

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Ocypode pallidula emerged cautiously from their homey holes, sideways, without taking their tiny black eyeballs off me. (Photo/Petteri Sulonen/Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license)

Matters big and small

Keeping quiet in a noisy world

This morning, this very early Kailua morning, I'm waiting for our suriya sun to rise over her still, sighing sea. I wait and wait. Barely a breath of trade winds blow. There's not a reeling seabird in sight. As for surf, we have none. I check my watch. I wonder when's sun-up.

I'm thinking, maybe I'll just sit. Right here on the cool sand. And wait some more. I check my watch again.

I'm thinking that I could be sitting at Kailua Starbucks, the place President and Mrs. Obama drop by, with their pretty daughters in tow, when they holiday here. Christmas time. I'm thinking seriously about a thick warm slice of Starbucks pumpkin loaf, with a cold smear of cream cheese on top. But on second thought, the reason I rose real early was to see windward O'ahu's grand sunrise, right here over her expanse of sighing sea.

So I unlock my knees, fold my legs like a Fred Meyer lawn chair, and let myself drop.

On my way down, I notice a hundred alert little crab eyes, focused on me. Bright little bug eyes atop tiny periscopes affixed to knobby body armor — all of them fixed on me. Unblinking. Anxious.

Inside the same instant I hit bottom, FUMP — they disappear. Every single little guy inside my five-meter radius of

night vision: Gone. All at once into their Magic Marker-sized black holes. Gone, like a single reflex. Like my knee or like your elbow in our doctors' offices.

Five seconds later — probably five workweek days and nights later in sand crab time — up pop their little periscope peepers. They wait for my next move. But I'm not moving, so they wait. Then they wait some more. Saturday's sleepy sun's rising, surely gloriously though I cannot say because I'm no longer focused out there. Not anymore.

Of course, the big-picture perspective matters. Certainly our sun matters. A lot. Our splendid blue, green, and earthy-brown planet would perish and return to cold stone, were it not for our generous suriya sun. And yes, her morning arrival is more grand than a Java sultan soaring in on Garuda, or a Hollywood superstar stepping out of a pearl-white curbside limo.

But my new best crabby buds are, somehow, more familiar. Sure, they're as gritty as their sandy homes, but just as surely they and we seem more simply related by our shared instincts. Someone thumps, we jumps.

As our achy earth turns slowly into our sun's nurturing reach, fantastic shadows are made of this strand's smallest fea-

tures. Little ridges left by morning tide's measured retreat cast lovely shadows, each momentarily marking our warm sea's retreat. A disproportionately long shadow's thrown from a single sodden coconut. He seems so alone on the sand. So distant from our shore's palm-tree line. And now, I can count those hundred deliciously black holes my crab buds wait in.

Finally, my slowly warming best buds — known to white-lab-jacketed guys as *Ocypode pallidula* — emerge cautiously from their homey holes, sideways, without taking their tiny black eyeballs off me. Maybe they think I'm a predator. Maybe they know I'm hungry and thinking of warm pumpkin loaf. Or a crab sandwich, with melted garlic butter dip. But just as likely, they're not thinking a thing. Not one thought. Not between the lot of them. And, I kind of like this idea.

I make a move for my camera, and they zip on lightning tippy-toes into whoever's hole is near. Quick as a blink. All pau. All gone.

I need this. I'm thinking we would all benefit from more moments like these. More focus on what's near, and dear, rather than what's big and newsy. And it's really not a *thinking* matter. It's a present-mindedness that we all know in

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our irreducible bones. It's a *knowing* that resides in the living tissue connecting jumpy sand crabs and lonesome coconuts and conflicted early morning beach walkers. Sassy seabirds too, wherever they are. American presidents, Javan sultans, and Oscar aspirants need not be thus connected. Breathless network newsmen and an intense commerce of competitors for our short spans of attention, have got them covered. 24/7.

If I'm not careful — if me and you are less mindful — of who and what occupies all those precious empty spaces inside these porous bones, an alien army of political operatives and ad men will take over. Take us over. And they'll pack what little silence we still own with increasingly shrill issues, in frighteningly shortened news cycles.

So this must be what explains my brothers Lee, Kilong, and Alberto — the first out back whispering to his rooster, the next wandering that distant golf green, the last messing with his BMW motorbike. All of them, inside their silent moments, so that come Monday morning, their precious inside spaces cannot be filled by all those bigger and shriller voices.

Editor's note: This essay is written Indo djatung-style, meant to be read aloud. An office back staircase, an empty tiled bathroom, with a friend under covers, are all good.

2014 Most Honored Elder Award Recipient

Sary Khauv

Sary Khauv was born May 28, 1943 in Beung Keng Kang, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and, along with four siblings, was raised alone by his mother after his father passed away. He became a high school teacher in 1966 and married his wife Kim Nhorn Khauv in 1967. After the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh in 1975, he and his family were sent to the countryside to perform forced labor. Persevering through a great deal of difficulty and hardship — losing many family members, suffering deprivation and abuse, and enduring the terror of war — Sary and his family were able to escape into Thailand and enter into a refugee camp where he found work as a teacher. Because he had been a civil servant before the war, his family was given priority status and in 1980 he immigrated to the U.S. via a distant cousin in Oregon. His first job after arriving in Oregon was as a part-time English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher at Lincoln High School in Portland. He served as a community agent beginning in 1982 and became a special education teacher in 2004. Although he retired from the school system in 2008, he continues to teach at the Cambodian language and culture school on the weekends and in his more than 10 years of teaching Saturday school, he has only missed twice, once to visit his grandson and once a dear friend. He lives with his daughter Ratha and her family in Beaverton. His daughter Rany lives in Portland and his son Navy resides in Arizona.



AR Photo: Jan Landis

Children of Asian casino workers reshape Connecticut school

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Parent. Uncle. Parent," said Kaplan, who oversees the programs for students learning English as a second language.

Mohegan Sun and its nearby rival, the Foxwoods Resort Casino, bring dozens of busses full of Asian-American visitors every day to the corner of rural south-eastern Connecticut. The casinos have Asian marketing teams that develop and promote clubs, restaurants, concerts, and table games such as Sic Bo that appeal to the hugely important Asian demographic.

As part of the strategy, Foxwoods president Felix Rappaport said it seeks employees with the right language skills.

"We have the capacity to communicate with people in pretty much any Asian language you can think of," he said.

Mohegan Sun's celebration of last month's Lunar New Year included concerts by a Hong Kong pop singer, Chinese cultural craft demonstrations, and an appearance by winners of the Miss New York Chinese Beauty Pageant. Riders on Asian bus lines received traditional red envelopes with \$5 to \$100.

The English learners at Mohegan Elementary School also received red

envelopes, but with stickers inside, not cash.

Chinese students make up the majority of the 52 students who qualify for special language instruction out of roughly 350 students at the school, Kaplan said. The casino opened in 1996, but school officials say the diversity has grown notably over the last decade, with some Asian families coming from New York City and others coming directly from overseas.

The school employs a native Mandarin speaker who doubles as a teacher's aide and parent liaison, as well as a part-time tutor, and the district also has a translator for notes to parents. Signs throughout the school appear in English and Chinese. Principal Allison Peterson said the school tries to make parents feel comfortable by translating as much as possible.

In Norwich, one of the area's bigger cities, the school district has English learners representing 37 languages and often hires a private contractor to facilitate communications. Sheila Osko, the district's director of language and translation services, said many families choose the city because of its proximity to their jobs at Foxwoods.

READERS RESPOND

To the editor:

There are so many good reasons to read *The Asian Reporter* that we don't write to you each issue!

But Polo's columns in the January 19 and February 2 issues are so refreshing and excellent that we want to thank the editors for printing them, and Polo for writing them. THANK YOU!

Please be reassured that not all white people — not even most white people — adhere to The Code that continues to make human relations in the USA so unfair. Many are trying to exemplify a sane and welcoming worldview and enjoy our friends of color and/or immigrant as much as we do any of our friends. And in our case, as Jews we are sometimes on the receiving end of a parallel Code with a long, unfortunate history.

Thanks again for helping to advance American culture towards more inclusion and more joy.

Jim & Judy Emerson
Portland

The Asian Reporter Foundation is accepting nominations for its 2015 "Most Honored Elder" awards.

The recognition banquet will be held Thursday, April 23, 2015 at northeast Portland's TAO Event Center. Nomination forms and guidelines for eligibility are available for download at <www.ARFoundation.net>.

The nomination deadline is Wednesday, March 25, 2015 at 5:00pm.

Behind the wheel there is no such thing as a small distraction.

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