

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

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What writers, musicians, dancers, must do

As regular *Asian Reporter* readers know, publisher Jaime Lim has given me this page for 25 years. That's over 1,000 essays. For this profound privilege, terima kasih banyak. I offer you all my love for this cardkey into your ribcage.

Thank you for your voicemails, e-mails, and post mails. Writers are thrilled by readers responding. Whether we've made you happy, mad, or sad, matters less than connecting with your lived experience. Not with your well-considered opinions. Not that brainy stuff. Like painters and performers, writers need to know we resonate with what your heart knows. Your heart, old or young. Big city or country.

Today's column, silahkan (if I may) is an explanatory pause. A bit of glue for old readers needing some adhesive between my seemingly disconnected ideas. A framework for new readers already impatient with my meandering method.

Families move, naturally

If this were cinema, my camera's wide angle would be panning what scholars call human migration. The backstory of how families have always-always moved. Everywhere. In fact, right here at this rich confluence of rivers Willamette and Columbia and our Pacific sea, native peoples and the archeological record tell us that families have packed in and out for about 160 centuries. In context, U.S. Army captains Lewis and Clark paddled in just over two centuries ago. U-Haul trucks and trailers started parking curbside, a half-century ago.

My focus is on hardened borders, and how these hurt both families moving and families afraid of this natural cycling of people, products, and ideas. Tall walls are rare in human history. National gatekeeping is new.

Remember, the United States of America declared itself just 239 years ago.

U.S. colleges head to China to grow basketball fan base

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value from sports."

The Pac-12, meanwhile, is taking a long-term view on promoting its teams across the Pacific. The conference began taking men's and women's basketball teams to China for summer exhibitions several years ago and last year streamed 27 college basketball games in China through a partnership with LeTV, a Beijing-based online video company.

In October, the conference announced a deal with LeTV to start streaming college football games in China this season, as

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My Turn: When neighbors aren't neighborly

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disabled, immigrants, families with children, and other underserved consumers are reporting that housing discrimination remains a widespread problem in the United States."

I don't know if her plight is a sign of anti-immigrant or anti-single-woman discrimination, but when her neighborhood changed, her life became a personal nightmare, one she hopes she can awaken from if she can find a new home to rent in a different area.

The nation of Mexico is younger (194 years). The Canadian federation is newer still (33 years). Of course, competing kings on every continent have been hurling armies of poor farmers and their boys at each other to expand or to defend borders, for a few centuries more. But the point is, Washington, D.C. only began regulating families migrating away from ferocious diseases and bad bugs, nasty warlords and insatiable despots, less than a century-and-a-half ago. 1891.

My work — as a writer, as a lawyer, as a civic activist — is to ask you inside the racing pulse of about 100 years of shared history. This century of hardening borders. A century many Americans know from flickering black-and-white newsreels of hungry Italians, humbled Swedes, and terrified Jewish families at one end, and from evening news satellite feeds of desperate Arab families, at this end. A century many other Americans know from our personal, our familial or ancestral journeys here — which is why our hearts race so, when we see broadcast images of those people suffering.

Walls distort us

When I talk story about Alaska caribou families moving, about Pacific Gray whale families migrating, about Chapman Elementary School's astounding cloud of Vaux's Swifts jetting to sunnier Mexico this time of year, I'm noting how much our breathless scientists, our chirpy media, and our hearts go out to these families on the move. And I'm worrying why we don't also love two-legged families moving. The certainty and the beauty of human migration.

Our region's native nation's elders and biologists have always warned newcomers about damming the free movement of our generous rivers to their mother sea. They constantly caution against our interfering with their precious salmon's urgent migrations. They insist that dams distort

well, along with Chinese commentary.

Pac-12 commissioner Larry Scott said it was actually retired Chinese NBA star Yao Ming who first suggested bringing a regular-season basketball game to China.

"He's very passionate about this idea of exposing the U.S. system here," Scott said. "There are a lot of exhibitions over here. ... What would really be intriguing to people is to see top-caliber NCAA basketball teams going at each other in a regular-season game and that was the inspiration for the idea."

A second regular-season game is already planned for next November, also in partnership with Alibaba.

For the Washington and Texas players, many of whom have never been abroad before, the cultural experience alone made the trip worth it. At Alibaba headquarters, the players toured the sprawling campus in golf carts, shook hands with Ma and Tsai, and presented them with team jerseys. They also had a chance to practice their Mandarin.

"I've learned a couple words — they taught us *xie xie* (thank you) and *ni hao* (hello)," Texas guard Javan Felix said. "Just being able to communicate with the people here and seeing the smiles on their faces when we talk to them, or say something in their language, is cool to see."



Polo and granddaughters. Every parent can identify what's happening here. Same for evening news stories of families moving away from killer disease, hungry storms, bad leaders.

ancient balances they've mindfully stewarded for those 160 centuries mentioned earlier.

Likewise, raising tall walls, then criminalizing, then racializing a natural phenomena, damages us too. Whale-loving science guys may distract your hard-wired human empathy, shrill lawmakers may suppress our immediate identification with another parent's instinct to protect and nurture her or his kids — but we acquiesce to distraction and suppression at an awful cost. Tenderness will be displaced by emotional disability and political passivity. Cynical and endless argument happens, when my pounding heart needs me to act. To act in a world of hurt. But I don't.

Sustained emotional detachment from families just like ours will require the same kind of unblinking long-haul commitment of U.S. treasury and American soul, as presidents Roosevelt to Obama have committed to warring, decade in and decade out, from the mid-20th-century to today. The kind that crushes those we fear, the kind that also kills our humanity. Making us earnest consumers of nature shows and political theater.

Try this. Tomorrow night, turn on CNN and turn off the audio. Like a parent would, watch the obsidian eyes of walled-in Palestinian 10-year-olds; look closely at the twitchy jaws of Chinese soldierboys behind their wall of tanks; examine equally and tenderly the flared nostrils of rock-throwing Mexican teens and those of gun-firing U.S. Border Patrol guys, each on their respective sides of those hardened borders. Feel how familiar it all is. Don't turn from it. Stay a moment more.

Talking story about our distortions

I am, and these essays are, a lot like

Walls taller than NFL Samoans, walls younger than me, slow us a bit. But not long. Chunks of Berlin's Wall are on eBay. Tomorrow, in Starbucks' morning coffee line, ask someone under 30 about the Bamboo Curtain. Likely they'll tell you about shower curtains. Bed Bath & Beyond.

those caribou, whales, and Vaux's Swifts. All small bit players in a grand circulatory system almost as old as our achy little earth. Walls taller than NFL Samoans, walls younger than me, slow us a bit. But not long. Tourists now jam both sides of China's Great Wall. Chunks of Berlin's Wall are on eBay. Tomorrow, in Starbucks' morning coffee line, ask someone under 30 about the Bamboo Curtain. Likely they'll tell you about shower curtains. Bed Bath & Beyond.

I am wounded by those tall walls. Me and millions and millions more who made it, or didn't make it, out of Nazi Germany or partitioned Pakistan, out of suddenly darkened Colombia or Congo. Our broken places hurt our brave daughters and bright sons. I tippy-toe around our pretty grandbabies.

After I kiss their fragrant scalps, in their sleep, I write. I work at making my way into your heart. Into those chambers where the sorrow and the joy of your migrant elders or ancestors reside. Where they wait for you to revere them. And the moment you do, those irregular heartbeats brought on by evening news of Syrian and Rwandan dads, of Guatemalan and Afghani moms, will have a whole new meaning. Meaning, it's time to act.

Every serious artist's task is moving you to go with what your heart already knows. To go tell senator Wyden what you expect of America. To help mayor Hales care for Native, settled, and new Portlanders alike. To teach my Nepali policy analyst how to drive. To find our Rohingya refugee intern's exhausted mom a mortgage. To get our Tongan concrete guy a driveway job before Christmas.

This is what our families need. That's how concrete this work is. As simple and solid as our shared humanity.

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