

The Asian Reporter

Volume 25 Number 21
November 2, 2015
ISSN: 1094-9453

The Asian Reporter is published on
the first and third Monday each month.

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News Service **Associated Press/Newsfinder**

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TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Big universe, little girl

I am suddenly old. Irrevocably so. I'm saying this with a little surprise and with a lot of quiet gratitude. And jah tentu, with a bit of achy regret too.

Now, that first feeling, surprise — is surely shared by a lot of Portlanders also suddenly 60. And the second one, gratitude — is common enough among any of River City's 70 or so ethnic stream elder civic activists, those stubborn believers in blending us into a more robust mainstream. A savvy global city. Pero that third feeling, bluesy regret — likely requires some explanation. Some exploration. Some history, a little eastern metaphysics, some astounding astrophysics too, will be involved. Let me try my best.

It starts with that Old English proverb: *Time flies when you're having fun*. Though you know, time slips by at precisely the same clip during bad times too. Our ancestors taught our grandelders, and our parents told us: Though time and pain are constants, they're both constantly passing. We have power only over our anxiety about the hours, over our suffering over our hurt. "Go to sleep now, Joh," our momma used to say firmly. "You're tired-tired, and today is done. Tomorrow, you can worry some more. Tomorrow."

Indeed, it was this directive that allowed me to rest, to let go of bad days and good ones, to let go of dark years and beautiful ones. It was an order handed down through generations, by trusted, steady adults. It was instructive about our universe.

I mistakenly stayed this course. I stubbornly stuck to it, though our world widened and widened. And herein lies that achy regret I mentioned earlier. Regret deep as those reservoirs of chilly Bull Run water our city's hydro engineers keep around town.

Our widening world

During his and my most chaotic American times, I also told my son to go to sleep, to stop him from feeling his fears, thinking this would put them to rest. Daytimes, I punished him for expressing his anger, believing this would keep his teachers and their cops from crushing our mother's first grandson. I was wrong, and wronged him.

I was likewise wrong for not taking time to understand what was in our daughter's heart. And because I didn't know what was happening in there, I never knew how to be a part of that. How to be a



Edwin Powell Hubble is seen beneath his big Mount Wilson telescope in 1924. (Photo courtesy of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration)

**Albert Einstein and
Edwin Powell Hubble said our
universe is expanding. And so, by
extension, our internal and relational
worlds are no doubt growing wider
as well. Getting better too.**

part of her. Or how to properly parent her. I was not keeping up with her widening world.

Sure, I understand that our generation, that our parents and their parents, were parented during times when every individual kid's wants and every adult's disappointments had to be hushed. Under Netherlands' colonial rule, under Imperial Japan's occupation, in bigoted or otherwise ignorant 1960s America — social acceptance and economic viability depended on us suppressing our feelings. On us subordinating ourselves. Back then and back there, getting it wrong got your kid the gutter. Forever. No overstatement.

Here and now though, things have changed.

Continued on page 7