

## Magic of a Moment

By Isabella Parrotta

Days on the small island of St. Croix blend together like the warm colors of a sunset. Days are differentiated by dates, activities, and colors, but eventually blend into the big picture of the night sky. The seasons don't change; the natural warmth cradles you calmly and soothingly. You have a distinct feeling of happiness in your inner core. The sun sets for that day, and is expected to rise over the land, gently consuming the darkness, as it has always done.

Jan. 18, 2012, is one of those days I will never forget even one detail of – a conversation or feeling of scenery. The day started in my normal regimen, made perfect to my mind from years of unchanged practice. I woke up, thought about what I would do at school on this average Wednesday, got ready for the day, and waited for my brother and my mother to finish their regimens so we could go to school. I said goodbye to my brother and mother, and happily anticipated the outcomes of what I would learn and experience that day. I walked up the lane across from the front office, leaped over the puddle that always forms there after a rain, and up past the library, which reeked of mold from the latest shower. I stepped up the abnormally long concrete stairs lined by hibiscus plants to the upper school. I saw the light blue sky specked with sea foam clouds.

The same people, as usual, were sitting on the various benches, relaxing, talking, or scrounging for last minute homework. I made the left turn past the small bathrooms and went up the steep, short steps to my locker. That was the last moment of my life on St. Croix when I felt no doubt. The familiar embrace of bright colors, cool humidity, and the distinct smell of rainforest. It was a feeling so safe, justified, and righteous.

I saw a friend I had known since kindergarten walk towards me with a worried, sickly and scared look in her eyes. It was particularly uncharacteristic of her, considering she is to this day one of the most charismatic people I know. Her initial sign of discomfort caused an unsteady feeling in me.

She said in a faint and searching voice, "Isabella, do you know if the refinery is shutting down?" Thinking she was talking about an old press release from Hovensa, the oil refinery and main economical source for the island, saying that a part of the refinery's west area would be closed off, said "No. Only some of the west refinery is closing."

As she heard my statement, I saw relaxation return to her eyes.

"OK, good. I don't know why people are saying it's closing. They said it was on the radio this morning."

"I don't know why they would." I answered. "The refinery wouldn't shut down, it's too important to oil exports for the stateside people. Too important for the island."

The advisory bell rang and I sat in silence in the darkening French room contemplating this development. Listening to a croaking frog, watching a slender lizard escape into its wild home, and hearing the repetitive squeak of wet sneakers on tile. The murmur of people debating whether or not the rumor was true filled the air. By morning break, the murmurs became shrieks of disbelief.

Another friend, was surrounded by a cult of worried faces as she stated the facts.

"My dad texted me, he just got out of a board meeting. It's real. It's shutting down."

The buzzing mosquito sound caused by the rushed, wispy talk and the heavy humidity hanging in the air, eventually reached the main office. The bell for third period rang accompanied by a large boom of thunder.

The sky was silver now, a mix of strong sun and mother-of-pearl-colored clouds. As we entered the classroom our teacher said there would be an assembly in the pavilion. We all rushed to our destination to beat the rolling rain clouds, adding to the chaotic energy sweeping through our veins. A cold breeze sent shivers through the damp air.

As Mr. (Bill) Sinfield, the headmaster, walked with an exhausted expression on his face, the sky opened as though deeply stabbed. The tin roof came alive.

"We brought you here to close some rumors that you have all heard by now. It is confirmed that Hovensa is shutting operations. Don't worry though, your school tuition as been paid and the year should remain normal," he told us.

The rest of the assembly is vague to me. I am sure air continued flowing in in and out of my lungs, but the world lost a bit of its wonder for me. I seem to remember Mr. Sinfield coming to talk to me, to tell my parents he said hello and best wishes. That he was thinking of us. He tried wholeheartedly to stop the fear crouching in my mind.

The bus ride home was uncharacteristically quiet and alone. An unspoken law appeared that for this one day, silence would be observed to make the tears less noticeable.

The rest of the year brought spurts of happiness, but the future was blurry and seemingly unreal. Change is enigmatic that way. June 7 was the last day for too many Country Day School students. After the final awards assembly, reality sank in. Teachers and students were crying at

last goodbyes that were too soon, farewells that should have been reserved for senior year, not freshman, sophomore, or junior. Red eyes filled with sadness and faces with forced smiles became the norm. Hugs and last sweet memories of life once lived. The end of our era; our childhood of fierce sunshine and palm trees swaying on endless beaches.

On June 9, we left. Our friends drove us to the airport with an emotional goodbye. People I never thought I would see cry broke down in front of me. As we boarded the plane to Puerto Rico and then Miami, I took in my last memories of this place. My home. Its smell, the sun happily dancing on my face and surrounding my body. The fierce and emotionally stimulating blue sky and the deep green of tropical flora. I sat in my seat next to the window. As the momentum of the plane lifted us over this small land mass, I knew I would be forever grateful for the unique perspective it has bestowed on me.

As I hailed the Virgin Islands, emeralds of the sea, with coral sands and trade winds that bless this native land, I gave a last salute of loyalty, and pledged allegiance forever true. I let a few tears stroll down my face as I glimpsed at the last sight of my wondrous home. As I said goodbye.