

SESSION 1: SHOJU ROJIN'S TAMING THE BULL

The first session of the Taming the Bull program normally consists of an intake process. This is an opportunity for the client and therapist to determine both the program and relationship suitability. After completion of these first steps, you are invited to read the prologue for Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull.

PROLOGUE

THAD AND ALICIA

Tip tap tip, tap tip tap; Thad rolled his fingertips over the office counter in a purposefully irritating manner to get the school secretaries attention. Looking up, Mrs. Pernicky, flippantly sneered, "Well, if it isn't my old friend Mr. Thaddeus. I wondered whether you would make it through a whole day without being sent to the office."

Thad rolled his eyes in her direction causing her to send him a menacing glare.

"I guess I was wrong. What did you do now, Mr. Thaddeus?"

He offered his usual reply, "Look, it wasn't my fault. Mrs. Fletcher doesn't like me, so any chance she gets to throw me out of class she tells me to come here."

Mrs. Pernicky, looked at Thad over her thick fuchsia-pink rimmed eyeglasses and said, "I hardly think she sent you down to the office for no good reason. So what really happened?"

"I was just texting my friend when she *so* rudely interrupted me. I was just about to put my phone away but she told me I had to hand it over to her. I told her there's no way I'm handing over my phone ... that's all, and then she spazzed out and kicked me out of class. She's such an idiot! Then I shut that stupid door and that weak-ass glass broke. It's not my fault that this school is so cheap that it has crappy glass in the doors."

Mrs. Pernicky scowled, "Well I've heard this all before Thad. You might as well move permanently into the school office. I don't even know why you bother going to class; you always end up here anyway. And as per usual it sounds like you're not taking responsibility for what you've done. It's always someone else's fault isn't it? Seems like you can never admit what part you play in the problem."

Thad was gearing up for his argument when Pernicky pointed to the VP's office.

“Just wait there and try not to cause anymore trouble. Someone’s going to have to pay for that window and I suppose it’s your poor mother. Can’t you think about her for once? Geez if you were my kid...”

After mumbling to herself about discipline and teenagers, Mrs. Pernicky turned and called out to a girl who was hiding behind a big black filing cabinet.

“Oh, Alicia dear, please bring over a chair so that Mr. Thaddeus here can sit comfortably out of the way while he’s waiting.”

Peeking over the files she was sorting, Alicia mumbled a barely audible, “uh, ok.”

Dressed in loose fitting brown pants and an oversized shirt with what looked like an Anime character printed on it, Alicia hoisted a chair and brought it over to Thad who quickly grabbed it from her hands. In a single motion he flopped down and pulled out his cellphone. Staring into the screen with a furrowed brow he looked as though he had some important business to look after. As Alicia walked away he glanced up and thought, “She wouldn’t be half bad looking if she just wore some decent clothes. I guess she’s kinda pretty in a weird way.”

As Alicia nervously returned to her filing she thought, “Oh I hope he doesn’t talk to me.” Not talking to people was Alicia’s goal on a daily basis. She didn’t understand how to navigate all the social dynamics that were part of school life, especially in grade 11. The mean girls and mean guys, like Thad, seemed to appear at every turn through the maze of school corridors. Her constant anxiety about what they might say to her was an all-consuming torrent of “what ifs.” Alicia often thought about the “what ifs.” They outlined all the potential risks in her daily life and she took it upon herself to avoid everything that caused the “what ifs” to become a reality. Nevertheless, each “what if” would turn into it’s own self-fulfilling spiral of consequences.

“What if I don’t pass this test?”

Would turn into the avoidance of work till the last minute ensuing with a sleepless all-nighter of frantic studying that left her exhausted and near sick.

“What if people joke about me?”

Would turn into eating her lunch at home or missing it altogether just so she could avoid uncomfortable situations at the cafeteria and this also limited her chances at making any friends.

“What if it rains and I don’t have my umbrella? What if I say or do something wrong? What if? What if?”

The “what ifs” were an ongoing concern for Alicia and she pictured them outlined like a personal obstacle course just for her. Despite some attempts to “take chances” and “live life to the fullest,” one of the best ways for her to successfully maneuver through her obstacle course was to spend her spare class at the end of the day in the school office doing light filing for Mrs. Pernicky. Here she felt she could somehow control the “what ifs” and stack up community volunteer hours at the same time. Actually, she had already completed the required 40 hours in her first year. But Mrs. Pernicky kept Alicia on the job because she knew she was very anxious about all the students in the school and she wanted to give her a place of refuge. Outside of her classes and the school office, Alicia didn’t really take a chance

venturing into anything else except behind the safety and anonymity of her various social media sites. Her parents repeatedly told her to get off the screens and spend her time with “real flesh and blood friends”. But Alicia knew they couldn’t understand- she believed she did have real friends on line and it didn’t matter that she had never actually met them face to face. They were her friends and they were the only ones that understood her.

Interrupting her train of thought, Thad called out, “So you like that Japanese stuff?”

Burning with embarrassment, Alicia spun away from Thad and went back to filing hoping that he would leave her alone. Noticing her ambivalence, Thad slipped out of the chair and onto the floor proceeding to army crawl towards her. Mortified, Alicia looked up to see if Mrs. Pernicky was going to say anything, but the woman was distracted by her attempt to unhinge a piece of kale from her yellowing teeth with a pen. Deciding to abort her aimless mission with the files, Alicia turned on her heels and was about to walk away when Thad (who was still mid-army crawl) called out,

“I have that Japanese animation in some of my MMORPG,s (massively multiplayer online role playing games)”.

Alicia paused for a moment and then replied in a matter of fact tone of voice,

“Oh, you must be referring to the Anime character on my shirt. It’s really not the same as the animation in your video games. Anime is a specific art form, not just animation. Anime is a genre within itself, separate from mere animation. ”

Thad let out a loud sarcastic bark and then quickly looked over his shoulder to see if the still distracted Mrs. Pernicky heard. Naturally, he was still lying on the floor.

”Yah, sounds like you know a lot about *acne*- er um or whatever it’s called.”

Alicia was so excited to talk to someone about Anime, she missed Thad’s facetious tone and confidently resumed her monologue.

“I’ve been studying Anime since I was in grade two. I know everything there is to know about it.”

Just trying to kill the time off his detention Thad chimed back,

“Oh yah, what else?”

Pleasantly surprised, Alicia thought about all the facts she had cultivated over the years about Anime, Japanese art and culture. As she began to tell Thad about the early history of Anime she felt unusually comfortable. This young lady rarely spoke to others in person, but as she eagerly relayed the intricate details, Thad found himself looking at her with a curious attraction. No one had ever talked to him so plainly before. No sarcasm in her voice, no disdain. She was just talking to him and that was all. She was more beautiful than he at first thought.

They continued their conversation for an hour without Mrs. Pernicky interrupting. She had noticed the two talking earlier and was going to stop them, but Alicia never talked to anyone and Thad never sat still. The scene was a rarity and decidedly uninterrupted. Even still, after the hour-long chatter about anime, Pernicky found herself mildly irritated and ready to go home to her husband Stan and their fat tabby named Matilda.

“Okay you two, it’s time to clear out!”

“Yes Mrs. Pernicky.”

Looking slightly dismayed, Alicia turned back to Thad and quickly added,

“I could bring some anime artwork tomorrow to show you?”

“Sure,” Thad gave her a genuine smile.

“That would be great!”

Finally at her wits end with what she perceived to be the burgeoning of absurd young love Mrs. Pernicky called out to Thad,

“Enough socializing Thaddeus, time to go home and explain yourself to your mother! No doubt, Alicia and I will be seeing you tomorrow anyway.”

“Yep, sure. Whatever you say Miss,” and with that final comment Thad kicked the door open and left the office.

As Alicia, watched him leave, she thought, “he’s kind of nice I guess,” and then a burst of self doubt overcame her,

“*What if he thinks I’m weird?*”

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Thad opened the door to his house to see his mother just getting off the phone with the school’s Vice Principal. She didn’t know what to do with Thad. She felt helpless in the face of his poor attitude, his aggressive temper, his obsession with his cell phone and videogames and now the broken window. This call from the Vice Principal informing her that she had to pay for the broken window was the last straw. Fighting back her frustrated tears she slammed down the phone and turned towards Thad.

“Your temper is going to land you in jail some day and it will be no ones fault but your own. Do you know that?”

Thad shrugged his shoulders and rolled his eyes.

“Don’t you roll those damn...” She stopped herself mid-sentence and changed her mind.

“Thad, I’ve got plans for you this summer. Grandpa is ready for you to come to his place. You won’t be getting into any trouble and maybe you’ll learn something down there.” Thad’s eyes widened and his mouth went dry as he remembered the time he spent as a youngster in that boring house with his old grandfather.

“NO WAY Ma! The old man doesn’t do anything but watch TV. There is no Internet access, no way to play my video games. No way I’m going down there!”

Thad’s mom gave him a cold stare and thought about all the money she was about to dish out on repairing the window. In some ways she was slightly relieved at the prospect of sending Thad to live with her father.

“You lost your ability to choose what you’ll do this summer when you broke that window. Grandpa will meet you at the bus station in South Carolina next week and that’s the final word.”

Thad watched his mom stomp off and slam the door to her bedroom. He could hear her turning up the volume on the TV and forcing a laugh at the program. His summer had been decided for him. First he felt an anxious tingling sensation flow over him, followed by heat, sweat and then all he could see was red. The next

thing he knew, he was pulling his foot out of the drywall he had just kicked. Still burning with anger he was not yet finished with his destructive rampage. Running down the hall to the front door he drove his foot through the screen and began cursing at a woman who was innocently passing by the house. "Ya, what are you looking at?" Through the rage he could hear the muffled sound of his mom screaming,

"Thad! Stop! Thad don't you Dare! Stop!"

But the damage was done, and just like all the other times, the rage left Thad once more. Walking away to his room he mumbled, "I'm not going to Grandpa's place."

Summer vacation came and Thad was banished from his Toronto home to a small rural community in South Carolina. Thad was positive he would die of boredom in this small community that catered to veterans. The sound of southern drawls, squeaky wheel chairs, and walking canes, reverberated throughout the whole pathetic community. Everyone seemed as if they were just waiting to die. And even if there were anyone his age they were sure to be just a backward country hick and he had no interest in anyone like that.

The situation could have been a lot more interesting. His mom had told him once that his grandfather was one of the first American troops to accompany General MacArthur after the conflict with the Japanese in World War II. He was there when Emperor Hirohito and General MacArthur signed the peace agreement that made clear the conditions of surrender. Apparently it was from that point on that Thad's grandfather was stationed in Japan. Thad's mom said that this event was a pretty significant moment in world peace after the war, but unfortunately Thad's grandfather never mentioned this compelling history. The old man refused to discuss the matter. Thad wondered, "If it was so significant why didn't Gramps ever talk about it with me?"

Back at Alicia's place her mom and dad made the final arrangements to send her off to camp for the whole summer. They told her time and again to get off the computer and out of the house to visit some friends, but Alicia preferred to be home with her anime and on-line friends of different ages in foreign countries. Kids at her school were much too unpredictable and most of the time she was left crying and hating herself whenever she had to be in a group or was forced to socialize with people she didn't know. It seemed like her only reliable friend at school was worry. She could depend on worry to be there and it was usually right on the mark. Last year Alicia found herself worrying all year about being sent to camp and when she finally got there she was stuck in a cabin with a group of mean girls. They didn't care at all about Anime and she didn't understand why they were so enthused with doing their hair, nails, make-up and cruelly gossiping about each other. She thought they were all just boy crazy. Nothing like her on-line anime communication groups. Their discussions were so much more intelligent and interesting than all of those other frivolities cabin mates liked to talk about. But then again, she did remember that Thad guy being kind of interesting. He reminded her of one of her anime characters- a rough n' tumble troublemaker with wild spikey hair. An anti-hero that falls in love

with the homely girl that nobody knows or cares about, but who secretly possesses paranormal powers that could save their entire school from an interplanetary catastrophe of some sort. While Alicia daydreamed a smile started to reveal itself on her face.

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The night before and the bus ride up to camp filled Alicia with fear and anxiety. No Internet, no cell phone, no connection with her on-line friends. How was she going to navigate this off line experience? She felt like she couldn't breathe. She felt like she needed to runaway from the bus, but she was already too paralyzed with fear to make a move. Sitting on the bus by herself quietly struggling to breathe, the others kids met each other and made friends all around her.

After the first few days Alicia realized that these girls were not much different than last year's cabin mates. Hair, nails, make up and boys were all they ever talked about. No one was really interested in Anime. So Alicia made her pitch to the counselors to let her volunteer in the office. She arranged to make a computer program for the interpretive center highlighting all the animals that can be found in the wilderness surrounding the camp. The camp counselors thought it was a wonderful idea. They remembered all too well the anxiety attacks Alicia had last summer on a daily basis. They figured by keeping her in the office, she wouldn't be so anxious, she'd blend into the woodwork and there would be no trouble with her for the whole summer. A proposition that suited Alicia just fine, even though she knew it really wasn't in line with her goals to be more social. She did however think about that boy Thad and wondered what kind of trouble he was getting into this summer. Alicia found herself smiling just thinking about him. This was a confusing experience. She never felt that way about anyone before.

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"Hey Gramps. Gramps? Hey Gramps-man? Wanna do something?"

Thad attempted in vain to get his grandfathers attention, but the 90-year-old veteran was secured to the TV as if it was a respirator and his life depended on it. The only signs of life from the old man were a few farts muffled by an old leather chair and the occasional grunts and begrudging shrugs in Thad's direction. Boredom, heat and old man shows. Thad felt trapped in what seemed like the middle of nowhere. South Carolina was indeed beautiful, but his grandfather's house was too far from town to walk and his grandfather could no longer drive a car. With nothing to do and nowhere to go, Thad felt like he would fade away with boredom by the end of the summer. Anger welled up, but he had no one or place to direct his frustration. He vowed vengeance; he'd make everyone pay for this back in Toronto and if that meant jail time then so be it.

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With one-week left in his so-called exile, Thad woke up in the old South Carolinian house, dreading another day of boredom in the sleepy little community. Maybe if he caused some trouble his grandfather would send him back to Toronto just a little sooner. Lying in bed and staring up at the ceiling, Thad had no choice it seemed but to reflect on his life and how he ended up spending the whole summer at his grandfathers- away from his video games, his friends and all the action back home.

“This is like house arrest,” he thought to himself. “Without any of the perks of committing the crime.”

Thad could feel himself spiraling into a rage. He was almost comforted by the sudden familiarity of his own emotions, his life sucked and this realization provided justification for annihilation. Jumping off the bed and ripping open his bedroom door, Thad made his way towards the attic where he hoped to find something to get into.

Moving slowly up the stairs to the attic Thad began to experience the blistering heat from the early morning sun. It was no wonder he hadn't made this exploration before. The heat was unbearable. Opening the hatch he entered what seemed like another world in another time. His grandfather's world of photos, old furniture and clothing, endless books and nick knacks galore. Thad rummaged through the antiques while thoughtlessly muttering to himself, “Junk, junk, more junk.”

Opening a chest, he discovered his grandfather's military uniform, hat, a few medals and some old pictures of the company he fought with in the war. Thad daydreamed for a moment about what it would have been like to fight in the war. What would it be like to walk onto Japanese soil after the brutal destruction left by the atomic bombs?

Tucked in a corner something carefully concealed with a white sheet caught his attention. The anticipation of what lay beneath the cloth amounted to more excitement than he had all summer long, but as he unveiled the object he realized he'd hit the ultimate jackpot.

“Oh my gawd, a real Katana!”

With wide eyes Thad exclaimed, “Is this seriously an actual Samurai Katana?”

Thad had become familiar with swords and the ancient Japanese Samurai warriors from his video games and TV shows. He especially liked the show that simulated pairing up ancient warriors to dual and hypothesizing who would actually win a battle to the death based on weaponry and skill. His favorite one was when the samurai fought the Scottish highlander.

“The samurai would make minced meat out of the Scott with the Katana,” Thad would argue with his friends back home.

“That highlander wouldn't stand a chance! Not a chance, no way!”

Thad took a deep breath, picked the sword up with trembling hands. He could not believe his eyes. Such magnificence! He had never seen something as beautiful, deadly and spectacular as this! A few Japanese characters were engraved on the dark black casing, most likely the name of the owner he thought. Rubbing his fingers over the engraving for a short moment, he fumbled to unsheathe the

sword. Giving the handle another strong pull, a shiny blade of razor sharp steel revealed itself.

“Oooh Man! I can’t believe this! A real freakin’ samurai sword!”

Thad swung the sword back and forth and then with a stern and noble face bowed to the imaginary highlander and challenged him to a duel to the death. Sweat beaded off his nose as he slashed, thrust and stabbed with the ominous blade of death. Cutting through the air he felt the power of wielding this handsome and lethal weapon. Slash, thrust, stab, spin and jump. Thad tried to mimic all the sword moves he had seen in his videogames. Musing to himself, Thad wondered how it felt to use the sword in battle, “It’s probably cut down a hundred men! Or two hundred! Samurai’s are so badass!”

Slash, thrust, spin, duck, parry, jump, slash, thrust, parry, fighting stance, Attack! Attack! Attack!

Exhausted from the imaginary dual, Thad flopped onto the dusty steaming hot attic floor with a tremendous sense of satisfaction.

After catching his breath he frantically cleared away some of the other dust coverings to look for other treasures. Peeling one sheet cover away revealed a samurai helmet and a full compliment of armor. An eerie feeling came over him. It was as if he had been transported by time machine to 17th century Japan.

“Man, how did Gramps get this stuff?” He thought out loud, out of breath with a pounding heart.

Clearing away one more dust covering he revealed a very old book with a picture of a bull and a small man on it. Thad picked up the book carefully recognizing it’s frail and vulnerable state. Thad, had a strange and prophetic feeling that this book was important, perhaps even more important than the sword and armor. He carefully opened the book. It was full of Japanese writings and simple paintings of the same little man and the bull. It was strangely beautiful and kind of scary at the same time. The book appeared so simple yet gave off a feeling of power and importance. Thad was not usually drawn to detail with other things, but he took in the strong emotion coming from the man and the bull and he could not help but be curious about the relationship between them.

Papers started to slide out of its side while he carefully turned the pages. The sheets had neat English writing and were not part of the book. Thad picked up the first sheet that had fallen and read it out loud, “Shoju Rojin’s Taming the Bull.” It must have been an English translation of the Japanese book. Leafing through the transcript Thad was delighted to see that for every page of Japanese writing was a loose page of English translations.

“Huh, it must be a training manual on how to tame wild bulls. I bet Alicia would be interested in something like this... She’s really into Japanese art and stuff.” Thad closed the book, he began to feel dizzy and a little sick. The room started to spin as dusty floorboards rushed to meet his face...

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Thad woke up drenched in sweat clutching the book in his hand. He looked around wondering what had happened and where he was. He must have passed out from the heat. Then it all came back to him, the sword, the armor and of course the bull training book. He got up still a bit disoriented and crawled to the hatch and out of the heat-drenched attic. The air hit him like a welcomed splash from a cool pool on a hot summer's day. Thad went to his room and thought about how he was going to ask his very secretive and prickly grandfather about the sword, the armor and the book, "Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull." Where did all this come from anyway? Who did the translation? How did they get it? What's the story behind all this?

Thad went to the kitchen and got himself a soda and then approached his grandfather while he was watching TV.

"Gramps, can I ask you a question?"

"After my shows," grumbled the old man.

So Thad pulled up a chair and waited. An hour went by and then two.

"Gramps, I really need to ask you a few questions? Gramps? Grandpa?"

Thad quickly swung round to face his grandfather sitting slumped in the chair. His Grandfather's eyes were closed and he wasn't moving. Had he died before Thad could ask him about the sword and the book? Would this be a mystery forever?

"Grandpa! Grandpa! Are you Ok? Gramps!" Silence and then a great big snore trumpeted from his grandfather. He had just fallen asleep.

"Ugh, silly old guy, what do I do now?"

Pacing the carpeted floor Thad resumed his wait for two more hours.

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It was dinnertime and Thad was making some mac and cheese for them to eat. This was their staple meal since Thad didn't like anything else, and his grandfather was clearly unaccustomed to making elaborate meals for himself.

"Gramps, time to eat!"

Thad's Grandpa turned the corner to the kitchen and sat down at the table and began eating. Thad carefully brought a jug of water and just poured a glass for his grandfather with out making an offer.

They ate in silence as per usual. Thad got up his nerve and finally said, "Gramps- uh, I was up in the attic today and-"

His grandfather interrupted, "who gave you permission to go up there and mess up my things?"

"Sorry Gramps, I just was sort of bored and I just found myself ...er..."

"That's my private business," snapped his grandfather as he slammed his spoon on the table.

"You ain't got no business up there boy!" A piece of macaroni clung to his grandfather's jowls, threatening to fall with each of the old man's angry spasms, but he had made himself clear.

"Uhh...Sorry Gramps, but I found something. Something really special I think," Wishing he'd never said anything, Thad found himself staring into his bowl of macaroni.

“What did you find Thad? What kind of trouble are you digging up now?”

“I found a samurai sword and a book called, “Shoju Rojin’s Taming the Bull,” mumbled Thad hoping his grandfather might show some hint of forgiveness and interest. But, Thad’s grandfather only shook his head and said,

“You ought not have gone up there Thad. That’s none of your business son. That’s a past I would rather forget.”

“But Gramps where did you get this stuff?” Thad begged.

“Its not something I’m proud of...All that should of gone back to Japan and in a museum or something long ago. I’ve been a stubborn old fool holding on to what wasn’t mine. Now I’m too damn old to do anything about it.”

Gramps looked tired, but less angry as he pushed himself away from the table, like he was trying to push back the memories. Without understanding his grandfather’s ambivalence Thad continued to inquire, “Gramps... how did you get all of this?”

Thad’s grandfather grumbled and then remained silent. After a short while Thad’s grandfather pulled himself back towards the table and hesitantly started to reveal the story as though it might be the last time and only time in his life he would ever mention it.

“Well ya see, we were the first to be stationed in Japan shortly after the Japanese surrendered. The terms of surrender were clear; no martial arts were to be taught with the exception of something or other...Aikido I think. All references to the samurai class were outlawed in schools and business. All weapons were outlawed and this included swords and other weapons of combat no matter how important they may have been to the Japanese. Japan was a “free for all” for us American troops. We took all we could from folk’s homes...some for trade and sometimes we just took what we wanted. The Japanese were starving after the war, their country was in a shambles and we just did whatever. I’m not proud of it son, not proud of it at all, but it was war.”

“My buddy and I were stationed outside of Kyoto. Kyoto wasn’t bombed because of all them temples they have around there. Most of all them antiques were still there and in real good condition. Our company was in charge of securing the area and protecting these antiquities from looters. You know, investigating leads where resistance groups and war criminals may have been harboring, distributing propaganda and collecting weapons and any other contraband in civilian possession. Why, we tore through everyone’s home looking for this stuff but we also picked up things for ourselves like jewelry, gold, silver, food rations, - whatever we could get our hands on. Ya know son, as far as I was concerned the Japanese were still the enemy. They were in our debt for the loss of American lives. I felt I could take whatever I wanted. In those days, I thought them Japanese owed us at least that much.”

Thad’s grandfather paused and looked around. “Ok that’s all. That’s all Thad. There’s nuthin’ left to know.”

“But Gramps how did you get all this stuff?” cried Thad. Thad’s grandfather turned away.

“There’s nuthin’ left to say son!”

“But Gramps! Please! I don’t ask for much from you ever, but this is important!”

Thad’s grandfather squirmed in his seat, looking like he was about to get angry again, but then sighing deeply he slumped his shoulders in resignation.

“Alright, alright. When I’m dead an’ gone, don’t say I never did nuthin’ for ya. One day we came across one of them there Japanese family shrines hidden behind a false wall in a civilian house. The sword, the armour and the book were found there. We knew the stuff must have been old and valuable, so we gathered up the contraband and started to leave the house, when the old man of the house, I guess it was the grandfather jumped at me trying to get his hands on the book. Well, I swatted him away and the lady of the house came grabbing after me. My buddy peeled her off and she dropped to the floor in hysterics. They all started wailing and crying like we had just killed someone or somethin. They begged us to give back the armor and the book knowing full well we couldn’t leave the sword. But there wasn’t going to be no way we were going to leave anything, not a chance. We got out of that house and looked at each other like we knew we had just come into something big, the jackpot, ya know; our payment for the war. Like usual, we split up the contraband for the day. Some for me, some for my buddy and of course we gave Uncle Sam his fair share. I took the sword and the armour and my buddy being an egghead, took the book.”

“Well now, two weeks later we were given orders to keep on the look out while making inspections for a very special book with a little man and a bull on the front cover. We were told it belonged to a big shot man from Kyoto of that there samurai lineage, but they couldn’t find where his house was because the Japanese destroyed the census information to protect the families of their important military strategists. This guy was red flagged because he possessed weaponry and combat intelligence contained in what looked like family heirlooms. We were told a Katana, armor and a book called, “Shoju Rojin’s Taming the Bull” were kept in a shrine inside his home, but that this shrine hadn’t been found by anyone and it was suspected that it had been hidden in some way either by a false floor or wall. So, our company was informed by the U.S intelligence agency that the book was of utmost importance because it was a centuries old training guide for the samurai warrior class system. General MacArthur was most concerned about this Taming the Bull training book. Ya know, he felt it was the key to understanding Japanese war strategy and this was an important piece of intelligence for the American army. Our orders were to confiscate the sword, the armor and most importantly, “Shoju Rojin’s Taming the Bull.”

“Gawd, ya know we almost fell off our chairs in the briefing area that morning knowing that we already had what they were looking for. We were too ascaerd to say anything son, but we also didn’t want to give up our jackpot. As far as stealing from Uncle Sam, well, we felt we’d been good soldiers and we just wanted a little payback for our efforts. We hoped we could pawn off some of the stuff someday and get rich. We convinced ourselves that the army would have just squandered it all, or even destroyed ‘em. So we were actually doing everyone a favor by keeping them for ourselves. We knew the risks. If we had been caught we would

have played dumb, but we still might have been thrown in the stockade, maybe even court marshaled. My buddy and I never spoke of it again and by the year's end I had transferred and was stationed in the Philippines where I spent 4 years until coming back home."

"When I finally came home I brought along the sword and armour, but I had changed. The war was no longer fresh and I could feel myself becoming a human being again. Every time I looked at the sword and armor, my trophies of war, I could still hear that Japanese family crying out for their stolen family heirlooms as if they lost three of their dear honored family members. It got so bad, I couldn't look at 'em anymore. They are the reminders of all my sins boy. So I placed them in the attic and never pawned them as a punishment to myself and I haven't seen 'em since. "

Thad's grandfather shut his eyes and looked like he was sleeping. "But Gramps, why didn't you just send them back anonymously?" Asked Thad.

"I know, I know," said Gramps.

"Truthfully boy, I couldn't take the chance. I am a respected man in this community. When I came home to this town I was given a hero's welcome. I didn't want anyone to know they had been stolen and I didn't want to be arrested by the army and court marshaled for stealing classified government property. It was best to just keep it all in the attic and to forget about it." Thad paused and took in all that had been said. But something didn't make sense.

"How'd you get the book gramps?" asked Thad. "Oh well, twenty years ago my old war buddy showed up at the door. He was sick and dying of cancer. He brought me 'Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull' because he felt it should be with the sword and armour and he made me promise that I return all of them to a Japanese museum as soon as possible. He wasn't the least bit surprised that I hadn't pawned it all. He couldn't get their cries out of his head either and he started to have a heavy heart cause we had taken those precious belongings from them folks. So he spent his money to get the book translated by an English fella who'd grown up in Japan and spoke real good Japanese. My buddy told me the book was of great importance and indeed priceless. But, by the time he got it translated he already got the cancer. He said it was a training manual for the samurai class taught by a Zen monk named Shoju Rojin. But it's content was not strategic warfare, like General Macarthur had thought, but some sort of training for the warrior on how to live a life of honor, integrity, courage and what not."

"He discovered that the book has really nothing to do with taming bulls. Actually, it's some kinda training metaphor to help folks tame and manage their own wild emotions and difficult behaviours. I'll never forget what my buddy said son, and it scared me. Just a little too strange ya know for me to take. He said, 'Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull is some sort of training metaphor for living a balanced life with presence and loving-kindness'. "What's this loving kindness stuff anyway? Aw, its all just phooey"! Gramps complained. "Well, my buddy had since read it through and did the exercises contained in it. He said his life had been transformed and for the better and he was ready to die in peace thanks to the wisdom of this book. He sounded like some sorta born again Christian, but was talkin about this foreign book on taming the bull."

“I didn’t know what to say. At first I wanted to kick him off my porch. How dare he bring more stolen goods into my home implicating me further? All that nonsense about a balanced life and loving kindness. Why, I was just trying to live my life and let the past be the past. And to think he was going to leave me with the responsibility of getting it back to Japan somehow. I was right angry son, but I thanked him cause I didn’t want him to think I was ungrateful. After all, we had been through a lot in the war and he was dying. He had come all the way from California to give me this book and even ignored the protests from his children to just let be and stay home. He died the next day in this very house. Leaving me with the book and no choice but to keep it or find a way for it to be returned to Japan. I was angry and ashamed at the same time.”

“I know now that he just wanted me to read it, hoping that it would somehow give me the same strength and peace of mind it had done for him. I couldn’t deal with it Thaddeus. I don’t want to search my soul for some sort of redemption. At the time I felt I was too old to change and I’m not any younger today. So, I just put it in the attic with the sword and armour. I’m just an old man and that was a long time ago. Your grandfather’s a coward son. I’m not proud of it, but I don’t want the change it coulda brought to my life. I’m stuck in my ways. Ya can’t teach an old dog new tricks ya know.”

Gramps paused and then continued, “So, now you know what no one else alive knows about me; not even your mother. I’m not proud of it Thaddeus so don’t be shooting your mouth off. Just let this be our secret. Your mother is not to know ya hear? You understand”?

Thad, nodded as if conceding defeat. Gramps cleared his throat, “So, enough of this talk then. Clean up these dishes. After you’ve cleaned up here, you can watch some TV with me.”

“But Gramps, can we read it together? And if you don’t want to read it, can I borrow it?” Thad pleaded with his grandfather.

“There ain’t going to be no reading of it and sure as heck it ain’t going nowhere.” Thad’s grandpa shook his head with his arms crossed tight.

“But Gramps!”

“No, ‘but Gramps’ boy! Forget about it! Enough said. I have my shows to attend.” And with that Thad’s grandfather went back to his shows and never spoke to Thad about the sword, the armour or the book Shoji Rojin’s Taming the Bull ever again.

The summer rolled out and Gramps waved good-bye to Thad at the bus station with a tear in his eye and a gruff command, “Son, stop being a pain in the arse to your mother.”

As the bus pulled away, Thad had that prophetic feeling again. This would be the last time he’d see his grandfather alive.

*

After a long trip back to Toronto, Thad arrived home and went straight to his room. The Toronto temperature was already cool and the smell of school was in the

air. Thad daydreamed about the samurai sword and armour. He regretted not reading, "Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull" before speaking with his grandfather that day. At least then he could have had the knowledge that transformed and gave peace to his army buddy so many years ago. Maybe it could have helped Thad feel better about himself or have taught him honor, courage and integrity, and even help him learn something about that loving kindness stuff. Perhaps he wouldn't get into so much trouble and instead be able to do what he needs to do to be a successful man some day. Thad felt the loss of a missed opportunity. It was just one more thing to regret it seemed, just like his grandfather felt. What now would become of those stolen treasures? How would Gramp's ill-gotten gains ever be returned to Japan? Was he going to end up like his grandfather, a recluse, passing his time in front of a screen so he doesn't have to think about all the missed opportunities and all the regrets of his life?

*

Fourth period English class didn't go so well for the start of the year. Thad was caught on his phone sending inappropriate memes to his buddies. When asked what was so funny he told the teacher it was her face. Finding himself back in the office with Mrs. Pernicky once again, he sat by the Vice Principal's office waiting for the usual disappointed look and useless lecture from the V.P. He was hoping Alicia would be filing so he could tell her about the samurai sword and the book, but she was not there and he felt a sense of loss all over again.

"Maybe she moved away, he thought. Maybe I've lost my chance to get to know her too."

Time went by slowly before Mrs. Pernicky called out sarcastically, "Ok Thad, you're done. See you tomorrow!"

Thad got up, and as he was leaving he bumped straight into Alicia rushing in through the door. Alicia laughed, "I was wondering if I was going to find you here. Welcome back!"

They both talked enthusiastically barely stopping for a breath. Alicia told Thad about working in the interpretative center at camp for the summer and Thad listened patiently noticing the way she smiled every time she spoke about creating the computer program database for all the campsite wildlife.

Alicia's "what ifs" surfaced when she was talking to Thad.

"What if he really doesn't like me? What if he's a mean guy just pretending to be nice? "What if? What if? What if?"

And then she blurted out loud, "I thought about you Thad."

Blushing, she immediately corrected herself, " Oh I shouldn't have said anything. You probably think I'm an idiot."

"No, no, not at all," Thad said in part to console her and in part to stroke his own ego. "Actually... I thought about you too."

Then Thad began to tell her all about the samurai artifacts and the book, "Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull." Alicia was fascinated and disappointed all at the same time.

“I would’ve loved to read that book. It sounds special. And potentially helpful...”

Thinking to herself Alicia wondered if the book could have helped her be less shy and manage her “what ifs.”

“Ya, I know what you mean... It looked super cool. I feel like I needed it.” said Thad.

They looked in each other’s eyes and both realized that they were two people with troubles that had found each other. Now, just maybe, they could give each other some support. Thad and Alicia spent hours telling each other about their summer and then made their way to their homes for dinner.

Thad was humming a tune as he pushed open the door to find his mother crying. She looked up and said, “Grandpa died last night Thad. Grandpa’s gone.”

*

One month later...

Thad’s mom arrived home from South Carolina exhausted. As the executor, she had spent the past weeks settling all of her father’s affairs. She told Thad that the will had been reviewed, but there wasn’t much left after settling some of Grandpa’s debts, burial and tombstone costs. Arrangements had to be made quickly to sell the house once all of the belongings were auctioned off in an estate sale. Thad cried, “Oh no Mom! The Attic! The samurai sword, the armour and the book! It can’t be auctioned, they’re priceless!”

Thad’s heart sank. Why wasn’t he more convincing with his grandfather? He should have taken the book and ran with it. His mother looked at him and smiled, “Oh don’t worry about that, your grandfather’s will didn’t lack any detail when it came to things for me to do. The will actually directed me to hand deliver, the sword and armor to the Japanese Consulate in Virginia on my way back from South Carolina. These items were only included in the will four weeks ago. I guess Grandpa knew I would have to take the bus through Virginia on the way back from South Carolina anyway so he chose that consulate. They took me right away when they heard what it was concerning. The Japanese ambassador said that the sword and armor were at least 400 years old and worth a great deal of money, but its significance to the Japanese people was priceless. He assured me that the artifacts would be tagged and registered and he would personally appoint his assistant to investigate the name on the Katana and track down the rightful owners of these lost family heirlooms.”

She paused as fresh tears began to streak her face.

“It was the first time I’d heard of that samurai sword and all the other stuff...It was in the attic this whole time. How did he ever end up with this family’s property? He was such a strange, stubborn, secretive man. I never did understand him and now he’s gone,”

Thad, paused and said, “OK, Ma, what about Shoju Rojin’s Taming the Bull? What happened to Shoju Rojin’s Taming the Bull?”

Sitting on the edge of his chair, Thad felt his heart pounding in anticipation. His mother replied, "Whats a shojo mojo bull? A what? I don't know what you are talking about Thad. I don't know anything about that. Whatever it is, its already been auctioned or gone to the trash."

Thad gulped and felt sick to his stomach. He felt there was no need to ask anything else as he began to walk to his room, with his head hung in defeat.

"This is a crappy ending to the story," Thad said out loud. The book and all its valuable contents were probably in a South Carolinian dump. Then he hit the wall with his fist.

"Don't start Thad! Calm down and don't be so dramatic!"

Thad felt the heat and the rage building and he screamed, "Life freakin sucks!"

"Thad calm down! Just calm down and don't you dare break anything! Your grandfather left you something."

Thad immediately paused. Turning around he saw his mom looking through her suitcase.

"Now where is it? I'm sure I put it in this suitcase. Oh my, did I leave it there. Oh, I hope not. I'm really so forgetful. Now where did I put that thing?"

"MA! You're driving me nuts!"

"Um, Oh here it is. I'm sorry honey, it's just an old book, but Grandpa stated specifically in his will that it was meant for you and no-one else."

Thad ran toward her and grabbed the book from her hands. He could not believe his eyes. He was holding, "Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull." It was here in Toronto safe and sound.

*

That night, Thad texted Alicia to let her know about the book. They agreed that after school they would make the commitment to start and work on it as long as it takes to finish the ancient training manual together.

The next day Alicia and Thad examined the front cover and then opened to the first page with awe and anticipation.

And so this begins the training program **Shoju Rojin's Taming the Bull**

Taming the Bull Program
Code of Conduct for Group Training

Safety is the first priority: The Therapist/Instructor will determine any risk to students and will take the appropriate action necessary to ensure safety.

The Student Shall:

Encourage and support an environment of mutual respect
Arrive on time and prepared for the session
Not wear shoes in training space (dojo)
Not gossip about or put down others
Not fight or intentionally harm others
Not fight with peers
Not fight with family members

Attention Please:

Use of any martial art techniques to harm another person will be seriously reprimanded and may result in your removal from the program.

Declaration

I understand that I am not permitted to use my martial art self defense skills without my instructor being present. This means, I will not spar with friends or acquaintances nor shall I engage in any fighting activities using the skills I have acquired in this program.

This code of conduct has been explained to me and I understand them. I agree to behave in accordance with this code of conduct.

Name Printed

Signature

Date