The Story Behind the Florescent Shirt

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa has been a great college experience for me. As an outer island girl, I first came to this school, in the Fall of 2008, afraid and very much out of place. I signed up for general classes but needed a few more credits under my belt to become a full time student. A friend of mine convinced me to join the University of Hawaii Marching Band. I played the trumpet in high school but have never marched before so I felt uneasy about joining. In the end I did so and it was the best decision of my life. I came to Oahu with a total of 5 friends from Maui. By the end of that first day of college I had over 50 from all over the country. This short essay is to explain the collage of inside jokes on my florescent t-shirt.

First off, I need to explain why there is a florescent greenish yellow shirt in the first place. It's a UH Marching Band tradition to wear a green shirt on the Friday before every football game. I did not have a green shirt so my section leader at the time bought me one on Wednesday. He said, jokingly, that the punishment for not having my own green shirt was to wear this bright yellow one so everyone would know who wasn't following tradition. I took the shirt home, pulled out my box of sharpies and worked on it all night. When I wore it to band on Friday everyone was speechless. I had just started a new tradition. I ended up making individual florescent sharpie shirts for both of my section leaders and even the baton twirler, Shannon Dresser. We began wearing them every Friday ever since. As the years passed by more and more designs were added along the way.

The first design to go on the shirt was the big trumpet on the front with the anti drug logo below. I did that to express how music has, in fact, kept me out of trouble all these years. Band is a very time consuming activity, we have practices three times a week and football games pretty much every other week. Because the members spend so much time together we learn how to bond and have “sober” fun. We practice together, play together, and even study together. My instrument and this University’s band is my anti drug.

Next came the large word “Derp” on the back of the shirt. Derp is a word that I had brought from Maui. It’s a slang word that we use to explain one’s clumsy behavior. Since I came into band not knowing how to march I made more than my fair share of mistakes and before I knew it, the word “Derp” was used against me and became my nickname.

The third design is on the left sleeve. I’m proud to be a 2008 high school graduate. I wanted to bring that up to Oahu with me so that left sleeve is a reminder of my high school and my class. The ipod is from my student government t-shirt. I have it breaking through a wall to represent leaving high school and welcoming my new college experience.

The Rainbow Mafia, sign up sheet, and the name tag came a year later. It was my Sophomore year and we had this inside joke running around the band. I’m a 4’10” Asian girl, I was the shortest person in the entire band which is not very intimidating at all. The joke was that if the University of Hawai'i had a mafia I would be the gang’s leader. The signatures on the ruled paper design are actually people from the different sections of band who claimed their spot in my pretend mafia. They also happen to be the people who have impacted me the most at UH. For example, the second signature on my mafia list is Chad Kikuchi, he graduated from UH Mānoa with a degree in Design and currently works at Hamilton Library. He got me a job there as a student worker in Admin when I was a freshman. I have been working there for three and a half years now.

The pie design with the mathematical Pi is another inside joke. It was added during my
Junior year. My friend Jonathan, the fourth signature on my mafia list, had just graduated from UH Manoa and secured a teaching job at Niu Valley Middle School. He had created his first math midterm and wanted to see if a bunch of college students could figure it out. Math was never a strong subject for me, so instead of figuring out what Pi was I just drew a picture of a pie. Jon also became my math tutor during my Freshman year. He playfully teases me about that Pi incident till this day.

The last design to go on happened towards the end of my Junior year. On the right sleeve it says “owned by Kristin Tanaka.” Kristin was my mentor, she took me under her wing and taught me how to adapt to an Oahu lifestyle. When I was a freshman she was a field staff member but during the Sugar Bowl year she was the Marching Band’s drum major. She is also from Maui but is 5 years older than I am. When I came to the first day of band she was the one who pulled me on the side and taught me how to march. Whenever another field staff member would come to scold me for marching wrong she would step in and teach me the correct way. Her mentoring wasn’t just limited to band. Outside of band she would make sure my grades were up by helping me study. Kristin was the person I could come to whenever I felt homesick because we would spend hours talking about home. She graduated in the Spring of my Junior year and now teaches Choir and Japanese at Maui High School. My right sleeve was the only part of the shirt that was not covered yet so she claimed it.

Currently I am working towards a BA degree in Animation and Game Design through the ACM route. I could have submitted an animation or little cartoon clip about a character walking around campus, going to class, eating with friends, etc. But to me that would not have truly expressed the hard work, time, effort, and dedication that this shirt can. It is faded through hours spent on Ching field with over 200 of my closest friends and the ink is running due to the long practices in the Mānoa rain. I feel like I’m contributing to my school by performing at football, basketball, and volleyball games. I started off as a frightened freshman in band and now I’m working as student staff member. The older band members are gone now but they have “passed the torch” down to me and I hope to do the same for the younger students. Marching Band is not just a club or a class to me, it is my Mānoa experience.