Ateeqa Roslan

Ateeqa graduated from SMK Bandar Baru Darulaman, Malaysia. At NIU, she majors in Visual Communication, and her current interests include creative writing, art, sports, travelling, Islam, and women and gender studies. Her career goals are to become a successful journalist, educator, and advocate for women, family, and community development. This essay was important to her because it recounts her memories of growing up in Malaysia. Ateeqa offers these words about the essay: “It felt very satisfying and yet surreal to be able to compose the old memories in words and share with the world. The essay also served as a frame that captured the memories in time, reminding myself what beautiful childhood I had.”

This essay received the First-Place Award in the Van Kiergaard contest.
My favorite place from childhood is a city called Seremban in the Southern part of Malaysia. In one of the many friendly neighborhoods there, there is a two-story bungalow house that has a special place in my heart. It is my grandma’s home. The swing there is home to some of my most cherished memories. That swing, or buai'an in Malay, swayed on the left side of the house’s porch long before I was born, but as a child, it was my special place. It is a huge swing with two benches facing one another on a platform. On the bars where the benches are supported is a beautifully designed wire frame that makes it look like Cinderella’s chariot. Buaian is designed to hold four individuals, but in my case, six people were always the minimum. The color of buai'an is always changing. I only went to my grandma’s three times a year, and I found that the color of buai'an was unpredictable. It switched year after year, from red and green to blue and yellow. What I most appreciate about buai'an is the adventure and imagination it brought to my childhood.

Buaian was the place where my cousins and I let our imaginations run wild. Buaian became everything that we wished. We would pretend that buai'an was our monkey bars, time machine, magic carpet, vehicles, everything that took us to our version of Neverland. With the help of wet clothes that were hung all over buai'an, we pretended that we were in a pirate ship with lots of decorative flags. Swinging buai'an vigorously would indicate that we were overcoming some killer waves in torrential weather. I would always be the abducted princess whose role was to wail “Help! Help!” at the top of my lungs, hoping someone would save me. It was usually my brother who acted as the prince who saved the day. In a split second, the story would change, and I would suddenly become the hero whose task it was to save the ship from crushing into an ice berg, just like the Titanic.

I saw my adventures on that swing as preparation for becoming a professional stunt girl in Hollywood. I climbed up to the top of buai'an, which was six feet high, and jumped down on the concrete. (I would only do that when my parents and grandma were not around, of course.)
There were a lot of similarly dramatic acts. Sometimes when it was still swinging, I would jump in. I remember that there was a spot which I called the gear button. Putting force there would rapidly accelerate the speed of the swinging; we found a superbike within *buaian*. It was all very dangerous, but despite occasional accidents, we continued our adrenaline-pumping action. They were some of the most amazing adventures I have ever experienced.

*Buaian* even became my partner in a grand scheme. During Eid celebrations in Malaysia, people hold open houses. This is when family, friends, and neighbors pay a visit to each other’s houses and are served with avalanches of festive food by the hosts. Without a doubt, it is simply the best time of the year for children, too. Kids from the neighborhood come around knocking at your door to celebrate Eid with you. It’s like trick-or-treating and Christmas morning at the same time because, not only do they get to eat as many biscuits and cakes as they want, the main reason for their visit is to receive Eid money, called Eidee, given in an envelope by the host. As for me, when my grandma hosted an open house, I would be busy entertaining the guest children my age. As they were stuffing themselves with food, I would wait outside by *buaian*. As I saw them leaving, I would be on *buaian*, swinging away with tremendous joy, and I made sure they were looking at me. Because of that, a lot of them wanted to join me. Being as sneaky as I was, I would con each one of them out of twenty cents, the price of a ticket for the ride of their life. It usually worked, too, because I knew that their pockets were full of money. I would be the “taxi driver” and ask them where they wanted to go. With great professionalism, I would step on the gear button and swing as fast as I could for a good five minutes or so, stopping when we had arrived at the “destination.” For as long as the open house lasted, *buaian* and I would wait for our next potential victims.

To me, *buaian* wasn’t only the place for seeking adventures, it was also the place for seeking tranquility and peace of mind. As I grew older, I was trusted by my aunts and uncles to take care of their little babies, since I was the eldest of the girl cousins. When they were small, I remember carrying one of my cousins in my arms, patting her to sleep. It had been twenty long minutes, but the baby would not stop crying. I decided to take the baby out for some fresh air. I swung my body from left to right and right to left but she was still in discomfort and so was I. I saw *buaian* and thought of resting there, hoping the baby would like it, too. I softly hummed the sweet lullaby that my mother used to sing when she was getting me dressed, putting me to sleep, cooking in the kitchen, or driving the car. The breezy wind came blowing pleasantly, giving a cooling sensation on
the warm afternoon. The baby finally seemed to be restful. She looked up at me with her eyes half closed as I lost myself looking up at the light blue sky. Swinging slowly on buaian had taken me so many miles away in my own little world that I didn’t even notice when the baby fell asleep. The sun was setting below the horizon and the blue sky turned orange. I said to myself, sitting in perfect silence is just as much fun as having a crazy roller coaster ride on buaian with my cousins.

Buaian’s peace was also there to make my last moments with my late grandpa memorable. Receiving the heart-breaking news that my grandpa was terribly ill, all of my extended family gathered at my grandma’s to pay him a visit. I was happy that he was still able to smile and talk, even though it was a struggle for him. As a child, I was always drawing pictures. To cheer him up, I thought of drawing a picture of him and me on buaian. It was at that moment that I realized I was going to lose him and I had nothing to remember him by. I didn’t want to forget his face, especially his smile. So I ran up to my mother and told her that it would be nice if, for once, we could take a family photo on buaian. My family all agreed to do it first thing in morning. The next day, the sun shone so brightly, favoring the perfect lighting for the family photo. My uncle repositioned the plants and flowers in the ceramic vases to be as close to buaian as possible, creating a studio-like effect. Buaian was pure white at the time, and it contrasted beautifully with the red and pink hibiscus that my grandpa planted with his own two hands. Looking back at the photo, I’m glad that we took it. It has been treasured with care. I believe that a picture is truly worth more than a thousand words.

I’ve not seen buaian for four years now, and I’m not sure when, if ever, we will be reunited. The whole of my childhood is condensed in buaian. In the context of film-making, which I am now studying, it signifies the object of the subject’s “connotative” feeling. I could relate a lot to that. Prior to this essay, I never even thought of my childhood places, let alone talked about one. I didn’t even notice when I passed from childhood into this new phase of my life, the scary phase of adulthood. What’s special is that by writing this I have given more meaning to my childhood, especially to buaian. It’s going to hurt deeply if one day it gets broken or destroyed. It is already deserted. Nevertheless, I’m grateful that it has been, and always will be, part of me.