

# Do You Have A Passport?

By Stella Fronius

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“Do you have a passport?” he asks me nonchalantly. We’re in line for coffee after class, and at first I don’t quite understand the question. I stare blankly at the assortment of pastries, the stacks of cups organized by size, then at my scruffy sneakers. And before I get the chance to say no, that I’ve never left the country, that I’ve hardly even left the state of California, Professor Christy intently squints at the menu and says, “Because, you’ll need one, of course.”

I pause, deliberating over a response and my mind flashes back to the short conversation I had yesterday with Stephanie Sawyer, undergraduate advisor for UC Santa Cruz’s History Department. With false bravado, I had waltzed into the department headquarters, declaring my presence with a quiet shove of the door, leaving it ringing with finality. Green eyes sparkle delightedly my way when I express a general interest in Japanese history, especially lighting as I enquire specifically about research projects open to undergraduates. It is at this point that my fate is sealed. “As a matter of fact...Professor Alan Christy is putting together a team of students to look at material from Post-War Okinawa. The Gail Project.” “I would love to learn more!” I say enthusiastically. Stretching out her fingers, Stephanie then types out a brief email to Christy, communicating that she had come across a student who she thought might be a good addition to the team. Me.

My hasty introduction in the Cowell Coffee Shop probably wasn’t the best way to approach Professor Christy, but here I stand regardless. Breathing in I press on, “I would like to speak with you more. Do you have time?” Alan sips his dark roast and says “sure. How about we move to my office and I can show you the photos that started The Gail Project.”

Fast-forward half an hour and I’m sitting in his office, staring intently forward at the images flitting across the screen. I glance quickly at the small island of Okinawa, highlighted on a map of the Japanese Archipelago framed on the wall. Yet as the faces and landscapes fade into one another, remnants of an Okinawa preserved by the lens of a touring US military dentist in 1952, I am unable to associate them with the flat dot on the map.



Charles Gail, 1952

Alan launches into his pitch for the Gail Project. Promise of adventure, participation, and research fill my ears as anticipation threatens to overwhelm my racing heart. Uneven nails digging into sweaty palms go unnoticed as I eagerly nod assent at whatever is said, barely conscious anymore of anything except for the fact that this had to be the opportunity I was waiting for. But sitting across the desk from the head of East Asian Studies, surrounded by a myriad of Japanese and English texts that threaten to overwhelm, my excitement falters. Our chairs squeak softly, quietly mirroring the slow tick-tock of the wall clock made absurdly apparent in the sudden silence as I gather courage to speak honestly of my uncertainties.

“Professor, I am only a sophomore. What can I do? I have never studied Japanese history; I know nothing about Okinawa, or the base controversy. I don’t even know how to speak Japanese.”

Fast Forward a week and I am not quite sprinting down the long hallway leading to the Faculty Instructional Technology classrooms hidden within the confines of McHenry Library. “Room 1130 Room 1130,” I mutter beneath my breath, desperate to find the correct door, already 10 minutes late. I contemplate again not going through with this. What had I been thinking, pretending to be anything other than what I am: clumsy, unskilled, unfocused, a disillusioned business major retreating from possible failure to the ambiguity of a history focus. I turn over questions I have contemplated constantly since last Friday afternoon, when I left Professor Christy’s office. What would the humanities do for me in the long run? What are my parents going to say when I tell them about getting involved in this project, especially when they still believe I am studying accounting? Then room 1130 is in front of me, and a hand that is no longer my own pushes the door inwards. Immediately my ears are assaulted with the sound of raucous joking and laughter. “Welcome! I hope you found the place alright!” Christy smiles from the podium up front. Fourteen unfamiliar faces look up in unison as I hurriedly sit down in

the back. “Everyone, this is Stella, a sophomore and a history major” He looks to me for confirmation. I nod back in response. Names are matched to faces as introductions were quickly made. I look around in interest, astounded that so few actually majored in history. What drew people and why did they stay, volunteering their time as I intended to? Things quickly proceeded as if an interruption had never occurred. We take care of administrative business first. Recent articles published in the news on Okinawa are discussed, and I am told to read the Melvin Price Report to gain further background knowledge on the land issue and resettlement in 1950s Okinawa. Government declassified documents relating to US occupation, of which there are 9000 total and were collected by Stephen, Ian, and Connor from the National Archives in Maryland, are then distributed and I am assigned my own set of 200 to peruse. I am to learn that most of these students had been in a seminar on Post War Okinawa the previous quarter and as part of the class had visited Yokohama University to collaborate with Japanese students who were also learning about relations between Okinawa, Japan, and the United States. Trevor connects his computer to the podium, starting a PowerPoint that encompasses their trip and adventures through Tokyo and Yokohama.



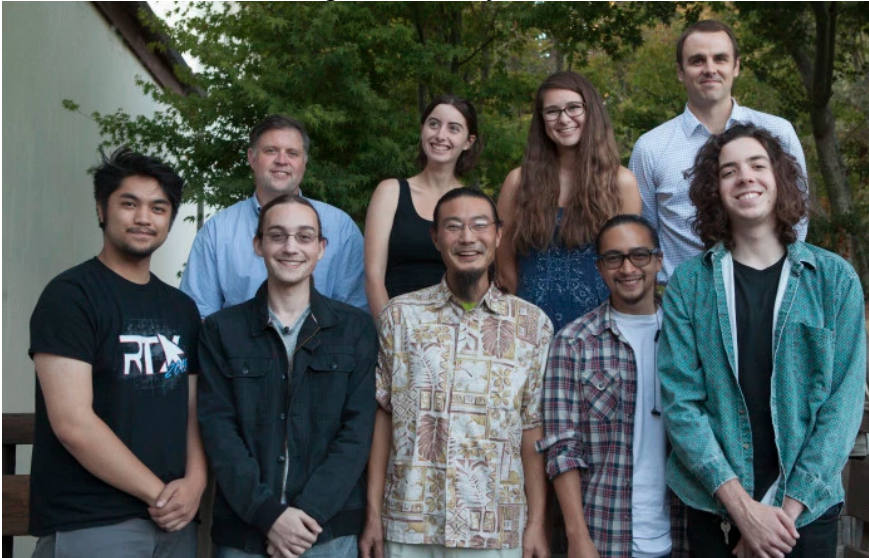
Yokohama, Japan 2013

I relax into my seat, smiling in response to the interaction everyone was having within these photos, envious of their group cohesion, and wondering if I would ever be included. The meeting takes a slightly more serious turn as we discuss the format and outlook of our archival website, which in its finished format will showcase Gail’s photos, the government documents, testimonials and oral histories, translatable in both English and Japanese. Maddie pulls out her latest design for the logo and we fawn over her artistic skills. Nate discusses technical website details and we avidly take down notes.

I look around at the excited smiles, listen to the enthusiastic voices, and something occurs to me. I was expecting to do no more than clerical work, behind a desk, buried in a book, a passive participant in the active research of my betters. I suddenly realize that this project will not be quite as library bound as I was imagining. The Gail Project is huge, much more complex, and carrying with it the potential to fulfill something that I hadn’t even known I wanted. My first real taste of public history is delicious, loud, raunchy; unequivocally and

undeniably fun. Most importantly, I am fascinated with the simple truths presented: humanists engage with the world on the conceptual, individual, and social level. Further, historical perspective enables humanists to apply empathy and cultural knowledge to understand current events.

Fast-forward to present day. I surreptitiously rub a tired hand over my forehead, attempting to smooth ever-present wrinkles, a sign that I have once again taken too much onto my plate. I inwardly grimace as I pace forward to my doom, glancing around the conference room and acknowledging the resigned interest reflected in the faces of my would-be audience. As part of the Chancellor's Undergraduate Internship Program, student leaders are tasked with presenting in front of project mentors and campus authorities. Have I mentioned that I hate public speaking? "As the Chancellor's Undergraduate Intern for the Center for the Study of Pacific War Memories, I work closely with Professor Alan Christy to co-manage and direct the Gail Project." Words stumble out and my face heats as I hurriedly glance down at my PowerPoint. The enthusiasm I feel over the project, lost admits nerves and a slight fever. I take a deep breath and continue in a clearer voice, "Over the past two years that I have been involved, The Gail Project has transformed and grown into what it is today: a multicultural, transnational, student led public history devoted research team."



Gail Project Documents Team, 2015

"Our standpoint is centered in the humanities and we conceive of the project within dimensions of history, language, religion, and art, with aspirations to affect current public understanding through historical perspective. Rather than search for a solution to an equation, within the humanities; we expand upon human perspectives to explore the controversial and historically sensitive presence of US bases in Okinawa. Travel abroad enables team members to initiate conversation with like-minded parties in Japan, such as our ongoing partnership with the prefectural museum in Naha and with Ryukyu University."





Naha, Okinawa 2014

“While this project incorporates sensitive political and cultural concepts, its central focus is people and their daily interactions admits the growth and upkeep of US bases. Another dimension that I emphasize are the students who actively engage with the material, learning not only about the project, but about themselves as individuals and participants within global interactions. An example of transformative education, students take the initiative to pursue their own research goals, which will ultimately culminate in a traveling Exhibition to premiere at the Sesnon Porter Gallery in Spring 2017. From UCSC, it will travel to places within the Okinawan diaspora, including Naha, Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Hawaii. There are many facets that students work within, building a practical skill set through experimentation and design, including project management, fundraising, exhibition planning, research, podcast production, social media outreach, and publishing.”



Podcast Recording, 2016

“When I was asked to join the project, Professor Christy mentioned that I might need a passport. Now it is my turn to strongly suggest the same. As CUIP for the Gail Project, I am designing a class that will be open to approximately 20 students, staff, and faculty at UCSC to travel to Okinawa and conduct field research that will be incorporated within the exhibition.”

In the last thirty seconds of my talk I add impulsively and a bit emphatically, “Humanities isn’t a dead end. Within the centrality of humans, engaged in and with other human and nonhuman elements, the individual and collective identity of culture, language, and history becomes engaging and interactive. There is a tangible barrier that separates STEM and the humanities that frankly shouldn’t exist. Without the humanities, the process of lived experiential dimensions is incomplete. The Gail Project is thus an argument for the humanities.” With this big finish still ringing in the eves, I close my computer with a snap and return to my seat.