

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

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Our frightened kids, our silent majorities

Some Fridays ago I was in heaven. Okay, I overstate. But not a lot. That Friday, at the exhausted end of another River City workweek, I was before a Portland State U masters in teaching class. A roomful of teachers, that, for those of us 1-in-5 foreign born Portlanders, is heaven.

Great reverence we have, for our children's and our grandchildren's teachers. We always have. From the 50 sending-countries once bullied into the Soviet Union; from Spanish-speaking communities stretching from the Rio Grande to icy Tierra del Fuego; from Arab-speaking nations that added algebra and astronomy to our Classical World; from vigorous East, West, and Central Africa; from chilly Manchuria to the steamy tip of Indonesia's 3,000-mile archipelago: We bring to America this awe and this love for our kids' teachers. Sure we do.

And we bring tons of it. According to 2010 federal figures, each month about 1,300 international newcomers yank their bags off PDX baggage belts. Ask Oregon's civil-society activists, and they'll substantially bump that number up, based on families arriving by car, van, or pickup truck.

Once unpacked, according to 2012 data from the Washington D.C.-based Immigration Policy Center, Latino Oregonians annually add \$8.4 billion to our state's cash registers; Asian consumers contribute another \$6.1 billion. As an immigrant teen, then as a Portland parent, now as an American grandpa, let me tell you how central it is to our core cultural values for us to dress well our bright girls and boys, to show proper respect to their teachers come September. No overstatement here. They are our future. These kids and their

educators.

What kind and capable parents do

All that accounts, I have to hope, in sentiment and in raw numbers, for my high that Friday, in front of PSU professor Amy Sharpe's masters class.

We began by discussing how our schools can best engage Portland's energetic newcomer families and communities. But soon enough, we were talking about our Central American refugee crisis, about parents too terrified to keep their precious kids in their awful neighborhoods; about those children now sleeping in secure bunk beds, right here in River City. This is where kind hearts are wont to go.

We talked about deeply wounded teens, as pretty and smart as our daughters; we talked about the ugly men who hurt them, with impunity. We thought aloud about the silence of all our fathers on all sides of all the borders between these girls' hometowns and here. The silence that sanctions those vicious men. The wounded daughters who, in the words of Alberto Moreno, chair of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs, "We now need to thank for firmly placing you and me in our role as parents, as capable and kind parents."

Conversations with educators almost always go here. To how on earth we'll better serve our kids. Because today, about half of Portland's public school kids go home to ethnic minority families. Our teachers need to know that you and me have their backs.

So whenever educators air how complex their workdays are, and when they inevitably ask if America's going there with them, the very best I can do is to rely on a foreign-born Portlander's stubborn belief in this extraordinary nation. To lean

into a newcomer's confidence in our American ideals.

In nascent nations everywhere, kids learn that democracy is working people leading and political people following. Earnest college students occupied Tiananmen Square and made a papier-mâché Lady Liberty. Young people packed into Tahrir Square's tent city, intoxicated by this ideal, turned angry Egyptian Army tanks.

What the public square requires

But the opposite of all that — the opposite of leading with our ideals, by claiming our public square — is also true. Always and everywhere. The silence of conscience, our absence from the popular narrative, sanctions the disengagement of our leaders. Which sanctions our crazies and our cruel.

The absence of most of Portland's civil-society organizations, the silence of too many of Oregon's faith communities, of our national labor unions and professional associations, from this public debate is troublesome. A generation of their substantial absence from what a kind and creative America should do about families migrating away from cruel or negligent states has made this monster moment possible. More than 57,000 refugee children are turning themselves over to U.S. border police; overwhelmed officers are bussing them from place to place, looking for a safe spot to let them rest.

It's always been communities of conscientious Americans that have made possible the successful integration of our

Oregon has been a welcoming home to unaccompanied minors and refugee children, and will continue to be so while we wait on congress to adopt more responsible immigration policies.

-- Oregon governor John Kitzhaber

"I'm not just a mayor. I'm a father. And speaking as a father, I stand with governor John Kitzhaber and welcome these refugee children to Oregon. Sending children back to failed states is unacceptable to me. That's not the spirit of Portland, or the spirit of Oregon.

-- Portland mayor Charlie Hales

dreamy newcomer families into our cities' robust mainstreams. Affirming, so that immigrants and refugees can reaffirm, another era of living American ideals. Of course it has.

This coming Friday, at the exhausted end of yet another River City workweek, I'll go home to a kitchen table of New American believers needing to hear again from our more settled neighbors. Our energetic if uncertain immigrant nation needs to know that we're still dreaming old-school American values.

Next week we can start off by standing tall, by thanking all of those Central American girls and boys for so suddenly showing up, by thanking them for firmly putting you and me into our place as kind and capable parents. Sure we can.

Department of Consumer & Business Services



Building Codes Division

The Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, Building Codes Division (BCD) ensures safe building construction while supporting a positive business climate.

Hiring a licensed electrician or plumber helps ensure that the person doing the work is qualified. To check on whether a person you wish to hire is licensed, visit our website at bcd.oregon.gov, then click on "license holder search." For more information about obtaining a license, please call (503) 373-1268. BCD also wants to remind you that permits help protect the safety and value of your home.

You may need a permit if you are:

- Adding a room
- Remodeling a kitchen or bathroom
- Building a deck 30 inches above ground
- Building a fence taller than 6 feet
- Adding electrical circuits
- Building a shed

Call your local building department or check our website, www.PermitsProtect.info, to find out when you need a permit for your building or remodeling job.

www.bcd.oregon.gov

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And the best thing to do is leave your home and call
NW Natural. We'll be out to make sure everything is safe.

Unsure of what to do? Just take a look at our tips to the right.

Smell. Go. Let Us Know.

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How to identify a possible gas leak.

If you smell a rotten egg or sulfur odor, you hear a blowing or hissing sound, or you see blowing dirt, it could be a gas leak.

What to do.

Leave your home and the area immediately. Don't use any electrical device such as a light switch, telephone, appliance or garage door opener. And don't try to find the leak yourself.

Who to call.

Go outside and use your cell phone, or a neighbor's phone, and call **NW Natural** at 800-882-3377.



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