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TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Better blending West and East (Portlanders)

Bhakta and Yanuka's apartment block is hard to find at night. Harder still when Oregon rain's blurring your vision and East Portland's awful neon is distorting your windshield.

But really, the biggest reason their little household is hard to find is on account of how far they and their pretty babies live from River City's public-policy and business leaders. I mean this as much a measure of social distance, as a matter of actual miles.

To be clear — because clarity is necessary when navigating winter nights — what follows is not an essay on the disparities between Portland's first-world urban core and our outer eastside's underdevelopment. Not at all. Not in the conventional ways our policy and business leaders are already adept at analyzing.

And to be fair — because sharing is so core to those traditional communities living parallel to our city's robust mainstream — in trade for eight minutes of reading, I offer three things Portland's ethnic streams bank in great abundance. Three kinds of capital absolutely essential for happy households, for healthy neighborhoods and nations. Assets mainstream America likely longs for as much as our ethnic streamers desire of our dominant society's political and financial assets. We're talking about fair trade.

My downtown colleague Joanne and I finally found Yanuka and Bhakta's place that night. The night of their birthday party. Auspiciously, both were born that day in their beloved Kingdom of Bhutan. Less blessed was their king expelling their entire minority community. Bhakta and Yanuka were raised two countries over, in Nepal, in a sprawling refugee hovel. Twenty-one years later a generous United States of America accepted them for resettlement.

From the moment their jumbo jet taxied to a stop at PDX, an oddly asymmetrical alliance of determined East Portland ethnic associations and community organizations plus public agencies governed from our town's center, rapidly integrated them into the accelerated life of our city. Despite consequently lumpy outcomes, it's all gone pretty well.

Precious cargo we carried here

I knocked at an apartment I thought was our



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friends' place, but an Iraqi dad in a saggy white T answered. With Arab hospitality typical in Raffa and Aleppo and even in Sana'a, he opened wide his household's door. Joanne and I did a universal "so sorry, sir" smile and reverse shuffle. He smiled some more. So did we. Evidently, our birthday people and their pretty kids had moved several doors down.

Bhakta, sockless in rubber silapahs (slippers), stepped outside waving his arms. In Old World neighborhoods, back home and right here, news radiates quicker than Xfinity's tip-top speeds. And surer than Mr. Trump's tweets.

Once inside, heavenly Lotsampa curry scent soothed us. Elegant elders and hardworking parents and everyone's squirrely kids embraced us as if we're familia. Because in our bones and in deeds, we are.

"We HAPPY you here," Bhakta and Yanuka said — well, not exactly *said*, because neither can hear, which makes learning and speaking Nepali or English hard. Real hard. "Happy you here" came from Grandma Mangali, trying her best to be gay though her lovely daughter just passed away, leaving a grandbaby boy in her arms. And Grandma's translation came via kind teacher Shukun,

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