

Raised By Struggled, Driven By Strength
By Sanoë Tenise

I am Tough and misunderstood

I wonder why anger feels louder than peace

I hear the yelling echo through the valley

I see fist fly before words ever do

I want the violence to stop

I am tough and misunderstood

I pretend I'm not hurting

I feel tired of seeing people fight instead of love

I touch the streets that raised me

I worry the cycle will never end

I cry for the ones that never changed

I am tough and misunderstood

I understand that healing starts with me

I say peace can still grow in rough places

I dream of seeing waianae calm and proud

I try to stay strong without the violence

I hope I can show other a better way

I am tough and misunderstood

Most of us grew up seeing, feeling, and trying to understand violence happening in Wai'anae. It isn't something that happens in the background; it becomes a part of our everyday life, how we think, and how we move. If I see people arguing or physically fighting, or if I hear about someone getting hurt, it bothers me way more than I let anyone see. It makes me carry this kind of heaviness, like I always gotta be alert. I love my home, and I love my community, but knowing the violence around makes me realize not all of us living here gets to know peace.

It affects my life in so many ways that people barely recognize. It is a difference in the way I trust others, communicate, and even vision my future. Sometimes it feels like violence is trying to tell me who I am supposed to become: cold, hard, or numb against everything. But that is not what I want to be. I want to be one who breaks the cycle instead of continuing it. Because growing up around violence really pressurizes me to be that kind of person who has understood the pain and does not spread it. It makes me want to rise above everything I've ever seen and prove that coming from a rough place doesn't mean we can't choose a better path.

Some causes of violence in Wai'anae are generational, hand-me-down legacies most didn't ask for. Struggle with poverty, broken homes, addiction, and trauma that is replaced from generation to generation. For some of them, the element of violence becomes normal since it occurs around them so often. Others carry anger, stress, or sadness without guidance or someone else to teach them better ways to cope. So, when the pain inside rises, it begins spilling out in ways that can hurt many. When people are feeling unheard, unsupported, or unloved, this reinforces the pain inside them, which then overflows with behaviors which harm the people around them. Violence is usually not the real problem, but a reaction to deeper problems that nobody helped solve.

To prevent violence, I can start by changing the way I handle my own emotions. I can choose patience over anger, communication over confrontation, and understanding over quick judgment. I can check on my friends when they're going through things because sometimes all someone needs to calm down is feeling seen. I can use my voice to stand up for peace, not with big speeches, but in the way I treat people every day. And as a young person from Wai'anae, I can lead by example — showing that healing, kindness, and growth are stronger than any fight. If more of us choose that path, our community can become a place where future kids don't grow up learning violence first, but hope instead.