

Newsletter of Asian/Pacific Islander Unitarian Universalists and their Allies

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How We Began

Young Kim, (Wauwatosa, WI)

The idea for a group of Asian and Pacific Islander Unitarian Universalists began to bounce around in my head in 1993, when I was a member of the First Unitarian Church of San Jose (CA). At that point I received exposure to the UUA's antiracism efforts, which approached the issue from a Black/White perspective. While useful, I found this Black/White-only concentration to be frustrating, as my own experiences seemed to have a unique twist. The stereotypes that I had to deal with were different. I wasn't getting the "thug" or "terrorist" label stuck to me. What I was getting was "foreigner" or "geek" or "sweatshop laborer." I also found that many UUs seemed to believe that Asian Americans didn't experience racism.

I decided to do something about it at the 2001 General Assembly in Cleveland. I told all my friends to look for any Asian faces, get their names, and forward them to me. For my first "Asian sighting," I saw KokHeong McNaughton riding down a hotel escalator as I was going up. I ran up the escalator, ran back down, and caught up with KokHeong outside the hotel. I blurted out: "Excuse me ... are you a UU?" My wife ran into Mark Watanabe, who told me about a charming delegate from Oakland – Karen Eng. I also traded message board messages with Vivien Hao. Our first meeting was right at the message boards at that General Assembly. Three of us sat on some rusty folding chairs

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Third Annual Meeting Highlights

Thirty adults and nine children (including two babies and five white allies) attended A/PIC's third annual meeting in Oakland, CA, February 18th-20th, 2005.

The program included multi-group caucusing, children's programs, and a workshop called *Multi-cultural Family Resource Guide* led by Karen Eng. A/PIC members also participated in the Sunday morning service at 1st Unitarian Church of Oakland, with homilies delivered by Catherine Stearns, Leslie Takahashi Morris, and Catie Chi Olson.

A new slate of Steering Committee members was elected during the business part of the meeting. Many of the activities that we are currently doing are working well and will be continued. These include General Assembly Programs, email lists, an online Covenant Group, Annual Meetings and the DRUUMM association.

Future programs will include developing a new brochure and a bi-monthly newsletter, and increasing efforts in building regional meetings.

On Diversity: Do Asians Eat Dogs?

KokHeong McNaughton (Los Alamos, NM)

The initial question was innocent enough. "KokHeong," he asked, "Do they have pets in China?" His body language was humble, as if he was genuinely seeking information.

My mind was racing. *What is this leading up to?* I answered that I am not an authority to be speaking about China, that there are so many people in China that I'm sure some people have pets and some don't. Just like in the US.

Then the true intention emerged. The innocent question was just to set the stage for the really big one. He began to tell me the story of an American couple going into a Chinese restaurant in Shanghai with their poodle. I stopped him before he could go any further by saying I have already heard that one. In fact, I have heard it so many times it wasn't funny. It was disgusting.

I went home from church that day with a knot in the pit of my stomach and it stayed knotted for several days afterwards. It hurt. And as I am writing this down, I cannot keep the tears from falling.

I went back to re-reading the chapter *Dog-eating and the Dilemma of Diversity* in Frank Wu's book, *Race in American Beyond Black and White*. When asked, "Do Asians eat dogs?" he gave some good retorts. But I am not the kind of person to use retorts that only serve to further divide instead of unite. Wu suggested inviting dialogue with, "What do you think?" and a retort like, "No I don't. But if I did, be assured that I won't eat *your* dog."

Different cultures have practices that may violate the value of another culture. I'm not condoning dog-eating, and in fact, I am appalled by the practice. I do not deny that it happens. I'm happy to report that many Asian countries are clamping down on it. None of the people I know personally have eaten dog meat to my knowledge. But then I don't go around inquiring if they have eaten dog meat. It just isn't a conversation topic! I myself wouldn't even touch the rabbit stew that this same person once brought to a Knife-and-Fork Dinner. But is dog-eating very different from eating pigs (unthinkable in Islamic culture), or eating cows (sacred to the Hindus)? If the very idea of eating dogs is too horrible to imagine, try stepping into the shoes of a Muslim or a Hindu for a moment.



Eating meat of any sort is appalling to vegetarians and vegans. There are more and more people who choose this lifestyle for sustainability and health reasons as well as their objection to animal cruelty. If the abhorrence we feel against dog-eating involves the intelligence of a higher form of life, and since a pig is deemed to be more intelligent than some dogs, I suggest that eating pork is more nauseating than eating dog meat.

But pigs are raised for food and dogs are raised as pets, you may say. Well yes, most dogs are raised as pets. So are some pigs. So if a dog farm raises dogs for food somewhere in a remote part of China, just as pig farms here raise pigs for food, does that make it OK?

Urban legends abound about Chinese Restaurants secretly serving dog meat to their unwary customers. Another hoax, started by a white man writing in the broken English of an Asian immigrant, has been circulating on the Internet since 1994. Joey Skaggs, a man who has been the bane of the media for thirty years, pretended to be a Korean restaurant owner and contacted animal shelters and offered to buy carcasses of euthanized dogs for his restaurant before they could be incinerated. Many people fell for it and animal rights activists protested. These sort of hoaxes and jokes serve only to perpetuate racism in our midst. No one looks beyond the hoax to the real horror: more than 6 million dogs are euthanized in animal shelters across the country every year.

To quote Frank Wu, *"To begin with, we need to inculcate within ourselves a sense of proportion. Dog-eating becomes an excuse to make Asians the butt of jokes. Dog-eating is leveraged to disrespect complete cultures as primitive. Reducing the inhabitants of the Asian continent to dog eaters, defining them by a minor aspect of their multifaceted ways of life, becomes absurd."*

If I could turn the clock back to the point when I was asked, "Do they have pets in China?" I would have used the invitation to dialogue, "What do you think?" I didn't have to provide answers to questions directed at me. If I had done that, I would have changed the course of our conversation.

But then, I wouldn't have written this column.

In Memoriam: Christopher Wong 9/16/61-8/30/04

Christopher Chi Wai Wong was born and raised in Hong Kong. He came to the United States to advance his studies and according to his brother Gabriel, he intended to return to China to serve his home town and country. Gabriel wrote that as a child, Chris enjoyed playing football after school, reading different kind of books and travelling. The family treasures a photo of Chris taken with one of the top mathematicians in China.

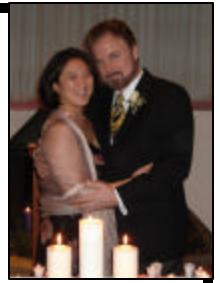
Chris suffered a stroke on Friday August 13th and remained in a coma until his death on August 30th in St. Mary's Hospital, Waterbury, CT. During that time, Rev. Carol Wolff, the newly-called minister of the Mattatuck UU Society in Waterbury, visited him several times.

A memorial service was held on October 10th at the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City where Chris had been active when living there. The Rev. Alison Miller presided.

Chris was cremated and his remains sent home along with his belongings. Upon opening his belongings, his father Hoi Wong wrote, "I just open Chi Wai's belongings from US. I find there is a catalogue about APIUU or UU. As far as I know, he is rare to join any organization. I think yours is definitely important to his

Among Our selves

Jennifer Ryu & Preston Moore were married on New Year's Day 2005. The small ceremony was held in the same room at Starr King School where they first met three years ago. Preston and Jennifer are both preparing for UU ministry and will be serving as co-ministers for 8 weeks this summer at the First Unitarian

*Reflections on Christopher by A/PIC members:*

"When Chris was living in California, he attended our church. I was like a grandmother to him. After he moved to his new job in Connecticut, he was so lonely that he would call me every weekend just to talk." — *Fran Chan, 1st UU Society of San Francisco, CA.*

"I only met him briefly at General Assembly when I was staffing the A/PIC booth, but it is apparent that his spirit has touched the lives of many in our group." — *Mark Watanabe, Arlington Street Church, Boston, MA.*

"I first met him in person at the Long Beach GA. We spoke Cantonese to each other. He looked and sounded like my brother!" — *KokHeong McNaughton, Unitarian Church of Los Alamos, NM.*

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by the message boards, and talked about our experiences. I didn't know Mark and Karen very well, but I felt a strong bond right from the beginning.

Later that summer I called Robette Dias, one of the founders of DRUUMM and a UUA staff member at the time. I asked her to give me the email address for every Asian or Pacific Islander UU that she knew. Armed with about 35 new email addresses, I took a deep breath and fired off an email into the internet ether. People answered (!) and Joseph Lyons set up the email listserve.

Our second meeting at the General Assembly in Quebec had better attendance. Twelve UUs came, and we talked about the need for a national meeting. I requested and received grant funding from the UU Funding Program and in February of 2003, the A/PI Caucus met for the first time in Berkeley, CA.

After that meeting, I stepped back from leadership and then A/PIC really started to take off. I am thrilled to see what A/PIC has accomplished under the leadership of Kim, Manish and Jennifer. I am even more excited to see fresh leadership stepping up to the plate – a sure sign of a healthy and self-perpetuating organization. And we've only just begun to scratch the surface, because more Asian and Pacific Islanders here and abroad need to hear the good news of our liberating faith.

Postcard from Abroad

Linda Hsieh (China)

Ningpo in Zhejiang Province

While wandering around northwest Europe last October, I decided I needed to go to China, and I didn't see any reason to wait. Three



months after returning home, I packed a backpack, a daypack, and bought a ticket to China. Three days before leaving I found a job teaching English in Inner Mongolia Province, China; not to be confused with Outer Mongolia, the country.

My parents were petrified with the thought of their only daughter traveling to China without a plan or substantial contacts. However, they were also excited since they had never been to the Mainland. They emigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan before I was born, and I was the first to return to China since my grandparents left over 60 years ago. In a way, I was making this journey for all of them.

When I first arrived in Shenyang, I thought the city would eat me alive. As I bussed through the countryside, I wondered what I was doing and questioned my adaptability. But after being here for a month, my reasons for being here are becoming clearer. This land and these people are my roots. I

feel a soulful connectedness here that I can't find anywhere else. I am finding what it means to me to be Chinese-American. I am nurturing my roots to strengthen my wings, and someday soon, I will fly.

Editor's Note: Linda Hsieh served on the A/PIC Steering Committee as liaison to YaYA (Youth and Young Adult) caucus of DRUUMM from 2003-2004. Prior to leaving for China, she attended the UU Fellowship of Durango, CO.

Milestone



Leslie Takahashi Morris was ordained February 27th in 2005 by the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church of Charlottesville. The ceremony was blessed by friends from around the country, including a number of members of DRUUMM, and was a rich testimony to the supportive community that stands behind Leslie as she begins her ministry. The gift of flowers from A/PIC graced the altar on Leslie's first Sunday as an ordained minister at TJMC-UU where she is now in her second month as co-minister.

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