

## Michelle's Narrative Bio

I was born and raised in Hawaii, the oldest of 3 daughters. I spent much of my childhood riding my bike up and down our neighborhood street, playing kickball and dodge ball, hopscotch and Chinese jump rope, and during quieter moments, sketching our cat Muffin. Playing soccer and going to the beach were my favorite pastimes as a teenager.

After graduating from high school, I attended the University of Hawaii. I loved my art history, speech, and expository writing classes, so (of course!) I majored in psychology. It wasn't until I heard Dr. O'Donnell speak about empowerment and social support that I became passionate about my major! I applied and was accepted into the psychology graduate program at DePaul University. Three months after my college graduation, I departed for the mainland where I spent the next 19 years of my life.

My graduate education afforded me many opportunities to practice my classroom learning in the real world as a therapist, program evaluator, and substance abuse prevention specialist. Living in the big city was the first time I really pushed myself out of my comfort zone, without the daily support of family and the familiarity of surroundings. It was scary and exciting!

Without consciously knowing so, I continued putting myself in unfamiliar situations where I was the minority because of my gender, experience, and/or ethnic heritage (my dad is Caucasian, my mom is Japanese). I took on difficult therapy cases. I befriended fellow students from all walks of life. I conducted research with people who survived horrendous trauma. Each of these experiences taught me about the strength of the human spirit, the importance of support, and the value of being different.

I incorporated many of these lessons into my own life. For example, to help me finish my PhD, I started a dissertation support group with 4 other grad students. We regularly updated each other on our progress and kept each other accountable. Years later, I taught multidisciplinary education to 2nd and 4th graders so that my children and their classmates would appreciate instead of put down people who didn't look, talk, and pray like them.

When my own life tilted out of balance, I was fortunate to connect with Ann and create the Goal Sister process. Having Ann as a Goal Sister helped me to pinpoint specific areas of change, to chart my course of action, and to make those changes happen! Being a Goal Sister - and writing a book about the process - also helped me to live more consciously.

Today, I continue to push myself out of my comfort zone: I'm adding fresh fuel and focus to my art and writing, igniting my activist flames, and stoking my child-related volunteer service activities. I'm grateful for all the continued support I receive from my husband, family, Sisters, colleagues, and friends.