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“Who are you?” people often ask when they want me to introduce myself.

“I am Arun, born and raised in India. I am an Indian American, an Asian American citizen. I speak Marathi, a language from western India,” I say with an accent.

When they ask for more I say, “I’m an ex-engineer, an editor of a multicultural magazine, an educator. I am a father, a co-parent. I am a friend of so and so.” I might add further, “I am a born-again Universalist Hindu, a student of life. I am a vegetarian, a non-smoker, a ‘tea-totaler,’ a health-nut, a pacifist, a nature-lover, and an environmental activist.” Depending on my mood, I might ramble on, “I am a world-traveler, a global citizen. I’m on a lifelong journey. Where will it take me? Who knows? I am open to all possibilities.”

I want people to like me, and so I tell things about me that they might like to know. If they belong to a Spanish-speaking culture, I try to stretch what little skills I have in Spanish. If they are from Europe, I talk about my 3,000 kilometer bicycle trip in northern Europe. I try to show that we have many things in common.

Deep down, I want everyone to maintain their cultural, ethnic and religious traditions, and at the same time, embrace the diversity of our global family. While treasuring our own heritage—language, culture, religion, family, and experiences—we can still venture out of our cultural, national or religious cocoons.

“But who are you, really?” I ask myself.

Who am I? I know that I am not my brown skin. I am not just my eyes, hands, legs, body or thoughts. I am not really a Hindu, an Indian, or a father. I am not my pride or ego. I am none of these worldly labels and identities.

The true “I” in my body is really the consciousness that makes me who I am, and also the consciousness that makes you who you are. We are all representations of the same oneness. I am the Self. You are the Self. Together, we are the One!

In fact, we are so interconnected that Amma, my spiritual teacher, says, “Children, you cannot harm anyone without injuring yourself, nor can you help anyone without benefiting yourself.” When we act out of love, we are loving ourselves as well. If someone else is in pain, we feel the hurt, too.

I know that a day will come when my physical body will no longer be active, will no longer be needed. It will be time to leave it behind, to be free of its physical limitations and all the baggage that I carry. Then there will be no pain, no hunger, no suffering, no thoughts of discrimination or prejudice.

The spirit will glide in the infinite space; it will become One with the universal consciousness—a pure, awake state of awareness. The spirit will not be stopped by any national borders or geographical barriers. The “I” will merge with you and the whole creation. The “I” will realize its total oneness with everyone and everything—with ants and plants, with animals and minerals. What a unifying experience that will be!

But why wait till the end? We can realize the Oneness now. Let’s begin by developing the awareness of our unity now. Let’s put ourselves in other’s shoes, feel their pains and joys, their points of view, and let’s treat others as we wish them to treat us.

Here’s to new beginnings in the New Year!
Editor's Mailbag

September 11th not only brought out the patriotism in Americans, it brought out the hatred too. Since the beginning of civilization, prejudice has existed. From the Holocaust to Japanese interment camps, certain groups have been hated because of their beliefs or appearances. It is no different now. It was obvious that Islamic fundamentalists had a great deal to do with the terrorism in America, but what some people do not understand is that Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists are not the same thing.

Mosques are being vandalized. People with dark skin or Arab names are being harassed or threatened. If only people understood that it wasn’t all of these people, but a small group! Most of the people of Afghanistan want to throw the Taliban out. These people should not be blamed.

If only people would understand that hating is wrong. If only they would understand that it all comes back to you in the end.

—Amanda Shaffer, 9th grade, CHSN, New City, NY.

I liked the way the themes were presented in Vol. 13, no. 5, however, I do not agree with the majority of the letters to the editor. I believe that world peace should be an ultimate goal, but I don’t think that fanatics who fly planes into buildings are eager to accept that. In this case “turning the other cheek” to these depraved zealots will simply not work.

Though the views in the letters were interesting, I am probably not alone in finding some of them very contrary to my views, for example, the letter from Robert Bolman. He makes a number of vague arguments against the United States. He states that for quite some time “certain people” have tried to “make a point” that world poverty is caused by the U.S. and European colonization and that the U.S. has “toppled various democratically elected governments.” How many colonies has the U.S. had? I can only think of Puerto Rico. And what democratic governments has it “toppled?” What he’s saying is that we’re just getting our comeuppance for decades of evil-doing. Though the U.S. has certainly not been perfect in its behavior, that doesn’t justify the killing of 6,000 civilians. I don’t know whether the editors of Skipping Stones agree with this man, but I would prefer to see more letters like the one from Bill Hessling, which is much more specific and realistic.

—Aaron Wells, 14, student reviewer, Eugene, OR.

Robert Bolman Responds:

It is a matter of historical record that the C.I.A. toppled democratically elected governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954) and Chile (1973). Moreover, the U.S. government has worked to prevent meaningful democracy in many countries around the world. A good case study would be Central America in the 1980’s.

Consider that the majority of people in the world live on less than four dollars per day. If that majority had a meaningful say in how the world is run, we would live in a very different world. There would be less hunger, less homelessness, more education, more health care, etc.

There would also be a less-friendly climate for the wealthy people and big corporations on whose behalf the U.S. typically acts. That is why, despite constant, self-righteous claims to the contrary, the U.S. isn’t truly concerned with meaningful democracy for all the world’s people. And that is why poorer people elsewhere in the world can get very angry at the U.S.

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—Amanda Shaffer, 9th grade, CHSN, New City, NY.

A Howl from Yellowstone

In my 7th grade science class, we are studying the wolves of Yellowstone National Park. As we researched, we recognized two sides to the issue. On one side, the majority of ranchers who have land bordering or near the park demand that the wolves be destroyed because they kill livestock and pets. Wolves don’t avoid these nearby fields occupied by thousands of cattle because they have no perception of human boundaries. On the other side, conservationists say the wolves should remain in Yellowstone because they keep disease from spreading throughout herds by stalking the sick, weak, diseased and old, and they help control populations of herbivores. They also provide meals for scavengers.

Many vital parts of the ecosystem at Yellowstone are fulfilled by the wolves that live there. Without them, more harm would be done than good because the entire ecosystem would eventually be destroyed just to save a few cattle. It would be a pitiful thing to have to explain to our great-grandchildren why Yellowstone has fallen into such a state of decay. Removing the wolves from Yellowstone would be so devastating that the park would probably have to be sold. To lose Yellowstone National Park would be a terrible mistake, and it should not be made!

—Matthew Harover, East MS, Shelbyville, Kentucky.
What's On Your Mind?

Scapegoat + Blame = Censorship

Recently violence has seemed to increase, especially among teenagers and children. Shootings and acts of violence by young people seem to have become more prevalent, and people have been desperately trying to find its cause.

Unfortunately, people have been quick to put the blame for violence on others instead of themselves. Video games and movies are blamed, but music and clothing are blamed even more. People seem to believe that listening to certain types of music or wearing certain types of “weird” or “different” clothing causes children to go on mass shooting sprees.

The teenagers and children of this world are much smarter than they are credited for. A song or type of clothing is not what makes a person kill. There are much deeper reasons why a person would feel the need to kill another. We need to stop blaming music and clothing and start finding out what those reasons are.

Censoring music and clothing is not the answer. Censoring only kills freedom by telling us what is good or bad for us. We need to stop trying to find a scapegoat for our problems and look for deeper reasons and solutions within ourselves.

—Rachel Hubbard, 16, Glen Ellyn, IL.

Rabbit, Fox and Dog

In the world today, there are three types of personalities. The first is the rabbit character, who is a quiet, shy person. This person is often very nice but so shy they are unapproachable. The dog type interacts with the rabbit personality because they are sociable and are not afraid to approach anybody. They are popular and kind to every personality. They usually click well with the rabbit type because opposites attract. The third personality is the fox. Their most hunted prey is the rabbit. They are very mean and sly and love to taunt the rabbit and the dog, but they cannot consume the rabbit if it is with the dog. The fox cannot defeat the dog, but the fox hates the dog because it is so liked by others. The fox personality must consume something. Every rabbit without a dog at its side is in danger. Even though the dog is popular and could easily crush the shy rabbit too, it chooses not to because of its kind personality.

In my analogy, all three character types are needed to make the world go around. Without one, the world would be at an uneven balance. I guess you can tell the character that is best-liked, the dog. Because of this, it thrives the longest of the three and shows how much character does count.

—Chidinma Nwosu, 13, African American, Gibsonia, PA.

Conscientious Objection

Why not join the military? It’s great! You get a higher education, travel to exotic places, and there’s perpetual excitement. Furthermore, you win honors and recognition, and there’s plenty of camaraderie and fun. These advertising “facts” draw many young people to join the military. Although the military, in all its glories, may seem an ideal way to serve one’s country, I know that if the draft is reinstated while I am of age, I will register as a Conscientious Objector (CO). The things that influenced my decision the most were the life of Mahatma Gandhi, the experiences of my grandfather, and my religious and cultural upbringing.

Gandhi is remembered for his nonviolent stand during the Indian Revolution. He led marches, boycotts, and fasts, all nonviolently protesting the cruelty of the British.

“I object to violence,” Gandhi said, “because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.” This statement is proven true by the devastation that all wars bring: 30 million people died in World War I; 46 million civilians were killed in World War II (six million, mostly Jews, in the concentration camps); and five million died in the Vietnam War, which also left millions traumatized, deformed, and orphaned. Due to Gandhi’s persistent, peaceful campaigns, the British eventually left India. Through Gandhi’s work I realized that peaceful solutions last, whereas violence only begets more violence.

Another person who influenced my decision to take a CO stand is my grandfather, Carroll King. He joined the army at a young age and served as a bomber pilot during World War II. Today he still regrets his participation in killing so many innocent people. In a gesture of goodwill, he went to Iraq to stand with the suffering people during U.S. imposed sanctions and bombing. Like so many others, my grandfather enlisted in the army with good intentions. However, once he realized that he was serving evil by killing civilians, he could not continue any longer. The fact that he could completely change impresses me and strengthens my CO stand.

Even before I knew my grandfather, I had been encouraged to find a peaceful way to solve problems. I have helped resolve many sibling conflicts without using violence. I participate in marches and rallies opposing the death penalty, sanctions on Iraq, the embargo on Cuba, and other events that harm or kill humans. I have written letters to protest these cruel acts. I have always opposed violence.

I am a pacifist, and I would register as a CO should a draft be reinstated. I hope you register as a CO or do alternative service. Fight a nonviolent war to stop oppression and injustice!

—Marika King, 12, Elka Park, NY.
The Sign of the Dragon

“Sarah, you just beat the school record for the 100-meter dash!” Mei-ling called to her track partner. “You’ve got to try out for soccer this fall.”

“Ugh,” Sarah said. “I enjoy running, but I wouldn’t like chasing a ball.”

“Really? When were you born?”

“May 5, 1988.” Sarah swigged her water. “But what does that have to do with soccer?”

“Everything! People born in 1988 were born under the sign of the dragon in the Chinese lunar calendar. Dragons prefer individual sports to being on a team.”

“So you’ll get off the soccer idea?” Sarah asked.

“You bet,” said Mei-ling, “now that I know your sign.”

Chinese horoscope signs are based on the yearly cycles of the Chinese lunar calendar. Each year in the Chinese calendar is associated with an animal in the following order: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog and pig.

The Legend of the Chinese Lunar Calendar

How did these animals get to represent a year? And why is the rat first? One story is that Buddha invited all the animals to visit him one last time before he left Earth for heaven.

“I will reward those who come early tomorrow to wish me a safe journey,” proclaimed Buddha.

The ox and the rat both wanted to be first to receive the reward.

“I must get up early to escape the cat,” thought the rat.

“I must get up early to escape the tiger,” thought the ox.

So they both got up before the cock had crowed and set off. They had walked for many hours, the rat scurrying along next to the ox, when they came to a deep river. Buddha sat on the other side.

“Can you help me across the river?” asked the rat.

“Certainly,” said the ox, “but you must promise that I will be the first to greet Buddha. After all, if I did not help you across the river, you would not make it at all.”

“Of course,” said the rat, scrambling up the ox’s nose.

The ox swam across the cold, deep river with the rat clutching his horns. When the ox’s hooves touched the muddy riverbank on the other side, the rat slid down and scurried over to touch Buddha’s hand.

Buddha laughed. “My faithful friends. You, clever rat, will be the first animal in the new calendar I am creating. And you, diligent ox, will be the second.”

As the day went on, the other animals showed up, one by one. The first twelve were included on the calendar. The tiger was third, and the cat...well, the cat never showed up. Some say he was too busy sleeping to say goodbye to Buddha!

Calculating your Sign

How do you calculate your Chinese horoscope sign? The easiest way is to consult a lunar calendar, like the one below, and determine the animal associated with your birthdate. For example, people born between the dates of February 17, 1988 and February 5, 1989 were born under the dragon. Adding or subtracting twelve from any year determines other years with the same sign. For example, the year 2000 is also a dragon year!

Why does the starting date of the Chinese calendar differ from year to year? It varies because the lunar calendar is based on the cycles of the moon. The first day of a new year is calculated as the second new moon following the Winter Solstice (the shortest day of the year).

Your sign and your personality

Each animal in the lunar calendar represents certain traits. The dragon is a symbol of good luck, and the rat is a symbol of charm. Your sign carries information about your personality. Asking someone their sign, like Mei-ling asked Sarah, is a shortcut to getting to know them.
The table shows more about the personality traits of each sign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If You’re a</th>
<th>You Have</th>
<th>You Are</th>
<th>You Are Good at</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>charm</td>
<td>eager</td>
<td>team sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ox</td>
<td>diligence</td>
<td>reliable</td>
<td>leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>bravery</td>
<td>energetic</td>
<td>thinking up new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>peace</td>
<td>generous</td>
<td>arts and crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon</td>
<td>good luck</td>
<td>creative</td>
<td>individual sports</td>
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<td>Snake</td>
<td>wisdom</td>
<td>sensitive</td>
<td>playing an instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>enthusiasm</td>
<td>independent</td>
<td>languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>artistic talent</td>
<td>respectful</td>
<td>theater and dance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monkey</td>
<td>imagination</td>
<td>curious</td>
<td>communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cock</td>
<td>honesty</td>
<td>vivacious</td>
<td>gardening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>loyalty</td>
<td>dedicated</td>
<td>caring for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>integrity</td>
<td>hard-working</td>
<td>entertaining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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How much should you believe in horoscopes? If you think something about your horoscope sounds wrong, trust your judgment. But if you think the horoscope sounds like you, then perhaps you have learned something about yourself—which is, of course, one reason to read horoscopes—they may help you to understand yourself and your friends better!

—Kathleen Ahrens, National Taiwan Univ., Taipei, Taiwan.

**The Legend of Merlion**

Long before your time, there lived a mystical creature called the merlion. This creature was not like any other. The bottom half was fish; the top half was lion. The people feared this creature. It came out at night to hunt. It preyed on the fish in the sea.

Soon, the merlion had eaten almost all of the fish. One morning the fishermen rose in their huts, yawned and ate a quick porridge with nuts and fruit. They set off for a day of work. They fished all day but did not catch a single thing.

This happened for several days. The fishermen got mad at one another, and fights began to break out. The villagers decided to hold a meeting to discuss the scarcity of fish. They thought that it was a bad-luck spell, or the Great Spirit was punishing them for some evil thing that they did. They were very puzzled.

One night, Waikami, the runt of the village boys, was dreaming. A strange creature appeared. It was half lion, half fish. It spoke to him.

“Bring the chief. When I appear you must say to him, ‘This is the cause of our troubles.’ The chief will know what to do next.”

Waikami did as the merlion told him. He brought the chief to the beach the next night. All of a sudden, there was a great rumbling in the ground. Then, out of the water rose the merlion. In a frightened voice Waikami stuttered, “This is the cause of our troubles.”

The chief rubbed his chin and thought. Finally he said to the merlion, “Okay, you go to the other side of the island, and each year we’ll give you 50 basketfulls of fish.” Merlion thought this was a good idea, so that’s what they did. He kept his promise and so did the people. The chief decided to name the city Singapura, the lion city. Oh, yes, and they lived happily ever after.
In the summer of 2000, I jumped into a new world—China. I felt like I had somehow taken a time-machine and gone back to the old days of Japan. I am Japanese, but Japan is not traditional anymore. Japan is a very Westernized country, where many different customs and lifestyles are mixed together. China, however, doesn’t have strong influences from other countries, and Chinese people are very sentimental about their traditions. When I was in Beijing, many situations reminded me of what I used to do more than 15 years ago in Japan. When I realized that, I found myself already at ease in my new country!

I had been studying Chinese for two years at the University of Oregon. At first, Chinese was very challenging to me. Despite some similarities between Japanese and Chinese characters, the spoken languages are very different. Nevertheless in the beginning of my junior year, I gave myself an extra challenge by moving to China through the Oregon Study Abroad program.

The program finds a “friendship family” (host family) for participating students. It was hard for them to match me with a family because I am Japanese. China had a lot of difficulties with Japan in the years of World War II. I wasn’t sure whether they didn’t want to be my friendship family because they still do not like Japanese people, or whether they were only interested in having American friends. Because it is still rare to see foreigners in Beijing, having an American-looking friend carries a lot of status. Although it is changing, some people are still not used to seeing modern, Western things, such as new fashions. I tried to be patient because I trusted that I would have the best friendship family ever.

I was the last person in the group to find a friendship family. Eventually, Yang Shuiqing, [In China and Japan, the family name comes first, and the first name is last.] who works in the dorm buildings of my Chinese university, accepted me, and his family became my Chinese family. I still clearly remember everything I did with them the first day we met. We folded dumplings together for dinner that night. Knowing my Chinese was limited, they talked to me slowly and repeatedly until I understood. That was a very touching day for me thanks to their warm welcome. I told them that I was extremely happy to get to know them. They told me that they were also glad to have me as a part of their family.

Due to government regulations, foreigners are not allowed to live with Chinese families. So I was not allowed to stay over at their house even though they were my Chinese “family.” But they asked me to call or come over to their house anytime I wanted, and I began visiting all the time.

The Yang family has five members. Yang Shuiqing is about 10 to 15 years older than I, so he asked me to call him ge ge (gaa-ga), which means older brother. I called his wife jie jie, meaning elder sister. Their daughter, Bing-bing, 11, was, of course, the only child in the family. Chinese families now have only one child because of federal law. Jie jie’s parents also lived with the family.

When I first became a member of the Yang family, I thought without a doubt that I was going to be Bing-bing’s elder sister, but she called me a-yi, which means auntie. I called her mom jie jie, so automatically I became Bing-bing’s auntie. I felt old for the first time in my life when she called me that, but at the same time, I realized that I am a grown-up and 10 years older than she. Because I am the youngest in my family in Japan, I had never felt like a grown-up!

The Yang family lived in one of the faculty dorms close to the university. The dorms are about 10 to 20 stories high, and the Yang family lived on the second
Bing-bing and I rode a bike together, and she led me through the maze of Beijing. Compared to the Chinese houses that I had imagined before, their home seemed pretty comfortable with two bedrooms, a living room where everyone enjoyed hanging out and eating, a kitchen, and a bathroom with a toilet and shower. Whenever I went to visit them, they always welcomed me with warm smiles and delicious Chinese food!

The People's Republic of China is comprised of 56 official nationalities. The Yang family is Hui. They are Muslim, and they do not eat meat except lamb and beef. Most of the time when I visited them ge ge cooked big, delicious meals for us. We all loved what he cooked. When I spoke highly of his delicious foods, he proudly told me that he was the best cook in the family. His wife also told me that a lot of Beijing husbands cook more often than their wives, and they cook better, too. I wanted to tell all the men in Japan about that! What a nice idea!

As time went on, the Yang family became like my second family, and I was having one of the happiest times of my life. It was very hard when I had to leave after completing my four months of intensive study. I was totally into China, and I couldn't imagine leaving. My last few weeks in Beijing were full of good memories and thoughts of the many new things I had experienced. Beijing had become like my hometown. I wanted to stay longer in China, but I knew I needed to go back to the U.S. and finish school. I also remembered that now I was Bing-bing's a-yi, a grown up who had to face reality when the time comes.

I had so many memorable experiences in the short span of four months in China. Now I look back on the difficulties of studying Chinese in the U.S., and I realize everything paid off. I am glad I had studied the language really hard in the U.S. before I actually went to China. It helped me adjust and have a good time there.

My readjustment to the U.S., on the other hand, was much harder than I had imagined. Nothing could satisfy me anymore in the U.S.—food, people, environment, even smell. I also found myself speaking Chinese unconsciously everywhere instead of English. Because I had finished all the requirements for my Chinese minor, I didn't take Chinese classes when I returned. I had to force myself to readjust my whole life to American habits. What a torture!

After several months in the U.S., I still missed China a lot. Finally, I decided to go back to Beijing in the summer of 2001, six months after I came back to the U.S. I would stay there for two weeks. I was shaking with excitement when I imagined myself back in Beijing again. It was like a pleasant dream.

Even after six months of absence, Beijing had that same wonderful smell I loved. The Beijing smell is a very distinctive blend of the city's food and its people. But the city was not entirely the same anymore. About two months before I came back to China, Beijing was chosen to host the 2008 Olympics. Things started changing right away. Many of the stores I used to visit had been levelled. People are trying to build new, good-looking buildings throughout the city. It is a matter of how the Chinese see themselves and how the rest of the world sees them. They consider it their duty to make the Olympics as good as possible. But do they see the hidden reality? It is said that these will be the most expensive games
ever. Twenty billion dollars worth of city improvements are planned over the next seven years. Can China afford it? Will China be able to maintain its culture? If China opens up its society, it may be beneficial for the country and the people. I feel happy for China, but personally, I feel a little sad to know that it will change dramatically in the coming years. I hope China won’t end up losing its culture and traditions.

Because I returned on very short notice, jie jie and her parents were on vacation in a different city and did not even know that I was coming. I called the Yang family about a week before I arrived. Only ge ge and Bing-bing were home. To my surprise, however, jie jie came back to Beijing to see me. The effort that she made to come see me was extremely touching. She is truly my elder sister! That made me realize that families are very important in any culture.

For the first time in my life, I stayed the night at my Chinese family’s house. Bing-bing and I shared a bed, and before she fell asleep, we spent precious moments talking to each other. Patiently, she asked me a variety of questions in Chinese. She told me about school and running. She loves running and goes for a long run every day. Fragments of our conversation stuck in my mind.

When I woke up the next morning, I noticed that our conversation had continued forever in my dream. Did Bing-bing have the same dream that night? Or was it not a dream?

I was the last person in the family to wake up that morning. Ge ge and jie jie had already left for work, and Bing-bing was waiting for me to wake up. I could not stop feeling grateful and excited about my stay. Bing-bing filled a glass with soy milk and handed it to me with a cute smile. I had two pieces of Youtiao, a long, narrow fried bread, that Bing-bing had bought for me earlier that morning. I dipped the youtiao in the milk and bit into it. That’s the common way to eat youtiao in China.

Time passed very quickly that day. Bing-bing and I went out after breakfast and had many adventures riding bikes down “secret alleyways.” I pedaled the bike, and she sat on the back. She led me through a maze of alleyways where I had never been before. In the afternoon, ge ge and jie jie came back home to have lunch with me and the family together. Once again, ge ge cooked a delicious lunch for us.

My visit to Beijing and the Yang family has motivated me to keep up with my Chinese. I have resumed the language study once again, with even greater energy to meet its challenges. Doing what you like is the most pleasant way to spend your time.

—Natsuko Tamakoshi is our Japanese intern from the University of Oregon.
Tibetan Tales

The authors in the following pages are Tibetan Chinese students (ages 17 to 22) who have been studying English for five years. They attend the English Training Program, run by the Nationalities Department of Qinghai Normal University, located in Xining, Qinghai Province. The program is funded by Trace Foundation, the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, The Bridge Fund and the Ford Foundation. These students were all previously bilingual in Tibetan and Chinese but had not had an opportunity to study English before. They will complete their associate degrees in English next year and many will become English teachers in rural Tibetan areas.

—Kevin Stuart, teacher, Qinghai Province, PRC.

Mountain Deities

Mountain deities are sentient beings. They can assume human form and ride black horses, hold swords, bows, arrows or spears and wear black clothes. They can become tigers, lions and wolves, but never dogs, yaks, sheep and horses.

There are two types of mountain deities—worldly mountain deities and wise mountain deities. The worldly mountain deities are very envious. If people worship and believe them, they are very happy. People hope they will protect livestock, life and health. People also hope they will remove bad things, give them things they need and make them successful. They believe that if people stopped worshipping these deities they would become very angry and destroy them. Also if people cut trees, break rocks, kill animals or sleep on the mountain, the worldly mountain deity will harm them. This is because the mountain is ruled by mountain deities.

There is a story that happened many years ago. A very rich family—father, mother, daughter and son—had much livestock. This family didn't worship mountain deities. The son herded livestock on the mountains, and one day he slept on the mountain. When he woke up, he was mute and deaf. His father went to a lama's home and asked, "Why did my dear son become deaf and mute? What happened to him?" The lama replied, "Your son slept on the mountain. The mountain deity destroyed him." The father didn't believe this and went home. Later the father killed a wolf on the mountain. Three days afterward the father and most of the family's livestock suddenly died. The family became the poorest in the area. The son's mother went to a lama's home and asked, "Why did my husband suddenly die? Why did we lose our livestock?" The lama said, "Because your husband killed a wolf on the mountain. Wolves are the mountain deity's livestock, so the mountain deity was very angry and destroyed your family."

Wise mountain deities know all spiritual wisdom and are compassionate to people. They don't become angry and destroy people. Wise mountain deities aid all people and are just. For example, Ani Snow Mountain is a wise mountain deity. If people cut trees, break rocks, kill animals or sleep on the mountain, he doesn't destroy them. Wise mountain deities have very kind hearts.

Tibetans worship and believe in mountain deities. Mountain deities aid and protect livestock, take away bad luck, and make people who believe in them very successful.

—Huaji "Ben," 21, Tibetan Chinese.
The World Depends on People

One day, an angel found out that a ghost was trying to destroy the world. The ghost had pulled the world near a cliff. In the nick of time, the angel appeared between the world and the cliff.

"Ghost, why are you so angry with this sinless world?"

"Shameless people. I spent countless years building it for them, but they are destroying it in a twinkle."

"So what are you going to do, Ghost?"

"This world can’t survive, so I think it’s better to destroy it instantly than suffer for a long time."

"Why don’t you try to tell people about this condition?"

"I’m tired of them. I gave them a lot, but they were never satisfied. They ask me to give them more and then waste the things that make up this world. Listen. Can you hear? The world is hardly breathing. It’s dying."

"Please put it back in the forest and think of a way to save it."

"I don’t want to do anything for it, but if you want it you can have a competition with me."

"Okay! I’d like to have a competition with you for it."

The rule was that they couldn’t use their magical powers, and they must race through a tunnel. When they were ready to start, an animal shouted, "Ghost, may we have a talk with the angel?"

The ghost thought he should allow the angel to talk with them. So he said, "Yes, of course."

A white animal who was holding a cloth said, "Dear Angel, I am from the North Pole, and this is my gift for you. You can use it to keep yourself cool."

"Thank you!"

The ghost and angel started to run. The tunnel was very long. After they ran for an hour, the tunnel slowly became hotter and hotter. So the angel put on the cloth that was given to her by the white animal. A very strong fire was burning, but the angel was not afraid and ran right through it. The white cloth protected her. The ghost was burned in the fire, and the angel won the world.

After that the angel put the world back in the forest and said, "If people protect the world well, nothing will destroy it. The state of the world depends on people."

Think about what we are doing to the world that holds us as if we were its heart.


Living Flowers

As the sun rose over the horizon, I went out to enjoy the beauty of the grassland scenery. On the way, I saw a pair of red flowers blooming. They had flat petals and were incredibly full of smiling beauty. Those independent flowers seemed very vibrant. Gazing at the flowers made me think of many things.

Dew like pearls shone on the grass brightly. Rays of sun offered happiness. I stood and stared at the beautiful flowers for a long time, enjoying the bright, pleasant sunshine. Butterflies and little bees were flying about. Then some naughty children with sticks came. One child swung his stick when he saw the flowers. Many petals fell to the earth, and with them, my heart fell too.

The next day, beside the road, the red flowers were brighter than the day before. The natural beauty made me gasp. It gave me an understanding of the energy of growing and youth and convinced me it couldn’t be destroyed with a heartless stick. I wanted to be like the soul of a flower.

Then I saw an old woman and child coming along the road. When they reached the flowers the child quickly plucked one. I felt great horror and then heard the old woman say, "What beautiful flowers. Don’t pick them." The next day, I couldn’t see the flowers anymore. The grass and leaves on the ground were almost dried. I was in a world of great sorrow.

Life on the Grassland

I think life on the grassland is very interesting because my family lives there, and I am used to living there too. In summertime the grassland is green and beautiful. My family pitches a tent there with our animals. When dawn comes, the sun turns the sky a fiery red, and my mother wakes up and goes to milk the yaks. When she finishes milking, she sends the yaks out and keeps the calves tied until the yaks have gone. After that she sends out the calves in a different direction and cleans the yak shed. When my mother finishes her work, she comes in and begins cooking breakfast.

After breakfast my father takes the sheep out to the grassland. Sometimes he wears a Tibetan robe and rides a horse to follow the sheep on the mountains. Frost covers the grassland in the morning, and it’s very white and cool. Herdspeople don’t have sunglasses to shade their eyes from the bright light. They hang some yak hair over their eyes to follow the animals. When the sun reaches it’s zenith, it’s very hot. The animals are thirsty, and the river is crowded with many animals. Herdspeople keep their animals away from other people’s animals.

When I was at home, I helped my mother fetch water, cook and wash clothes. Sometimes I herded animals on the grassland. I like the grassland, and I like animals even more.

Winter is very different from summer. In the winter my family lives in a house in a thicket of thorn trees. My mother does not wake up as early as in summer because it’s very cold. In winter the earth seems yellow, and animals die. The earth gets covered with thick snow, and the ground freezes. Animals can’t find grass under the hard snow. They can’t eat, and so they starve. There is a well for each family. But when the water freezes, it’s very difficult for animals to drink it.

I feel sad when the animals die because I like animals, and they are very important to nomads. If their animals died what would carry nomads’ tents, and what would carry nomads across rivers and up mountains?


The Wind Horse Flag

In Tibetan areas we often see wind horse flags. They are long cloths on which horses, scriptures and the six syllables are printed. We often put them on top of houses, or people put them where a vehicle accident happened. They prevent evils from injuring people again.

The wind horse flag has five clouds, they are red, white, blue, green and yellow. They symbolize the five elements that comprise the world: earth, water, fire, wind and sky. Another explanation is that the red is sun, green is grassland, yellow is earth, blue is sky and white is clouds.

The origin of the wind horse flag may be a monk who obtained a scripture from India. When he crossed a river, he dropped the scripture into the river carelessly. Then he quickly spread the scripture on a big rock and sat in meditation. Suddenly violent thunder sounded like drums. He felt liberation from all sadness, and when he opened his eyes he saw that all of the scripture had been blown into the sky by a strong wind. Finally, he went straight to heaven.

In order to commemorate the spirit of the monk and the scripture of Buddhism, people printed the scripture on the cloth and hung it up between the sky and the Earth as though the scripture was flying in the sky. We also know why people put the wind horse flag on the top of mountains and houses. Our ancestors had a very great idea about chanting scripture, they thought not only could people chant scripture, but so could the five elements. The wind horse flag is a good example of how they use the wind to blow the flag, which means that the wind also chants scripture.

—Adalakanzhu “Ella,” 21, Tibetan Chinese.
Traditional Wedding Customs

When Tibetan herdsmen marry, the families of the bride and the groom ask a local lama to select an auspicious day for the marriage. On the selected day, the bride’s family gives their daughter some ornaments and new clothes. They also comb the bride’s hair and braid it in many plaits.

The groom’s family prepares by cleaning their house and sewing new clothes for the groom. They buy some presents and foods including vegetables, candy, meat, wine and beer.

When the wedding time arrives, the groom’s family sends five men to lead the bride to the groom’s home. Two of the five men must be the groom’s father and an uncle. They all ride horses, and they bring a nice white horse for the bride. They also bring auspicious presents such as silk, tea, butter, yaks, sheep, horses and a small bag called layi, which is the most important present. It’s made of white cloth, with a yellow cloth sun, moon and star. The small bag is full of barley and a knotted stick with seven different colored pieces of cloth. When they reach the bride’s home, they put the layi on a table, praise it’s auspiciousness and wish eternal joy for everybody. Then they enjoy a wonderful meal!

The next day, the bride leaves for the groom’s home with her father, uncle, brother and the five men from the groom’s home. At the groom’s home, there is a white blanket marked with a symbol made of barley. The bride sits on this. Then some of the groom’s relatives lead the bride into the yard. Outside of the kitchen there is a cask of milk and a hobble made of yak hair. First the bride puts the cask of milk in the kitchen and ties the hobble around the pillar that supports the roof in the middle of the kitchen. Then she and the groom sit on the white blanket marked with the symbol. Then all the relatives and guests give auspicious scarves to the couple and have a big banquet for many days. And so the bride becomes a member of the groom’s family forever. This is how people get married in my homeland.

The Broken Ruler

On May 24, 1996, five people and I represented our class at a “whole school mathematics selection examination.” On the wall outside the classroom I saw a notice, “Examinees must have a pencil, ruler and an eraser.” I went into the classroom. Ding-Ding, rang the bell. It was only two minutes before the examination. I opened my pencil box, but I couldn’t find my ruler. I was worried, and I scolded myself for being careless. I knew there would be some exercises on analytic geometry requiring a ruler. I didn’t know what I should do. I looked at the students around me. They were already prepared, and I felt more worried.

“What’s wrong with you?” said Niji, who was sitting behind me. “I forgot my ruler. I can’t find it,” I said. There was only one minute before the examination. Suddenly I heard something breaking. I turned back around and Niji gave me half of a new green ruler. “Oh, what a beautiful new ruler,” I said looking at her with deep gratitude. I saw the other half of the green ruler in her hand, and she smiled.

The teacher gave us the examination papers. I wrote the answers to problems one, two and three. Number six was on analytic geometry and required a ruler. I took the ruler and very carefully drew the pattern.

The examination was finished, and I left the classroom. I couldn’t control my excitement. I shook Niji’s hand and said, “Thank you very much!” She smiled so sweetly.

Both writings are by Quachu Zhoma “Susan,” 20, Tibetan Chinese student.
Evil-expelling rituals are a Tibetan religious activity. In this world, everything has an opposite: bad and good, beautiful and ugly, gods and monsters. When people get an unlucky disease from a ghost and die, a lama or the family members hold a ceremony to expel the ghost. First, family members use barley and butter mixed together to make animal shapes. Then these shapes are put on a white cloth and Jiaxie, a scripture to control disease and bad luck, is chanted for two days. After chanting, the animal shapes are put on a black cloth. Four people take them in four different directions. Ghosts, bad luck and diseases are attracted to these animals. If you take the animals, you must not wear a hat, and you must not look behind yourself. If you do, the bad things and ghosts will surround you.

Ghosts wander everywhere. Some Tibetan lamas have special, powerful magic. They use a gun to kill ghosts on the mountain, or they corral the ghost into the Yellow River. When lamas shout to the river, people hear the ghost yell. Do you believe in ghosts? I’m not sure I do. I heard that when people die some souls are reluctant to part with precious things or loved ones. So they don’t go to heaven or any of the eighteen layers of hell. These souls wander about where they were born.

Some people can see ghosts. A famous Tibetan lama said that if people have no powerful magic or no image on their shoulders, they can see ghosts. There are usually two images on the shoulders of everyone, which we can’t see.

Here is a story about ghosts. In Rajiain Township, Machin County, some herdsmen went around Machin Snow Mountain. They did half the journey on foot. At night they made a fire to cook. After supper, they chose a small hillock for sleeping. A person named Zhacxi woke up at midnight. Suddenly, he saw a naked person who was moaning. He called to the other people, and the naked person suddenly disappeared. They thought it was an unlucky place and wanted to move away. A moment later, the naked ghost appeared and just looked at him while moaning. Then the ghost disappeared into the hillock.

In another story, a monk who chanted scripture for a dead person was given silver coins by the dead person’s family. After chanting scripture for seven days, he returned to his temple to rest. That night was dark with no moon. The door moved as if there was a hard wind blowing. It sounded like thunder. Suddenly, someone called to the monk and said, “Please give me.” This was repeated three times. The monk was awakened by the fearful sounds. The terrible voice continued saying, “Please give me.” He couldn’t believe it was true. He turned on the light, and he was so afraid. He looked very hard and saw a black hand with feathers. There was only this hand. Then, he thought of the silver coins that the family had given him. He took the coins from a wood box and threw them on the ground. He put some sutras (prayers), on his quilt and went to bed. After a moment, he didn’t hear anything else.


**Consequence**

In ancient times, a male and a female bird lived in the forest. One day, when they were flying over a forest looking for something to eat, they saw some seeds on the ground. The male bird asked the female bird, “Who should get the seeds?”

“Don’t you know females are always first?”

“I agree, but let’s have a competition to see who truly should get the seeds.”

They decided to race around a nearby hill one time, and whoever could get back to the place where the seeds were first would be the winner and have all the seeds. They started the competition, but when they got back to the place where the seeds were, they had been eaten by a crow, and there was nothing left for them.

—Dongdrjia, ”John,” 22, Tibetan Chinese
Once in a Lifetime Birthday Party

The herdspeople don’t usually do anything to celebrate their exact birthdays, but there is a small ritual on the 80th birthday. In some areas there are some old people. In my hometown there are only a few old people.

When someone turns 80, his/her family makes a new sheepskin robe, shoes and so on for the birthday person. The festival lasts about three days. In those days all the person’s relatives come to the home with gifts, and they eat, drink and enjoy themselves together. The next day they go to temple. Inside the central hall there are many colorful paintings and scriptures, and they kowtow in front of them. The old person’s daughters, sons and other relatives put butter into the butter lamps, so the lamps will not go out all day.

Then the relatives go around the central hall and kowtow. They pray that the old person will have a good life. Eight monks chant scriptures for a day, and the family gives them food and money.

—Yikbeh “Mariah,” 21, Tibetan Chinese.

Tibetan Funerals

Tibetans practice four kinds of funerals: final departure, cremation, water burial and ground burial. Final departure and cremation are the most common.

**Final Departure:** There is a magnificent final departure site near Lhasa. An old monk works there and lives near the place of final departure. The family of the corpse only needs to pay the monk lamb, butter and cheese. There is a big, round stone on which two crossed vajras are drawn. Vajras are used to stop evil form coming near. There is a shelter on a hill with hundreds of skulls hung under it. Many prayer flags are also there. The old monk takes a small piece of bone from each corpse and makes a string of beads.

But most places of final departure are simple. There is just a big round stone that is covered with blood. The family of the dead person pays a monk to preside over the ceremony. The corpse must be tied in three places like a fetus. An even number number of people should take the corpse to the final departure, and they must be relatives. The body is cut into pieces and fed to vultures, and the bones are pounded. Most corpses can be taken to the place of final departure but not lamas, babies and people who died in an accident or were murdered.

**Cremation:** Cremation is used for people such as lamas, leaders, and people who died suddenly with their palms pressed together in an attitude of meditation. Seven days after great lamas die, their corpses are put into the fetal position and burned. Monks put the ashes of lama corpses in a stupa (a building for relics) or use them to make a figure of the lama. The leader’s bone ashes are kept by the monastery. Some of the bone ashes of people who died suddenly with no illness are kept by the family or put into a monastery.

**Water Burial:** In Yushu water burial is used for babies because local people believe that babies like playing with water. But in Guolog babies are buried under stones because local people say if you bury your baby under stones at the foot of a mountain then your next baby will not die. In Huangnan water burial is used for old people who died naturally because water must be clean, and an old person’s personality is similar to a baby’s.

**Earth Burial:** This burial is for people who died in accidents or were murdered. If the corpse touched the ground, the soul will not leave, and it can not be taken to the place of final departure (The site of the final departure is a pure or holy place so the corpses must be clean). Earth burial is used in Yushu. In Guolog such corpses are taken to a simple place of final departure. Local people believe that since burial requires digging in the ground, you might kill many other beings at the same time. So they do not practice ground burial. Also, after a few years the corpse would be eaten by worms, so local people say earth burial is the worst sin.

Festive Deities

The 22nd to the 25th of the sixth lunar month (our summer), according to my home town’s calendar, is the greatest festival for Guide County people. It is called the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival. It has an interesting folklore background and a very long history.

Long ago there was a king in my home county. The king was very cruel, and he did not manage the area well. People grew so angry that some brave people disobeyed the king and, instead, they obeyed a lama who was very kind to people and very famous locally. The king was enraged and wanted to kill the lama.

One morning, the lama saw a young man lying near his door. He ran to help the man but found that he had been murdered. At that time several soldiers caught him and took him to the king who accused him of being a murderer. The lama said the young man was murdered with a knife, but he had no knife. The king saw the lama’s pencil-box. He thought it must contain a pen knife. The king told the lama that if there was a knife in the pencil-box the lama must be the murderer. If there was not the lama would be set free. The lama was very afraid because he always put a knife in his pencil-box to sharpen his pencils. But when the king emptied the pencil-box there was no knife. The lama was delighted. After the king and soldiers left, the lama looked inside the pencil-box. A small man was holding the pen knife. The tiny man resembled a Chinese high officer and was leading a white horse. The lama asked in amazement, “Who are you?” The man said he was Yei La, the soul of the king’s famous high officer. The lama said, “You saved my life. I will do anything to help you if I can.”

“I need a simple house to live in,” said Yei La, and then he disappeared. The lama felt very sad as he didn’t know where to build the house. After a month, a villager came to the lama and told him he had seen a tiny man who looked like a high Chinese officer, on a big stone in Shang Jiu Village. The lama built a small temple on the big stone where the villager had seen Yei La.

From then on, the 22nd to the 25th of the month became the festival. Every year it is held at the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival Ground. Many trees and fields surround this ground. The ground has a brilliant gate and a dancing platform. In front of the gate there is a beautiful building, called “Hot Spring Guest House.”

Before 1966, the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival was held for three or four days. Many monks chanted, “Om Mani Padme Hum,” to invoke the blessings of Chenrezig, the embodiment of compassion. They held the Yei La image and another image of Yei La’s friend. The two deities had met at the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival Ground. The monks held the two images together and walked around the fields to signify that the farmers would have a bumper harvest.

Unfortunately, after 1966 the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival was stopped for eight years because of the Cultural Revolution. In 1974 the festival was started again, but it had greatly changed. It is now held for seven days, and the monks do not hold the icons of Yei La and Yei La’s friend.

During the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival, the festival grounds are like a bustling market emanating a merry clamor of endless bargaining and thousands of guests. Traders from Xining, Tibet, Sichuan and Shanghai sell incense, leather boots, fruits, tea, rice, dried noodles, jujubes, butter, jewels, and so on. Many old villagers say, “If you want to buy something, you should go to the festival on the last day because on that day most traders are leaving, and things are very cheap.”

Many people like this festival. In my hometown people say, “If you haven’t gone to the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival, your life has no meaning. I will go to the Sixth Lunar Month Deity Festival every year if I am not dead.” I like the festival, too, because I can see the magnificence of this world, and it has a very long history. But I feel sad because we can’t see the icons of Yei La and his friend anymore.

—Tseirang Dorji “Justin,” 19, Tibetan Chinese.
To the frogs
on a temple pool
The lotus stems are tall;
To the Gods
of Mount Everest
An elephant is small.

From "Bodhisattva of Compassion"
by John Blofeld.

Quiet bamboo
Double temple
Extended mountain
Yangshuo countryside

Earth Touch
Walking along a ledge we meet a giant Buddha carved into a crack in Mount Qing Cheng.

Photo by Scott Vlaun
A gracious family in the Shennongjia Mountains.

Tobacco, abused by many and considered sacred by few, is a plant enjoyed worldwide, even in the high mountains of China. Our friend has a bundle of rolled tobacco leaves; he breaks off half an inch of a leaf and fills the pipe. He squats comfortably next to pile of tubers. Assuming it to be a harvest of sweet potatoes for the family, I inquire into the nature of the variety. I am told that these potatoes are pig food.

Below: Demonstrating the strength of her weaving skills, this woman carries her baby in a handmade basket.

Thank you, Chuugoku (China), for sharing your inventions like the bicycle. We find folks fixing bicycles on street corners in Shanghai. A flood of bodies flows through the streets at 7 a.m. Parents and children make their way to work or school on bicycles and buses. Ding de dling dleeeeng, the air is alive with bells and yells, laughs and singsong words. Beep Beep Beeeeppp, a path opens for a car. As it rushes by, spewing black farts, a few bikes narrowly escape the tires, maintaining balance through morning flow.

Left: Skeptical friends regard the Westerner (me) at a roadside market in Guilin Province.

Right: A ball of dough is quickly and expertly transformed into strands of hen hao cher, a very delicious noodle food.
Flutes and drums
Children and adults flock
To the harvest festival.
—Toshiko

Left: A woman bundles rice straw.


Rice dries on concrete slabs, is swept into piles, scooped into large baskets, and fed through a wooden winnower or Yangshuo countryside. The clay pots hold grains and other foods.

—Kusra Kapuler lives with her family in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, spinning clay vessels, folding origami cranes, riding her bike through the rain, singing, stretching, and, when inspired, photographing life all around her.
Inside a Tibetan Temple

The entrances to many temples have murals with the four guardian kings of the four directions, the wheel of rebirth, and the protector deities. Inside the temple there is a big sutra hall. This is where lamas worship and chant sutras, Buddhist scriptures. In the front of the hall is a throne where lamas preach. There are also rows of seats where monks sit during rituals. The walls of the main hall often have pictures of historical figures and Buddha stories. One wall may have relics, scriptures and copper images. There are also many scrolls of sutra.

Different temples have different styles. Tibetan temple construction stresses simplicity and beauty (using simple materials such as earth and wood, rather than metal, cement, etc.)

Temples follow different traditions, therefore the scriptures and images will not be the same in every temple. However, the Buddhas are usually there. Offerings are put in front of their images including money, butter, butter lamps, strips of silk and water-offering bowls.

Temples are linked with Tibetan life. Even in modern society, most Tibetans go to temples. Temples are considered to be protective. When people do anything important, or when they have a big problem, they go to temples to pray. When they get married, they go to temples too.

Tibetans believe in an after-life and think that temples will lead them to the right place so that their after-life will not have suffering and pain. Temples are vital to Tibetan life.


Hat of Dignity

Uncle Dom Zhi had a hat made of dignity. He depended on his hat to live; if he didn’t have the hat, then there was no meaning to his life. He loved his hat so much that he wore it everywhere, especially to attend meetings. He wore it very tidily as an ornament. He never left the hat even for a minute except when he was asleep.

One day, he was going to attend a meeting, but he couldn’t find his hat. He asked his wife where it was. She said, “I put your hat by the door, and then I didn’t lock it. Maybe it was eaten by a dog.” Dom Zhi was so sad, and he felt very angry at the dog. He scolded his wife. After several curses, he left to go to the meeting.

Since his hat had been a hiding place for him, his life began to change a lot. At the meeting, he started to act like an important, confident leader, but no one knew why. When he came home, his wife smiled and welcomed him. She said, “The dog has not eaten your hat. It fell under the bed. I found it when I was cleaning the house.” She handed him the hat. Dom Zhi thought for a moment and said, “No, no, my hat was eaten by the dog. It’s not mine. I have no hat.” And with those words, he threw the hat to the dog.

—Chajup “Amy,” 20, Tibetan Chinese.
"It's time," Noi's mother said. Her voice was steel.

Noi's heart thundered as he followed her through the sticky darkness. His sisters and brother were silent as they crept past sleeping houses. They had barely two hours before a blade of light separated sky from earth.

The two men that Noi's mother had hired to transport them to freedom were waiting with a canoe on the Mekong River. The Manivongs planned to escape their country, Laos, forever.

The family crammed into the boat, and the men shoved off. On the other side of the river was Thailand and a new chance for Noi's family. But on this side of the river the Pathet Lao (communist soldiers) shot people for trying to escape.

As the boat broke through the black water, Noi worried about his father whom he hadn’t seen in two years. Would he ever be released from the labor camp for prisoners of war that the Pathet Lao called “seminar” camp? Would he think the family had abandoned him to escape Laos? Would he even make it out alive?

Noi’s racing thoughts were interrupted by a rush of frigid water gushing over the edge of the boat. The weight of eight people squashed the wobbly four-man canoe. It was sinking like a penny in a pool.

"Hang on to the canoe!" Noi’s mother yelled.

The boat flipped three times as wet hands scrambled for a hold on the slippery wood. Finally it settled upside down. Noi’s mother held his six-year-old brother, Jo, against the boat while the hired men, Noi and his older sisters, Pon and Tic, kicked furiously to steer the boat back to land. Noi’s younger sister, Kak, panicked and thrashed, gulping mouthfuls of water.

Pon and Tic begged their ancestors and Buddha, “Please help us! Don’t let us die tonight!”

As the Mekong forced them down river, the water steadied, and the family made slight progress toward land, but Jo soon lost his hold and disappeared under the murky water. Time seemed to stop as arms and legs intertwined in the frenzied shadows. Noi’s mother, Dalouny, reached out, barely snagging Jo before he was lost forever, but their momentum toward the river bank stopped.


Noi's family reached Thailand, but their struggles had only begun. As an illegal resident, Noi could not attend school. Only 13, he worked in a sign factory while his mother and sisters sold food on the streets.

In 1987 Noi's father, Lt. Colonel Nhanh Manivong, was released from the labor camp after 12 years. Nhanh lived in Laos for nearly a year before learning through word of mouth that his family was in Bangkok. He obtained a visitor's passport and was reunited with his family. The Manivongs entered Thailand's Na Pho Refugee Camp and then immigrated to the U.S. in 1989. Noi was 19 and hadn't attended school since his escape from Laos in fifth grade. He studied English and received his high school equivalency in 1997.

Noi and his family are now U.S. citizens, and they work in school services, health care, production and retail. Noi married an American woman, this author, whom he met in a volleyball league. He now studies information technology. Kak, his younger sister, is an assistant E.S.L. teacher for elementary students. Children born in Southeast Asian refugee camps still enter her classroom. Right now countless other refugees sit and wait for their chance at new lives.

—Laura Manivong (Noi's wife), Overland Park, KS.
Fighting occurs all over the world. One group attacks. Then the attacked retaliate. It feels so hopeless. There must be a better way. —L.A.

Yes, I am convinced there is a better way. Unfortunately, I do not have a master plan to end all wars. However, I have seen that individuals and groups of people have made significant progress in resolving conflicts. I propose we learn by observing such individuals and groups. Let us be open to learning from people we encounter, from books and from all useful teachings.

As an example, I picked a heart-warming book, “My Brother, My Sister and I” by Yoko Kawashima, (Watkins Aladdin, 1966). During World War II, the author, who was then 14, and her siblings had to flee on foot from Korea. These are a few lessons I gained from that family’s attitude and peaceful lifestyle:

When Yoko’s only shoes are destroyed in a house fire, Older Brother gives the shoes a burial in a stream. He says, “Shoes, you served my sister well. She thanks you. I thank you. Help us find new shoes.”

Older Brother repeats to Yoko the teaching of their absent father. “You must not cry or fuss over what you have lost. You must appreciate what you still have.”

Older Sister says to Yoko, “Do not say or think, ‘If there were no war...’ The word ‘if’ is hindsight. We do not have control of the outcome of things. We do have control of moving forward led by our own worthy spirit.”

Yoko was a poverty-stricken refugee, and her classmates treated her cruelly. A sympathetic teacher chose Yoko to enter the city science fair by raising silk worms. One day Yoko was looking at the silk worms. They were so ugly but eventually they would create beautiful, white, strong silk thread. Yoko thought, “If I go through life well, I will become a beautiful person—maybe not as beautiful as silk thread, but as beautiful as humble wild flowers, giving pleasure to all. How silly of me to be bothered by the snobbish girls at school.”

Dear L.A., If we start out observing the kind, gentle, peaceable ways of others, (people we know or people we meet in books) we will make some progress toward becoming peaceful individuals. The more progress we make, the clearer the next step will become in healing of anger, hate and revenge. One step will show us the next in living the path of peace.

Send your questions or comments to:
Dear Hanna c/o Skipping Stones
P.O. Box 3939, Eugene, OR 97403

Illustrated by Paula Gregovich, Eugene, Oregon.
Quake

It was the end of winter; the cold
Was melting into the earth; promises
Of spring harvests were sung to the tune
Of hoping...Perhaps it was the right time
For a change in mood; everybody
Knows that too much contentment
Is harmful.

Listen
To the shudders.

Proving its imperfection, the earth
Trembled with guilt of its shortcomings
And faults. Spread the waves
Of destruction in its nervous breast
And with greater cowardice
Trembled again.

And showed you the power of its heart,
While great rocks shook and died
In seconds, and the alley cats
Felt it under their dusty feet and ran
In terror into nowhere, screaming
With the voices of a thousand
Fears, proving
The ill omen.

You never had a chance to say
Goodbye; miles of dust-filled land
Had fallen between your hearts.

Serenity

In everyone's heart there is a place of peace.
Here there are no worries, no problems and no confrontations.
Just whimsical thoughts of fairies and mystical creatures.
Only kindness and love.

Commotion of everyday life turns into the beautiful song of a robin.
And the wretched odor of the world disappears with a fresh breeze bringing heavenly scents
Of blooming wild flowers.

Here there is no sight that can pollute your mind with horrid images.
Only admirable landscapes, with gracefully flowing streams.
When your mind needs to be eased, and your soul replenished,
Close your eyes, and remember this place in your heart where you can find serenity.

—Danielle Gulis, 8th grade, Rockford, Michigan.
“It’s time,” she said. Her voice was firm; her green eyes burned into mine. “You’ll have to let them load him onto the truck.”

“Oh please, Mom!” I tried just one more time. “Please let him stay! He won’t do it again. I’ll be careful; I promise!” I couldn’t bear the thought of Chico being taken away.

“Pedro, I told you before. Once is too much.” She sighed, and I knew her decision was final.

“At least let me take him for one last walk. Please?” As though Chico knew she might say no, he suddenly jerked on the chain and dragged me out the door into the garden in back. I didn’t even check to see if I had Mom’s permission.

Chico was an anteater, a gift from my cousin, Esteban, who lived in the Amazon jungle. I’d had him a year, and I loved him the way most kids love a puppy or a kitten. An anteater is just as lovable but more fun, I thought. Besides, all the kids envied me. He was still a baby, but he was as big as the biggest dog I’d ever seen. With his enormous chest, short legs and long snout, he looked like somebody made a mistake putting him together. His long, silky fur was so black it looked blue. And his short, strong paws were armed with huge claws that looked like meat hooks in a butcher shop.

We bolted out of the garden and into the street. Chico huffed and puffed, rooting here and there as I struggled to direct him toward a neighboring park.

Like an invisible sheet, the heat of the Peruvian sun slapped my skin, and I began sweating. I remember how my wet shirt stuck to my chest, and how I could see the heat steaming off of it. And I remember the sweet odor of grass mixed with the luscious fragrance of jasmine from the vines that hung over the garden walls.

Chico’s gigantic claws clickity-clacked on the sidewalk, and the way he moved reminded me of a fur ball rolling along. The enormous chain around his monster neck cut into my fingers, burning my hands as I held on for dear life.

Then we entered the park, where tall eucalyptus trees provided a sudden break from the sun. My skin welcomed the coolness, and my eyes adjusted to the dark. I allowed Chico to lead me where he chose. At last he found what he was looking for, a dead tree trunk filled with termites and ants. I sat down on the cool grass, leaned against a tree and watched Chico enjoy his feast. His long, rough tongue darted feverishly, and he devoured his treat as if it were his last meal.

When he looked up, I went to him and put my arms around his neck.

“Why did you do it?” I said between sobs. “Why did you have to go and tear up Mom’s bedroom? What kind of friend are you anyway?” Then I remembered that it was really my fault, not his, and I sobbed harder. “How could I have forgotten to leave you chained in the back yard? Now they’re going to take you away, and I might never see you again. I don’t even know what’s going to happen to you.”

Chico’s thin, tapered head turned toward me as if he understood. His eyes were bright, like roasted coffee beans.

Chico must have sensed my upset mood as we took our time returning home. A large truck stood by and Mother waited for us at the front door.

“What’s going to happen to him?” I asked.

She shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe they’ll let him go in the jungle.”

“But Mom, Chico might starve to death. We’ve had him since he was a baby. He hasn’t learned how to survive in the jungle.” I broke into
sobs again as I pictured Chico in the jungle, hungry, helpless and alone. “Please, please, Mom. I’ll do the dishes every day. I’ll clean my room without you telling me.”

My pleading fell on deaf ears. A few minutes later I waved a last goodbye to Chico, whose snout protruded from the back of the speeding truck. I stood in the middle of the street, tears streaming down my cheeks.

A few days later I was walking in the park and playing with my favorite knife, when suddenly I had an idea. “Maybe if I give up something I really like,” I thought, “then just maybe...” I didn’t even dare to think the rest of the idea. I put the knife in a package and sent it to Uncle Carlos, Esteban’s father, with a note telling him how worried I was about Chico. “Please, Uncle Carlos, don’t send Chico back to the jungle,” I wrote. “Maybe I can still talk Mother into taking him back.”

The long days of summer vacation passed slowly. Every day I ran to meet the mailman and came back disappointed. I was almost glad when school put an end to the empty weeks.

And then came a letter from Esteban! “Don’t worry,” he said. “We’re keeping Chico at home, and you can come visit him any time you want.”

—Jorge Larco, born in Peru, lives in Portland, OR.

Woodpecker
My blue feathers blend in with the sky
My big beak helps me build big holes
For a safe, dry home for my young and me.

I like the cool crescent wood against my beak
I like poking at the cold hard wood that
Cools my beak like a cool refreshing Pepsi.

—Jimmy Quintana, 12, was born in Los Angeles, California. His parents are from El Salvador.

The Rippling Water of a Cool Spring Morning
This enchanting stream Sparkling under the sun’s light
A smooth moving dream.

—Rachel Abraham, 14, Wexford, PA.

What Causes Frost?
Jack Frost might get all the credit for the frosty winter patterns, but the real creator is Mother Nature.

Ground frost—the kind that paints delicate patterns on window panes and leaves frozen crystals on almost everything—depends on water vapor, an invisible gas form of water. (Water has three forms: solid ices, liquid, and gaseous water vapor. Steam that escapes a boiling tea kettle is water vapor.)

Water vapor is always in the air. People call it humidity. When the sun warms the surface of water, such as lakes, rivers and oceans, some of the water evaporates, or dries into water vapor. When the air cools, the water vapor turns back into water droplets. These droplets can form fog or mist, or collect in clouds and fall as rain or snow. Some turns into water at ground level, called dew.

Dew forms when the leaves of plants become colder overnight than the air around them. The temperature at which this happens is called the dew point, and it changes all the time, depending on how much moisture is in the air.

So what does this all have to do with frost? If the dew point is below 32°F, the water vapor turns into frozen droplets, or ground frost, instead of dew. The water vapor tends to start condensing around specks of dust on cold surfaces, such as grass blades or window panes. From these points, tiny, six-sided ice crystals begin to spread outward, layering on top of each other.

By morning, the frost has formed feathery and leafy patterns in ice—and they’re so pretty that they almost could qualify as art!

—Susan Vaughn, The Ohio State University, Ohio.
Precious

Colorful long dresses that dance in celebration
To keep the tradition going
Famous rivers flowing with life
People rejoice for the goodness and peace
But now where are all the lost souls that died
From earthquakes and genocide?
It still stands: Armenia.
Where is the ancient land and people?
Where is the rich soil?
Where is the place where you look up and see
mountains touching skyes?
A huge land that has been cut to a fourth
Is there still a place where one city has a
thousand churches?
Where did all this begin?
Who were the people that created these wonders?

It still stands: Armenia.

—Anita Moursalian, 10th grade, New City, NY.

Chip Off the Old Block

The smile that mimics mine
behind the glass I stare at the old block.
I am the chip that was not perfectly cut.
For years it was the same warnings,
heedings and instructions,
but now it is only idle chatter and
recounting of another's life.
I had to learn it all myself with
me as my own master.
The sordid tale of a life
crumbled where the pieces
are dusted off and ill-fitting
is everywhere I look.
I am not alone.
The guard comes, announcing to
wrap it up, and it seems we've just started.
There is an awkward moment as if both of
us are asking “Why?” but nothing is said.
I am led away from a two-hour visit that must
last two or more months and then left alone
with a head full of “what if’s” and “why’s.”

Poem and art by Mike Salazar, 18, is a prisoner in Iowa Park, TX.

Friends

When you say the word “friends,”
you get a warm feeling,
like homemade hot chocolate
running down your throat.
If you could feel the word
“friends,”
it would feel like velvet.
If you could see the word “friends,”
you would see a gold bar.

Friends are the key to
the door of life.
You need the key
to go through the door.

—Jalisa Van Heel, 6th grade,
New Brighton, Minnesota.

Man With Alzheimer’s

I am stuck in this world
where memory
is no longer my lifelong companion,
where my heart
is empty, my mind lost.
The past is an empty tin can,
the future shattered glass lying on dry, brown weeds.
I look around,
but everything is foreign:
Arctic ground, frigid gray sky,
ancient buildings of faded blue and rusty brown paint.
Furious dogs bark in the distance.

It seems so familiar, but then it’s forgotten.
Images blur and lose their shape and color,
a dense fog on a warm summer day, but it is December.
My palms begin to sweat:
fear of the past,
of the unknown.

I can’t take the pain,
louder than the dogs, louder than life:
just one more day, wandering, lost,
forgotten.

—David Goldstein, 15, New City, NY.
The Fixed Dreidel

“You are the rudest children I have ever taught! And Kevin Fox, wipe that grin off your face, or I’ll call your parents.”

I stare at my unlaced sneakers. Mrs. Finkle has forced the seventh graders to attend the Hanukkah party at the B’nai Israel Senior Residence, and I’ve never even been in a nursing home before. We 15 kids huddle in a corner talking among ourselves. Mrs. Finkle hands out dreidels and bags of peanuts and orders us to spin the dreidel with the residents.

The dreidel game is usually one of my favorite parts of Hanukkah. Spinning the dreidel is like playing dice but with only four sides. Each Hebrew letter tells you what you get from the pot: nun is nothing, hay is half, gimel is everything. If you get a shin, you have to put something in. I play with my friends Mitch and Fish for money, and I always win. I’m going to be a professional gambler someday.

“Okay you three, let’s go.” Mrs. Finkle stands over us, pointing to a table with three men and three empty places. “And you’d better behave yourselves, which you have yet to do today.”

Which we never do in religious school. Everybody calls us “The Animals,” and it isn’t only because of our last names—Fish, Fox and Wolf. We slouch toward the table. An old woman sticks her cane in front of Fish’s ankles, and he trips and falls into a walker.

I slide into a metal folding chair before I get tripped too. Across from me sits a guy with gray hair. His shirt has stains and a collar that went out of style before I was born. A fat, bald guy with thick glasses and a bow tie sits next to him. On my side at the end is a skinny bald guy. Fish has to sit next to him, lucky Fish. Mitch parks himself across the table at the opposite end from me, next to the full bag of peanuts. Right away, he rips into them.

“Vh, uh.” The fat guy with glasses wags his finger. “Those are for the game.”

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“Uh, uh.” The fat guy with glasses wags his finger. “Those are for the game.”

The old guys ask our names, and I forget theirs. We each toss two peanuts into the pile. Mitch spins. A hay faces up. Mitch takes six peanuts from the pile and eats one of them.

“Slow down,” the skinny guy warns him. “You’re going to eat yourself out of the game.”

Mitch grunts. He probably believes the sooner he runs out of peanuts, the sooner he can go home.

The guy with glasses gets a nun and passes the dreidel on. The guy with hair spins a shin and throws in two more peanuts. I get a gimel and take them all away.

“Yes!” I pump my fist in the air. The Fox, one. The old guys, nothing.

We each push in two more peanuts. I spin the gimel in the next round and add another ten to my pile.

As the game goes on, Mitch eats the peanuts as fast as he can win them. He drops the shells on the floor, and Mrs. Finkle swoops by to yell at him.

“Don’t worry,” the guy with hair says. “They’ll clean them up after we leave.”

“Max, that’s no way to be a role model for these kids,” his friend with glasses says.

“Okay, okay,” Max waves his hand, “pick ’em up.”

Mitch picks the shells from the floor and adds them to his pile, instantly doubling his winnings. Good move. Fish and I crack open our shells, eat the peanuts and sneak the two halves back into our piles, leaving the outside of the shell facing up. But the old guys shake their heads.

“We’ll have no cheating, boys,” one says.

Soon Mitch runs out. The two bald guys and Fish go bust. Only Max and I remain with a whole crowd around us.

Mrs. Finkle pushes kids to dance, but I stay in my seat. I’m winning big. Max has six shells left, and I have a gazillion. I pile them into a mini-pyramid, like the ones my ancestors, the slaves in Egypt, built.

Only one more round, and I can win it all.

Max throws in his entire stash. He picks up the wooden dreidel and spins it way too hard. It flies off the table and skitters across the floor. It lands under a lady’s wheelchair.

“Uh, oh,” Max says.

Fish stands and points at me. “Kevin wins. Kevin wins! He has the most shells.”

“Not so fast, sonny,” the guy with glasses says. He exchanges a glance with Max and digs a dreidel from
Someone tell me why a man like Malcolm X
Went unheard for his true intentions
Why my American heroes
Are rarely mentioned.

Somebody explain to me why
I was lynched while you were just hung
How a whole nation of people can believe
They’re supreme to another one.

We built this country with our bare hands and feet
Robbed of our history, raped of our liberty
But with the same thing in mind, we’re advertised
In prime-time as the leading ones in crime.

Being called “colored” is offensive to me
Such a word is absurd in the year 2G
Some say separation is an everyday thing
That it comes as second nature
In the species of human beings.

Maybe if we could stick together
Whatever the cost
All battles would be won, and little wars lost
But blacks and whites are both quick
To raise a fist when there’s
No logical reason to be prejudiced.

—Lyn Miller-Lachmann, Ballston Lake, NY
—Jennifer Trabi, African American, high school senior, Iola, KS.

Winter is…
The white wolf’s dream
Spring’s passing corner
The coldest season of the year
The sky’s falling snow
The season you can see any peaceful animal’s footprints
The season to be jolly
The white carpet’s relative
The penguin’s friend
Time to have hot cocoa
Time to go sledding on a slippery hill

—Stacey Wagner, 8, Grove City, Ohio.
Blood Donation, Sept. 12, 2001

Eyes blank.
Heart swelled
beating to a drum that
is lost amongst the others.

In line,
almost silent
form in hand:
trembling,
so scared.

I want to cry
to put sun glasses on,
wait for my turn,
for the needle in my arm.
O positive, or negative
I forget.

Bright,
beautiful faces
on the TV screen.
If you’ve seen them, call...

A nation blank.
Hope, drum
lost amongst the others.
—Beth Litwak, 17, New City, NY.

Who Am I?

Who am I?
I need to know,
Where should I be?
Where should I go?

In a world that never bends,
Please tell me, will this ever end?
The side I’m on is always confusing.

The identity I have,
I’m already losing.
Please tell me
Where should I be?
Please tell me
How can I see?
—Whitney Hobley, 10, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

It All Works Out Okay

If I had one wish,
I’d visit younger days.
And tell the younger me,
“IT all works out okay.”

I’d dry off all my tears,
And take me by the hand.
Divided we may fall,
But united we will stand.
—Jessica Somers, 14, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

Witnessing the Destruction

Witnessing the destruction we cause ourselves,
it is impossible not to look deeper,
into our souls
and see what could have been.

No one knows how to look within oneself anymore.
Why take the time and energy,
when we can simply push a button and watch TV?
On TV, fire explodes from within a high-rise,
and people’s screams blare twice as loud.

This is just the beginning.
Rescue crews invade the area desperately searching.
Families await the arrival of loved ones,
only to be let down, destroyed inside.

The ash-covered world
is broken by a red sweater and a china doll.
The only color left on the doll’s ashy body
is her small green eyes.
The owner of the sweater and doll is not to be found
She is gone along with the rest.

We feel safer because we imagine this horror
only on TV and not in our own souls.

The bombings, the abuse, the killings—
out on the street,
not in our minds or hearts.

We must look into our souls, into our minds.
We may not be bombers or killers,
but if we refuse to acknowledge our faults,
we are just as wrong as the
horrors we see on TV.
—Emily Stein, 16, New City, NY.
Proud to be an American, Not Afraid to be Sikh

September 11th upset me in many ways. I was horror-stricken over the tragic events. Some family friends who are no longer with us were trapped in the World Trade Center. I also realized that the blame would go to Arabs, all Arabs, and all people who look Middle Eastern. No one would ever forget the scenes of Osama bin Laden wearing a turban. I and all the males in my family also wear turbans, but wearing the same thing in no way means we feel the same way.

Turbans are worn for different purposes, and there are many different types of turbans. Hindus wear the turban to indicate social status. Sikhs, who come from Northwestern India, wear it for religious purposes. I wear the religious turban to represent my beliefs, which center on the Sikh faith. Even people who do not grow their hair, as I do, wear turbans for religious or even practical reasons, such as protecting your head in the desert heat.

My hair is very long—down to my waist—and the meaning behind it is strength. It is a symbol of my feelings toward my religion, and it represents my personal will power to grow my hair, preserve my culture, and not succumb to the pressures of a different culture. Many kids have urged me to cut my hair, but I don’t because Sikhs believe God has created humans with hair from birth, so hair is a part of our natural creation. Sikhs consider cutting hair as a disgrace to one’s family and religion.

Many people convert to Sikhism because of its simplicity and values. Sikhism suggests that everyone can become a Sikh; this is one that way my religion opens its doors to anyone who is interested in our beliefs. Sikhs also advocate acceptance of all people.

I haven’t always received acceptance from all people. Growing up in America has been difficult. I’ve faced racism ever since I started wearing my turban at age ten. Elementary and middle schools were the worst years of my life; I was beaten up for my turban all the time. In high school things changed; people had grown up and accepted me more. I did not face much racism anymore—that is until September 11th.

I am concerned that since that day, racism against Middle Eastern and Asian people has become more acceptable. Occasionally I will get comments about my turban. I have even been asked if I was a terrorist. Just because I wear a turban, does that mean I am a terrorist? Do I resemble Osama bin Laden? Members of the Taliban? What makes me even more upset is that even if I were Arab, does that mean I should be facing this racism? Not every Arab is a terrorist or part of the Taliban, and they should all be treated fairly. When Timothy McVeigh bombed the Oklahoma City building, no one insulted all men with blond crew cuts because one aspect of their appearance resembled him.

My family was deeply disturbed after hearing that a Sikh man in Arizona was shot dead for no other reason except that he was wearing a turban and looked Middle Eastern. Recently a relative of mine, who also wears a turban, was chased by a man in a car. According to police, the man was a lawyer and had a weapon. This is frightening. It’s so close to home now, and it makes me wonder what strangers, and even friends, are thinking about me and my family.

Obviously being Sikh right now is more dangerous than ever. Despite all of this, the events of Sept. 11th have made me realize that it’s more important than ever for me to remain true to my faith. It advocates acceptance of all good people, regardless of what they wear or believe. I only hope that yours, no matter what it is, does too.

—Shawn Gulati, 10th grade, Clarkstown North HS, New City, NY.
These students want penpals:

Hannah Taloiri, F, 13
Monica Adjeiwaa, F, 16
Ernest Oppong, M, 15
Hannah Mon, F, 17
Daniel Angley, M, 14

Write them all at:
P. O. Box 1724
Sunyani B/A GHANA, W. AFRICA

Stephen Pedaisayi, M, 17, and
Le-Roy Pedzisayi, M, 15
Int: music, drawing, novels, movies and writing.
18 Mufenje Rd.
P. O. Mufakose
Harare, ZIMBABWE
spedaisayi@yahoo.co.uk

Hicham Khalfaoui, M, 17
Int: postcards, stamps, travel, music and learning languages.
Bloc Kastor 27
Rue 27, No. 60
Hay Mohammedi
Casablanca, MOROCCO

Calling All Peace Makers

Please write an original and true story for a new book about the ways people have made peace in their lives. At the Peace Maker site, www.peacemaker.st, you can find directions for writing and submitting a true story for Chicken Soup for the Peace Lover’s Soul. Once you get to the Peace Maker site, go to the section titled Peace Lover’s Stories where there are writing guidelines and you can even submit a story, poem or song on-line about how peace happened anywhere in the world.

—Prof. Candice Carter, Jacksonville, Florida
The War by Anais Vaugelade (Carolrhoda). The Reds and the Blues have been at war for a long time. One day, Prince Fabien, son of the King of Blues, creates an imaginary army of Yellows in order to end the war. His cleverness and courage leads to the unification of the people. Stunning watercolor illustrations. ISBN: 1-57505-562-7.


Efrain of the Sonoran Desert: A Lizard's Life Among the Seri Indians as told by Amalia Astorga and Gary Paul Nabhan (Groundwood). A native Seri storyteller describes the loving relationship between a lizard and a young girl. It also solves the mystery of why lizards thrive near this tribe but are endangered elsewhere. Ages 8 and up. ISBN 0-938317-55-5.


Nico Visita la Luna by Honoria Robledo (Cinco Puntos). Nico is too young to walk but finds plenty of mischief nonetheless. In this surreal tale, he floats his way to the moon on a string of balloons where he has a wonderful time playing in outer space. But don't worry, he makes it home in time to start kindergarten. Available both in English and Spanish. Ages 5 to 9. ISBN 0-938317-57-1.

A Thousand Peaks: Poems from China by Siyu Liu and Orel Protopopescu, illust. Siyu Liu (Pacific View). China’s ancient poets lead us on a trip through the region’s political and natural history. Impeccable design, detailed translations (including original characters and transliterations) and commentaries offer a unique, fascinating and personal look into a complex history. Ages 10 to adult. ISBN 1-881896-24-2.


Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America by Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich and Gary Paul Nabhan (Oxford Univ.). Describes the beliefs and practices of these religions and explores their up-to-date history in the U.S. Includes personal accounts. Ages 10 and up. ISBN 0-19-512442-1.

A Guide for Parents & Teachers

I just returned from the 11th annual conference of the National Association for Multicultural Education, NAME, in Las Vegas, Nevada. It was a truly multicultural event. The participants were empowered, not because they belonged to a particular group, but because of the atmosphere that respected the many differences and experiences that make each one of us unique.

Educators, administrators and students gathered for four days to discuss pluralistic education. The conference theme was standardized educational testing. How do we ensure that students with the greatest needs have adequate learning opportunities? How do we provide support to those students who need it most? How do we reform schooling so that academic success is within reach of all students, regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, first language, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation or disabilities?

We recognized that standardized testing is one of the obstacles that prevents children from true learning. Testing can be a valuable asset in managing student learning and monitoring academic progress. However, test scores are being misused as a key factor in deciding who moves to the next grade level, who takes advanced or remedial classes, and who enters a given college or profession. Most of the educators and presenters felt that such tests should not be used as the primary means for apportioning educational and economic opportunities.

The current usage of standardized tests is a social policy issue of utmost importance. Hence, in 2002, NAME will adopt a resolution that will instead encourage various performance-based assessments that evaluate students and teachers on what they can actually do.

The following composition was written at last year’s NAME (www.name.org) conference in Florida:

NAME was created to bring us together, across our biases, issues, backgrounds and regions to create equity in our society.

Action and advocacy will open doors to opportunity and success for all of us, from the youngest to the eldest.

May the blessings of our strength and dedication benefit our Earth and all our peoples.

Everything we believe in is possible. When we work together with our minds, hearts and souls, we shall overcome—and all will be included—and each shall be equal and treasured.

The Peaceful Parenting Pledge

Udayan Care Homes for orphaned and abandoned children in India (www.udayancare.org) believes in peaceful parenting. Each person who works at Udayan Care takes the following pledge:

I pledge to teach children to care for others and to always search for peaceful and nonviolent ways to solve problems. I recognize that these teachings begin with my own behavior as I try to teach children appropriate behavior.

I pledge never to resort to physically aggressive discipline, including all variations of hitting, slapping, whipping or pinching. I will not threaten children with physical aggression. I will not resort to verbal assaults, such as calling children “bad, lazy or stupid,” as I recognize that derogatory words also cause harm. When I have a problem with my children, I will persistently search for a peaceful and sensible way to solve the problem.

I pledge to create opportunities to teach children about kindness, peacefulness and sensible problem-solving. I will speak up and make thoughtful decisions about violence, bullying, cruelty, or unkindness in interactions between siblings, caretakers, volunteers, tutors and peers.

The Earth Pledge

The Earth Pledge was introduced in the U.N. by Lillian Genser, and is now being used in many schools. She asks that teachers all over the world teach it in addition to their national pledges:

I pledge allegiance to the world,
To cherish every living thing,
To care for earth and sea and air
with peace and freedom everywhere!

FAVAN, the Families Against Violence Advocacy Network (www.ipj-ppj.org) based in St. Louis, MO, focused on media violence and its impact on children in their May 2001 newsletter. They also suggest TV viewing tips such as:

• Limit your TV time to no more than 1 or 2 hours a day (including videotapes) • Make your own TV guidelines • Watch TV with your child (No TV sets in their bedrooms!) • Learn to watch TV programs carefully and critically • Use TV to talk with kids about tough issues • Be selective when you use TV by paying attention to how much and what you watch when kids are around.
Natsuko Tamakoshi, a Japanese student born in 1979, portrays her personal growth and recent experiences in China and explores gender equality issues in these silkscreen prints. See pages 8-10.