

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

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Sheep Year lovers guide

Horse Year 2014 is done. Sheep Year 2015 is here. And what a relief it'll be for both you and me. Unlike the Horse, Sheep are not hot-tempered, they're never suddenly unstable and moody. Sheep are simply solid. Straight forward.

2014 was crazy. Last year was bad for business; awful for politics; impossible for love. And speaking of love, last year young folk and old, gay and straight, white and brown and black and blue, told me stories. Love stories. Mostly about crazy twisted love. Horse Year love.

People talk to me. They just do. Say, I'm sitting quietly on a TriMet, or in a Starbucks window seat. Portlanders'll settle next to me, and tell me things. Andaduh'llaah (OMG) if I should nod or otherwise signal ascent, the questions pour out. Big ones.

Pero please, let me clarify here and now that I don't know a lot. And answers, I have none. It's because our family is from Indonesia. We're a complex people, parked on an ancient commercial and cultural crossroads. Our reverence for our red soil, our generous sea, our impulsive volcanoes, has for millennia blended well with Mother India's Vedic metaphysics, with Compassionate Buddha's dharma, with Prophet Mohammed's Holy Qur'an (Peace be Upon Him), and Jesus Christ's Teachings. In short, we're better at awed wonder, than at smart-alecky analysis.

Answers, we shy away from. Answers about that intoxicating abyss we call Love — we gave up a long time ago. Really, what's to know? Love is the opposite of knowing. Same for God. Both are unreachable by reasoning. Both are outside of cost and benefit analyzing.

So what follows are not definitive answers to Love Qs. Not at all. They're simply four critical observations about a human intersection I heard and heard about over our last 12 tumultuous months.

Intersections requiring we slow down, and look left and right.

1. Love is Mike Tyson

Love, Portlanders say, is like Iron Mike Tyson unloading a straight right. To your head. Love knocks you out. Sure, you can stay on your feet, but right and left, right and wrong, will no longer be where they were before love hit. Common sense is unavailable.

So, to Sheep Year 2015, TriMet and slow-escalator riders asking impossible questions, instead of me politely nodding, here's what you're going to hear: "Not sure if you're in love? — Do Top-40 teen love songs make you burst into tears? Are those mawkish Hallmark cards suddenly full of meaning for you?" Education or age, zip code or marital status, make no difference. Mr. Tyson does not discriminate. Love knocks good sense right out of you.

2. Love is a sockeye

There're a lot of comparisons in nature when we're talking about love. Take gray whales or gray wolves, take rutting elk or determined mallards. My Pacific Northwest fave is salmon. These guys (and girls) go thousands and thousands of ocean and river miles, for Love. The impulse is so urgent they'll shrug off voracious sea lions and hungry PGE hydroelectric turbines. After Mother Columbia's salmon couples have finally earned a little intimacy, they make beautiful babies. Then they die, smiling serenely on a pebbly stream strand. That very same irresistible biochemistry drives people too.

"My dear friend," I am going to tell anyone interrupting one of my solitary Starbucks momentitos, "Love is a single-minded sockeye. Fighting love only drives up muscular urgency. Resisting love only escalates neural arousal. Go with love like salmon do. And thank God for Love, like salmon do."

3. Love is a bottle rocket

Our Creator, or Nature (take your pick)

made Love the vehicle to the big bang. Love is like a bus to get you there, but the ride is more like a bottle rocket — red hot, lightning fast, but short. Of course, it was all supremely well planned or well programmed (depending again on whether you separate God and Nature), because no whale, wolf, duck, or salmon, neither you or me, can be stupidly in love for very long. Please see sections 1 and 2 above.

That bottle-rocket high serves the purpose of gathering boy and girl gray whales from our marvellous blue marble's deepest oceans; it drives sockeye and chinook to their ancestral love hotels; for pedestrian Portlanders, this crazy propellant, when combined with that explosive climax of endogenous morphines, are meant to couple us for life.

Simple Sheep Year warning for girls and guys riding the rocket: Maybe you really are "meant to be" — as a million lovers before you have earnestly declared. But just as likely you're not. Just as naturally, what's shouting is the biochemical cocktail coursing your veins.

So unless you're an elk or a duck, or you're a teenager with responsible adults covering your mortgage, utilities, and garbage: Chill. Slow your heart. Review Section 1: Love is stupid. Review Section 2: Love is stubborn. Then breathe deep. Do not drop your university studies or your six-figure corporate salary. Do not drop your wife or husband or kids or the Golden Lab. Not yet. Sure, love is hot, but it's short.

4. Love is not constitutionally covered

Though love is surely in our nature, it is not in our U.S. Constitution. You have no right to it. There's no equal protection, not for the love you give. Not at all.

While it's hard for humans to know how duck lovers actually feel about each other, their emotional commitment to mating is easy to measure. Zero. Mallard girls and guys party hardy, but they never nuzzle over breakfast. For ducks, there's no individual risk. There's no societal consequence. It's quack, kiss, done.

And ducks, we're not. Given what I heard over Horse Year 2014, and assuming Sections 1 through 3 are solid — Sheep Year lovers will likely not calculate what their investments mean to their lovers. Not even once.

Lovers *know* with certainty that their love knocks them out. They *know* love is crazy-making. But they lack the present ability to understand that these truths are

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entirely self-centered. This knowledge is only a tachometer on our individual internal states.

You cannot likewise read the dial on the internal emotional state of your beloved. There's no guaranteeing love is equally experienced. Or equally committed to. And this asymmetry is awfully risky, because what people feel and fear, what love we've had or not had, is entirely rooted in our personal, our familial, and our communal, histories.

In short — given the variety of joys and sorrows accumulated by Portlanders from our 70 or so ethnocultural streams and our countless socioeconomic tiers — the likelihood of two individuals emotionally aligning beyond love's rocket-fuel burn, is super unlikely. In other words: He may not be *that* into you.

I cannot tell you how many times I've looked down at a lovely face, as her chocolate eyes looked away from mine, but not quickly enough to mask the love no longer there. Not like last week or last month or last year. Not like the love I'm still burning with.

I *can* tell you, though, how alone I suddenly was with my mistaken assumptions. How erroneous I was in my emotional investments. How badly I got clowned.

So there you go, Sheep Year lovers. Sobering for sure, but it's not just about flash and crash. Not at all. Probably, erotic love is simply a single but irreplaceable member of the bigger family of Love: Love of God, love for our precious soil, love for elegant grandmas and delicate babies. My love of Kit Kat candy bars. It's the lovely glue binding us to our blessed little planet as we arc through all that mysterious silence of our unknowable universe. Alhamdulillah.

Court sentences Korean Air nut rage exec to one year in prison

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Chaebol chiefs convicted of white-collar crimes have typically received suspended prison sentences and later on, presidential pardons. Courts have often acknowledged the contribution of such industrialists in transforming South Korea from an economic backwater into a developed economy.

But the Cho case indicates South Korean society is less indulgent of the second- and third-generation members of high-profile business families. Heirs to fantastic fortunes such as Cho quickly ascend the executive ladder but few believe their rise is based on merit.

"Most second- or third-generations of chaebol in South Korea think of themselves as members of royal families or in the special aristocratic class. So they think they can do whatever they want," said Yonsei University psychology professor Whang Sang-min.

Cho is the eldest of the three children of Korean Air chairman Cho Yang-ho. After graduating from Hotel Management School at Cornell University, Cho in 1999 joined Korean Air, which was founded by her grandfather. Also known as Heather Cho, she enjoyed fast-track promotion and became an executive in 2006 at the age of 32. Her two younger siblings also became executives at a precocious age.

In her letter to the court, Cho said she was given only toilet paper, soap, and underwear after being detained, but was humbled that other prisoners had given her their toiletries

"People there lent me their toner, lotion,

shampoo, and rinse. I was so thankful," the letter said. "They didn't ask me anything about this case. I felt that this was indeed being considerate for others."

Oh, the chief judge, said the court took into consideration that Cho's actions undermined the flight's safety, that the flight attendants who were verbally and physically abused are still struggling to return to work, and worldwide media reports about the case damaged South Korea's reputation.

"If she were considerate to people, if she didn't treat employees like slaves, if she could have controlled her emotion," said Oh, "this case would not have happened."

But the court also recognized that Cho showed remorse and the airline was making efforts to help the affected flight attendants.

Cho's attorney later announced that Cho had filed a notice of appeal to a Seoul court.

Some South Koreans felt the sentence was inadequate.

"To me, the nut-rage incident looked like a rich kid in an elementary school looking down on poor or weak kids," said Chang Sabine, a teacher. "I think she should be doing community service to become mentally matured."

The court sentenced Yeo Woon-jin, a Korean Air executive who pressured employees to lie about the nut-rage case, to eight months in prison.

Transport ministry official Kim Woon-sub was found guilty of leaking the ministry's investigation to the airline. He received a six-month prison sentence suspended for one year.

My Turn: The all-American sitcom

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were called a racial slur. Throughout the evening, people were commenting so much on Twitter that "Fresh Off the Boat" became a trending topic with mostly positive tweets.

By the second episode, it was clear to me that the breakout character in "Fresh Off the Boat" is the fearless mom portrayed by Wu. With subtlety and strength, she rides the fine line between playing a steel *mei hua* (the national flower of China Taiwan) and a loving caring mom who only wants the best for her family. I saw the same driving, micro-managing spirit in my own mother.

Reviews so far have ranged from mixed to very positive, and Asian-American communities have shown great support. The show debuted strong for a sitcom

with 7.9 million viewers (not counting DVR or online views). In its second week, the show's ratings dipped by 29 percent, but held its own with other comedies in its timeslot, according to *Entertainment Weekly*. Though not a perfect show, it features endearing characters portrayed by a skilled and charming cast. Will it pave the way for other television shows with Asian Americans as the prime characters? Yes, if the ratings hold steady. I believe it can grow into a show with greater depth and complexity. I hope "Fresh Off the Boat" succeeds because it's high time for Asian-American families to be front and center in an all-American sitcom.

"Fresh Off the Boat" airs Tuesdays at 8:00pm on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). To learn more, visit <www.abc.go.com/shows/fresh-off-the-boat>.

The staff at The Asian Reporter wish you and your family a safe and happy Lunar New Year!