



TODD COOPER

The China Connection

'The students depend on the people' ESSAY BY DAVID ATMAN

China and Eugene are connected in a thousand ways, from the Chinese and Chinese-American families who live and work among us to the food we eat, the art in our campus museum, even the air we breathe that carries over the Pacific. David Atman is more connected than most. He is married to a woman of Chinese descent, his child attends a Mandarin language program at the private Oak Hill School and he was at the Tiananmen Square demonstrations 20 years ago as a foreign correspondent, dodging bullets and tanks and sneaking out photos. He wrote a cover story about these events for the June 29, 1989, issue of EW, known then as What's Happening, and since has written everything from business feasibility studies to a computer game about China. Today he's a vocal advocate for recognizing the economic and cultural connections we have with China and doing something positive about it, particularly in education, economics and the environment.

BEIJING SPRING

So brave were the students and, soon after, nearly all segments of Chinese society in those heady days of May 1989. It was Beijing Spring; college students and countless others were in love. They proudly paraded their love around Tiananmen Square singing "The International" and carrying *hengfu*, large banners that called for an end to pervasive corruption and impoverishing inflation. Journalists demanded: "We want to tell the truth; don't make us lie!" *Hengfu* quoted Abraham Lincoln's "of the people, by the people and for the people," and swore "Give me liberty or give me death!" in English.

In the ancient capitol of Xian, *hengfu* declared, "I have a dream." Demonstrations sprung up in over a hundred towns and cities throughout China.

Back in Beijing, the demonstrators held hunger strikes, entranced the world through foreign media, upstaged the first USSR-PRC summit since 1959 when Gorbachev met with Chinese leaders, saw martial law declared on what China's government called

the student movement's "turmoil" and built a 30-foot tall "Goddess of Democracy."

I'm Manhattanese by birth. This icon, a spiritual clone of the Statue of Liberty, inspired within me never-before-sung songs of deep kinship and celebration of freedom through democracy. Students positioned the "Goddess of Democracy," which came to symbolize the student movement's aspirations, facing Mao's huge portrait at the head of Tiananmen Square, the largest square in the world.

Great loves are forever. June first came in with International Children's Day's songs, laughter and youthful exuberance dominating the Square. On June 3 and 4, 1989, in Beijing, the world cruelly was reminded that great love involves great pain.

That June 4, my interpreter and I returned to my hotel and passed through its secret police just before 5 am. My camera stopped working that murderous night before — while I clicked away, a soldier smashed my head from behind, smashing my camera onto street concrete.

But a student entrusted his film to me to show to the world. So, over my hotel's lobby rug stained with fresh protester blood, my interpreter and I set out cross-town on bicycles through the teeth of the dragon to deliver uncertain film to the Associated Press.

We switch-backed endlessly through Tiananmen Square's radiating maze of ring roads, arterials and side streets for more than five hours. Helicopters eyed all from above. Bullets spat past us. We were turned back at many roadblocks. Patrolling tank columns forced us in the wrong direction. Burning buses, military vehicles and assorted debris obstructed streets. Sometimes we carried the bikes. Soldiers and plain-clothes police were everywhere. Gunfire whizzed by often enough eerily to

seem like a rock opera refrain. Troops in Tiananmen Square lit a huge bonfire that smelled like death.

On June 4, the Chinese government's propaganda machine furiously proclaimed a party line that, at first, no one had been killed; then, only brave PLA soldiers had been killed by "counterrevolutionary hooligans," but no students had been killed; then ... on June 5, this AP photo (below) of crumpled bikes and bodies ran front page center above the fold in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The London Times* and other papers around the world. AP staffers told me years ago that it's been published "conservatively" thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of times worldwide.



This famous photo was on the roll of film taken by a student and delivered to AP by the author

PHOTO COURTESY OF AP