

Worldman

By Kuniharu Shimizu

While I am sorting out my shelf, I find an old book I have totally forgotten about. A yearbook, a graduation photo album of McKinley High School, 1968. It has been forty years since then... The plastic sheet on the cover is yellowed. It actually takes a few times to blow the layer dust off it.

I crack the spine, and open its dark green cover. I turn the pages, seeing the smiles on the boys and girls. The lighting, the costumes and the poses made them traditional portraits. Among them, I find my own photo. Under it is my name "Kiyoshi Kato". It was the time before long hair had become popular. My hair is combed neat. My tie is as thin as a pencil. My smile does not look natural. The image reminds me of the shyness I felt at having such a photograph taken for the first time in my life.

Short messages written on my friends' smiles: farewell and well-wishing words. I read them one by one. They are mostly stereotyped phrases, but never bore me after so many years. I wonder how these people are doing now. The connection with my friends after the graduation has now practically died out.

Yes: I develop a sudden, promising new idea. I will look them up on the web. With the album in hand, I sit in front of the computer.

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I access Google's search site and begin

typing in names. I do not bother with girls, for they probably no longer go by their maiden names. Besides, I knew so few, being a shy boy then. Even so, among the few messages, I find one written by a girl who was chosen as a homecoming queen.

Homecoming is a big event that happens once a year. Schools invite back former students, and they hold football matches, parades and dance parties. To liven up the event, students of the current year select a king and a queen from them. Students with good looks and those who earn more or less good

grades get selected. They also choose attendants for the king and the queen, a boy and a girl from each grade. All of them get dressed up formally and form a miniature royal family consisting of eight students in total. It was the queen of the high school campus who left me the message. I cannot remember why and how she came to leave me a message. Someone so beautiful and as popular as she, must have a different surname by now. I skip her name, too.

I decide to pick only for boys names like, Richard Nagatomo, Russel Higa, Edmond Ching, Dickson Lau, William

Travio, Leo Kauhinni, Leslie Kuebutz, Dexter Puluti, Jelly Fitzgerald (of course, unrelated to the author of *The Great Gatsby*), Howard Palmaton.

I search for all these names, one after another.

Not a single hit.

Well, to be exact, there are some hits. For example, Howard Pelmaton. The one I find on the web, or the name that corresponds, is "Dr. Howard Palmaton". That Palmerton, who ridiculed me for not knowing the local slang for masturbation, whom I helped gotten through his pre-algebra class, and who had trouble disassembling and

reassembling the ROTC rifle, could never have made a doctor. No, this is a different guy.

For the most part, Howard was the kind of guys I hanged around. I was, then, like just off the boat (I actually took a ship to come to Hawaii from Yokohama, a seven days ocean trip), going through miserable high school life: I was struggling with English, was under constant puzzlements about school life in America. Howard and the likes made fun of me but were also helpful in my getting used to the foreign environment.

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Let's transfer the wandering eye back to the yearbook. I come to the page about the student council. Yes, I know one more guy, the president of McKinley Student Council. His name is Worldman Gimm.

He and I were in a physics class together, taught by a Japanese American woman with big breasts, which seemed to me untypical for a science teacher. On some less frequent occasions, I recall having completed collaborative physics

experiments with him in class. He sometimes even asked me for help in clarifying some concepts in physics. I used to stay up very late, wrestling with the textbook and would often end up falling asleep with my head in it, dissipating some of the typography with my saliva. Still, because of my diligence, I eventually came to understand the subject very well. However at the end of the school year, I got a little scolding from the teacher for returning the textbook with its mucous-wrought damage. I did not mind the scolding at all for it was given by a big breasted woman.

Anyway, Worldman was the president, a member of National Honor Society, and only senior moving on to the Harvard University. Can you imagine a prospective Harvard guy asking for help from a nobody, a miserable off-the-boat student from rural Japan? I was honored and flattered. I liked him and we began to chat time to time.

Surely a luminary like Worldman, who was equipped with both leadership and good grades would have become successful in the world. I search for his name online, expecting to see many

results relating to Worldman.

Google, however, provides only one link. Something about Harvard Radcliff Class of 1972 Reuni....

How come only this?

I click the link. A single webpage appears. On the left side are menu bars, and on the right is a chart of names.

What is this chart?

The website banner read: "Memorial Register"

No...memorial? No way! But I cannot find his name in any other part of the page so I go down the list of names until I come to "Mr. Worldman Gimm" and

next to the name is Death Date "04/27/78".

What! He is dead already!

I calculate quickly. Worldman died at the young age of 27 or 28. It was but six years after graduation from Harvard. Despite his promising and ordained future, the list confirms his premature death.

The finding completely shocks me, almost throws me off the chair. I do not expect a result like this. My expectation was to see wonderful findings, to see his name listed like, Dr. Worldman Gimm gives a lecture....or CEO Worldman

Gimm announces the merger of...or
Chairman Worldman Gimm presides
over the annual convention held
at...CNN Special world report by
Worldman Gim... I was expecting to see
something befitting his name, Worldman.
A person with such a name must have
made some dent in the society. Instead,
in the internet world, he has only one
line: "Worldman Gimm / Death Date
04/27/78".

It's been a long time since that resolute
date. I doubt that I am even able to find
out what happened to him. I would not
say I am not interested in finding out

why and how he passed away. Still, people do die by one way or another. There does not seem much point for me to know what had happened to a person who met his untimely end more than thirty years ago. What occupies my mind now is an old question:

“Why does a good-natured and distinguished person has to pass away at such a young age?”

I know that an answer to this is not easily apprehended. I am hooked on this same question for a while, but finally settle on a safer way of thinking in the end. That he must have been born again and is leading a new life somewhere.

Once again, I turn to the yearbook and find the message inscribed to me on his photograph.

“To Kiyoshi, Good luck and best wishes to a great physicist and person

Aloha.

Worldman”.

I do not turned out a great physicist, but I am trying to be a good person, toward my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my neighbors and friends. The sort of person he would have aimed to be if he were still alive.

I have difficulty fathoming that there is only one association to him on the entirety of the web. I decide to transcribe short notes of memoir onto my homepage. If Google was to pick it up, that would be the second link about him. The second "Worldman" on the World Wide Web. I can only do so much for him. I wonder if he would be happy to have this second link generated by my reference to him.

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The yearbook from forty years ago, memories of my miserable high school life, and the early grave of Worldman

culminate to make me feel sentimental. I swivel my chair and fix my glance to the window. The thick damp cloud which covered the sky in the morning now reveals patches of blue sky in its wake.

Sitting there, looking through the window pane, my thought drifting. I wonder if there is any way to know what happened to Worldman. What would I do with it if I found out, I ask myself. I really do not know, but still, I cannot deny nor revoke my curiosity. I now stare at the Google top page vacantly. What about his family? If he were to have brothers and sisters, they would still live

somewhere in America. Of those who are born in Hawaii, many go to universities on the mainland America, and tend to stay there afterwards. If Worldman had any siblings, they might have been as distinguished as he was, and some would have left Hawaii and were living somewhere else. But some other might still live in Hawaii. I do not have to be so concerned about the potential for particular geographic areas to be excluded by my internet search, but that was my natural process of thinking. And "GIMM" is a rare surname. How about searching for the surname?, I mused.

I type in GIMM, add Honolulu as an afterthought, and start the search. This secures a few results. One of them shows link to the result chart for a bicycle race in Honolulu, showing the name "Atomman Gimm", the 68th in the competition. He does not sound like a great racer. But the name "Atomman" is unquestionably similar to "Worldman" in its singularity.

A few lines beneath the present link divert to another link for a daily newspaper called *The Honolulu Advertiser*. The article is about him, and was published in the paper on June 13th, 2005.

The beginning reads:

'Atomman Gimm, forty-nine years old, and who works as chief accountant for a mobile telephone company releases the stress from his work by pedaling on his bike.'

I scroll further:

'Atomman belongs to Trade Wind Cycling Club for seven years and presently plays the role of club leader' And the article continued by stating that 'it was during his high school days when he first encountered cycling', which is followed by this comment:

'I could not be bothered to use the bus anymore and started riding a 10 speed

freewheel bicycle which my brother had left at home when he went to an university on the mainland. I used to cycle to McKinley High School everyday from Nuuanu, where my home was'

His brother went to an university on the mainland...he went to McKinley High School... This had to be... I stop reading the article and start searching for "Atomman Gimm". Many results come up, but most of them are more or less the same as the original race result. It seems like many bicycle races are held throughout the State of Hawaii. One of the web-links about a race featured a

photo of Atomman, as well as an article he'd penned for *The Honolulu Advertiser*. He is quite handsome, and he possesses big eyes. He reminds me of Worldman in some ways. I trawl through other links, but cannot find a decisive statement that connects them.

I look at my watch. It is approaching 11 a.m. I search for the current time in Honolulu on the web. It is 3 o'clock in the afternoon there. I email the editor of the daily newspaper and ask for the contacts of the reporter who wrote the article. The reply comes quickly.

'...This article was written by a

contributing journalist two years ago...Did you read the brief paragraph which reviewed the race club that Atomman belong to, at the end of the article? You will find that his contact information follows...'

I did not read all the way because it was some other cyclist's article after Atomman's. Nonetheless, as the editor instructed, the article does contain Atomman's email address. Immediately I sent the following email to the AOL account specified therein.

"I am writing from Japan. I am a past acquaintance of a person whose name is "Worldman Gimm". I have only just

found out that he had passed away a long time ago. Are you related to him?"

I wait for a while but receive no reply. He is maybe out somewhere. I am now excited by the prospect that my investigative efforts may have secured a sudden opportunity to find out about Worldman. So excited that I become impatient and cannot wait for a reply. I follow the link in the subsequent article's by-line to the homepage of a bicycle shop, which constitutes another contact for Trade Wind Cycling Club. I write the following email to their info address.

"I am writing from Japan. Am looking

for Atomman Gimm. Do you know his current contact details?"

Soon a reply arrives in my inbox:

'I will forward your email to Atomman'.

I wait for a while, but no email from Atomman. I arch my back, reclining sluggishly into my desk chair, and mumble to myself, "Where are you, Mr. Atomman?"

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I soon hear my wife's voice from the kitchen.

'Are you free? Could you go and get my medicine for me?'

My wife has long been diagnosed as suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. She is the sort of person who spends seven, eight minutes repeatedly washing her hands. She had recently prepared herself a few different kinds of gloves to allow her to go to the toilet, or to facilitate short trips out of the house. She has developed a pre-established method and order to do anything. Without following the routine through, nothing gets to be finished, and nor can she function with any comparative comfort. Nonetheless, once she starts on something now, she will continue to work till the job is completed.

Sometimes I hear the vacuum cleaner roaring in the middle of the night. For more than thirty year, this woman has been my wife.

I get a prescription from my wife and head to the clinic near the railway station. It is in three minutes riding distance. Atomman would not ride a “mummy’s bike” like mine. The wind is nice and cool as I pedal along. I hand the prescription to the pharmacist with the familiar face. The medicine is presented to me in a few minutes. Because I have been there so many times, the response feels like that of a vending machine. On

the way back, I stop by my local bakery and buy ham sandwiches, my wife's favorite. We have them for lunch, and I go along with her for groceries later that afternoon. We buy some daily necessities for our son and his family, who are returning from overseas job post.

Later that night, I slump in front of the computer again. The email has arrived.

'I heard you were looking for me. What can I do for you? Atomman Gimm.'

I check the email address attributed to his message, and it's been sent via his mobile telephone company's account. He may not be using his AOL account

anymore. I add a few lines to my former email to his AOL account and forward this to the new address. I write about the yearbook, about Worldman and I being high school classmates, and about Harvard Alumni Memorial Resigter. I quickly receive a short reply from Atomman.

'I am a younger brother of Worldman. He certainly did pass away in 1977. Is there anything I can do for you? Atomman.'

Just as I have reasoned, Atomman is Worldman's brother. Now two "man"s are connected. And the person who passed away at that unequivocally young

age was the Worldman I have known. I did not reject altogether the possibility that it might be a different person with the same name—not till I have received a decisive answer.

I have trouble articulating an immediate and pithy response to Atomman. I am confused over how best to express the question of how his brother died. Should I ask him or not? Finally, I decide to send an email stating thus:

‘You are his brother, as I’d deduced...I understand that it is very late in arriving, but please accept my condolences. I only

knew Worldman for a short time when we were young. I doubt that would qualify me to ask you this, but I wonder if you could tell me how your brother passed away. Of course, I ask this of you only if you do not mind. Your brother was a distinguished man. There must be a lot of people in Hawaii, who still remember him. I want to let you know that there is someone who seeks to live up to your brother's image across the ocean, too.'

I watch as the clock on the computer screen signified the arrival of a new day. I turn off the computer and retire to bed.

It is hard to imagine that Worldman, such a healthy sportsman that he was, would die from illness. It must have been because of an accident of some sort. I wonder what kind of accident it was. From my experience, America was—and is—such a globally-recognized car society, so it followed that it could be a car accident.

A vivid picture of a person from Hawaii, an island of eternal summer, driving a car on the east coast in the heavy snow, come to my mind.

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On the next day, I check my inbox, and find a reply from Atomman.

‘Thank you for your words of sympathy. Even now I still meet people who tell me that they used to be my brother’s classmates. For example, my wife’s dentist, whom you might know. He was in the same class as my brother in junior high school.

Worldman became mentally ill during his university days. He suffered for years and years after that, and took his own life in the end. It is very sad to see the life of a promising young man for whom I was so endeared, end in this way. My brother was only twenty-seven. It is

almost a lifetime ago. My children are reaching his age and I cannot help wishing their happiness. Atomman.'

I am taken aback by the unexpected cause of his death. This seems a most unlikely way of dying for the Worldman I remember. Unable to keep staring at the computer monitor, I swivel my desk chair toward the window. It is cloudy again today, and it looks like it is about to start raining at any time. The air appears crisp and lucid, probably because of the distinct lack of wind. I can view the surrounding mountains clearly around this basin. Why ever did

Worldman kill himself? The question continues going 'round and 'round in my head. I decide that I better compose a reply to Atomman. And I face the computer again.

'Even though it is a long time ago, it must be hard for you to remember the sad incident. I appreciate your kindness for opening up a private issue to someone like me, who is not directly related to him. I only found out about his death yesterday. It does not seem like such a long time ago and it will not leave my mind for a while.

Please find, attached, the scanned image of a photo from my yearbook. It is

Worldman's photo with his accompanying message to me.'

I decide to keep the question, "why did he...?" to myself. I would rather not excavate any deeper, for I do not desire to know that much. I shall leave the cause to my imagination. More importantly, the question must have meant more to Worldman's family than it ever might mean to me.

Atomman was trying to learn something from what had happened to his brother, and use what he was able to observe for good to raise his children. He

must have long been conscious to ensure that such a sad incident would not repeat in his later life. All the family members, too, must have tried to learn from it to locate something constructive or consoling that may assist in their later lives. The Gimms must have practiced what they've learned with unfaltering resolve over the length of these past thirty years. So I wish, at least in this way, that what had happened to Worldman can be interpreted as a valuable inheritance.

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“Shall we make a start?”

I hear my wife’s voice. We are about to go and pick up my son and his family from the airport. They are returning from a country, which I have seen so regularly reported in the news on TV for its mafia, drugs and kidnapping cartels. As an aging parent, I have been very worried about them living such a place. But the country is so far away that all I could do was learn to succumb to change and pray to God. I am feeling very relieved at their safe return. It is also our grandson’s first birthday today, and that inspires within us a dual happiness.

I unwind the car window a little on the highway. The wind is fresh and tropic from the advent of the rainy season.

“What did your bring?” I ask my wife, as she sits enthralled in the passenger seat, clutching a pale blue paper bag on her lap.

“It’s a stuffed toy of Anpan Man, the first birthday present for our grandson. It’s the first time we’ll see him, so we need to spoil him well!” says my wife, and she giggles a little before covering her mouth with her gloved hand.

“I see. You know how to pay close attention to detail.” I also laugh a little.

I think of Worldman's parents while steering the wheel. I must be about the same age as they were when they first lost their son. Knowing what state of mind Worldman was in is as inscrutable and as difficult as finding someone in the fog now, but I can imagine his parents' regret. For a moment, I think of my joy over the health and vitality of my children, but suppress the inclination to compare this to Worldman's parents. I favor appreciating the good fortune of our family in this moment, and feel happier for it.

It soothes like a trade wind. I think, catching the scent of tide in the air. I take

a deeper breath. My sentimental mood may linger a little longer, till I see the faces of my son and his family.

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