

## TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



## Too much mobile tech? Not for my demographic slice

Studies have been done, articles written, and lots of hands wringed about how much time we spend staring into our smartphones' bright little faces. About the cost to *real* communication, with real people. About how harried we've made our lives.

With all respect due staid university researchers and contemporary urban worriers — I'm thinking this issue might be an instance of an urgency affecting a relatively slim slice of America's wide bandwidth of social and ethnic streams.

Here's what I mean: Our daughter just handed me down her iPhone 5. Her employer gave her a 6. She's happy and I'm happy. Caricia and her generation, and the mobile device she gave me, are sleeker and smarter than me and mine. My superseded phone is an all-thumbs bumpy keyboard Nokia.

At this moment I'm in a downtown Starbucks early morning coffee line, drafting this essay on that very smart phone. Now mind you, inside my lifetime — indeed, inside the lifetimes of 1-in-5 Portlanders, the percentage of foreign-born Americans in our rather typical U.S.

gateway city — our family has moved a lot. We've gone from our non-literate elder auntie Kris rushing our big brother to fetch a pencil to scratch her a note, to me tapping out my thoughts while waiting for a Sulawesi dark roast. Very handy.

For our immigrant generation, the upgrades came fast. They came big. Before tall cell towers and fiber optic cables, before the jumps produced by California's t-shirted Silicon Valley or by our state's Nike-sneakered Silicon Forest, our family relied on shaman Elder Auntie Kris to speak for us, across town, around mountains, over blue oceans. And of course, another shaman at the far end mediated our communication with all the biases and embellishments this kind of connectivity brings with it. Shamans are a moody crew.

Compare that to now.

When the ambient anxiety so central to our accelerated lives gets a grip on me today, I speed dial our savvy daughter. Reassurance is immediate.

"Salamat pagi, Pop," she sing-songs. "— Sure-sure, ev-very-thing's fine."

Just one more marvel before I let it go.

Before we leave our societal worriers their territory, and return to Immigrant America's ridiculous optimism.

### Old school high tech

As important as Auntie Kris' telephonics were to us in those slower times and places, even more essential was the predictive value she added to our precious lives. Allow me a quick story.

One sleepy Saturday afternoon, Auntie Kris told Big Brother Robbie to get a pencil and jot down a number string she was seeing on the sun-reddened backs of her closed eyelids. Then she did her best to write what she was seeing in the air between her and him. "Take it to sari-sari store, buy lottery tickets," she snapped, handing him a fistful of rupia. "Ayoh-ayoh!" (GO-GO-GO.) He went. We won.

With the winnings, we ferried to an uncle's little pig farm at the edge of Papua's thick rainforest. On route, I edged near Auntie Kris. She was for me, always a source of reassurance, no matter how scary she was to everyone. Auntie leaned heavily on our steamer's aft railing. Her eyes squeezed tight, her brows she deeply furrowed. Mixed sweat and tears streamed down to her chin, down her neck. She said not a thing, not our entire trip.

From the next week's ferry crew, Poppa learned that Christian boys had nailed shut our mosque doors during Friday women's prayer, then they burned it and them down. The following Sunday, Muslim boys nailed shut our church doors, and burned everyone inside. "Inside a house of God?" our elders asked.

"Inside a house of God," Auntie Kris confirmed, eyes still shut.

I edged as near her as she allowed.

Nowadays, shamans are not so necessary. Not their circuitous communication

**Before tall cell towers and fiber optic cables, our family relied on shaman Elder Auntie Kris to speak for us, across town, around mountains, over blue oceans.**

style. Not their moodiness. My iPad lights up in an instant. BBC is on my favorites bar. There's a live feed from a kind-faced but exhausted Liberian doctor. There's a mini-sub vid of a deep, dark place 239 people aboard that disappeared Malaysian airliner might be resting.

In this morning's Starbucks line, I can reach around our entire earth's ether, and see what's happening, and what's about to happen. Any tolo (knucklehead) with a forefinger and a touch screen can. From anywhere. At anytime. For free.

So, when we get that anxious ache the way every parent will, the way grandpas do. If I need to see our daughter's brown eyes and hear her daughters' sweet voices: It's FaceTime.

Prrrrrrrrt ... "Hi Pop!"

"Salaam Baby. You okay?"

"Say hello to Opa," she spins her smartphone's super-sharp eyeball around at husband Anthony, one squirrely baby on his shoulder, another in his arm. "Hi Oh-pa-a-a," they sing-song. They smile. Anthony smiles. Me too.

Thus connected time to time, here and there, me and my generation, our demographic pie-slice of our grateful immigrant nation — are all good to go. Ayoh-ayoh.



**FABULOUS FUNGUS.** A record-setting 4.16-pound white truffle is seen in West Haven, Connecticut. The truffle was found in Umbria, Italy. Sotheby's says the fungus was sold for \$61,250 to a food and wine lover from Taiwan bidding by phone. (AP Photo/Sotheby's)

### Record-setting truffle auctioned in NYC

NEW YORK (AP) — A record-setting white truffle recently went on the auction block before going on the chopping block. Sotheby's says the fungus was sold to a food and wine lover from Taiwan bidding by phone.

Sotheby's auctioned the 4.16-pound fungus in New York for \$61,250. The truffle was found in Umbria, Italy, by Sabatino Truffles.

The firm says it turned down million-dollar offers from buyers in China. Instead, it sold the luxury item to benefit Citymeals-on-Wheels and the Children's Glaucoma Foundation.

Sabatino Truffles spokeswoman Jane Walsh said the truffle was slightly smaller than an American football. She also said the average white truffle that's unearthed is about the size of a walnut.

According to Sotheby's, the previous record-holding white truffle was 2.5 pounds and sold for \$417,200 in 2010.

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## Honolulu expands sit-lie ban beyond Waikiki

By Cathy Bussewitz  
The Associated Press

HONOLULU — Honolulu mayor Kirk Caldwell has expanded the city's sit-lie ban to commercial districts outside Waikiki, signing the bill in Chinatown surrounded by business owners who welcomed the change.

The bill prohibits sitting and lying down on sidewalks in commercial districts including downtown Honolulu, Chinatown, Kaimuki, Kapahulu, Kailua, Kaneohe, and Waipahu.

"This bill is about keeping our sidewalks open for people to do their business, for pedestrians to walk on, and for businesses to get their deliveries made; to use them for the intent they were designed for — not to sit on, not to lie on, but to walk on," Caldwell said.

The bill, which went into effect December 2, prohibits reclining on sidewalks between 11:00am and 5:00am. It follows a ban passed for Waikiki in September that Caldwell said has "worked miracles" in the tourist hot spot.

The police department enforces the law in Chinatown and downtown, two areas that have received the most complaints from business owners, Caldwell said. Enforcement started with a two-week education phase. Business owners have complained that they're unable to open shops in the morning because of people lying across the entryways and that they've had to clean up human waste in front of their stores.

"This is a great first step for cleaning up the area for businesses to prosper and rejuvenate again," said Howard Lum, representing the Chinatown Community Center Association.

Advocates for the homeless said they fear the law will make it harder for homeless people to get out of poverty, pushing them into different areas and sometimes leaving them with fines they can't afford to pay.



**SIT-LIE BAN EXPANDED.** Honolulu mayor Kirk Caldwell, center, presents a signed copy of Bill 48 to Joseph Young, left, a retired dentist and honorary mayor of the Chinatown neighborhood, after Caldwell signed Bill 48 into law, outside of Fresh & Green Market in Honolulu, as co-owners Michelle Chang, second from right, and Kim Tram, far right, look on. The bill extends the ban on sitting and lying down on sidewalks to several commercial districts on Oahu beyond Waikiki. (AP Photo/Cathy Bussewitz)

An estimated 80 to 100 additional homeless people are living in Honolulu's Kakaako neighborhood since the Waikiki ban went into effect, said Kathryn Xian, executive director of the Pacific Alliance to Stop Slavery. The prohibitions are making it harder for homeless families to find stability and services, she said.

"It doesn't give them any incentive to take shelter or give any services," Xian said. "It just hurts them."

In Waikiki, 262 warnings and 72 citations have been issued since the ban there went into effect, and two people were arrested, Honolulu assistant police chief Clayton Kau said. The citations carry a fine up to \$1,000 and up to 30 days in jail, but penalties are at the discretion of a judge, said Donna Leong, corporation counsel for Honolulu.

"We can't speculate as to how people are going to pay for fines," Caldwell said. "This happens every day. People are cited for violating our park-closure rules. The

process is much the same."

The city estimates that more than 4,700 people are homeless on Oahu, and about 1,600 are without shelter. But the number of shelter beds available nightly falls well below the need, advocates said.

"I'm confident as we go forward there will be enough space," Caldwell said.

Caldwell's administration is pushing hard for Housing First, a program that will provide permanent housing units for the chronically homeless on Oahu. The city is working to find housing for 115 households in Chinatown, Downtown, Waikiki, and the Waianae coast, said Jun Yang, executive director for the city's Office of Housing.

It's using limited resources and shelter space in hard-hit areas and encouraging people to seek help at shelters, Caldwell said.

"Seven homeless killed seven homeless in the last 12 months or so," he said. "It's dangerous."