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Please send all correspondence to: The Asian Reporter
922 N Killingsworth Street, Suite 2D, Portland, OR 97217
Phone: (503) 283-4440, Fax: (503) 283-4445

News Department e-mail: news@asianreporter.com
Advertising Department e-mail: ads@asianreporter.com
General e-mail: info@asianreporter.com
Website: www.asianreporter.com

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Publisher **Jaime Lim**
Contributing Editors

Ronault L.S. Catalani (Polo), Jeff Wenger
Correspondents

Ian Blazina, Josephine Bridges, Pamela Ellgen, Maileen Hamto, Edward J. Han, A.P. Kryza, Marie Lo, Simeon Mamaril, Julie Stegeman, Toni Tabora-Roberts, Allison Voigts
Illustrator **Jonathan Hill**
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TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

By Ronault LS Catalani & Caricia EC Catalani Veneziale



When I'm 64

I recently turned 64. I used to think, when I was our daughter's present age, that 64 is ancient. Un-im-maginable.

So as my birthday neared, I began thinking about those 50 fast years that passed us since Sir Paul McCartney recorded "When I'm 64." Since he tucked that rooty-tooty little number inside The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. "Will you still need me," he sang sweetly, "will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four? Oooh."

Also back then, we were new to here. To Salem, Oregon. Back then, America's boys and men were warring ferociously with our old neighborhood's boys and men. Their moms and daughters too. In the Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos, in the divided Viet Nam.

During those chaotic '60s, our Pop and us boys packed our couch to watch CBS News' dead body counts — their losses versus ours. A dashboard of sorrows. All TV networks did this, every evening. Pero you know, even as a squirrely krotjong I knew, just inside these left-side ribs, that those ugly government numbers did not square with what's true, with what our achy little earth was actually living. Though none of us, not our Pop, not his boys said so.

Also during that dark decade, also in every living room, everyone watched America's brightest political leaders and our bravest moral authorities, shot to death. We saw Mrs. Kennedy patting back into place, the top of her husband's head; we witnessed her handsome brother-in-law Bobby bleed out on the Ambassador Hotel's kitchen floor; we saw America's fearless civil-rights elders and activists pointing at a running gunman as our beloved Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. breathed his last. Oh ampun'illaah. Oh God have mercy on us all.

Those evenings I watched our pop's polished teak eyes while he watched Mr. Cronkite's. And I knew — inside the same humming bones every son and daughter knows the meaning of their father's eyes, his brows, his lips corners — that our tough and tender pop was choking back what every good parent resists at times like this. Regret. Oh Lord, did I make a mistake? Bringing us here.

Fifty furious years ago — years much-much better than our elders' preceding 50 of grinding Dutch colonial self-loathing; dissolving into brutal imperial Japanese occupation; devolving into years of dirty warring among our nascent Indonesian

Antara Tempat (Places Between)
By Caricia EC Catalani Veneziale

To my Pop, on his birthday,
Who, like many of you, has stood
For most of these 64 years
In places between places.
Not here and not back there.
Somewhere that might have become
Nowhere.

To my Pop, who had the heart
To build a place for us
In this place between places;
Who shared his love with us
Without any one place to anchor it,
Ground to plant it,
The rights to hold it.

To my Pop, who shared the same boundary-less
Spirit as many of you.
The spirit that builds a community
In places between places.
Our community, made more beautiful
By not belonging to here or there.
Like Brindisi, like Istanbul, like Alexandria and
Nairobi, Java.

A place made more beautiful
By being Us.

nation's major and minor ethnic communities; concluding with our familia's expulsion from our mother's home — like I was saying, five supersonic decades ago, The Beatles were hot, Carlos Santana was cool.

The evening of my 64th birthday, 64 of my tried and truest kualarga (meaning "familia" in the traditional sense) representing four generations of transnational mechanicos, gathered to thank our Mom, our daughter and son, and their rajini-rajini (princessitas) for lending me to our newcomer communities.

Since my birthday, I've thought and thought about how to thank you all, for so honoring our matriarch, her children and her children's children. Al'hamdulillaah. But I could not, until I saw our daughter Caricia's handwritten poem for my 64th birthday. Please read her poem above.

Pero silahkan (but if you please) read aloud. She and me, write in Indo djatung style, in which tone and rhythm and volume mean as much as words.