if I would be next. I can remember my mother’s reaction to this event and how it was a total shock to her, too. I cried in her lap as she held me tightly. Other than that experience, I remember the visit with my father’s family as more of an adventure for me at four years old than anything else.

I was my mother’s only child, and I felt the emptiness of not having siblings. I would carry this feeling into adulthood. What I learned from our visit to Savannah was that I had an older brother and older sister, but I didn’t understand why they did not live with us. I did not question my father about this. My siblings were six to ten years older than me and, unlike me who was half-Black, they were fully Black. I felt like I was constantly walking a tightrope between my two identities, never fully belonging to either. My childhood was filled with confusion, questions, and curiosity about my unique background.

After a week or two of visiting my family in Carver Village, which was once known as the largest individually owned housing development for people of color in the world, with over 600 homes, we traveled to New Mexico. We drove there in a 1973

Grand Prix that my father bought in Montana, where he was stationed before I was born. I thought it was the biggest car I had ever seen, and it would be our home for the next few days as we made our way across the country. Being on the road and seeing all this land was an adventurous moment for me. Life in America, as I saw it then, was so wondrous because I was unaware of anything negative about it. I never thought of the dangers that my father was thinking about as far as traveling through America as a Black man in an expensive car with an Asian woman in the passenger side who barely spoke English was concerned. I remember how the music and dancing on the trip made it so much fun. We listened to a lot of the Jacksons, and Michael Jackson's "Destiny" and "Off the Wall" albums are still some of my favorites. I also remember stopping in Baton Rouge to spend time with one of my father's friends in their lavish home with mirrors on every wall.

Arriving in New Mexico, we were met by the family of my father's friend and their daughter who was around my age. They helped us settle into our government quarters. At this time, I still did not speak any English so playing with other kids was difficult for them but not for me because I understood everything they were saying; I would simply reply in Japanese. I never felt strange about speaking Japanese to them because, in my world, that was normal. However, in their world, I was odd. One kid went so far as to ask my father, "Why does he understand everything, but we don't understand nothing he says?" My father replied that I spoke a foreign language. I wondered why my father didn't just say Japanese, but in noticing that his body language and expressions didn't show any hesitancy, I just moved on with it

and the question never crossed my mind again. I didn't understand the cruelty of American kids toward those who are from other countries, because in Japan being a bully or just cruel to your peers can result in your ostracism. I adjusted to American culture so much that the father of one of the kids whom I played with came to my father to ask if he could tell me not to bully his son. I was surprised that this kid thought that I was bullying him. It was probably because I mimicked karate moves that I learned in Japan after school when I played with him. A few days after that encounter with the kid's father, I ran my bike into a window of a house and the doctor who removed the glass out of my eye was none other than that same father. As my father explained it to me, soon after the bike accident, I just started to speak English fluently out of the blue.

I never encountered racism or prejudice as far as I can remember during my time in New Mexico and that could have been because I was living on a military base. However, I could see then in my mother's eyes that she did not enjoy America as much as she did Japan, so she mostly stayed at home. This was probably due to a combination of homesickness and the difficulty in grasping the American way of life. After a year of living in New Mexico, it was now time for us to move back to Okinawa. I can remember my parents' joy as they prepared to return to Japan. My father loved Japan. He felt free there and its different culture expanded his mind in ways that he didn't experience in America as a Black man. We never had to have the "talk" in which he explained to me what life would be like for me as a Black kid. I never even thought to ask the question, nor did it cross my mind. I enjoyed every moment of life up to that time.

When we arrived in Okinawa, I can remember Ka-Chan coming up to me and asking if I had done my best while I was gone. "Do your best" in Japanese is *Ganbatte*, and it was always the first and last thing Ka-Chan would say to me. In America, my grandmother would always say to me "I love you", but in Japan one referred to effort more than emotions. I would always reply that I had, and I believed it in my spirit, which gave me a lot of confidence as a kid. My father allowed me to make a lot of decisions about my life as a child and would tell me to accept the consequences, good or bad. He never disciplined me physically because he didn't have to: in Japanese culture to let your family down was a shame more damaging than physical punishment.

Once we returned to Japan, I could see that friction was developing between my parents. My mother was absent more and it was mostly my father and I at home. I was now, at the age of six, on my own a lot. Every morning my father ironed my uniform for Christ the King International School. Christ the King was a K-12 institution, most of whose students were Filipino. There were also a few Japanese students in the school, but only three Black kids, including myself. I would wake up, get dressed, eat my cereal, and then proceed to walk to school, which was about two miles away from where we lived. This was a daily adventure to me. When I got home, I would have around four hours by myself before my father returned home from base. We lived in an Okinawan neighborhood that was far away from where my classmates and other Americans lived. It was there that I met Kuniyaki and Shinobu, who became my childhood friends. They were like a year older than me and attended Japanese school. My first encounter with Kuniyaki was a confrontational one. At the time,