

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Rivers of rain, of joy and sorrow too

Let me tell you a story. It's a story straight out of Asian and Pacific and African and Latino America — a story straight as Pacific Northwest Tiger butterflies fly. Let me tell you a River City story.

I am driving our lead Dodge Caravan, a seven-passenger rig kept ship-shape by City Fleet manager and downtown guapo Marvin Navarro. We're heading due north on far east Portland's 122nd Avenue. It's me and a boatload of Zomi elders.

In our wake, the Spanish-speaking son of Royal Thai and Chinese Portlander parents, Jono Saiget, is ferrying a crew of resourceful Myanmar Karen civic activists. A little behind them, behind the wheel of her tired old Toyota, tough and tender community organizer Cristina Palacios is bringing her stubbornly ambitious Bhutanese, Guatemalan, and Mexican Portlanders. Everyone's eager to participate in Portland's nationally envied style of local democracy.

All our families have survived our achy little planet's worst neighborhoods, to settle here. All fled our world's cruellest or most careless leaders. And so it goes without saying, that everyone aboard this bus is a bit anxious about government. Sweaty palms notwithstanding, that's precisely where we're heading — this crew's presenting testimony to our new hometown's mayor and our city council. Ayoh-ayoh. (Let's go-go-go.)

"In 600 feet, turn left onto North Marine Drive," my smart-alecky iPhone says above our crowded cabin's din — chatter as anxious as macaque when harimau (leopard scent) is in the air. So left we go.

Stubborn sojourners

Grand River Columbia runs deep and wide on our right. On our left, Portland's tidy international airport opens our region's robust heart and our pulsing economy to a world of wealth, and a world

of hurt.

Our Caravan is suddenly silent as prayer. Still as night. While white caps roll by, while United jumbo jets roar west and Northwest Dreamliners roar east — not a sound comes from those elder aunties seated behind Big Uncle Mung and me.

As we pass Salty's packed upscale restaurant, I ask Pa Mung: "Apakabar Pa? (What's happening Uncle?) How're aunties doing back there? Too hot or too cold?"

"Dunno," he says, though both he and me do know. Sure we do. In our very bones, every man knows exactly what's happening in the back of this Dodge van; what's happening in the economic backwater of our women's eastside apartment blocks, and back in the failed states we fled. Men simply won't say it.

Pa Mung turns and asks in a tone that makes him such a respected and loved leader: How're you all doing, ladies? (I can only guess, I speak no Zomi.)

A short answer follows. Sobs follow this. Sobs landing like boulders. Some more aunties answer. Weeping follows that, wave after weeping wave — the way our women sorrow, everywhere. Always. No translation necessary.

Every man knows very well what these women's bursting hearts are saying. And every self-respecting guy's breathing stops. We know — sure we do — how we've failed to protect our mothers, how we've failed to provide for our wives and our daughters. Ampun'illaah.

Silence returns to our cabin. Long-long moments of it.

Pa Mung finally says to me: "They say, 'this river is same as River Mekong, back home. When we see this river, we're so happy. When we see this river, we're so sad.'" They cry for joy. They cry for sorrow.

With those words hanging in the air, this mighty man and me turn our eyes straight ahead. We dare not say another thing. He

and me drop into our separate solitudes. Each knows that by breathing slow we just may steer wide of our humiliation. We men.

Remedy for all that sorrow

"In 300 feet, turn slight right onto Fessenden," says my very smart phone.

"In 600 feet, turn right on Burr. Your destination," she says with a trace of pride, "is 300 feet, on your right."

Right. We're at George Middle School, site of city council's north Portland community budget forum. Our quiet Caravan coasts to a stop, curbside. I floor her park break. I turn off her engine and turn around to say, "Ayoh-ayoh nonyanyanya manis!" Let's go-go-go, dear ladies! Everyone smiles, radiant as a Sulawesi sunrise.

As we cross the school's crazy parking lot, St. Johns' broad-shouldered Tongan civic activists, gently led by Kolini Fusitua, arms thicker than my waist, back-smack Big Uncle Mung and me. As we enter, north Portland's beaming West Africans join us in this already packed hallway. For their big company, we feel better. We women and men alike.

When mayor Hales calls city council to order, ten of Portland's 70 muscular ethnic streams settle into our auditorium's wooden seats, all of us earnestly braiding into our city's splendid mainstream. All of us so much like the blending of Rivers Snake and Spokane, Yakima and Umatilla, Cowlitz and White Salmon, into our generous River Columbia.

That river of Pacific Northwest rain. Our river of joy, our river of sorrow. Al'hamdulillaah.

The Asian Reporter's Expanding American Lexicon

Al'hamdulillaah (Passar Bahasa, from Koranic Arabic): All our gratitude to God. All is God.

Ampun'illaah (Passar Bahasa, from Koranic Arabic): May God have Mercy on us.

Aunties and uncles: Respectful and affectionate forms of address for folks a generation older than you.

Ethnic streams: River City is a mélange of about 70 ethno-cultural streams, according to public school data on student's home languages.

Caravan (from Persian, Karvan): Merchants plus their pack animals. Also a Chrysler Motors product.

Civic activists: 1,000 Thank Yous for this story to Ivonne Rivero, to Kolini Fusitua, to Jerome Adibonou, to Cristina Palacios, and to Andrea Marquez for organizing then presenting their respective communities at the city council

We're at George Middle School, site of city council's north Portland community budget forum. Ten vigorous Portland ethnic streams settle into the auditorium's wooden seats, all of us earnestly braiding into our city's splendid mainstream.

budget forum described above. Participating in the life of Portland can cure broken hearts.

Dreamliners: Northwest manufacturer Boeing's newest generation of high-tech, long-range airliners.

Failed states: For all of human history, communities have migrated away from failed states and toward energetic economies, national borderlines notwithstanding. We migrate like whale and caribou families do. We always have.

Guapo (Tagalog noun): Good looking guy. (Spanish adjective): Handsome.

Karen Portlanders: New Americans from the Karen (or Kayin) state of southeast Myanmar (or Burma). Karen are not Burmese, not Korean, nor Karenni (another Portland community). Karen are a distinct cultural community with an enduring language and a proud history. Myanmar's military government and Karen have warred for 66 years.

PDX: Many credit Oregon governor Victor Atiyeh (son of Syrian immigrants) and Portland activist Sho Dozono (immigrant from Japan) with connecting PDX to Japan, Mexico, and Western Europe — our only direct international links.

Portland-style democracy: Portland neighborhoods participating in city governance set national high-water standards during the 1970s and '80s. Please see: "The Dynamics of Creating Strong Democracy in Portland, Oregon — 1974 to 2013," Paul R. Leistner (Ph.D. Thesis, 2013). This year, Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government honored Portland for even better community-building through our Office of Neighborhood Involvement's Diversity and Civic Leadership Program.

Sulawesi: Island at eastern end of Indonesia's 3,000-mile archipelago. Our family's homeland.

Zomi: In this context, New Americans from the Chin state of northwestern Myanmar (Burma), from southeast Bangladesh, and several northeastern states of India. Zomi are from Burma, they are not Burmese. Zomi are a distinct cultural community with an enduring language, and a proud history.

Third season for Portland Thorns, NWSL off and running

By Jody Lim
The Asian Reporter

The third season of pro soccer with the Portland Thorns and the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) is off and running. The league kicked off in mid-April and the nine squads have played at least five matches of each club's 20-game schedule. Thorns FC are within reach — just three points — of the current first-place team, the Chicago Red Stars, which has three wins and two draws (11 points).

The Portland squad — which has two wins, one loss, and two ties (8 points) — features Hawai'i native Meleana "Mana" Shim, who has been a key contributor. The 5'4" midfielder, who is now in her third NWSL season, has started all five matches, scored three goals, and given three assists.

Portland kicked off the season at home this year, the first time since the club's inception into the NWSL in 2013. In the opening match, held April 11 against the Boston Breakers, Shim scored the team's second goal in the 38th minute on an assist from defender Kendall Johnson. Midway through the second half, in the span of one minute, 14 seconds, Shim also assisted midfielder Allie Long twice, moving the score to 4-1.

After the match, Portland coach Paul Riley commented on Shim and Long's play, saying they had "great chemistry together."

The Thorns met Boston again this past weekend at Soldiers Field Soccer Stadium in Massachusetts. Boston



found the net in the final moments of second-half stoppage time to give the Thorns their first loss of 2015. The teams meet again August 5 in Portland.

In the second home match of the season, a physical 1-0 win over the Western New York Flash on April 18, the Thorns scored the go-ahead goal when midfielder Sinead Farrelly hit a cross that was flicked into the goal by Long.

SUMMER OF SOCCER. The third season of pro soccer with the Portland Thorns and the National Women's Soccer League is off and running. The league kicked off in mid-April and the nine squads have played at least five matches of each club's 20-game schedule. Pictured is Meleana Shim of the Portland Thorns dribbling the ball in front of 13,148 fans at Providence Park during the team's April 18 match against the Western New York Flash. (AR Photo/Jan Landis)

Portland meets the Flash two more time this year: July 29 and September 4, both at Sahlen's Stadium in Rochester, New York.

Thorns FC hit the road April 25 to take on the Chicago Red Stars, where the two teams battled to a 2-2 draw. After digging a 0-2 deficit, Portland goals from forward Christine Sinclair and Shim levelled the score at two apiece.

Chicago's roster includes defender Rachel Quon, who has Chinese ancestry, and defender Abby Erceg, the captain of the New Zealand national team, who is of Maori heritage. Quon, a graduate of Stanford University, is now in her third year playing for the Red Stars, having logged more than 3,200 minutes during the 2013 and 2014 seasons. After signing with the team in May of last year, Erceg started 11 matches and logged 990 minutes. The 25-year-old from Whangarei, New Zealand has played in the German Bundesliga and is the most capped player in New Zealand national team history.

Chicago and Portland meet one more time during the regular season, on August 9 at Providence Park.

After a bye week in early May, the Thorns returned to

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