



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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In Heritage Month Let’s Honor Women

We joke — my best Viet Kieu, Korean, and Cambod buds and me do — about Asian ladies. About finding one of those submissive, slipper-shuffling nonyas you see in Hollywood movies. About taking home one of those mousy women playing that part at PJ Chang’s, bowing and repeating “hai . . . hai . . . hai” after every little thing I say or do.

We joke about it, because you know, I’ve got a kitchen table crowded with women quite unlike that. Unlike them. Take our mom or elder aunties, take our daughter or my wife. Please. There’s not a mouse among them.

And there’s a world of reasons for this. Reasons for women on both sides of our big blue sea being as alert and adaptive as sparrows, as stubborn as bamboo. For as long as any grand elder’s memory: Cruel or careless leaders have failed to deliver dignifying work for our boys and men; angry armies from faraway places have warred over our neighborhoods; awful famines and hungry storms have devoured our mothers’ households.

While a traditional man’s work ends when I return to our family wounded or worse, when I finish a workday tired or fired, or both — women’s work only accelerates. These are our women’s unscripted stories. No demure make-up, no hot camera lights, no big-screen special effects.

It’s the same unadorned narrative in Southern Philippines as in

ASIAN PACIFIC HERITAGE

Ronault Catalani

North Portland. It’s the same story in West Java as in Portland’s far Eastside. Our women have had to be adaptive and responsible and persistent. Hard history have made them so. And because May is home to both Mother’s Day and Asian Pacific Heritage Month, here’s a chance to talk about that. About them, our women.

Sitting around Dr. Thuy’s kitchen table, with her mom nodding at her side and her daughter squirming in her lap, the logical core of her question is clear.

Saigon to Westminster to Portland

Mdme. Han Tran is in her kitchen when Vera-An Nguyen comes home from Mrs.Newcomb’s second grade class at Russell Academy, in far NE Portland’s Parkrose School District.

She’s always there, keeping her household warm and fixing Vera snacks fast. Same thing for older brothers Lucas-Minh and Oscar-Vinh Nguyen, when they come home from school. “She’s always been there for all of us,” says Grandma Han’s eldest daughter and Vera’s mom, Dr. Thuy Chu Tran. Meaning, she was their home’s center pillar in Westminster,

California before they moved to Portland, Oregon. Meaning also, she stood firm in that matriarchal role back in the Republic of South Viet Nam before their family fled to the United States.

“I remember when I was growing in California and mom had to go to work, second shift, to help support our family. She would prepare everything ahead of time for us, so when we kids came home from school and when our father came home from work, all we had to do was heat the dinner she already laid out for us.”

Taking a blue collar job outside of her household was new for Han Tran. She was raising four kids and pregnant with her fifth when she and husband Diem Tran shoved out to sea at Vung Tau, a small fishing and harbor town a couple hours east of Saigon, a week before the Fall of the Republic to North Viet Nam’s communist army in 1975.

With minimal English in a bewildering new country, Mdme. Han went to work to make household ends meet. “Five kids in a 2-bedroom apartment,” she says, smiling at her memories. She did assembly work at an aircraft com-

ponent subcontractor for the Boeing Company. Her 3:00 pm to midnight shift made home-life more difficult, but frequent overtime demands made it possible to purchase their own home within 10 years of resettling in America. Our women are responsible, and adaptive.

According to grand daughter Vera-An: “Grandma is a great cook.” But — according to the bright eight year-old — she’s pretty strict. On the other hand, Grandpa Dien Tran’s standards are a bit more relaxed, and according to both his retired wife and his doctor daughter, like all traditional Asian males, though he’s resourceful in any number of ways, he’s not much good in the kitchen. Our women have had to be persistent.

Leadership forged for these times

Dr. Thuy Chu Tran is plainly her mother’s daughter, responsible and adaptive. And given her place in the world of NE Portland business as an optometry practice owner; given her place in her kids’ universe as a Girl Scout troop founder, math and reading class volunteer, and a member of the Parkrose School Board; and given her place in Portland’s vigorous civic life as a president of the Lion’s Club and as a Lt. Colonel in the Oregon Air National Guard — she is every bit as persistent in her commitments.

Dr Thuy is a leader. in the adaptive old-school style of her mom.

Read the rest online at www.theskanner.com



Take a Recess from Closing Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett has announced plans to close at least 50 schools as a cost-cutting measure. But before any other urban school system follows suit, it should take an extended recess and reflect on what has happened in the past that makes this such a foolish idea.

We can start by looking at what has happened in Chicago. A volunteer group called CREATE —Chicagoland Researchers and Advocates for Transformative Education — has produced a briefing paper on past school closings that provides some interesting insight.

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry



of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) found that 82 percent of the students from 18 elementary schools closed in Chicago moved from one underperforming school to another underperforming school, including schools already on probation,” said CREATE. “In a

graduating.”

The researcher stated, “School closings will also negatively affect the achievements for students in the receiving schools... For one thing, closings often lead to increased class sizes and overcrowding in receiving schools. As a result, the pace of instruction is slower and the test scores for both mobile students and non-mobile students tend to be lower in schools with high student mobility rates.”

When the Chicago School Board announced its previous closings, it figured it would sell, lease or repurpose half of the schools. However, a Pew study found that of the buildings closed between

the country, we have seen how former schools have been converted to community health centers, churches, community centers and other useful facilities.

But if they are simply becoming schools again, what’s the point in closing them in the first place?

Chicago is not the only major city that has overpromised and under delivered in public education.

Administrators in Washington, D.C. boasted about how much money they would save by closing a group of schools.

Pointing to a report by the Office of the D.C. Auditor, CREATE noted, “The audit determined that instead of saving the district \$30 million, as claimed by former schools chancellor Michelle Rhee, the closures actually cost the city \$40 million after factoring in the expense of demolishing buildings, removing furnishings, and transporting students.

“Further, the district lost another \$5 million in federal and state grants as students left the system, many to charter schools being built in tandem with the closings.”

With all the lip service paid to public education by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, he has not been willing to put his money where his mouth is.

Read the rest online at www.theskanner.com



Based on its past, there is no reason to trust Chicago Board of Education’s financial projections.

follow up 2012 report, the CCSR determined that 94 percent of students from closed Chicago schools did not go to ‘academically strong’ new schools.”

It cited another study that found “students who transitioned into new schools following closure scored lower on tests one year after closure; they were at an increased risk of dropping out, as well as an increased risk of not

2005 and 2012, only 17 schools were either sold, leased or repurposed. Another 24 closed properties remain on the market.

Surprisingly, of the 77 public schools closed in the past decade, 80 percent now house other schools.

Everyone realizes that with a dwindling school-aged population, not as many schools will be needed in the future. And across