

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Man turns trauma into messages of **LOVE**

By Andrew Hamlin
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

He was forced into making drugs. He was forced into selling drugs. He was forced into sexual slavery as a small child. He grew up through horrors many people couldn't conceive of.

Maikaru Douangluxay-Cloud, sometimes known as Michael, allows all the above. It's all part of his story.

But he'd much rather be known, by any name, as someone who turned his life around, worked hard, and wants to spread peace, love, and diversity. Sometimes through card games. (More on that later.)

"Well, I was born into an unfortunate series of events," he states simply. He's half Japanese and half Native American, but his upbringing didn't allow him to celebrate either of his cultures. Forced into prostitution, he grew up without any semblance of normal life.

"I was forced to be a sex slave, as pedophiles obviously like boys and not men." He also manufactured crack, mixing baking powder and ammonia. This created a huge stench, like someone sweating weeks without a shower.

But even given his youth, and his trauma, he was smart, and looking for angles to work.

"I was about 8 or 9 when I approached them to be the manager of dealing crack,



Chi-Shiuan Hsieh (left) and Maikaru (right)

not making it," Maikaru explained. "My mother was doing a horrible job, always giving credit. But most of the time, [her customers] never paid her back. So I implemented a better system, and ended up making more in revenue than my mother did."

He felt bad for everyone around him, but he had to concentrate on his own survival. He knew that his youthful looks had an expiration date, and he feared for what came next when that happened. Fate

lent a kind hand: He was very small, and did not pass 5 feet tall until an unexpected growth spurt at 17.

He got out of that life at age 10. He doesn't feel comfortable saying exactly how he did that, or who held him in the first place.

"All I can say is they were an affluent type of people, who had strong ties to certain types of people, who could look the other way, while this was happening."

He studied in an accelerated program



Vicious Cats Card games by Maikaru

to compensate for his lack of formal schooling.

"I really enjoyed math in grade school, then eventually found my passion for storytelling."

Fate lent a hand again when he found a mentor, who directed him to the University of Washington. He majored in Visual Arts, and appreciated the multicultural aspect of the campus, complete with a fair number of people looking a fair amount like him. Campus life represented a safe space, where he could work out the darkness in his life.

"I had to prove I was more than my history, and I was determined to not become a statistic. It is very typical for a former trafficking survivor to return to a life of dealing, [prostitution], stealing."

Shortly before receiving his Bachelor

see **MAIKARU** on 9

KING COUNTY NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Sealed bids will be received for C01479C20, KC Parks Asphalt Paving and Concrete Work Order; by the King County Procurement and Payables Section, via email, at procurement.submittals@kingcounty.gov, until 1:30 PM on Sept. 22, 2020. Late bids will not be accepted. The public bid opening will only be conducted via Skype or telephone following the Bid Due Date and Time. See Invitation to Bid for details regarding the public bid opening.

There is a 5% minimum Apprentice Utilization Requirement.

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The work includes asphalt overlay, asphalt patching and repair, surfacing materials, crack sealing, pavement repair excavation including haul, grading and compaction of subgrade, pavement marking, concrete walkway, curbs, ADA ramps, chain link fence, signage, root barriers, root pruning/removal including base repair, bollards, wheel stops, erosion/water pollution control, and temporary traffic control.

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MAIKARU from 6

of Arts, he found work at Seattle's Art Wolfe Gallery. Here he met another important figure, a young filmmaker named Amanda Harryman.

It took time, but he eventually confided in Harryman about how he'd grown up. Later, after he'd left the job and started studying for his Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), she called him and asked if she could film his story.

The film runs seven minutes. Harryman had only five days to complete it. Maikaru narrated into the camera, but he also acted out scenes in his life, from behind a screen, a kind of sinister shadowplay.

He studied in between takes and ended up passing his GMAT. He's since earned two advanced degrees from Seattle Pacific University.



The seven-minute film, meanwhile, took on a life of its own.

"I was originally under the impression this film was to only be screened in Toronto and viewed by about 30 judges, then forgotten," Maikaru recalled. Then he learned the short film won acceptance to the Seattle International Film Festival.

"I remember being nervous in Toronto, knowing [the audience] was about to know some of my deepest, darkest secrets."

So he'd already been through the wringer once, when the film showed at SIFF, in the same downtown theater, AMC Pacific Place, where he'd enjoyed the Harry Potter movies.

The phone rang a few nights later, and he answered it to Harryman, jumping for joy. They'd won SIFF's prize for Best Documentary Short.

Maikaru kept moving forward, though. He'd designed and filmed a pilot TV show about virtual reality gaming, but that project sputtered to a halt when the virus hit. So he decided to design the game first, and try to sell that.

"Vicious Cats" involves House Cats prowling through their territory to find and eliminate the Vicious Cats, using a special deck of cards. But, it seems, either side can win, which adds to the fun.

The card game has a Kickstarter going for it. As of the week this article went to

press, he's raised roughly \$3,000 of the \$16,700 he needs to launch the game. He has roughly 20 days to get the rest of the money in pledges.

Maikaru acknowledges that his past will always be his past, but he refuses to be defined or limited by that.

He lives with his husband in the Seattle area. His future plans include masterminding web series, dramatic shows, and podcasts.

As he concluded, "It is my mission to increase diverse and inclusive narratives, across media." ■

To support Maikaru's "Vicious Cats" card game, visit kickstarter.com/projects/mainasty/vicious-cats-card-games.

Andrew can be reached at info@nwasianweekly.com.

MOMO from 1

Kleifgen, the wife-husband duo that owns and operates Momo, the decision to close up shop actually happened much later than anticipated.

Momo opened in the ID in November 2007. Named after the word for "peach" in Japanese, Momo offers clothes and accessories for men and women from international fashion hubs like Japan and France, as well as homegrown offerings from the Pacific Northwest. The boutique's interior design features aesthetics influenced by Hawaiian and Scandinavian cultures—an homage to Shiramizu and Kleifgen's respective upbringings. For Shiramizu (who's Japanese American) and Kleifgen (who's white), the store is a physical manifestation of their combined "hapa" or "Scandinavian" identity.

When the shop first opened, its location was seen as no man's land in the ID—there weren't many retail shops on that stretch of Jackson at the time, said Kleifgen, and many people questioned their decision to open a store there. Still, the duo viewed the location as an accessible one, and saw an opportunity to become and serve as a concierge for the ID.

"We entertain and engage with people from around Seattle and the world," said Shiramizu.

"We really do have an international flow of people come through—not just because of Momo, but because of the ID. We welcome visitors and share information about where to go. Momo acts like a gateway for the rest of the neighborhood."

She credits travel books and crowdsourcing sites like Yelp for informing out-of-town visitors about the shop, while local media and the ID itself brings in locals.

"This neighborhood's very engaging," said Kleifgen of the ID. "The community comes in, engages you, and

people ask if you'd like to get involved."

And get involved they did. Over the course of their 13-year run with Momo, the two were involved with several initiatives supporting the ID, including fundraiser and cultural events, community activism, serving on nonprofit boards, art selection for points of interest in the neighborhood, organizing the summer festival Hai! Japantown, and more.

When it came to community activism, it was important that they played an active role to represent the sub-neighborhood of Japantown in the ID.

When the City of Seattle wanted to add a streetcar to Jackson Street, ID shop owners were concerned about the potential disruption to their businesses. Kleifgen served as director of a community group that pushed back against the city's plans, and worked closely with engineers to help them understand the neighborhood's needs and concerns.

This led to Kleifgen's involvement with the decoration of streetcar stops and switch boxes in the ID. Kleifgen, who has a background in design, worked with the city as part of a subcommittee to decorate the neighborhood's switch boxes in a way that celebrated the various cultures of the ID, while ensuring the addition of them looked less garish. He also sourced artists to decorate them. The efforts resulted in four decorated switch boxes in the ID.

As a small business, it was also important to Kleifgen and Shiramizu to lift up and amplify the voices of fellow small businesses.

Shiramizu has long been a fan of local establishments in Japantown, including Maneki, Panama Hotel, and Tsukushinbo among many others. Because of her connections to local media, Shiramizu often leveraged coverage of Momo in Seattle Magazine to increase awareness of other businesses in Japantown. She noted that the success of these businesses isn't because of Momo—

rather, Momo served as a starting point to discover and frequent new businesses in the area.

She was also invited to sit on the boards for the Chinatown-International District Business Improvement Association and the City of Seattle's Small Business Advisory Council. Both groups focus on providing resources to small businesses to help them thrive, as well as advocating for public policy and planning issues. More recently, Shiramizu started a Facebook group for female-focused small businesses in Seattle. Representation across these small business-focused groups has forged connections not just across the ID, but also across the city.

Initially, Kleifgen and Shiramizu imagined Momo would stay open for 10 years before the two moved on to new pursuits. But their deep ties with the ID community and the city kept them open longer than they could've imagined.

Now, though, the two are ready to pivot to their next chapters in life. Kleifgen's ready for retirement—a "much deserved one that's been long time coming," said Shiramizu. As for Shiramizu, she plans to search for her next, big creative project in addition to spending more time with her elderly parents.

Although the shop's closure is a bittersweet one, the two expressed deep gratitude for the experiences and the relationships they've forged over the last decade.

"We're very lucky," said Shiramizu. "Our shop's tagline is, 'happy. lucky. life.' And I feel like we've really enjoyed that here. We've lived up to our tagline." ■

Momo will be open Fri.–Sun. from 12–5:00 p.m. until its closure on Sept. 30. For more information, visit momoseattle.com.

Vivian Nguyen can be reached at info@nwasianweekly.com.

SPORTS from 7

"Watching the continued genocide of Black people at the hand of the police is honestly making me sick to my stomach," wrote Osaka in the same post.

Her means of using her platform as a way to create discussion is one that many other sports and entertainment stars are doing. Osaka did not let her one-day protest end as she continued her entrance into the U.S. Open the following week. ■

Jason can be reached at info@nwasianweekly.com.

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