Dear Chuck,

I'm writing to thank you for the amazing opportunity that you have provided for me over the last six years. I don't know if you are fully aware of the impact that writing for your magazine has had on my life.

As a child, I had a very unique idea of what qualified as "necessities" for my family's regular trips to Moloka'i, Hawai'i. Feather boas, princess dresses, some baby dolls and a tea set would suffice as crucial entertainment on the desolate island. I was far more absorbed in my frills and make-believe than the practical realities of hunting and fishing that surrounded me. As everyone else prepared the day's catch for dinner, I would be flying down the beach in a ball gown, or sitting in my regal throne at the top of a tree. I was an oddity in that isolated beach community.

But then one day, quite by accident, everything changed. I was embarrassed at first that my mother and father had found and submitted that essay I wrote for class in 7th grade, until I realized that I had unknowingly addressed a major current debate over the use of unselective fishing practices in Hawai'i that trap endangered animals, like sea turtles. I was flattered when you offered to pay me for monthly articles. I was acquainted with your magazine: I had seen it at every convenience store check-out counter, at the grocery store and on my dad's desk. Every local fisherman had the annual *HAWAII FISHING NEWS* tide calendar tacked to his wall. Our own family consulted it daily in order to plan and prepare for the appropriate activities. However, I was not a fisherman, nor did I have any dreams of becoming a journalist. Yet, there I was, a gangly, blonde, 12-year-old, strict vegetarian girl from northern California, on the cover of the magazine with a giant sea turtle that I had helped save from a gill net and I was getting paid to recount my fishing adventures to men much older and more experienced than I.

So, my trips to Moloka'i took a new turn. I now had to take full advantage of the time there in order to gather enough stories, interviews and data to write about every month that I was back in California going to school. However, this was not hard. Being featured in *HAWAII FISHING NEWS* seems to be a source of pride and social superiority to the men on Moloka'i, all of whom read it cover to cover religiously. What more could you ask for than to have your name in print, with stories of your fishing expertise and glorified success? So, as soon as our rusting truck was spotted in the yard of our beach house, calls started pouring in from all my dad's friends, who fish every day both for the joy of it and out of the simple necessity to feed their families, inviting me to come along. Of course, I was thrilled to actually be a part of that lifestyle.

Moloka'i is a very traditional, and thus male-dominated, island. Every job and leisure activity is gender-specific, and fishing is a job for the men. Women and children are seldom, if ever, included. Yet now, as an *HFN* writer, I go out daily trolling, diving for wana, spear diving, shore casting, bottom fishing and setting lobster and prawn traps, then cutting, scaling, cleaning and preparing the fish (and the poi to eat with it!). I am always the youngest and the only girl on each and every one of these excursions, causing me to remain, despite the change, a local oddity.

Now I pack my bag for Moloka'i with swimsuits and fishing gear, knowing that I will have no down time for any other form of entertainment. The achievement of getting this job has had a dramatic effect on my life. Not only have I gained knowledge, experience and acceptance in a world that I would have otherwise never known, but it has also forced me to become extremely environmentally conscious. By talking to fishermen in the Greek islands, reading every ocean-related news article in the newspaper and online, and studying the rapid decline of the ocean's health, even in the six years that I have been watching, I cannot help but become enraged at the sheer greed and selfishness of fishing industries. Since I have become far more involved in the local community on the island, my passion to protect it has also increased.

All of my youth, I only wanted to be a movie star when I grew up. However, this job, while not removing my old ambitions, has directed my focus down a new avenue. I now also dream of studying to become a journalist or lawyer so I can reach out to more than Hawaiian fishermen and evoke changes for the better in people all over the world. Hopefully in my downtime, there will be time for a little fishing, too.

I feel terrible about how incongruous my writing has become these last four months. I got caught up in the whirlwind of transition, graduating and getting ready to leave. But I don't want you to think that it was out of lack of appreciation or respect for all that you've done for me. I leave for UCLA on September 17. I can't help but be extremely aware of the fact that *HFN* was a large part of all my college applications, and is the reason I was given a scholarship to the private high school I went to–both of which were significant factors in my admittance. Thank you again for all of the lessons, experiences and stories I have gained. I know that in my future travels I will never be able to pass up a fisherman without interviewing him. Who knows what interesting stories will await me out there! I hope to keep in touch and share them with you.

With lots of aloha and eternal gratitude,
Malia