



The Newsletter of Asian/Pacific Islander Unitarian Universalists and their Allies

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Sharing Experiences and the Dream

Personal Reflections Following the A/PIC Conference
by Vivien Hao — Pacific Unitarian Church, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA



Shortly after I returned from an inspirational weekend of community building at the 4th Annual A/PI UU conference in Atlanta, something happened that reminded me once again, of why we, and in particular, I, need A/PIC.

As I was leaving my massage therapist's on busy Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena, I heard a voice behind me, "Ching chong, nee ho ma." I glanced at the 30-ish white man dressed in a bizarre outfit eyeing me. Turning toward the parking lot, I walked briskly to my car, as he shouted after me, "Don't you dare turn your back on me, bitch!" My heart pounding, I pushed the "lock" button the instant I got into my car. In my rear view mirror, I could see that he was walking away... had he already forgotten about me?

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Our Imperative to Create a Multicultural Faith

by Karen Eng — First Unitarian Church of Oakland, Oakland, CA



Last year I hosted the Asian Pacific Islander UU conference at my church in Oakland, California. I was sitting towards the front at the first service on Sunday, feeling very satisfied with how the weekend was going. When I looked up I saw 3 women from our group leading worship. So then I turned around and looked at the congregation and saw the people from the conference. I'll never forget my surprise when tears started to well up in my eyes. We were all there worshipping together in my beloved church. I could hardly believe it! I saw myself reflected in the pulpit and in the congregation – I had never imagined what that would be like, and there it was. I'm certain that we set the record for the number of Asian/Pacific Islander UUs worshipping together in a parish church on that Sunday morning. It was historic! And it was a profoundly

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Quest of the Spirit

by David Yamashita — Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA



UUCA is a community of faith that encourages and supports our individual spiritual quests out of which we act together for social justice. Many of you have heard these words before and recognize them as UUCA's mission statement. From a personal standpoint, I heard these words when I joined the Board of Trustees 3 years ago and I have to honestly say that that I really didn't fully appreciate their meaning. They are nice words, but when you break down the words, they come down to "Community" "Spiritual Quests" and "Social Justice."

At UUCA, we are a very large community with active groups, made up of many interesting people. For Social Justice, our congregation has a long history in actively participating in civil rights and nothing made me prouder than our involvement in same sex marriage while I

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Appreciating Diversity through Cinema

by KokHeong McNaughton
Unitarian Church of Los Alamos, Los Alamos, NM

The first time it happened to me was more than ten years ago when Ang Lee's movie *Eat Drink Man Woman* was released in video and hit our local *Film Festival At Home*. A friend from church grabbed my arm in the library somewhere between the Southwest Fiction and the Mystery aisles and said, "I've just seen this *incredible* movie *Eat Drink Man Woman*. You've got to see it!" She was so intense, and her enthusiasm so great that I had to promise her I would lest my arm would come off from all that shaking. When I did, I enjoyed it immensely and I thanked her for bringing it to my attention. We talked about the movie for quite some time afterwards, reminding each another of our favorite parts and reliving the experience over and over.

This sort of thing has happened to me so often that I'm finally responding to this need that we all seem to have of sharing our experiences with those we trust and love, whether it is from having read a good book, having watched a good movie, or attended a good concert. What is shared is enjoyed ten times over; what is not shared dies a sorry death.

So I began a series of movie-and-potluck dinner events called "Appreciating Diversity through Cinema" at my church. The first of the series was held on Sunday, February 26th, beginning at 4:30 PM. We showed the award-winning movie *Crash*. The event was billed as "an opportunity to have fun and to build community, to provide a safe environment in which to engage in conversations about tough social issues." We set up tables with boxes of Kleenex, some index cards and pens/pencils for people to take notes. After the movie, we rearranged the chairs into a circle while people got up to get desserts and returned for a moderated discussion. We provided free baby-sitting (with teen volunteers) so that young families could enjoy the evening as well.

It was important to keep the conversation focused on feelings and reactions to the movie rather than becoming a critique about the movie, which many UUs are

fond of doing. Therefore it was important to create a comfortable space by sitting in a circle and to take a moment to center the group with chalice lighting and a short meditation or reading before the conversation.

With inputs from members of my church and a recent discussion thread on A/PIC's general email list, I've compiled a list of possible movies for future showing. Two of the movies are owned by A/PIC thanks to a donation from one of our members. These are marked with an asterisk and are available for people to check out. Most others are available in DVD stores or Netflix.

- Crash
- Brokeback Mountain
- Memoirs of a Geisha
- Eat Drink Man Woman
- Devil's Playground
- Saving Face
- The Wedding Banquet
- Better Luck Tomorrow
- Rhapsody in August
- Kundun
- Catfish in Black Bean Sauce
- Snow Falling on Cedars
- The Debut
- Chunhyang
- Untold Scandal
- Joint Security Area
- The Truth About Jane
- The Grace Lee Project*
- Race is the Place*
- The Sea Inside (El Mar Adentro)
- Hotel Rwanda
- Passion Fish
- The Brother from Another Planet
- Lone Star State of Mind
- The Twilight of the Golds
- Transamerica

(Editor's Note: A/PIC is building up a DVD-lending library for people to check out movies and documentaries that are hard to come by. We'll keep a list available on our website under "Resources" and keep track of who has which item. The person who requests an item makes a commitment to pay the postage and handling cost to get it to the next person who requests it. If you own a DVD or video and would like to donate it to A/PIC for this purpose, please contact movie@apiuu.org.)

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spiritual moment for me. For in that moment I realized that for the first time I was present in a different way than I'd ever been: I felt like a Chinese American and a Unitarian Universalist.

Now why is that such a big deal? Well for starters it's hard to make that happen when there are only 1 or 2 Asians in an entire UU congregation. But more than that, we showed that when we did make it happen, we experienced worship in a way that was rich & wonderful for both my congregation and for the A/PI conferees.

I believe that our faith wants me to bring my whole self to it, just as it wants my gay and lesbian sisters and brothers, my disabled co-religionists, and all of us in our many identities, to be in community with one another. As religious people, we are called to make this happen.

Let me tell you about my spiritual path. I grew up Presbyterian – in an all Chinese church. We have many Chinese churches in Oakland. Not only are these religious communities, but they are also cultural communities. By growing up in a Chinese church I lived and learned the cultural practices of my forebears. I don't just mean that I celebrated holidays and rites of passage. Through the church community I became a Chinese American. I practiced deference and respect. I came to venerate sacrifice and hard work. I was groomed to be a model minority. My entire extended family went to that same church.

But I couldn't stay in a church that was increasingly at odds with my worldview, so I drifted away. Then quite by accident I stumbled on a Unitarian church some 23 years ago, and I knew I had found a spiritual home where I could make meaning of my life.

So I accepted a trade-off. My daughter does not have that same cultural foundation. She doesn't feel the rhythm of the cultural year or suffer the relentless reinforcement of those cultural patterns. But she is a UU down to her bones. And I live out my faith in a context that lacks the cultural connection that I long for.

Now don't get me wrong: I made that choice, and

I'm stickin' to it! This is my chosen faith. But does it have to be either/or? This is my dream: to be a UU and a Chinese American in my beloved church community.

I don't know how we make that happen. I wish I did. It's complicated; it takes work and it takes time. But things worth doing are rarely quick and easy. And as religious people I believe that we are called to figure this out. It is the work of affirming the worth and dignity of each of us.

So I am here in Atlanta this weekend because my heart is so full when I am in my faith community and with my cultural community – at the same time! It is powerful. It renews me in a special way. And I am grateful.

May it be so, and amen.

(Editor's Note: Karen's and David's homilies were delivered at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA, on Sunday February 19 as part of A/PIC's 4th Annual Meeting. Programming.)

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was President of this congregation. However, you always associate any religious affiliation with “spiritual” words, so spiritual quest sounded good, but provided me no context. I never felt “spiritual” and certainly, did not feel like I was on any quest.

Then, through luck and good fortune (truly, I mean it!), I became President-Elect of this congregation. In order to learn more about being a leader of this community, Laura (my wife) and I attended General Assembly in Long Beach, CA. As some of you heard, I am easily swayed by the word “free” (remember, how I got here, free babysitting, but that is another story) and attended something called the Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus FREE LUNCH get together. Imagine my surprise at meeting other UUs who looked like me! This magical moment brought context to my community and social justice by adding that key ingredient called Spiritual Quest! Because you see, I never really thought of myself as a “Person of Color” until that moment and never felt affiliated with anyone, especially

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other Asian/Pacific Islanders. How things quickly change since that moment. In the 2 years that I have been associated with this group, I have done the following:

- ◆ Rediscovered my family and my roots. I have been making a conscious effort to reconnect. I met my cousin twice this year that I haven't seen in 35 years! Frightening, isn't it? For many people from the South, this is an unbelievable statement.
- ◆ Learning about my family history. My cousin filled in some of those, especially the "scandalous" ones (aren't we all People Magazine readers, after all?), but also that my uncle, aunt, and Grandfather were interred at Manzanar, CA and Poston, Arizona.
- ◆ Meeting other Asian Pacific Islanders in the metro Atlanta area and beyond and have actually started following some of those traditions, such as New Year's (big party, special food). Whether this is true or not, even my mother thinks I understand Japanese much better than I use to and were surprised to meet so many Asian Pacific Islanders at our house during a recent visit.

Today, I have the proud honor of hosting at UUCA, the 4th Annual Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus meeting. I have old and new friends from North and South California, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C. and local friends here at Atlanta today.

So, I have started my spiritual quest. I am happy to share my quest with you today and I look forward to what I will find with you, my family, and the new adventures along the way. Some of you may have quests as well and are on searches. I feel like mine is spiritual because I am truly learning and discovering things that cannot be read and discussed, but only experienced. Isn't that ultimately what we are seeking?

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But for me, this experience was difficult to ignore. When I recounted this a few days later to some A/PI friends, one asked if I had reported the incident to the police. "You think Pasadena PD would drop everything they're doing to track down a crazy guy yelling insults on the street?" I said. My friend looked at me patiently, "No, but it *would* be important to help law enforcement track hate crimes in the area."

A few days later, I mentioned the same incident to a colleague of mine, who is of Egyptian ancestry. Her take? "He was obviously wacko. It had *nothing* to do with racism."

After carefully considering these two distinct viewpoints, my own conclusion is this: Yes, he was crazy. And yes, it was racism. If this had been the first time something like this had happened to me, I could have shrugged it off. But it wasn't the first, second, or even third time—more like the 7th or 8th—a pattern of behavior aimed at me and others who look "foreign" or "exotic"—that is, not white.

So what do I do with these feelings I have of being a stranger in my own country, of being the perpetual foreigner, of never quite being fully "American" no matter how much I perfect my English, or how hard I try to assimilate? Unlike Vincent Chin, I was not beaten to death by two white men with baseball bats who blamed him for jobs lost in Detroit's automobile industry. Unlike Wen Ho Lee, I was not jailed for months by the US government who, in the end, failed to prove even a single charge of espionage against the Los Alamos nuclear scientist. Unlike 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry, I was not stripped of my home, job, possessions, dignity – and incarcerated simply for the crime of looking like the enemy.

But I have had a taste of what it is like to be "the other." And I know that daily, many other Asian Americans and other people of color in America suffer innumerable acts—large and small--

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of discrimination, and yes, indeed, hate. This has been called “death by a thousand paper cuts.”

In this knowledge, I have found comfort and strength among my fellow A/PI UUs. Not only do you know what I am feeling, but I believe you also share the same outrage, the same disappointment, and the same fears. You have not only “walked a mile in my shoes,” but you also share in the conviction that our liberal religious faith calls us to work toward dismantling this institutional racism and oppression- the passive acquiescence of society that allows the kind of behavior, attitudes and speech that dehumanizes and ostracizes people because of their race, color, faith, ability, or sexual orientation.

Ours is a faith that calls us to speak out, to act, and to organize to change what we know to be wrong in our society. Ours is a faith that abhors

injustice and calls us to be the “higher angels of ourselves.” Yet, it’s still just a dream, isn’t it? We have a long way to go before Unitarian Universalists can truly call ourselves a prophetic voice for all races, for all people who are oppressed. The UUA has a long way to go before it makes good on its 1990 GA Resolution of Immediate Witness to fight for racial justice—to change both our own churches/denominational structures and advocate for the same in the larger society. DRUUMM and A/PIC have a long way to go before we can begin to play a major role in the transformation of our chosen faith community.

But I know that you, my fellow A/PI UUs, share the dream. And that’s where we can offer each other comfort and inspiration in our common quest. It was so at the recent APIC Annual Conference in Atlanta. And may it continue to be so.

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