



Todd Mills

Department of Main Roads

You push the spade with all your weight and the spade goes into the ground with almost no sound. You dig like this unless you hit a rock. If you hit a rock, the spade scratches across the face and self-directs back into the dirt, where it enters again with ease. But sometimes your spade hits a big rock and you feel a strong kickback. This is because the spade has all your tangata and has to go somewhere, so it travels through your bones into your spine, where you feel it like electricity.

To excavate a big rock, you need an iron bar and a mate. You slip the bar under the rock and rock it back and forth like a tooth; then a strong man like the Samoan grabs it with his two hands and rolls it out. You work as long as you need to because there's no hurry to get anything done unless a cement truck is coming and you have to float the same day.

When it's rainy you play cards in the cafeteria and there are different kinds of sandwiches on the table and every kind of condiment including: beetroot chutney, A-1, mint sauce, habanero, and the marmite in the yellow jar. This is where you hang out and you always have time for a few laughs or a practical joke before you go out. After it clears if there's nothing to do, you drive around in the truck and sometimes you hide in an empty lot and take a nap in the truck. You don't have to be smart about where you park the truck even when nosy neighbors spot you; you slip down in your seat and tip your hat over your eyes because nobody can touch you. You work for the Department of Main Roads.

Sometimes you work underground; that's when you set up *double* cones on the sidewalk so

that no one falls into the manhole. When you go down, there's one man who wears an orange vest and he's the lookout, like the short, fat kid from Wellington who has the Class 4 License. He's the kid who took off his shirt to jackhammer the sidewalk the day Pa'a said: "If I were you I wouldn't take off my shirt."

One day you're eating lunch in the cafeteria when someone bets the kid he can't eat a shit sandwich and the kid takes it seriously and asks if you mean "like a real sandwich with two slices of bread." You look at him and try to imagine it and you want to laugh; you get a picture in your mind that makes you imagine the details like the quart bottle of Gatorade to wash it down. After that you call the kid *Shit Sandwich* and when he's driving the truck you remind him to turn off his manual turn signals and when he leaves them on, you remind him to turn them off again.

Shit Sandwich, who has the Class 4 license, is pulling the cement mixer with a full load and you can feel it fishtailing. Tank says let Shit concentrate on his driving and Shit gives Tank a look. Pa'a, who is a good friend of Tank, says, "Your turn signal is on" and Shit says, "If you say that one more time, the mixer is going up your ass and I'm not bullshitting!"

Joe says, "Shit's not bullshitting" and everyone laughs and Joe says it again. You try to remember the next part when the concrete came through the window of the truck and how Pa'a and Tank got it first then Joe and the Samoan. So you sit there with the concrete starting to set and Joe looks at Tank and Tank looks at Pa'a and nobody cracks a smile. You sit there and look to see what Shit's going to do; you look at the corners of his mouth to see if they're twitching. You sit there and wait and then Shit blinks twice and the way he does it with the spacing makes it the most hilarious thing you've seen in your life.

So when you go back to the cafeteria you always have something to bust you up. You laugh about it for months and when anyone comes around like the pizza delivery boy and asks: "Which one of you is Shit Sandwich" it's Pa'a who says, "I know a Shit but I don't know anyone with the family name of Sandwich."

One day you are digging in a muddy hole and you hit a rock and it takes three men to excavate it.

"Hey, Kevin, put your weight behind it," says Tank.

"Use you back," says the big Samoan.

"Use your belly," says Pa'a.

You watch while Kevin tries again and you see him slip in the mud and go down. You check to see if he is smiling...if his mouth is twitching because you want it to happen again. You want it to happen exactly like it happened before but this time he doesn't blink and it's how he *looks* at you and it travels through your spine like tangata where you feel it like brothers.

Todd Mills received his bachelor's degree from Antioch University. As a young man he worked his way around the world and supported himself as a laborer, cook, and teacher. He currently lives comfortably with his Zimbabwean wife in Ojai, California. He co-wrote and produced the documentary film Timothy Leary's Dead. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Alabama Literary Review, Amarillo Bay, Euphony, Rougarou, Entropy Magazine, Fogged Clarity, The Alembic, Green Hills Literary Lantern, Griffin, The Legendary, ONTHEBUS, Voices, The Coe Review, Yellow Silk, AUSB Odyssey, Sage Trail, riverSedge, OxMag, Collage, Antiochracy, Forge, Jet Fuel Review, New Plains Review, The Nonconformist Magazine, Crack the Spine, Storgy, Serving House Journal, Barely South Review, Santa Monica Review, The Penmen Review, Voices de la Luna, and in the anthology Poets on 9-11.