

The Asian Reporter

Volume 28 Number 23
December 3, 2018
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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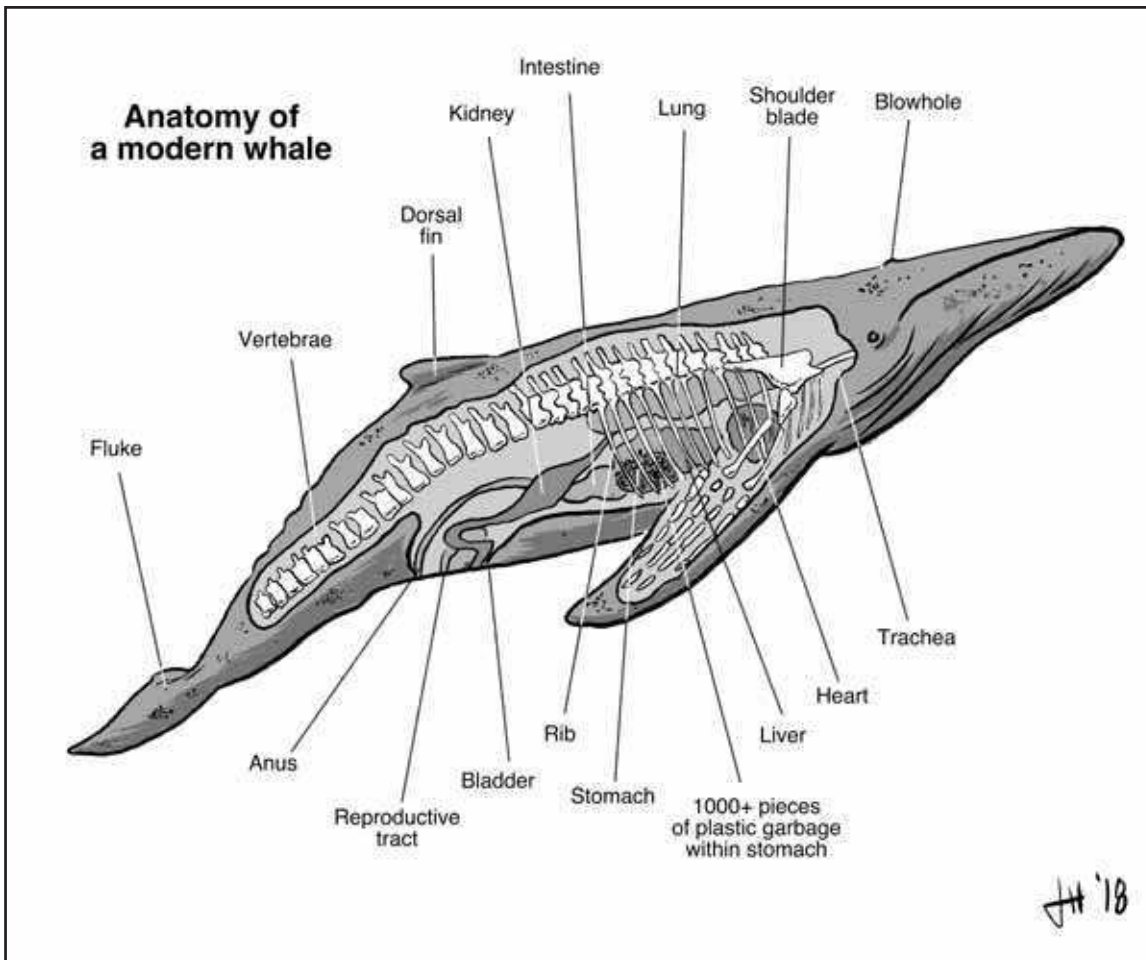
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TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo

When Grandma Kia passes away

July 10, 1936 to September 15, 2018

When an elegant grandma passes away, the way each must — this grandma then that one, your grandma followed by ours — there’s an awful anguish in all our bones. Especially so in the bones of our transnational and traditional communities. It’s an anguish shaped by awful uncertainty, like the dread that overtakes you when you break an arm or leg bone really bad.

A revered grandma leaving us is different, very different from when a determined grandpa passes away. Away from this sweaty life we’ve daily shared.

When a grandpa goes, our muscles ache. We ache like a bruised boxer’s old arms and shoulders ache, as we sorrow and we celebrate what our stubborn grandpas did and did and did to deliver their children and their children’s children from all those desperate places, from all those dark days and darker nights, so far away from our splendid lives here and now. So far away from this robust city on the confluence of our generous matriarchs, Rivers Columbia and Willamette.

Hmong-American Grandma Kia Vue Cha’s passing away in Oregon’s autumn of 2018 was so different from that of any great grandpa.

When this grand lady, as elegant and strong as bamboo, quietly left us — no old working man’s blues filled you or me. Her departing had the sharp anguish of a badly broken bone. Fractured bones, doctors reassure us, will surely mend. But a splintered bone, like a torn apart people, cannot heal. Not ever.

It is the possibility of their human broken-ness, it was the probability of Hmong (Free People) extinction that has urged Grandma Kia’s kin to move continent to continent, century to century. To here. To the safety of here. To raise pretty babies and bury their elders, here.

Just as surely, it’s been every muscular migrating family’s fear of erasure, that has made so vigorous this blessed northwest corner of our shared America. About 130 centuries of that.

This is always and everywhere true. Every human community’s dignity, each of our determined un-broken-ness brings a world of meaning to our marvellous little planet’s children, to their children and then to theirs. And likewise true: Every family’s un-brokenness has right up to today,



As Thai-American artist and community activist Chompunut Xuto said at Grandma Kia’s memorial, for families suddenly without a home, for communities without our homelands: “Mothers are our country because we are so far away from our homes.”

depended on women like Grandma Kia.

Always, they’ve made our households warm. Everywhere they’ve made our tummies full, they’ve made our minds at ease, then made your and my sleep deep and sweet. As Thai-American artist and community activist Chompunut Xuto said at Grandma Kia’s memorial, for families suddenly without a home, for communities without our homelands: “Mothers are our country, because we are so far away from our homes. Mother is our country, our culture, our home.”

“Mothers are Home,” she said. “The home that daily feeds and rests us.” Then we get up for another day of shared sorrow and joy.

Let me say to our men, to our husbands and sons and grandsons — Hmong and Lao, Anglo and Latino, Asian and African, traditional shamanic folk and good Christians and Muslims — all of us near Madame Kia Vue Cha’s grand family: Let’s you and me forget for a sacred moment our own aching shoulders, our nagging backs. Because we are assured that our beautiful mothers and wives and their bright daughters, who’ll all certainly be our elegant grandmas, will be there for your broken bones. For my blues. No matter how bad. Surely they will.

Sure they will. But only if you and me properly care for their beauty and properly light their brightness. All good young men — including our sons and grandsons who’re a bit distanced from the

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