PACIFIC RIM MAGAZINE

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Spring 2007: Proposed library development

Messages

This issue of *Pacific Rim Magazine* gives me a chance to convey some wonderful news to our readers. Langara College facilities are expanding to serve our community better!

To provide a short history lesson:

- In the fall of 1996, when students first started producing this magazine, the college was busy serving the 6,500 students enrolled in our credit programs.
- Since that time, our Fall credit enrolment has climbed to 8,200.
- Since January 1997, about 5,000 students enroll each semester in our Continuing Studies courses.
- To provide the services required by the community and to the make the college a thriving centre of learning, more than 1,100 employees work here annually.

To date, we've accommodated almost everyone in our two main buildings. However, space is tight, and when compared to the Ministry space standards, we clearly need more facilities to house everyone in.

So we have made plans to expand our campus facilities, and on March 17, 2005, the City of Vancouver approved policy statements that will guide their development. Our first expansion will be a new library and classroom building which will include computer labs, large study spaces, a food service area, and underground parking. Our old library building will be renovated to house new classrooms, computer labs, offices, and meeting spaces.

The province of British Columbia is contributing $29.3 million toward our $39.3-million project.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the community, provincial government, city planners, College Board, and everyone at the college for their assistance in moving toward this exciting transformation to our campus.

Construction has just begun. The new library is scheduled to open in January 2007. After that, our 25 Year Master Plan includes a Creative Arts Centre, enhanced recreational and wellness facilities anchored around a gymnasium, and yet another classroom and office building.

Expect to hear about the progress of the library in next year's issue of *Pacific Rim Magazine*, and please enjoy reading this one.

Linda Holmes, President

In a story in this issue, writer Gregory Kero tells about his grandmother, a Japanese immigrant whose lifespan fell just three months short of straddling three centuries. She remembered the floor shaking during the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. At age 101, she remembered the name of her kindergarten teacher. This got me thinking about memory. We remember the events and people that make the strongest impressions on us, and we may carry those memories for decades. As of next year, an entire decade will have passed since students became involved in *Pacific Rim Magazine*. 2006 will mark the 10th anniversary of the Publishing program and the 10th time Publishing students have collaborated in writing, editing, designing, and producing this magazine. The effort has forged many strong friendships.

We plan to celebrate by bringing our alumni together for next year's magazine launch. If you know people who have graduated from the Publishing program, please ask them to get in touch with us. If you're a grad, please see the ad on page 31 and join our list-serve. In 2006, 10 years of students will share their memories. And with luck, they will all keep those memories until they're at least 101.

Elizabeth Rains, Publisher

Water: life-giving, yet destructive. Early on, we noticed that water was a pervasive theme in this year's issue. From the abode of the humble koi to the lair of the enigmatic shark, water supports life. Tragically, water has also taken the lives of more than 250,000 people in Southeast Asia and Eastern Africa. In the selection and editing of our cover story, *Songkran – Joyous Celebration of Cleansing*, the tsunami overshadowed the creative process. We, therefore, dedicate this issue of *Pacific Rim Magazine* to those lost in the disaster and to the loved ones they left behind.

Writer Anne Price explores the festival of Songkran as being a catalyst for renewal and moving forward. In this spirit, we hope that the article honours a part of the world that, recently, has only been seen in a negative light. As tsunami and earthquake survivors bravely work to put these catastrophes behind them, our thoughts are with them.

Warren A. Mailey, Executive Editor
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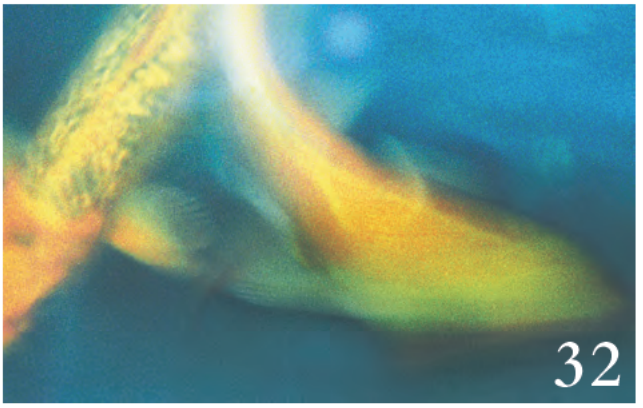
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Cover photograph by Curtis Hildebrand

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THE LONG ROAD HOME

BY JULIA RONMARK
ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN BAXTER

It wasn't until I bowed to the postman one afternoon that I realized how much had changed. How much *I* had changed. Three months after returning to Canada, the more obvious signs of my year in Japan had started to fade. My Canadian accent had returned, I could eat dairy products without getting a stomach ache, and I could drink North American juice again. Physically, I was re-adapting. Emotionally, however, I was a wreck. Bored, disorientated, lonely, and depressed, I was experiencing reverse culture shock.

Like most eager travellers, I had fervently prepared for my year abroad. I had attended seminars, read books, searched the Internet, and spent hours daydreaming. At 17, I had prepared myself to attain the biggest goal I had ever set: a year alone in Japan. It was not surprising, therefore, that I experienced little culture shock.

Of course there were moments. The transition from a town of 5,000 to a city of eight million was huge. Tokyo would be my new home: a sprawling metropolis of concrete platforms and towering skyscrapers. A perpetual luminescence replaced the fertile fields, grain elevators, and starry nights I had left behind.

There were moments from a culture completely unlike my own: the tiny school uniforms labelled "XXL," family outings to the public naked baths, and eating raw fish. Even more daunting was a new language to learn. But this was Japan – my dream. And I had fallen in love.

While living in Japan, I was euphoric. With so many new sights, smells, and tastes, I spent little time thinking of home. Of course I missed my friends and family, but thoughts of returning to Canada only conjured up uneasy feelings, the ending to my dream. I didn't feel the need to prepare for my return to Canada, which wasn't a foreign country after all. I had lived there the first 17 years of my life.

I arrived back in Canada on a terrific high. Despite crying the entire

way to Japan's Narita airport, nine hours alone on my flight had given me time to realize just how excited I was to see my country again. It had been a year since I left Canada and my family. Our only contact had been through letters, e-mails, and telephone conversations.

The initial high of my return home was short-lived. Back in Canada, I found myself growing bored. Living in a foreign country meant being in a constant state of stimulation. In Tokyo, everything was fast, new, and exciting; there was always something new to see or do. By comparison, Creston, BC, seemed slow, tedious, and dull. In retrospect, there were many things I could have busied myself with: hiking trails to explore, volunteer groups to join, and community projects to participate in. Unfortunately, I wasn't in the state of mind to do any of those things. I missed my Japanese life terribly.

The hardest part was preparing for school. I had left for Japan at the end of Grade 11 and, despite my schooling overseas, had provincial exams to write upon my return. After a year of "hands on" and experiential learning, book learning was a struggle. I had had the experience of a lifetime. I had walked the grounds of Hiroshima, discussed philosophy with Buddhist monks in the Japanese countryside, participated in local festivals, climbed Mount Fuji, and visited rice fields. I had studied calligraphy, dance, the tea ceremony, and had learned a new language. School and exams seemed trivial by comparison.

Eventually, my boredom gave way to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Now in a new class, I was without any of my old friends. As my classmates prepared for the most exciting school year of their life, I felt lost. Of course, many of them were kind, bringing me out to graduation events, inviting me home for lunch, or offering me study dates. Kind as they were, however, I was empty inside.

My feelings of boredom and isolation led to depression. My increasingly poor marks in school only confirmed my feelings of insecurity. Faced with culturally re-integrating myself, I questioned what the future held for me. I no longer had a clue.

Cultural re-integration was not only a personal challenge, but hard on my family as well. Since I was the only member of my immediate family who had lived overseas, relating to my struggle was difficult for them. To my family, Japan was still a foreign country.

They remembered me as the 17-year-old girl they had taken to the airport one year prior. They remembered the girl who collapsed on her bedroom floor the day before leaving and refused to move, not ready to go to this foreign Japan. They remembered the girl who did not eat fish, the girl who couldn't eat Japanese sour plums, the girl that couldn't speak a word of Japanese. But I wasn't that girl anymore. I was the girl I had become: the girl who now loved fish, the girl who couldn't wait to gobble down Japanese sour plums, the girl who now chattered on in Japanese, even if nobody was listening.

My family, however, remained strong. Sensing my feelings of loss, they were patient and made great efforts: opening our home to visiting Japanese exchange students, taking me to the North American sites of Japanese history and culture, trying out new foods, and learning bits of the Japanese language.

Leaving for Japan at 17, I never imagined I would have to learn how to become Canadian again. After a year abroad, that is exactly what I had to do. This July will mark the seventh anniversary of my return to Canada. It has been a long road home, but with two eyes, two ears, two homes, and one heart to experience the world, I wouldn't change it for anything. ⊞

I never imagined I would have to learn how to become Canadian again.

SACRIFICES and REWARDS

Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program

BY MEILYNN DATAYAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH LOMAX

There are a lot of sad faces. Tears flow as your family sees you off to a foreign land. Your husband and children hug you tight, wishing that you didn't have to go. A mantra echoes inside your head, "This is all for the best; this is all for the best." Although you are hesitant to leave your family and the only place you've known, you know that leaving for a few years is the only way to give them a brighter future. As you get closer to boarding the plane, you try to memorize every detail of your husband's face, every curve and every line; you do the same with your children. With a heavy heart and knots in your stomach, you pull away from them with all your strength, and head towards the gate. As the plane takes off, you prepare yourself for a journey to a strange place full of uncertainty. This is the story of many Filipino women.

Life in the Philippines is a struggle. The unstable economy forces many Filipino women to work abroad to support their families. The easiest way for them to work in Canada is through the Live-In Caregiver Program, also known as the LCP. For many Filipino women, the LCP is a valuable opportunity to work overseas, provide for their families, and eventually bring them to Canada.

According to Human Resources Development Canada, the Canadian government developed the LCP in 1992 to meet Canada's need for live-in nannies. This program replaced the Foreign Domestic Movement, which was implemented by the Philippine government in 1972 as a means of bringing more dollars into the country.

Approximately 80 per cent of domestic workers in Canada are Filipino women. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Filipinos' ability to speak and understand English and their high levels of education make them favourable employees.

In August 2002, Cecil Clavio arrived in Canada through the LCP. Cecil, a homemaker and mother of three boys, applied to the program to provide a better future for her family. She would not have left her country if she were more financially stable. But her husband, a sales associate for a small company, does not make enough money to support

her and their three sons. The couple's financial problems put a strain on their marriage, and Cecil felt that she had to take action. Through her sister, she learned about the LCP and decided to come to Canada.

According to Immigration Canada, the program has four main requirements. First, participants must have the equivalent of a Canadian high school education. Second, they must know English or French. Third, they have to complete a six-month Caregiver course in the Philippines with an institution affiliated with the LCP. Finally, there must be a written employment contract between the employer and employee.

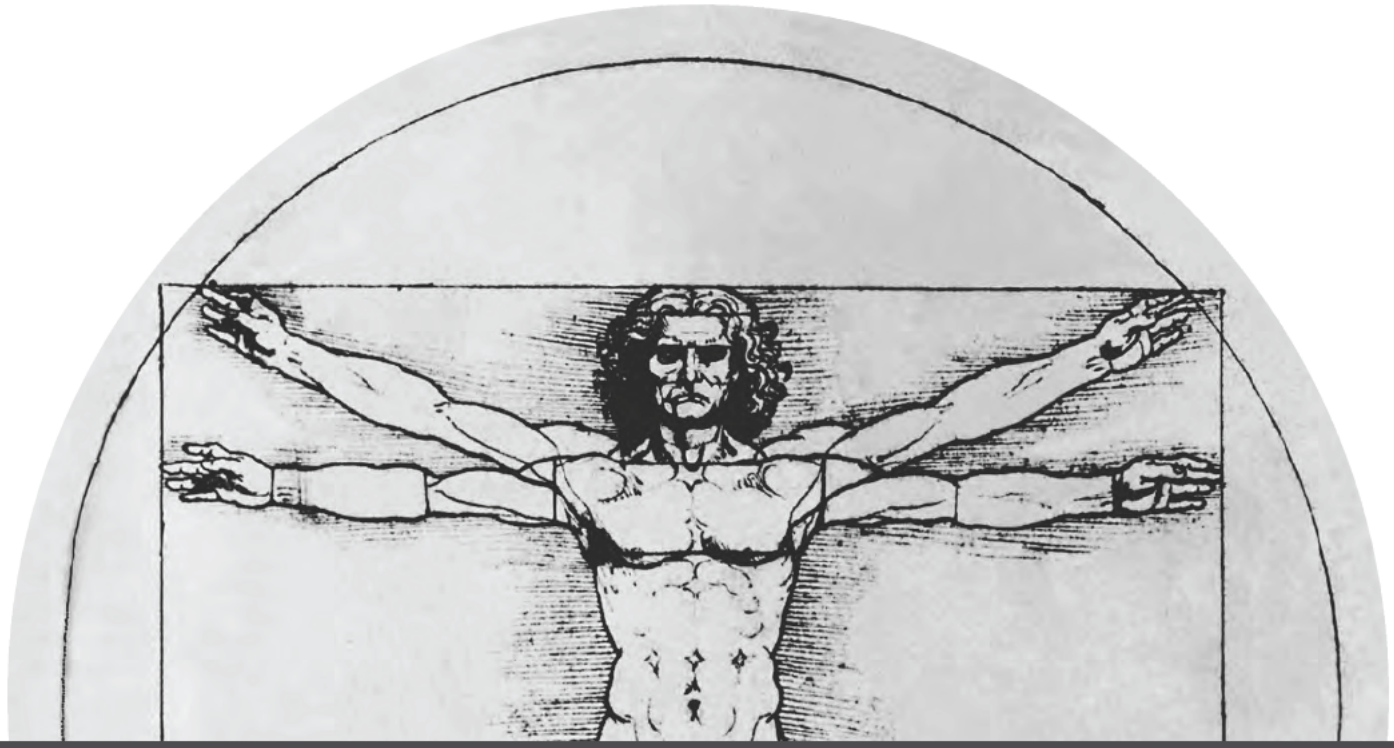
The program requires Canadian employers to provide a room for their caregivers and pay a monthly tax of $350 to the Canadian government. This tax includes employment insurance. The contract for the LCP is always between the employer and employee. Human Resources Centre Canada provides the employer with a list of tasks from which they choose the services they will require. The employee can apply for permanent residency for herself and her family after successfully completing two years in the program.

Simple and straightforward, this program looks like a wonderful opportunity. Sacrifice two or three years of your life and you and your family will have the chance to live in Canada. There are, however, many struggles that must first be faced.

For Cecil Clavio, being separated from her family is difficult. She keeps in touch with her husband and sons regularly, but phone calls are not enough. As days pass, she feels the gap between her and her family increasing. Her children are rebelling against their father, and she feels that her absense is the cause.

Aside from bearing the pain of being away from her family, Cecil is one of the luckier Filipino women; she is treated fairly by her employer and the contract is honoured. Some caregivers, however, are overworked and are paid inadequately. Employers, aware of the desperation to bring families to Canada, take advantage of the caregivers. Unfortunately, most of the caregivers whose services are being abused choose to bear the hardships. They do this so that they can quickly complete their two years of obligation. Caregivers can seek another employer, but it is not easy. Many women can't afford to waste time looking for a new employer while their families back home depend on the money they send.

Many Filipinos strive to fulfill their dreams of a better life by coming to North America. But immigration is not often an easy process. This is why so many women choose to work in Canada as caregivers. But is the sacrifice worth it? For Cecil, the opportunity to provide a wonderful life for her family makes it all worthwhile.



Golden Synergy: The Changing Face of Medicine

BY JOLLEAN WINGRAVE

Growing up in the '60s, I found our meals at home bland and basic – meat with boiled potatoes and vegetables. Dining out was for special occasions. Nowadays, we dine out regularly. At home, we cook stir-fry, Moroccan chicken, samosas, teriyaki, or other ethnic dishes as part of our regular dining habits. We have learned to take our favourite foods from each culture to create a diet that works best for us. We have done the same with our health care.

Increasingly, people are looking outside the parameters of medical science for supplementary health care. Delina Petit Pas, a reiki master for 14 years, sees the flow of information going both ways: "We have reiki and western medicine, and can use what we need from both. There are people in the medical profession who are taking touch therapy and using it in the system… there are times when we need to meet with someone who has the scientific knowledge to help us with a particular ailment."

> "We have reiki and western medicine, and can use what we need from both."

Doug Louis agrees. In his early 40s, he has relied on western medicine for most of his life. For the past seven years, however, he's been using reiki. If a problem can't be fixed holistically, then he'll go to a doctor. If he broke a bone, of course, he would see a doctor to have the bone set. Afterwards, he would go for a reiki session to improve and speed the healing process. "Reiki is more of an energy system, concentrating human energy to where the ailment is, relaxing muscles, and aiding the body in healing itself," says Louis.

In her book *Essential Reiki: A Complete Guide to an Ancient Healing Art*, Diane Stein observes, "Reiki is a laying-on-of-hands touch healing system of incomparable ease and power." It isn't a quick fix. Each session takes about an hour and multiple visits are required. To the uninitiated it seems that Reiki is pure faith and folklore. But faith may be what makes it work. "You must believe in yourself and the person giving reiki or you'll fight it and it won't help you," explains Louis. He considers it the same when you take medicine – you must believe that it's beneficial. "When your psyche is feeling better, it means your body is going to feel better."

Disillusioned with the western medical system, Louis seeks supplementary care through reiki. He remembers a time when nurses did the initial diagnosis and the doctor verified their findings. At that point, doctors and nurses

worked together as a team. "Now it's two factions fighting against each other, and it seems like they forget about the patient," says Louis. As a result of this situation, he believes people should think before they go to the doctor.

In conventional western medicine, those seeking medical attention would go to a doctor, who would give a diagnosis; patients would obey the medical practitioner's instructions: "Take two of these, and call me in the morning." Now, patients are asking more questions, and want more information. Increasingly, people want to know what the side effects of medications are and what the medications do.

Today, we have greater knowledge of how the body works. In 2000, the provincial government sent out the *BC Health Guide*. The book contains sections on healthy lifestyle, fitness, nutrition, mind-body wellness, and complementary medicine – a definite sign that the public is demanding access to more information on health care.

Kathy Garmulewicz, a registered nurse for 15 years, says people aren't as patient these days. They demand more services and testing, and they are angry and frustrated in the emergency room. "Western medicine is science-oriented, evidence-based, and pharmaceutical or drug-oriented," says Garmulewicz. She adds, "It is also cost-driven. If one drug is cheaper, they'll use that, if one treatment is cheaper, they'll use that. It has gone from patient-centered to cost-centered."

The drawbacks of western medicine are clear to Garmulewicz: staff shortages, inadequate resources, and long waiting times for care and test results. There are, however, many positive aspects that Garmulewicz is quick to point out. The people who work in the system give so much of their time; they make the system work. They give up coffee breaks and lunches, and stay late to create a positive experience for the patient. Also, unlike alternative medicine, this kind of health care is available to rich and poor alike.

Unfortunately, our medical system has suffered due to cuts in funding. Registered nurses, who have four years of training, are being replaced by licensed practical nurses, and care aid workers, who both have less training. As a result, LPNs and care aid workers are now dispensing medication. The role of an RN has also expanded. Nurses often do first call and sometimes the doctor is not even called in. Those in charge of medical funding apparently believe that it's cheaper to have RNs, or LPNs handle the workload. Garmulewicz has seen staffing on a regular medical ward change from three RNs, one LPN, and one care aid worker, to one RN, and two LPNs. When RNs are absent due to illness, they are replaced with a tech, someone who knows machines but has no patient knowledge.

Although an ancient tradition, reiki is not immune to change. According to Petit Pas, "There are now factions of reiki. One is very advertised. The way I was taught, it was something that people would seek out." Traditional practitioners do not advertise, allowing clients and students to find them by word of mouth. By the traditional method, a level-two student must wait for approval before moving on to the final stage of training. In the non-traditional method, practitioners still believe training should be free, or at least affordable. But they differ because they do not require a waiting period between levels, and they advertise for patients and students. This makes reiki more accessible, but as a result, classes are generally larger with less one-on-one conversation and mentoring.

Most practitioners can recite the lineage of teachers they have learned from, back to Takata, the Japanese woman who brought reiki to the western world. Takata learned Reiki at the clinic set up by the monk Usui, the founder of Reiki.

Petit Pas became interested in reiki when she realized it was a calming experience for people, and helped them to deal with issues both physical and spiritual. She apprenticed with her master for 10 years. It wasn't something she took lightly. "I really believe that reiki is a vehicle for people to start to look at their issues, and they become healthy. There may be some things they can change; their lives could be different. They use reiki as a tool to assist them."

"Take two of these, and call me in the morning."

Originally, Garmulewicz went into nursing because she wanted to work with people and have steady employment. Now that she's on the job, helping patients to have a positive experience gives her a great deal of satisfaction. It is pleasing to hear that after a decade and a half, both women find their chosen paths fulfilling.

As to where things are headed, Garmulewicz believes reiki and other alternative services are beneficial in "non-acute and non-emergency settings." These approaches work well in regular medical and extended wards and children's wards, where people have more time.

Petit Pas sums up: "As a society we are always finding ways to do things better. That's why we are here, learning how to do things better." In the end, that is all any of us can do. We are trying to take care of our health in the best way we know how. For some, taking care means using western medicine only. For a growing majority, however, taking care is combining western medicine with alternative therapy to create a synergistic system of health care.

Grandmother

150 years of one family's history

BY GREGORY KERO
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF GREGORY KERO

In 1885, thirty years after Japan opened to the West, Gregory Kero's great-grandfather left England to set up an import-export business in Japan. Through the storytelling of his grandmother, the author recounts his family's unusual history – a combination of triumphs and tragedies involving such events as the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, Emperor Taisho's funeral, World War II, and the daily life of an inter-racial family in early 20th-century Japan.

According to numerous international surveys, the Japanese are the longest lived people on Earth. I have no doubt that's true, since almost all of the Japanese members of my family lived well into their 90s. My great-grandmother, who was born in Yokohama in 1866, died only four years before I was born, and my grandmother, who died only recently, continued to live independently for 20 years following my grandfather's passing. She was mentally razor sharp until the day she died at the age of 101. When I mention this to people, they look at me – that is, they study my blond hair and blue eyes courtesy of my Scandinavian father – and say "Yeah, OK … I think I can see it now. Maybe in the eyes …"

To get all the facts about my family history, I interviewed my grandmother one final time, only three weeks before she succumbed to cancer. Not surprisingly, as the storyteller in our family, she could recall every major event in her life – in our lives – in crystal-clear detail. She was able to recount so many events in the lives of her brothers and sisters – my

great aunts and uncles – and the rest of our family. But there was one story that always stood out.

"It was a Saturday, September 1st, 1923," my grandmother recalled. "It was three minutes before noon, and I was at work, getting ready to leave for the day. My sister, Gertie, had just been to the dentist, and had come by the office, which was in the downtown area of Yokohama, in an area called the Settlement. I was just putting on my coat, and then it hit."

What hit was one of the biggest earthquakes in modern history. By the time the Great Kanto Earthquake was over – in less than three minutes – 140,000 people had been killed, and the city of Yokohama had been wiped off the map.

"Gertie was standing in the doorway," my grandmother continued. "It's supposed to be the safest place to be in a building during a quake. Gertie shouted: 'Come away from the fireplace!' The shaking was so violent that the floor was moving from side to side, and up and down. I made my way to the door by holding onto a desk, and just as I reached the doorway, the fireplace, which was brick, collapsed onto the spot where I had just been standing.

"The building where I worked was made of wood, so it was able to move with the swaying of the quake. But all of the brick buildings just shook apart. There were just a few people in the office that day – my boss and a few of the Japanese staff. Some piece of debris had fallen and hit me on my wrist, so I was bleeding. One of the Japanese clerks wrapped a handkerchief around my wrist, and then we started to leave the building. As we came out, we noticed a pile of bricks, and it started to move. We could see that a cart-horse was buried underneath, and was trying to stand up, but we couldn't help; the city was starting to catch fire. I remember looking up at the building next door, which was occupied by a firm that exported silk. There were rolls of beautiful silk hanging out the windows, flapping in the wind like flags.

"There was a park a few blocks away, so one of our company managers suggested that would be the safest place, away from the fires that were starting up all around us. We made our way down to the street, and the whole city was in ruins. There were live electrical wires down in the middle of the street. We had to step over live wires, and we walked through puddles of water where live wires were. Of course, we had no idea what had happened to anyone else – to my mother, father, and my brothers and sisters: Charles, Emily, George and Maddie.

"As we walked down the street, a man ran up to us, white as a sheet. 'Can you help me?' he said. 'My family's trapped.' But we couldn't help. Later, we passed a Japanese girl who was lying dead on the street. I could tell she was a telephone operator, because she was wearing a pleated skirt – a hakama – that was the uniform of telephone operators in those days.

"We saw the strangest things. A little further on, the front of one of the buildings had fallen into the street, so you could see inside the building. I noticed that there was a horse standing on the second floor. It must have run up the steps inside the building to get away from the fire.

"Gertie and I made our way to the park to get away from the fires. I began to sit down on a sheet of metal, and a man came over and said 'Don't

The Fox family in 1925, at home near Kobe. Back row, left to right: grandmother, Lucie; her brothers and sisters, Charles, Gertie, George and Emily. Centre: great-grandfather and great-grandmother. In front: great-grandmother's sister and her daughter, Fuji. Opposite: The oldest family photo taken in 1891; great-grandmother holding Emily.

"I noticed that there was a horse standing on the second floor. It must have run up the steps inside the building to get away from the fire."

Life before the quake: at age 15, grandmother sits on the front steps of the family home destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. 140,000 people died in the quake, and the city of Yokohama was virtually destroyed. Miraculously, the entire family survived.

sit there.' I looked underneath the metal, and there were a number of dead bodies under it. There was a metal shop that had been nearby, and it had exploded, sending sheets of metal into the sky. One of the sheets landed on a group of people in the park, and had killed these people.

"The day had started out rainy, so I was wearing my oldest dress, because I didn't want any of my nicer clothes to get wet. It occurred to me that all I had left was the dress I was wearing; and all of my nicer clothes – and everything else – were gone. We lost everything. My father had a huge library, including an original-edition first printing of Charles Dickens' books. We weren't even allowed to touch them, unless we were very careful. That all went up in flames."

My grandmother recalled that she and her sister spent that afternoon and night in the park. There seemed to be no escape from the fires raging all around. Throughout the night, there were shakes – aftershocks from the quake. By the next morning, the fires had died down, and the people taking refuge in the park began to disperse, to search for family members and to see what was left of their homes.

"We could see Yokohama from the ship. The whole city was on fire."

"We tried to get to our house to see if any other family was there and if we could salvage anything," my grandmother said. "At one point we rested, and someone we knew came along, and said: 'It's no use. There's nothing there.' Everything had gone. One thing I often think of: we had three or four budgies in a cage, and two canaries. The mother had laid an egg right in the cage, but it turned out to be a blind baby chick. They all burned to death.

"We decided to get down to a place called the Bund. It was a large plaza, and there was a road that ran along the seashore. The harbour was there, and a number of ships had been turned into rescue boats. At the eastern end of the Bluff, near the Grand Hotel, was a creek near the harbour. As we passed by, we noticed dead bodies in the water. People had likely jumped into the creek to escape the fires. There were dozens of bodies in there.

"George had found his way up to our house, and found our mother in the bamboo grove in the back yard. Bamboo is the best place in an earthquake, because the roots are so woven together. George helped my mother and her sister get down to the harbour. My father and Emily had found each other, and joined us."

My grandmother recalled that the family began to assemble down at the waterfront. My great-grandfather, who was wearing a white linen suit, was covered with blood. When the quake hit, he was standing on the veranda of the foreigner's club, looking through a telescope at one of the Canadian Pacific Princess ships. A friend of his was about to go on board, and my great-grandfather was wondering whether he should go down to the ship to see his friend off. When the quake hit, the wall gave way and one of the bricks came down and gashed his head.

"My father and I were the only ones who were hurt," my grandmother said. "Then we all got on one of the rescue ships – *The Dongola*. That night was quite a sight. We could see Yokohama from the ship. The whole city was on fire.

"All our clothes were so filthy, and we had to wash them. People were walking around the deck with just sheets wrapped around them until their clothes were dry. There were crowds of people on the deck; no one had any private cabins or anything.

The next day, the ship took us down to Kobe, where father had friends who put us up, and we had to start our lives all over."

Our family's history was filled with starts, and with starts-all-over. My great-grandfather, Eugene Fox, arrived in Japan from England in 1885 to open a branch of the family's import-export business. Moving to Japan only 30 years after the country had opened to the West was a bold move, but there has always been a streak of unconventionality in my family. Even today, marriage between Japanese and foreigners isn't all that common, but in the late 19th century, it was unheard of. My grandmother was always vague about how my great-grandparents got together. There weren't many foreigners living in Japan at that time, she said, so for those looking to wed, the most likely choice would be to marry one of the locals. Interestingly, my great-grandfather spoke enough Japanese to get by, and my great-grandmother spoke virtually no English. Nevertheless, within a few years of his arrival in Japan, my great-grandfather married my great-grandmother, Taki Miyazawa, and together they had six children: Emily in 1890, Maddie in 1893, my grandmother, Lucie, in 1898, Charles in 1900, George in 1903, and Gertie in 1906.

Even today, marriage between Japanese and foreigners isn't all that common, but in the late 19th century, it was unheard of.

My family lived in Yokohama, overlooking the harbour in an area the foreigners had named the Bluff. Due to the success of the family's export business, the Fox family was well-to-do: they lived in a large house, entertained foreign dignitaries, and my grandmother and her sisters attended a convent school. Among upper-class families, women were expected to marry early, and certainly weren't expected to work, particularly if the family was well off. My grandmother, who was fiercely independent, got a job immediately after high school, as did all her sisters.

Life before the quake was good, and my great-grandfather was typically Victorian in most ways. Everyone in the Victorian family was expected to be educated and cultured according to their social class, which meant that if you were in the middle or upper strata of society, you were expected to play a musical instrument or sing. And since electronic media didn't exist, for entertainment, it was customary for everyone to gather round in the parlour for a family concert.

"Life was different in those days," said my grandmother. "There was very little in the way of radio or anything like that, so we would play music or take turns reading. Father was a good pianist. He wanted to send me to Paris to study

music, but he couldn't quite afford it. We would play piano duets together. George and Charles played saxophone, and Maddie had a lovely voice. There were times when we would get together and have a real concert. After dinner, in the evenings, we would take turns reading to each other."

My grandmother recalled that one night in particular gave rise to laughter as the family read one of the popular best-sellers of the day, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.

"Just as I was reading one of the most suspenseful passages of the novel, a light breeze entered through the open window and blew the curtain behind me into the room, and I felt it brush against the back of my neck. I almost jumped out of my skin. Everyone laughed at that one."

Life in the Fox household was an eclectic mix of cultures. While my great-grandfather would read Victorian novels and organize family concerts, my great-grandmother, who was one of nine children, would entertain members of her family. And with both European and Japanese influences in the home, Regency and Revival furnishings mixed freely with classical Japanese lacquerware and cloisonné vases. When at work, and when dressing for dinner, my great-grandfather would wear a suit in the style of the day, while my great-grandmother always dressed in typical Japanese fashion – in a kimono, complete with an obi for more formal occasions. My grandmother and her sisters wore Edwardian styles until the 1920s, when the "flapper" look came into fashion.

As I was growing up, both my grandmother and her sister, Emily, passed on to me all sorts of vivid recollections about life in Japan during the early years of the 20th century. Emily would relate stories of seeing the Emperor Meiji, who had abolished feudalism in 1867, and had re-invented Japan in the mold of a modern industrial state.

"I used to see him on his horse, always wearing his uniform and white gloves," Emily would recall. "This would have been around 1895 or 1900. He used to attend horse races, and when he passed by, often on the way to the race track, people bowed and weren't supposed to look directly at him, because the emperor was thought to be divine."

One of the strangest stories was my family's attendance at the funeral of Emperor Taisho in 1926.

"It was dusk, and there was a heavy fog," my grandmother recalled, "The crowds lining the streets were absolutely silent. As the funeral procession passed by, you could hear the eerie sound of one wheel squeaking on the wagon that carried the emperor's remains. The wheel was deliberately set to squeak as sort of a mournful cry, as the wagon was pulled through the streets. It was one of the spookiest things I ever witnessed."

But being witness to historic events also meant being part of them, and after the earthquake – having to start life over, and having lost his beloved library filled with first-edition Victorian novels – my great-grandfather was never the same. He fell ill and died only two years later. By that time, my family had put down roots in Kobe, where they had been transported after the quake. In typically unconventional fashion, my grandmother and

My great-grandfather would wear a suit in the style of the day, while my great-grandmother, in typical Japanese fashion, wore a kimono complete with an obi for formal occasions.

Three generations in Japan, early 1940. Grandmother Lucie (far right) and her husband Doug (back row middle) brought their children Patricia (middle row centre) and Doug Jr. (front row right) to Canada shortly after this photo was taken.

her sisters rented their own house, and were all working and independent.

In 1923, at the age of 22, my grandfather, Douglas Handford, arrived in Japan from England. Having apprenticed as a printer, he had secured a job as a reporter for an English-language newspaper in Kobe. My grandmother had joined the local hiker's club where she met my grandfather, and a year later, my grandparents married in 1926. Soon after, my mother and uncle were born, and my grandfather took an executive position with Columbia Records. As a record executive, my grandfather had access to free studio time, and a number of recordings were made of my grandmother playing works by Beethoven. We still have those 78-rpm records today, and listen to them on occasion.

Life was comfortable throughout most of the1920s, but family fortunes in the 1930s were a mix of good and bad. My grandmother's older sister, Maddie was the first to marry, but she soon after died of cancer at the age of 30. (In fact, she was not in Yokohama at the time of the great earthquake; she learned of the quake while in hospital in England during her treatment for cancer.) Distraught, her husband drank himself to death shortly after.

Years later, more family hardships would follow. In 1938, while in Korea, my grandfather and uncle contracted typhoid. True to my grandmother's indomitable spirit, she left the hospital one night at the height of the crisis, certain she would lose both her husband and her son, vowing to return to Japan with my mother to – once again – start over. My grandfather and uncle both recovered, but with the Japanese government in the grip of the militarist faction, local Japanese officials were making life increasingly difficult for foreigners and even those who were part Japanese. One consequence of the Japanese militarists' anti-foreign views was that my grand-

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father was arrested and detained by Japanese police. At about the same time that local authorities began accusing my grandfather of being a spy, Japanese police stormed the family home and discovered a map that my mother had copied from a Jack London novel. Things became truly absurd when police questioned my mother, who was 11 years old at the time, and insisted that her map was evidence of her involvement in espionage activity.

Finally, with the spread of World War II to the Pacific a virtual certainty, my grandparents, with my mother and uncle in tow, left Japan, arriving in Vancouver in November 1940. Having packed in a hurry, my grandparents were able to bring only a portion of the many items that had been part of their lives. While in Japan and Korea, my family had lived a life of comfort and affluence, with a full-time cook and even a chauffeur. Now in Vancouver, which was still in the grip of the Great Depression, they were faced with – once again – having to start over. With the Allied war effort gathering steam, my grandfather joined the navy as a lieutenant in the intelligence service. In 1942, he was sent overseas, and since he spoke Japanese, his main job was interrogating Japanese prisoners of war.

Needless to say, the war had split my family, and I lost family members on both sides of the conflict. In late 1941, my great uncle, George, and his wife, Dora, decided to get out of Japan. Even though war seemed inevitable, they made the fateful decision to remain in Hong Kong on their way to Australia. George was under the impression that the conflict would blow over quickly, and that he would get a job with the P&O Steamship line. The day after the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Japanese began their attack on Hong Kong. George left Dora to help out as an ambulance driver on the front line. He never returned. The Japanese defeated the British forces defending the city, and Dora was interned in a Japanese prison camp for the remainder of the war. Living on only a one bowl of rice a day for almost four years, she was determined to survive, hoping that she would be reunited with her beloved husband. When the war ended, she found that George had been killed during the invasion of the city in 1941. She was devastated, and spent a year in a sanitorium. Slowly, she recovered, and even returned to Japan, where she worked as an office secretary until she retired to Vancouver in 1966.

At war's end, my grandfather returned from duty, and he and my grandmother travelled to Ottawa as language interpreters for the royal commission which had been convened to return property seized when Japanese-Canadians had been interned. Soon after, my grandfather became a proofreader for the Vancouver Sun; my great uncle Charles returned from duty in the war, and joined an insurance firm.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the senior generation of my family passed away. Although she was the middle child, my grandmother outlived both her older and younger brothers and sisters, and everyone of her generation she ever knew. Nevertheless, she was determined to remain mentally keen. Even well into her 90s, she continued to live in the house she and my grandfather had bought in 1963, and continued to shop at the local supermarket, and get her hair done every week. And when the ambulance from St. Paul's came to take her to the hospital one last time only two weeks before she died, she refused to allow the ambulance attendant to take her by the arm to help her.

"No thanks," she said. "I'm going to leave this house on my own." Always the independent-minded survivor – and after so many start-overs in her life – she was determined to do things her own way until the end. And mentally alert, even on the day before she died, when told that the woman sharing the ward had died the previous night from cancer, she said, "Hm, lucky thing."

After my grandmother died, we finally began the task of opening the large steamer trunks that contained the household items my grandparents had brought with them to Canada. At my grandmother's request, they had been left untouched for close to 60 years. In the trunks, we found a sterling silver tea service, hand crafted in the early 1920s. We found the small wreath that my grandmother had worn as a floral tiara at her wedding. I inherited a set of lacquerware made in the early 1920s and given to my grandparents as a wedding gift, still wrapped in newspaper that bore the date – May 14, 1940 – the time when my family had packed in preparation of their move to Canada.

At my grandmother's funeral, I delivered the eulogy, and included some of the anecdotes in this article. In the eulogy, I mentioned that at age 101, my grandmother still remembered the name of her kindergarten teacher from 1903: Mrs. Kenderdine.

Our family still has many of the things my grandparents brought back with them from Japan, and we still use Japanese expressions in conversation. The legacy of our family's Japanese heritage continues. I worked as an ESL teacher in Tokyo in the 1980s, and while there, visited the various sites in Yokohama mentioned in my grandmother's stories: the church at Colonel's Corner, the foreigners' cemetery, and the area known as White Fence, where my family's house stood before the Great Kanto Earthquake. I'm glad to be the inheritor of so many stories, but most of all, I'm glad that my grandmother, who died only three months short of living through three centuries of history, was able to pass on so much rich detail before her very last start-over as she left her house one last time before her final passing. ⊠

INNER DISARMAMENT

MEDITATION AS A PATH TO PEACE

BY RICHARD PEEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANET BAXTER

Luang Phor surrounded by devoted monks at the Willpower Institute in East Vancouver

> "When strong, the mind must have current. The same as electricity, light must have lamp, lamp must have electricity, electricity must have current. If power not enough, cannot have light."
>
> Luang Phor Viriyang Sirintharo

Luang Phor Viriyang Sirintharo is the head of a Theravada Buddhist order in Thailand. Theravada Buddhism, along with Mahayana, is one of the two main branches of Buddhism. Most followers of the Theravada tradition live in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia. Like Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada promotes the teachings and practices of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama.

Hundreds of novice monks as well as thousands of followers throughout Thailand have learned the wisdom of meditation from Luang Phor for more than 60 years. He now brings his teachings to Canada in the hope that a state of inner disarmament will lead to global understanding and peace for all. He has built five temples in Canada already. His temples offer an open invitation to anyone who is interested in studying meditation, free of charge.

At age 20, Luang Phor became a novice monk, the youngest age at which a monk can be accepted into the Theravada order. Theravadan monks are celibate and obtain their food on daily rounds to the homes of devotees. Without these offerings from the community, the monks go without. Monks have no set limit on the time they spend in their order. Many people join for a short time; some devote their lives, as Luang Phor has done. The life of a monk is strict and without material comforts. Joining a monastery is viewed with great respect throughout Asian culture.

Luang Phor has been practicing advanced meditation since the age of 13. This is an unimaginable accomplishment for a child, when some adults spend their entire lives working toward this goal. When questioned about this feat, the Buddhist master shrugs it off saying, "It is very easy."

As an adult, Luang Phor decided that meditation had to advance along with the world if it was to make a lasting impression. He worked to better understand the objective of meditation so that he could teach it more effectively to others. He focused on making the discipline straightforward and simple. First of all, the mind must be calm and focused. To achieve this state, a name or sound is often repeated to help silence thoughts. In meditation, the word "Om" is often repeated as a mantra, or sacred formula. Some Buddhists believe that the sacred sound of "Om" accompanied creation and continues to echo and vibrate throughout the universe.

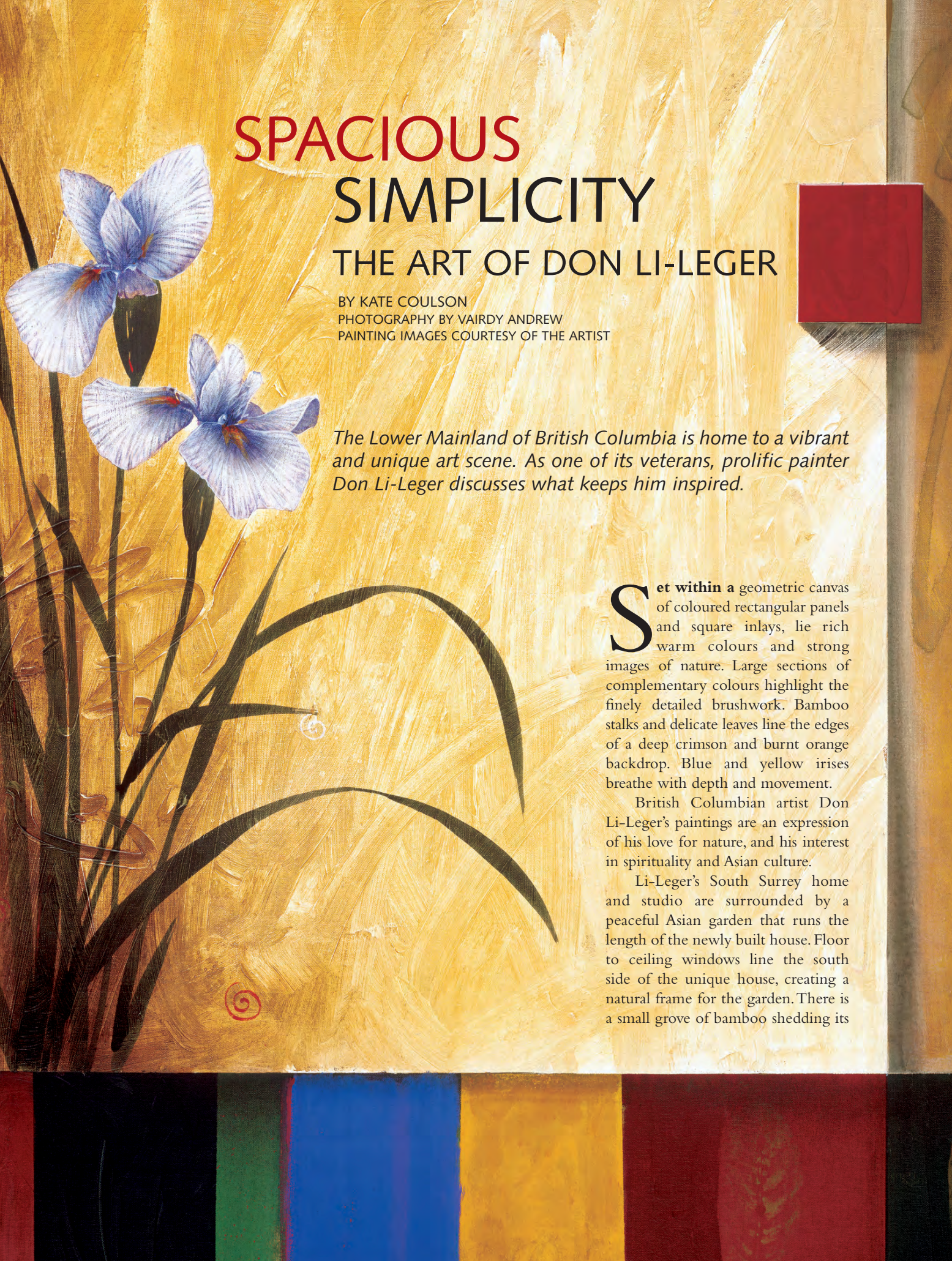
The most important of Luang Phor's lessons deals with conflict. People have different opinions, and different opinions can cause conflict. If the conflict in your life is great, you will not be able to control your mind. Through meditation, conflict must be reduced in your mind, family, community, and ultimately, your world. Through this daily practice, Luang Phor believes peace is truly possible. As he says, he taught himself, so it must be easy. ⊠

SPACIOUS SIMPLICITY

THE ART OF DON LI-LEGER

BY KATE COULSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY VAIRDY ANDREW
PAINTING IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The Lower Mainland of British Columbia is home to a vibrant and unique art scene. As one of its veterans, prolific painter Don Li-Leger discusses what keeps him inspired.



Set within a geometric canvas of coloured rectangular panels and square inlays, lie rich warm colours and strong images of nature. Large sections of complementary colours highlight the finely detailed brushwork. Bamboo stalks and delicate leaves line the edges of a deep crimson and burnt orange backdrop. Blue and yellow irises breathe with depth and movement.

British Columbian artist Don Li-Leger's paintings are an expression of his love for nature, and his interest in spirituality and Asian culture.

Li-Leger's South Surrey home and studio are surrounded by a peaceful Asian garden that runs the length of the newly built house. Floor to ceiling windows line the south side of the unique house, creating a natural frame for the garden. There is a small grove of bamboo shedding its

The artist at work: Don Li-Leger creating in his South Surrey home studio.

elegant leaves into a tranquil koi pond, and giant gunneras edge the back of the garden.

Li-Leger's art studio is separate from the house, at the side of the property. The studio's skylights and large windows offer glimpses into the garden from which he draws much of his inspiration. "Geometric patterns in nature become the blueprints that make up this seemingly chaotic environment," Li-Leger observes. Nature has always played a prominent role in his work. "When I was six or even younger, I drew some trees that seemed so real to me. They had something about them, some aura that inspired me." The evolution of Li-Leger's art is charted in the works that hang on the walls of his studio: early abstract paintings, wildlife paintings and prints, monoprinting, etchings, and more recent works.

"Colour is relative to whatever it's put next to; colours in their balance speak volumes. What it's come down to for me is using colour in a very spontaneous but controlled way." In addition to being evidence of developments in technique and style, Li-Leger's art reveals the colours, shapes, and influences the artist has collected throughout his life.

Li-Leger believes the process of painting is cyclical and explorative, and is an ongoing, evolving process. "Art is so much more than decoration," he says, "It's the meditative aspect of turning your logical brain off, and responding to what's there. When you don't worry about mistakes and you just worry about what's before you, you can enter a pure state of consciousness and experience a sense of free expression." Li-Leger paraphrases a Miles Davis quote saying, "There are no mistakes."

Li-Leger started as an abstract painter, but the work that gained him early recognition was his wildlife painting. For over a decade, he travelled in marshes and forests, photographing and painting the BC landscape. The artist studied ecology and biology at Simon Fraser University as well. Although plant life and nature continue to play a large role in his art, Li-Leger says he became increasingly frustrated with his watercolours. When he started a painting, he knew how it would finish. There seemed to be no room for personal expression. "At one time I felt I was following a path leading to a specific destination. I pursued wildlife painting, the natural world, and studied plant ecology, trying to understand and define those forms. But when you're painting, things start to happen, and you let them. You often wind up with a result you couldn't have predicted, and often, that's best. If it's done in a spontaneous and real way, it speaks to who we are as humans." Li-Leger's return to an abstract style was a natural evolution. "When I began combining imagery with broad areas of saturated colour, I found that allowing serendipity to

Art is the meditative aspect of turning your logical brain off.

Tropical Nine Patch II (2004), acrylic on canvas.

The artist's home reflects his love for Asian culture.

direct my path gave me the most satisfying results. When I returned to painting, I attempted to integrate the spontaneity with the liveliness of oriental brushwork that has long inspired and influenced me."

Li-Leger has always been drawn to the spacious simplicity and purity of Asian imagery. He studied Mandarin at Simon Fraser University and Chinese painting and calligraphy in Hong Kong. He also studied at the Vancouver School of Art and the Banff School of Fine Arts. It was in Banff where he met his wife Cora Li-Leger, an artist and art therapist. "We are each other's harshest critics," he muses.

While Cora was studying art therapy, Don read many of her schoolbooks on art philosophy, the creative process, and art therapy. Books such as *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards and *Trust the Process* by Shaun McNiff explore the meditative aspect of turning your logical brain off, and responding to what's there. Many of these books have influenced Li-Leger's theories about art. "Painting is a form of meditation," he says. "Time can become non-existent. Worldly concerns are non-existent. It's not about reward or impressing anyone. It's about the act of painting, and that to me is an ultimate right-side-of-the-brain experience."

It is difficult to think of art as a business when the creative and meditative aspects are so obvious. "It's hard to shift from the right brain creative aspect to the left brain, business aspect," he comments, "[Painting] is work; you have to put the time in. You never really leave it. Wherever you go, it's always around you and in you."

Although Li-Leger worked at various jobs when he was younger, art has always been a driving force in his life. "Wherever I worked, I would constantly be painting," he recalls.

The artist's travels have taken him through Taiwan, Japan, China, India, and Southeast Asia. The National Palace Museum in Taipei has been a featured source of inspiration in Li-Leger's travels. The museum contains many priceless pieces of Chinese art and artifacts from the Sung Dynasty – a period when China's emperor dispatched his servants throughout the country, ordering them to plunder his subjects' paintings, sculptures, calligraphy scrolls, and books. All of the country's treasures were then kept in the palace for the sole viewing pleasure of the royal family. The palace (now the National Palace Museum) still holds the world's largest collection of Chinese artifacts. Li-Leger drew inspiration from this collection, and many of the images and colours on display in the museum now influence his own work.

There is a warm and inviting depth to Don Li-Leger's recent paintings.

There is a warm and inviting depth to Don Li-Leger's recent paintings. Layers of acrylic paints and gels and the collaging of tissue and photographic images combine to

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create unique pieces. He paints on linen, canvas, and art board. Calligraphy from ancient Chinese poems, as well as Buddhist sermons and hidden Buddhist sutras, are common elements in his paintings. There is a sense of spirituality in Li-Leger's art, as he blends East and West – a fusion of Asian and Western philosophy. The artist pulls from aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism; the notions of karma and reincarnation influence his work.

Li-Leger was introduced to Buddhism through his travels and through the influence of his wife. Don and Cora have each embraced Tibetan Buddhism in their own way. Buddhist prayer flags adorn their home, and Buddhist themes are prevalent in the artist's paintings. Many of Li-Leger's influences are also derived from his studies in yoga during his travels to India during the 1970s.

Although they are avid travellers, the couple and their two children enjoy having a home base within the multi-ethnic culture of the Lower Mainland. Li-Leger enjoys practicing Mandarin and finds that Vancouver is a great location to use his budding language skills while exploring art, design, and food from all over the world. "It's a melting pot where nothing really melts," he says, "It's also very easy to travel to the Orient from Vancouver."

Matt Petley Jones of the Petley Jones Gallery in Vancouver says of Li-Leger, "[Li-Leger] has a unique personal blend of abstraction and realism – a fusion. There is a wonderful sense of realism with the flowers that he brings into the abstract world. His images are grown through his travels and involvement with Asian culture."

Li-Leger's ideas of spirituality, location, and travel are all reflected in his work. "On my artistic journey, I don't know exactly where I'm going to wind up, or what it's going to look like. I have some ideas, but I am open to discovery and exploration. That's why I do art in the first place." ⊞

THE VALUE OF EMPTY

The Artwork of Youngsin Lee

BY ALISON PENGELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DYLAN BRUUN

As a young Korean girl, Youngsin Lee rebelled against traditional stereotypes of women. Now a sculptor and mother in Vancouver, she continues to push the boundaries of femininity in a male-dominated society.

In a small Korean village, two hours from the nearest city, Youngsin Lee's parents joyfully anticipated the imminent birth of their first son. In a matter of hours, the whole village would celebrate the new gift from above – a baby boy to carry on the family name and ensure success in all family endeavours. Since the day they married, the Lees had hoped for a son. They were twice disappointed, bringing only daughters into the world. This time would be different, however. The townspeople, the midwife, and even the monks agreed that when the ordeal of delivery was over, there would be cause for celebration. Then the unimaginable happened. When Youngsin wriggled down the birth canal and entered the world with a wail, both midwife and mother could not believe their eyes. They held in their arms a baby girl – he was a she!

As a young girl in Korea, Youngsin didn't fit the traditional definition of femininity. Today, she is a mother and sculptor in Vancouver, British Columbia. Inspired by her experiences as a woman in Korea and an immigrant to Canada, Youngsin challenges, through her sculptures, the stereotypes that define women in a male-dominated society. Her artwork will be featured at Gallery Gachet, in Vancouver, during Asian Heritage month in May 2005.

Throughout her childhood, Youngsin gained a sense of the inferior social status of women. From an early age, she learned the differing gender roles. Speaking with a strong accent, occasionally struggling to find the words, she recalls: "When [my mom] was pregnant with me, everyone, the monks, and all the people around her told her 'this is going to be a son.' Every family [in the village] was so happy; it was very exciting. But then I came out and I was not a boy. So I heard they put me up to die. If you put a baby this way

Youngsin Lee holds a bust called Disappeared Passion. Like many neo-feminist artists, she challenges stereotypes of femininity.

[she motions with her palm down] they can't breathe. They put me down like that and then I guess they came back and turned me over. They were just so disappointed."

In relating this scenario, shocking to our Western sensibilities, Youngsin's tone is not judgmental. In the cultural climate from which she came, her family's reaction was not uncommon.

Although she was not told about her brush with death until she was a grown woman, Youngsin felt from the beginning that she did not fit in. Guided by her grandmother's Asian philosophy books, she began to do things a little differently.

"I hated myself for being a girl and I wished to be a boy," Youngsin says. "We have many Asian books that tell you what men should be like and what women should be like. I hated everything that women should do, and I followed everything that men should do. If it says men should not cry, okay then, I never cry. I became a strong character." She recalls the memory with a chuckle.

Like Viola from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Youngsin donned male attire whenever possible. She relished parades and costume events where she could shed her girlish appearance and revel in the freedom of the Korean male. Of course, Youngsin is not alone in rebelling against stereotypical images of femininity. Historically, the cross-dressing woman is a pervasive image in literature and film, and contemporary references abound as well, including Gwyneth Paltrow's character in *Shakespeare In Love* and Barbra Streisand's *Yentl*. In fact, upon close examination, the ability of women to defy narrow definitions of gender has proven to be a powerful feminist tool. The belief, not without foundation, is that a woman disguised as a man is no longer limited to traditional female roles because she has removed biology from the picture. Tasks that are usually considered out of her league – even forbidden – are now within the realm of possibility. These stories usually beg the question: why are women prevented from engaging in any given activity in the first place? Whether it be acting, studying the *Torah*, or simply playing soccer in a pair of shorts, the idea that biology determines social roles continues to hold women back.

In reaction to classical and Renaissance pre-occupations with biology, the early-feminist movement in art prohibited representations of the female body because they were perceived as objects of male desire. Since the 1980s however, neo-feminist sculptors like Kiki Smith and Louise Bourgeois brought the female body back to the forefront. Using the female form, these artists explored alternatives to traditional stereotypes. Similarly, Youngsin's sculptures use the human body to convey a message of female power independent

The female form as a canvas. Destiny (above) is part of a recent exhibit at Gallery Gachet.

from biology and male authority. Showcasing skills developed over years of formal training at Dongguk University in Korea, Youngsin's sculptures are rendered realistically. The human form then becomes a canvas for artistic expression through etchings, carvings, and assorted additions. It is within these alterations that Youngsin's artistic expression finds a home.

Her previous exhibit at Gallery Gachet, *Strangers*, featured a series of sculptures called *The Value of Empty*. These pieces included clay heads and obviously female torsos; all heads lacked hair. Patterns and Chinese characters were carved into the sculptures. Some had hollowed chests containing angular shapes, organic patterns, and in one case, another human form. Youngsin explained that an androgynous head, paired with an obviously female torso, expressed her resistance to gender stereotypes.

As a young girl, Youngsin tried to escape pre-determined female roles by denying her own biology. When she reached adulthood and became undeniably female, she realized her childhood attempts to deny her gender were foolish. In short, she maintains the right to be seen as a person first and a woman second. "When I grew up and admitted that I was a girl, I decided that I don't want to try to be girlish or mannish," she says. "With my sculptures, people will look at the face and they may think of a man. Although the body has breasts, it brings the two together. I just wanted it to be a person."

Her ongoing struggle with identity was somewhat alleviated by her immigration to Canada. Originally, she planned a move to Italy with a group of Korean art students. They were seduced by tales of classical European training and streets lined with clay banks waiting for the passionate sculptor to harvest. However, fears of an impending arranged marriage forced her to flee. When her uncle offered her a place to stay, she accepted his invitation.

When she arrived in Toronto, Youngsin was amazed and inspired by what she saw. "When I first came here and I saw the women, they were like huge trees – a lot of power, holding their heads up, and walking with power. Big, strong, women." In Canada, she found a place where her strong character was no longer a liability that placed her at odds with

society. Female power became an ideal for her. As a result, Youngsin created stylized busts of women with flowing hair and interlacing tree branches carved into their chests. These pieces show women as powerful, and yet they are not realistically rendered, signifying the unattainable power of the women she saw that first day in Canada.

"Throughout her career, she has explored the human condition – most specifically that of foreigner and woman performing expected female roles as mother and emotional provider," says Gallery Gachet coordinator Kirsten May. The series of pregnant torsos are headless and armless. Their only perceived value lies within pregnant bellies. An unconventional view of pregnancy, these pieces give voice to an aspect of the female experience rarely acknowledged: the alienation many women feel when pregnant, and as new mothers. However, they also signify a positive turn for the artist because, like her other series of voluptuous, headless torsos, their simplicity draws attention to the female body.

"With these, I wanted to celebrate the beauty of women," Youngsin explains joyfully.

In her upcoming exhibit, *To Be a Part of Our Story*, Youngsin's new optimism takes shape in more positive images of female power and freedom. Among her works in progress are clay busts of women with their chins held up and full heads of hair. The chests are cut away and replaced with tree branches more detailed and realistic than those incorporated into the stylized busts of her earlier works. The inclusion of male busts, a significant move for the artist, signals a more optimistic view of the power of the female gender.

"I don't regret being a woman anymore; I want to be proud," she says. "Some women seem to have a lot of power. I want to be more like those women. I'm still trying. I hope to get there before I die."

SONGKRAN
JOYOUS CELEBRATION OF CLEANSING

BY ANNE PRICE
COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY CURTIS HILDEBRAND
FESTIVAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS LECLERC

It's April 13th, mid-way through the hottest month of the year in Southeast Asia. As a visitor wades through 40-degree heat on the deserted side streets of Thailand's northern city, Chiang Mai, he hears a mischievous giggle drift around a street corner. He approaches, curious. Suddenly, he is hit by an icy blast from a supersoaker! The boisterous children run away, laughing, to reload and search for a new target. Recovering from the shock, the visitor relishes a break from the intense tropical heat.

This is Songkran, Thailand's New Year's celebration, one of the most anticipated festivals of the year in Southeast Asia. During the festivities, Thailand and parts of Laos, Burma, Cambodia, and China shut down, and the residents take part in what is likely the world's biggest waterfight. Weeks ahead of time, the streets are lined with stalls selling every form of weapon, from huge supersoakers to homemade water cannons built from PVC pipes. Even with such a varied selection available, most people arm themselves with a simple bucket, a barrel of water, and a big block of ice. While Songkran officially runs over three days, eager children are known to target unsuspecting pedestrians up to two weeks beforehand.

The name, Songkran, originates from a Sanskrit word meaning "to move" or "change place," and refers to the path the sun takes through the zodiac. A new astrological year begins in mid-April as the sun passes from Taurus into Aries. The festival, celebrated every year from April 13th to 15th, is one of the few remaining festivals that honours the old Thai lunar calendar.

The waterfight is a much-loved part of Songkran. Apart from this enjoyable activity, water holds a deeper significance in Thailand as well. As Songkran occurs at the end of the dry season in Asia, the throwing of water represents hope for an abundant rainfall for the upcoming harvest. Water is also a symbol of purification and cleansing. It is thought that anything bad left from the old year will become unlucky if carried through to the new year. Before Songkran begins, Thais vigorously clean everything, including themselves. They greet the new year cleansed, fresh, and dressed in new clothes.

Wan Sungkham Lohng, April 13th, is the first day of Songkran. Also called Maha Songkran Day or Major Songkran Day, this is the day that marks the end of the old year. Thais will spend this morning merit-making at the Buddhist temples, to ask forgiveness for any past wrongdoings and to pray for the safekeeping of loved ones who have passed on. Merit-making can be accomplished by presenting offerings to the monks and by helping clean the temple grounds and buildings. This tradition enables Buddhists to practice what they believe: good deeds will lead to happiness, whether it be in this life or the next.

Later that day, worshippers bring the Buddha statues out of the temples. The deities are sprinkled with jasmine-scented water and paraded through the city, so that everyone can take part in the bathing ritual.

Another Songkran custom is the releasing of caged birds and live fish caught and sold in the markets for the occasion. A procession of young girls in brightly coloured dresses take the animals down to the water where they are freed. It is believed that great merit comes with this kind act.

Buddhism plays such a big role in the festivities that Songkran is often mistakenly referred to as the Buddhist New Year. Many other events take place at the temples in addition to merit-making. One ceremony performed by Buddhist monks, called Bangsukun, is a way for worshippers to show respect for their ancestors. Upon death, a Thai's body is cremated and the ashes are buried at the base of a fig tree on temple grounds. Fig trees are sacred to Buddhists, as it was under such a tree that Buddha received his enlightenment. These trees are so important that they are found at almost every temple in Thailand.

Wan Nao, April 14th, is a transition day. On this day, the sun is at its mid-point between Pisces and Aries, halfway between the old year and the new. Thais gather at temples throughout the morning to pile sand into mounds topped with brightly coloured flags and vibrant flowers. This tradition dates back to when the faithful celebrated Songkran at the end of the rainy season in Thailand. Then, it was necessary to bring in sand to protect the temples from flooding. Now, sandcastles are built in memory of the old ritual. Buddhists believe that as people leave the temple, they take a part of the grounds with them literally and metaphorically. Bringing in sand during Songkran replaces what has been tracked away throughout the year.

An enthusiastic young girl waits out Chiang Mai's sweltering heat in a bucket of water.

Throughout the festival, young people pay their respects to older generations by gently pouring water over the hands and backs of their elders. In return, the elders give their blessing and offer good wishes for the coming year. They may also apply white, scented clay to the faces and necks of the youths. The clay acts as protection against evil and bad luck. It is considered wise to leave it on until it washes off of its own accord.

April 15th, Wan Payawan, is New Year's Day. On this day, with most of the rituals and responsibilities taken care of, the water throwing begins in full force. This is the fun-filled practice known around the globe.

Chiang Mai is the hub of all activity during Songkran. A moat surrounding the city provides plenty of ammunition for the festival's main activity. All day long there are

Buddhism plays such a big role in the festivities that Songkran is often mistakenly referred to as the Buddhist New Year.

music and dance events, parades, special markets, and the annual "Miss Songkran" beauty pageant. Many people, Thais and tourists alike, migrate to Chiang Mai for the festival. During these celebrations, the city's population quadruples in size. The traffic is terrible and the weather is unbearably muggy. Yet everyone walks around with big grins on their faces.

The world's biggest waterfight doesn't encourage mere spectating. In fact, tourists are strongly encouraged to participate. Francis Leclerc is a Canadian who was travelling through Southeast Asia with his girlfriend in 2004. The couple had originally planned a trip to Laos in April, but after speaking with Ken, a Thai employee at their guest house, they changed their minds. "Ken told us the place to be for Songkran was in the North [of Thailand]," Francis said. "He told us it was crazier up there!" Crazier didn't even begin to describe it. The pair spent a week prowling through the Chiang Mai streets armed with water cannons. "We saw lots of weird stuff. There was one little girl that spent three days sitting in a bucket of water outside our guesthouse!"

Songkran isn't just a festival for kids; many adults readily revert back to their childhood when given the chance. "There was one man I saw when I was having a coffee at a hotel," Francis remembers. "At the table next to me was a really nice-looking Japanese woman. She was sitting there reading a book. Then there was a bit of a noise at the door and a messy-looking man rushed in, soaking wet, holding an empty water gun. He stopped a waitress and asked her if he could refill. She said, 'okay,' so he ran off to the kitchen and refilled his gun. Then he gulped down a cup of coffee at the Japanese woman's table and went back outside. It was her husband! She just laughed. Kind of the way you would laugh at a child."

With *Lonely Planet* (aka the Travelers Bible) describing Songkran as being "celebrated with enthusiasm bordering on sheer pandemonium," it's no wonder that tourists flock to Thailand every April. "We were welcomed," Francis said. "We were encouraged to participate, although that could be because tourists make great targets."

For young people, the waterfight is the epitome of Songkran.

In many parts of the world, religious events continue to diverge from the traditional values on which they were founded. In North America, for example, many criticize Christmas as being little more than a celebration of consumerism, and Easter has been reduced to a chocolate festival. Songkran, however, is one celebration resisting this trend. While the young people in Thailand consider the waterfight to be the epitome of Songkran, the real heart of the festival lies in families and communities coming together. Whether it's through the merit-making rites that involve community temples, or simply a thorough cleaning of the family home, Songkran embodies all of the values and beliefs of Thai culture. Esteem for elders, respect for ancestors, and good fortune in the new year are all important to these unique people. Songkran is a time of contemplation and devotion for Thais, but it is also a time for great fun and mischief. ⊠

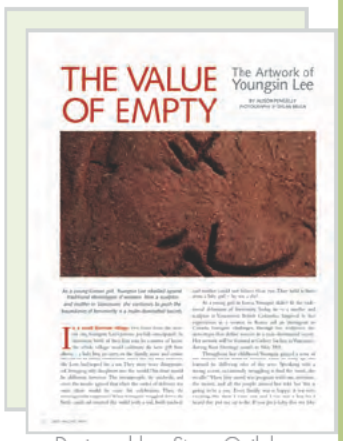
"We were encouraged to participate, although that could be because tourists make great targets."

Buddhism in Thailand

With 95 per cent of the population practising Buddhism, religion is a way of life for Thais. Buddhists don't worship an omnipotent God. Instead, they study the teachings of Buddha, who taught a basic mantra to enable people to live happier, fuller lives. He believed that it is through a cycle of death and rebirth that humans gain enlightenment and eventually reach Nirvana.

Merit-making is one of the most important aspects of the faith. Buddhists believe that they will be rewarded for acts of kindness and generosity. The reward could be happiness in this life, or a better rebirth into the next. Merit-making empowers each person to take responsibility for his or her own destiny.

The Thai population, in general, has a deep understanding of Buddhism and the inner workings of their religion. For example, as a rite of passage, teenage boys will spend a few months as a novice monk. Some stay on. Those who don't, leave with a greater respect for temple life. As a religion that encourages such active involvement from its members, Buddhism has become an integral part of Thai life.



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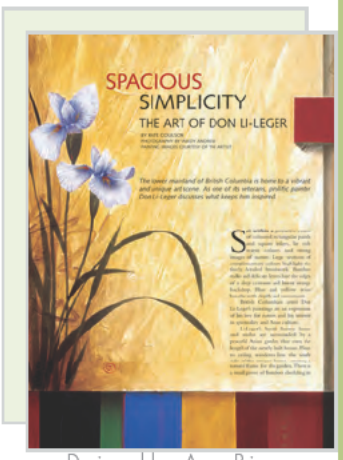

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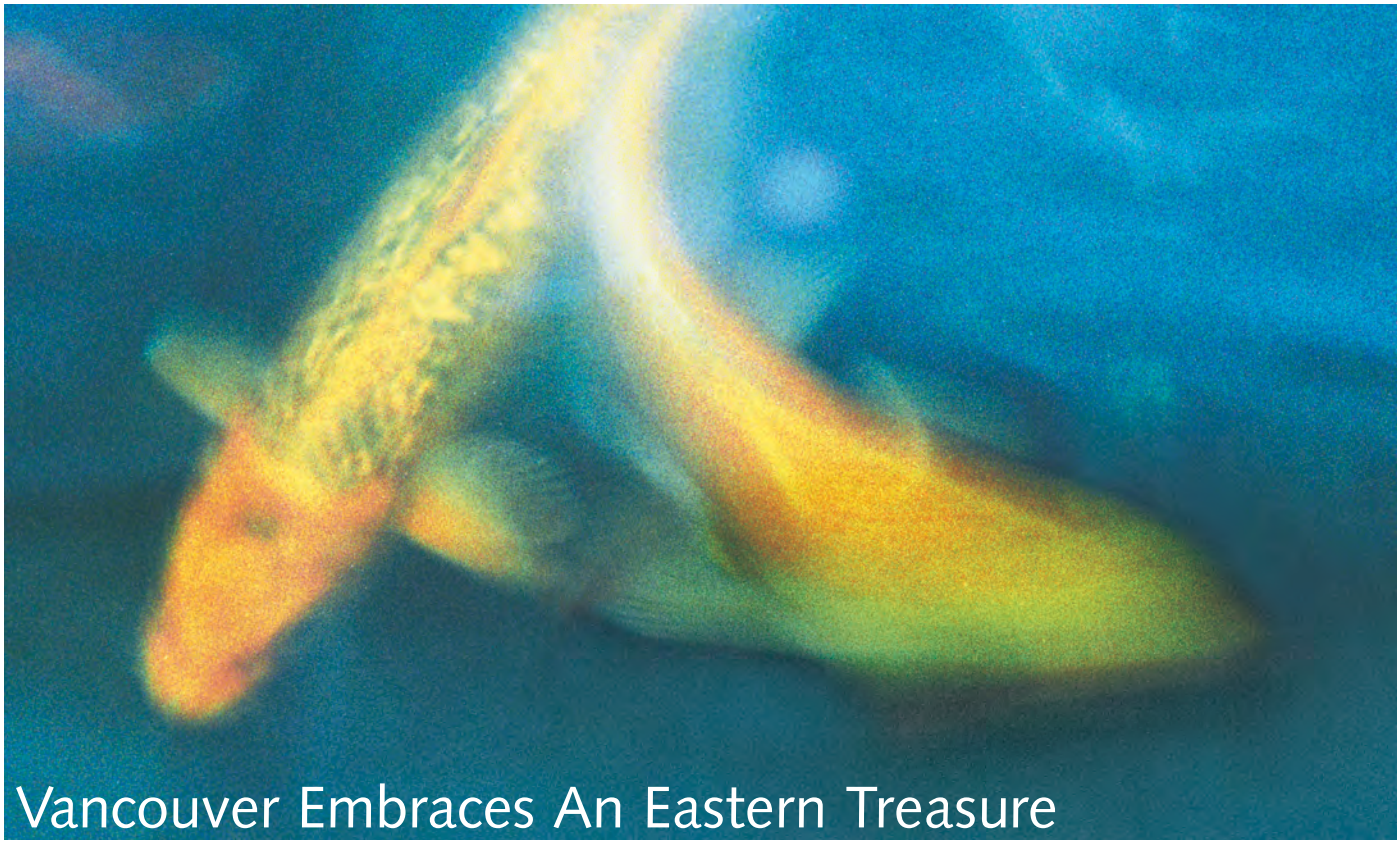


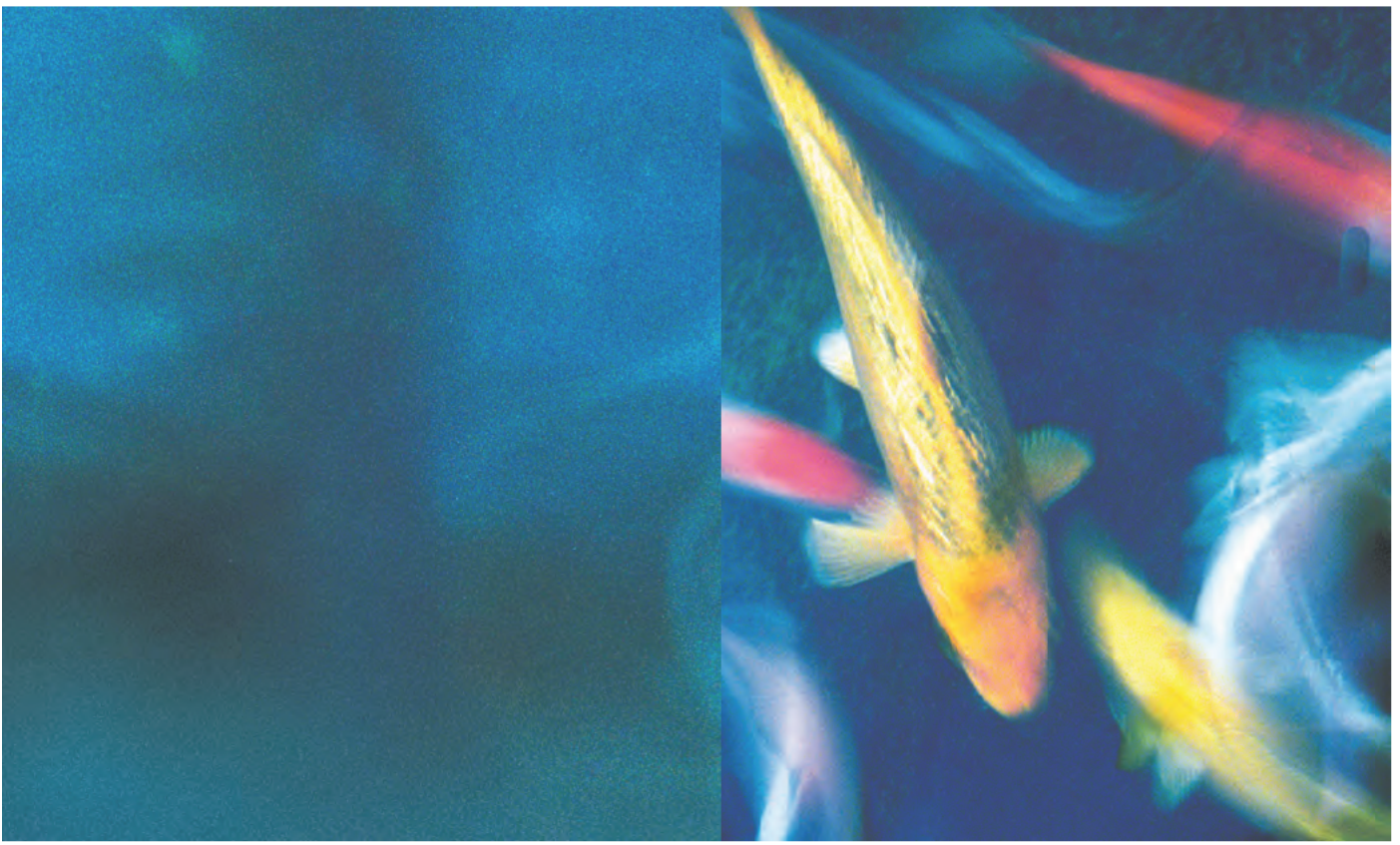
Vancouver Embraces An Eastern Treasure

BY PHILIP C. BREAKENRIDGE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY REBEKAH STORRING
ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN BAXTER

Gazing into the pristine pool, you are greeted by elegant swirls of white, peppered with splashes of orange, black, and red. Otherworldly creatures with cat-like whiskers propel themselves through the dreamy liquid with graceful butterfly wings. Their watery paradise is densely populated, yet no tension exists between them; each one gently nudges the other as it glides past. A speckled map of colour retires from its laps and rests on the pool's sandy bottom. A mate interrupts the placid being's doze and challenges it to a playful game of tag. Politely declining, it burrows itself deeper into the cool sand. Unphased by the rejection, the more gregarious fish darts wildly around the pool, finally jutting its head out of the water, smacking its lips and sniffing the clean, humid air.

Koi have fascinated the Western world since the 1950s. Although relatively new to our culture, this strikingly beautiful fish has been adored in Asia for centuries. With more and more koi ponds appearing throughout British Columbia's Lower Mainland, you may wonder where these majestic fish have come from, why we have so readily embraced them, and what care they require.

The history of Koi has been an exercise in speculation. Most experts agree, however, that the ancestor of the present-day breed originated in Persia and was eventually introduced to China and Japan. This ancestor, known as the common



carp, was an incredibly hardy fish, but was lackluster in colour. These wild carp still exist today and are used for food by people in Asia.

No one knows exactly how the koi separated from its less colourful cousin. Some historians feel that the Chinese helped develop different colour variations in the fish. In fact, the first mention of carp with colours is found in a Chinese book written during the Western Chin Dynasty between 255 and 316 AD. In the book, koi are described as having different colour patterns, including black, blue, red, and white.

Eventually, the Japanese became world leaders in selective koi breeding and continue to hold that position today. Koi breeding as we know it began in Japan during the 17th century. As rice farmers noticed wild carp having offspring with unusual colour patterns, they bred them over many generations to produce the koi we presently know and love. It wasn't until the 19th and 20th centuries that the koi's status was changed from food source to pampered pet. In the early 1900s, the fish's popularity exploded throughout Japan. The fish fervor soon hit the rest of the world, with a renewed interest in koi ponds catching on in North America over the past two decades.

The elegant and charming koi has found a place in the hearts of Vancouverites. Housed within a huge globe-like structure, the Bloedel Conservatory in Queen Elizabeth Park is Vancouver's premier koi watching spot. The blossom-covered koi pond, with its winding turns and soothing waterfall, is the first thing you encounter upon entering the self-contained piece of paradise. The pond houses a beautiful variety of koi, ranging in age from one to 20 years old. Some of the older koi are gigantic, measuring up to 24 inches in length. These fish are thriving, seeming more than happy to endlessly circle their heavenly surroundings.

"They are appealing because of their colours, sleek form, and graceful motions in the water," beams Alex Downie, supervisor of Queen Elizabeth Park and the

A soothing waterfall adds to the Koi's plush environment at the Bloedel Conservatory.

Feeding time at Bloedel draws the clever Koi to the surface. These insatiable fish love to chow down and can be trained to eat out of your hand.

Bloedel Conservatory. The conservatory's koi, most of which are originally from Japan, draw thousands of local and international visitors per year. People are naturally attracted to the fish's beauty and calm nature.

Bloedel's head gardener, Mark Rabey, feels that the public connects with the koi because they are peaceful and aware of humans. As their daily caretaker, Mark has found a favourite among them, a massive orange and black male he affectionately calls "Grand-daddy." This king-sized beast spends most of his time resting on the bottom of the pool, but is the first to surface at feeding time. "These fish have a concept of time," says Mark. "They know when it's time to be fed. If I'm even a few minutes late, they all gather at the side of the pool and look for me."

Marine biologist Dr. Herbert R. Alexrod states that "while koi are very hardy and can live under almost unbearable (for other fishes) conditions, they only thrive and show off their best colours and behaviour when they are properly managed." Those who are truly "koi kichi" (koi crazy) devote themselves to creating an ideal environment for their companion koi. A highly adaptable fish, Koi can be kept in either an aquarium or a pond (see **Koi Pond Building Tips**). And yes, it is a myth that koi will grow to the size of any container they are housed in. As Roger Macpherson, president of the BC Koi Club of Canada and a koi keeper since 1987, puts it, "people grow to different sizes depending upon their genetics and food, not the size of their bedroom or house." The same can be said for the plucky koi.

Although the koi is hardy enough to survive a winter much harsher than Vancouver's, it still requires more care that its common carp ancestor. Selective breeding for colour and shape has robbed the koi of some of its carp stamina. Macpherson explains, "Consider koi as a race horse is to the average horse." Koi may be more beautiful and graceful than their average cousins, but they are also more sensitive to their environment.

Most important to a Koi's health is clean water, free from pollutants. This can be achieved with the use of a quality organic filter. The pond water at the Bloedel Conservatory is continuously filtered through two huge Jacuzzi-like sand filters which are backwashed daily to remove any contaminants. In addition, 20 per cent of the water is removed and replaced daily with new water, which is run through activated charcoal to remove chlorine and other impurities. Attendants also add salt to the water, which protects the fish from skin parasites.

Satisfying the koi's dietary needs is not difficult. Like their human caretakers, koi are omnivorous, consuming both plant and animal matter. Although many manufactured foods are designed to meet the koi's nutri-

Those who are truly "koi kichi" (koi crazy) devote themselves to creating an ideal environment for their companion koi.

tional requirements, the feisty fish will also eat foods prepared in your own kitchen; the conservatory koi are fed green peas one day and commercially prepared Trout Chow the next.

For the aspiring keeper of the koi, Macpherson offers this advice: "Read as much information as you can on the hobby. If you decide to have a garden pond built, ask to see the work done by the company. Get addresses to visit, and speak with the pond owners." If you crave information on the koi, you're in luck; as the popularity of this breed has continued to grow, so has the amount of web and print resources available to you. The ambitious fish lover in you should balance passion with preparedness as you welcome these hearty little souls into your world.

Koi Pond Building Tips

When building your own pond, consult a reputable aquarium dealer or hobbyist website for advice. The following are tips to keep in mind when creating the perfect koi habitat.

1. Design a dream environment.
Take time to design a pond that meets standard guidelines and won't need high maintenance down the road.

2. Determine the size.
Generally, ponds should not be any smaller than 300 gallons. Smaller ponds experience greater temperature fluctuation and go foul more easily. Overcrowding of your finned friends must be avoided.

continued on page 56

KOI continued from page 35

3. Select the materials.
Various materials such as plastic liners, preformed fiberglass, reinforced plastic, and concrete can be used.

4. Choose a good location.
Locate your pond in an area providing partial shade sometime during the day. Ponds in full sun develop algae problems while those underneath vegetation can be poisoned by the decomposing leaves which fall in the water. Locate your pond away from large trees as the roots may crack the pool's structure.

5. Landscape your pond properly.
The installation of rock or wood around the pond's edge can prevent the entry of runoff water, containing fertilizers and insecticides, into the koi habitat.

6. Invest in quality equipment
Filters purify pond water while aerators fill it with much-needed oxygen. The success of the pond and the lives of your aquatic companions depend on the quality of this equipment – so don't skimp!

7. Predator-proof your pond.
Include deep water areas in your pond, so that its inhabitants can hide from aerial predators. Build your pond's sides on a steep angle to discourage raccoons and weasels.

8. Check with city hall.
There are many issues to consider before building a koi pond; soil stability, drainage, and depth are just a few. Generally, it is not advisable to have water at the top of a hill. Use common sense, and consult an expert.

VACT continued from page 37

would take it. "Yeah my mom has been a great force in my life; she is proud of her engineer son. The funny thing is, she is coming around with the acting. It's hard for her to understand the direction I am going but she ultimately wants me to be happy. I remember the first night I was performing and she was in the audience, and the character I was playing was a homosexual and dressed for the part. I was nervous, as it was my first night performing, but with my mom there I felt sick to my stomach."

Ashley laughs out loud at the memory. He overcame his fears and got into character, delivering a great performance that night. Ashley is thankful that there is an outlet for Asians who are curious about theatre. "It's great. We are living in a time that change will occur slowly if people like Joyce, Tom, Janet, and myself, along with all the volunteers at VACT, continue to dedicate themselves to making a difference in the way the theatre world perceives Asian roles."

There is one thought that Joyce, Tom, Janet, and Ashley all share: "What about us: the Asians who are born in Canada?" They want to put a face to those born here with two identities. In Canada, there are Asians who don't speak Chinese or Japanese; they communicate in English but have a strong sense of their Asian culture. Joyce concludes, "I want the next generations to be able to relate to Asian theatre here in Canada. There is plenty of material we have to offer as Asian-Canadians growing up in Canada, and none of it is stereotypical."

VACT is powering a movement in our city's theatre community. Their success over the last four years indicates that there is a market for this kind of theatre. The first step was taken by one person with a dream to make a difference, the second step by a community united in a common goal. Perhaps one day we'll see some of the actors who crept the boards with VACT lighting up the screen in film or television.

DIVING continued from page 39

seconds, to set a free-diving world record at Ansell Point in Vancouver.

Vancouver's dive community is a well-kept secret. When asked why his business had suddenly taken off, Orr responds "Vancouver has the best cold-water diving in the world." He lists several sights within a two-hour radius. The area has one of the highest concentrations of wreck dives this side of Nicaragua. There are wrecks all along the coast: at Whytecliffe Park, Porteau Cove, and Ansell Point. These wrecks are some of the greatest sights in BC, yet few people know they exist. Most of the wrecks are suitable for first-time divers, especially if a trained wreck-diver leads the tour.

BC even offers a selection of lakes to be dived in the immediate area if the ocean offers too much of a challenge to first-timers. Alouette and Sasamat are two of the more popular lakes frequented by divers in the Lower Mainland. One of the more spectacular times of the year to lake-dive is during the salmon runs in early September, when the water is full of bright-red spawning salmon.

There are subtle differences between ocean- and lake-diving. First, lakes, unless they are glacier fed, are warmer than the ocean. As well, mass is less buoyant in fresh water, making it easier to dive. Finally, lake life is just as diverse as ocean life. Besides huge red salmon, giant bullheads, giant cod and, occasionally, six-gilled sharks are known to live in fresh water.

BC cold-water diving has yet to reach its full potential. Sincere efforts should be made to get BC diving on the world map. The diving industry is more developed than it was 10 years ago, but struggles in comparison to Australia and tropical vacation destinations. After all, tourists can't enjoy what they don't know is there. Offering scenic ocean dives, adrenaline-packed free-diving, and fresh-water exploration, British Columbia gives those seeking underwater adventure more than enough reasons to take the plunge.

Play the Dane

Asian-Canadians step into the spotlight with VACT

BY RICKIE-JOCELYNE SANDHU
ABOVE PHOTOGRAPHY BY TEMPEST PHOTOGRAPHY
OPPOSITE PAGE BY ALI MURRAY

An angel kicked open the doors of opportunity with the strength of a tsunami and the fire of a dragon. Ten years ago, you wouldn't have imagined that a person of Asian descent would play a lead role in a blockbuster movie alongside superstars such as Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore. And yet a petite and athletic Asian woman with silky skin would adorn the silver screen. The angel's name is Lucy Liu. She broke into the world of Hollywood by playing against stereotype. In fact, because the casting director was so impressed with her audition, they created a character in Charlie's Angels for her.

Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre (VACT) is a platform that allows Asian-Canadian actors to break from stereotypes. The President of VACT, Joyce Lam, is Vancouver's own Charlie's Angel. She is determined to level the playing field for Asians in Vancouver and shake things up in the theatre community. "How are Asian actors ever going to get better opportunities if they have no experience? It makes me angry to think that there is such a large Asian community and yet there are no roles or productions set here in Canada." Traditionally, many never dared to dream of a career in acting, and those who did often gave up after years of struggling.

Joyce Lam and Tom Chin formed VACT in 2000. Their inspiration came from a Seattle Asian-American sketch-comedy troupe called OPM. Joyce was impressed by what the Asian community was doing in Seattle and felt Vancouver was lacking this kind of entertainment. She had an idea; she would bring OPM to Vancouver to do a show. Since money was an issue, Joyce and Tom went to NAAAP Vancouver, the local office of the National Association of Asian American Professionals. "We really wanted to do this, but we had no idea if we were going to make money or lose money," says Joyce. "I was relieved but not surprised at the success of our first show. The production was a hit!"

Tom, who is a comedian/actor/director, hosts VACT productions along with Joyce. Aside from his involvement






VACT Presents THE NEXT EPISODE OF *SEX IN VANCOUVER: INTIMATE SECRETS*
a serial romantic comedy about hyphenated Asians

in VACT, he is a French teacher who uses humour to make learning fun for his students. "I'm extremely proud of the positive outcome VACT will have on the future generations. These kids will actually have a chance to make their dreams come true." Considering that one in four Vancouver residents is Asian, Tom wonders why resources like VACT have been such a long time coming.

Tom has always done things that people wouldn't expect, considering his Chinese heritage. Whenever people hear that Tom teaches French, they're always surprised. "It's funny the reaction people have; yes I am Asian, and I speak Chinese. But I am also Canadian, and French is Canada's second language, so why would that be so surprising to people?"

VACT has had a tremendous impact on the lives of Janet Ip and Ashley Liu, two young actors who volunteer their time year round. Janet's voice is soft but filled with excitement. Her energy is felt from across the room and her comedic talents are evident from the get-go. Janet has the ability to make people laugh and smile. She is a doctor by day and an actress by night. Originally from Winnipeg, she was always involved in drama and school plays. As her father is a doctor and her mother is a dentist, they always encouraged the security of a career in the health sciences.

"My parents, like all Asian parents, just wanted me to be happy and financially secure," says Janet. "Acting is not an encouraged pursuit among parents in the Asian community. I love medicine and the act of helping people but there is a part of me that needs to explore my creative side. VACT gives me the opportunity to do this."

"I had the same routine everyday and I thought, there has to be more."

Although they want her medical career to come first, Janet's parents love the idea that their daughter is involved in theatre. Janet also produces documentary films about health care. She is not sure what the future holds in terms of a career in the theatre. But for now, she is enjoying a lead role in the episodic play *Sex in Vancouver*, playing a character that is her polar opposite. "My character has an antagonist role. She is vain, manipulative, and very self-absorbed. I remember performing my first night, and I was dressed in a scandalous outfit and I thought to myself, I am so glad my parents live in Winnipeg. I couldn't imagine how embarrassed I would have been with my father in the front row."

Janet is preparing for the next segment of *Sex in Vancouver* in August 2005. In April, they will be performing selected scenes from the first two segments for those who may have missed the first two episodic plays.

Ashley Liu has put his engineering career on hold to pursue acting. As a student at Langara College, he is enrolled in the Studio 58 Theatre Arts Program. When Ashley graduated as an engineer, he went to work for a private firm. He felt unsatisfied, like Janet, about the direction his life was taking. "I felt like: is this it? Every day, 9 to 5. I had the same routine every day and I thought, there has to be more." When Ashley went online to look for Asian theatre companies, he quickly realized there was only one. He contacted Joyce and offered to volunteer for anything backstage. One day, she asked him if he would be interested in being an understudy for one of the lead roles. Ashley accepted with great enthusiasm. This would mark the beginning of a love affair with the theatre arts.

Ashley fell in love with acting and decided to pursue it full-time. He started by taking evening classes at Vancouver Film School. Eventually, he put engineering on the backburner and enrolled in the three-year theatre program at Langara College. This wasn't an easy decision for him. He thought long and hard before making the leap to theatre.

"I never thought about a career in acting as a child or teenager. I became interested in my 20s. This could also be because it wasn't a typical career path for an Asian. Like Janet's parents, my mother wanted financial security for me."

Ashley recalls telling his mother with difficulty; he wasn't sure how she

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THE COLDER SIDE OF BC

BY RICHARD PEEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CURTIS HILDEBRAND
UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF C.J. CHIARIZIA

Your knees shake. The wind howls past your ears. You shiver, despite the fact that you're sweating. Adrenaline rushes through your veins as you hold your mask and blindly leap into the icy ocean below. You wouldn't think we're talking about pleasure-diving. Over the last few years, however, this image has become a reality for pleasure-diving in British Columbia. BC's coastline has become a hot spot for divers and free-divers from around the world. People are choosing pebbles and cold over sun and sand for the underwater sights and sensations BC has to offer. And BC offers a lot.

Local diving instructor Dave Orr and his business partner, Jodi Chang, run small dive tours off the West Coast and the islands. Orr has been diving in and around Vancouver for the past 10 years. His enthusiasm for the sport is contagious. After interviewing him for five minutes, I was ready to go wreck-diving at Porteau Cove.

Fall is the best season for diving off the coast of BC. In summer, the water can be murky. An overabundance of plankton reduces visibility to only a few feet, making an underwater experience fruitless. Around mid-September, the water temperature in BC drops. Over the season, temperatures can drop as low as four degrees Celsius. The colder temperature kills plankton and makes visibility crystal clear beneath the surface. Once winter hits, Orr and Chang start their busy season; their business benefits greatly from the large influx of tourists attracted by the snow of the ski slopes as well as the clean tides of coastal waters.

Divers have a few choices when it comes to keeping warm underwater. Most professional divers wear neoprene drysuits over their clothes when cold-water diving. Drysuits use a thin layer of air between the diver's skin and the material. The diver's body heat warms the air and insulates the suit. The main advantage of wearing a drysuit is

noticeable when you've finished your dive; peel off the suit, and your body is completely dry. Orr claims, however, that he has come out soaked before, but only from exertion.

There are a few disadvantages to wearing a drysuit. "It's bulky and more cumbersome in the water than a wetsuit," Orr says. More irritating still, the air makes your body more buoyant, so extra weights are required to keep you submerged. Also, a change in pressure or angle of descent can make the suit press against you in uncomfortable, and sometimes painful, ways. Orr warned about the danger of overheating while wearing a drysuit. He frequently stops along the bottom to cool down.

One urban legend about drysuits claims that if you don't have your weight properly placed at your ankles on descent, air will rush to your legs and trap you upside-down underwater with no way to right yourself. While he sees how this could happen, Orr has yet to witness it.

Despite the low temperatures, it's possible to dive in BC's waters in a regular wetsuit; some professional divers even prefer it. Orr recommends it for all first-time divers. He likes to see if they can hack it in a regular suit the first time out.

His clients are never disappointed with what they see. Depending on the area, divers can expect to encounter an array of sea life. Directly off Stanley Park, wolf eels, swimming scallops, giant cod, and octopi swim among the flora of the seabed. In the Campbell River area, seals, sea lions, and small sharks are common sights. One of the most desired animals to see in BC waters is the six-gilled shark, a relic from prehistoric times. This bottom-feeder is not dangerous to divers and is also a common sight locally. Whales can be seen frequently near Campbell River, and even experienced divers know enough to get out of the water when a whale comes near. Killer whales especially have been known to become aggressive toward divers. This isn't surprising, considering that a diver is approximately the same size and shape as the seals that whales feed on.

For those looking for more of a thrill than just observing under the water, imagine diving without an air tank. Free-diving is like an intense form of snorkeling. It combines pleasure-diving and depth-sounding, and is as popular as open-water diving in BC. When a diver breathes from a tank, the air is pressurized and becomes more so on descent. This means that if you have a breath at the bottom of the sea, that same breath is much larger on the surface. Divers have to come up very slowly to avoid damage to their lungs from air expansion. Free-divers do not have to do this because all their breaths are on the surface.

Directly off Stanley Park, wolf eels, swimming scallops, giant cod, and octopi swim among the flora of the seabed.

Free-diving is taken very seriously as a sport in BC, with biannual and annual competitions ranging from breath holding to depth-reaching. Divers compete without fins or lines to follow on the way down. However, weights and masks are permitted in the minor and international leagues. It seems that the days are gone when being thrown into the ocean with a pair of concrete shoes was a bad thing.

The international free-diving competition was held in France in 2000. Competitors came from over 20 different countries. Canada placed second overall in men and women's finals. In August 2001, Eric Fattah dove an amazing 83 feet in 2 minutes, 59

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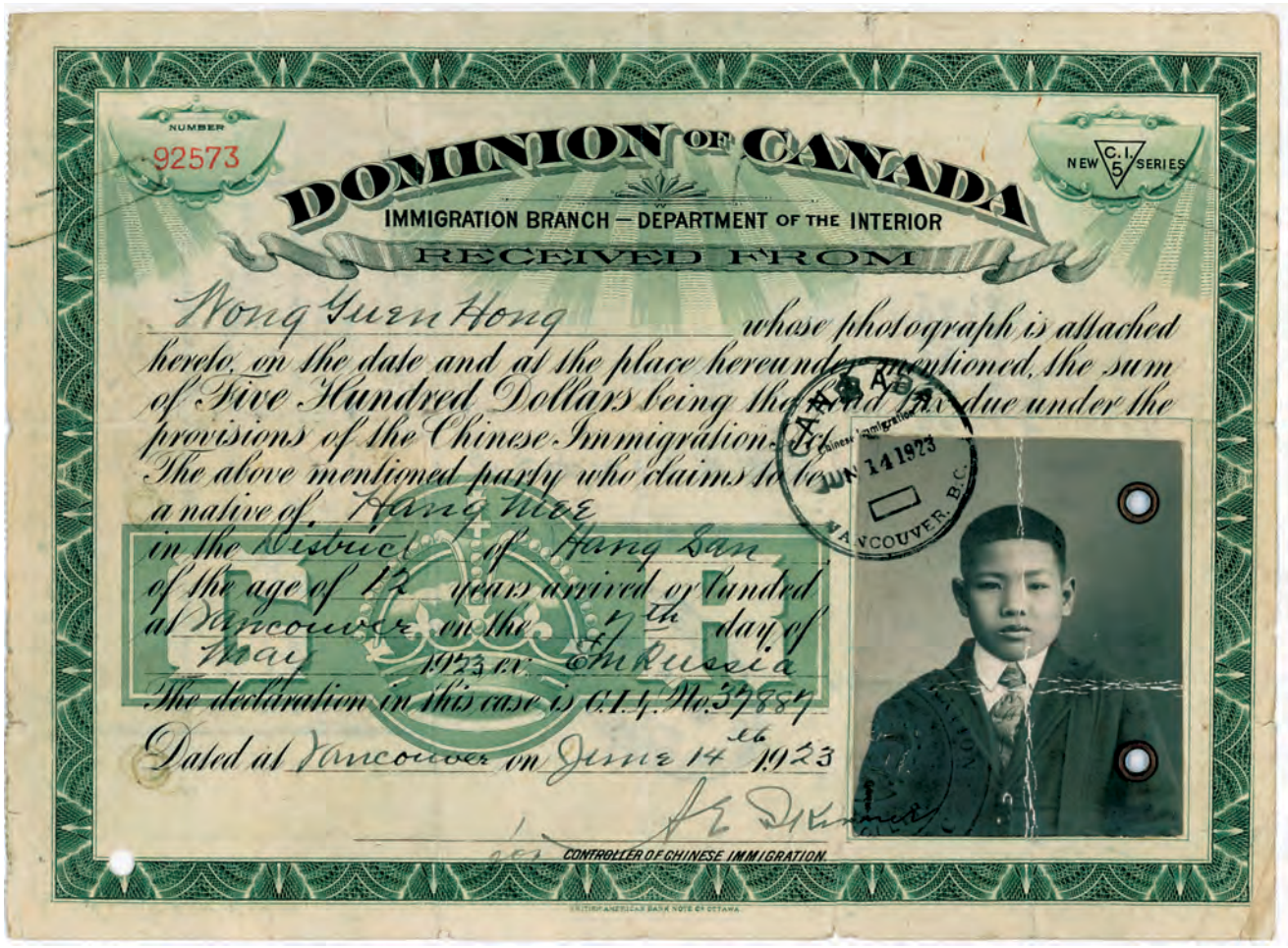
Octopi (top), sea anemones (centre), and wolf eels (bottom) are common sights off the BC coast. Divers can also expect to see ling cod, starfish, harbour seals, and sea lions.



REDRESSING THE PAST
of the Lo Wah Kui

BY WARREN A. MAILEY
PHOTO COURTESY OF VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, VPL 1773
HEAD TAX DOCUMENT COURTESY OF LINDA JANG

Sid Chow Tan is a patient man. The human rights activist and director of the Vancouver branch of the Chinese Canadian National Council has been involved with the head tax redress movement since it began 20 years ago. "I was a young man when this started," he says with a laugh.

Since 1984, the CCNC has represented nearly 4,000 Chinese-Canadians in the fight for acknowledgement and compensation for the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants between 1885 and 1923. The organization maintains that the tax and the Chinese Immigration Act, in place from 1923 to 1947, stunted the growth of the Chinese-Canadian community, caused decades of economic hardships, and tore entire families apart.

For almost a quarter of a century, the Chinese-Canadian community has kept the head tax redress issue before the federal government. With the number of living head-tax payers having dwindled to just over two dozen, a second and third generation of Chinese-Canadians has taken the lead in a new campaign for recognition and justice.

Sid Tan's grandfather, Chow Gim Tan, was a head-tax payer. He tended cows in China from the age of 10 to save enough money to come to Canada. Tan arrived in 1919 when he was 19 years old. Like many Chinese immigrants, he paid the $500 head tax. He settled in Saskatchewan and adopted the name Norman. He became a cook, opened a restaurant, and developed a love for hockey and cooking wild game.

Norman Tan was a lo wah kui, which translates as someone who is one of the old overseas Chinese from the poor and overcrowded southern provinces of Guangdong and Fuijian. He came to Canada in search of a better life. The lo wah kui were pioneers of the Chinese-Canadian community. And they were targets of the Immigration Act, also known as the Exclusion Act, because the legislation prohibited Chinese immigration. No other ethnic groups were singled out. Tan was fortunate enough to emigrate to Canada before the act came into effect.

The Chinese contribution to the building of Canada is without question. During the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, approximately 17,000 Chinese immigrants arrived between 1881 and 1884 to work on railroad construction. "This was an immensely important project, and its completion would have been further delayed without Chinese labour," says Hugh Johnston, a professor of Canadian history at Simon Fraser University. "They were, along with other ethnic nationalities, brought into Canada to build infrastructure."

University of Saskatchewan sociologist Peter S. Li concurs. In his essay *The Chinese Minority in Canada*, he states, "The usefulness of Chinese labour in mining, railroad construction, land clearing, public works, market gardening, lumbering, salmon canning, and domestic service was well recognized by many employers and witnesses who appeared before a royal commission in 1885 and 1902."

After the railway's completion in 1885, the federal government imposed a $50 fee on any Chinese immigrant entering the country. The head tax, as it became known, was the government's response to concerns in the labour sector and middle and lower classes of British Columbia about the growth of the Chinese population. The head tax was raised in 1900 to $100, and then again to $500 in 1903.

On July 1, 1923, the federal government passed the Chinese Immigration Act. For Chinese-Canadians, Dominion Day became known as Humiliation Day. Those who paid the head tax were allowed to stay. Many were men and boys with families in China. The Exclusion Act meant that they would be separated from their relatives for almost 30 years. Li asserts, "The absence of wives and family also meant that the growth of a second generation was delayed."

Following the Second World War, in 1947, the federal government repealed the Chinese Immigration Act. Along with this restoration of citizenship, Canada opened its doors to Chinese immigrants once again, and many Chinese-Canadians were able to bring their families into the country.

In 1983, Leon Mark presented his head tax receipt for $500 to his Member of Parliament in Vancouver. He asked her to help him get a refund. After the government refused to refund Mark's money, the Chinese Canadian National Council took up the cause. By 1984, the CCNC had signed up approximately 4,000 head-tax payers, their spouses, or children.

For Chinese-Canadians, Dominion Day became known as Humiliation Day.

The 1988 settlement between the National Association of Japanese Canadians and the government over the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War showed promise for the Head Tax Redress movement. But in 1994 the government stopped negotiating, and rejected the idea of redress. Little progress was made until 2000.

In December 2000, a head-tax payee, a widow of a payee, and the son of another brought a class action suit against the federal government. According to the CCNC's Redress Campaign website, the case claimed that the government was "unjustly enriched by the Chinese Head Tax that was in violation of international human rights that existed at the time." The Ontario Superior Court dismissed the case in 2001. In his ruling, Justice Cummings commented that the redress issue was a political matter; it was not a matter for the judiciary. He recommended that the federal government seriously reconsider

17,000 Chinese immigrants arrived in Canada between 1881–1884 to build the Canadian Pacific Railway.

redressing issues raised by the head-tax payers, their widows and families.

The dismissal was not a setback, however. "We knew that it might not win," says Sid Chow Tan. "But we got the recognition."

The Ontario Court of Appeal dismissed an appeal in 2002. The Supreme Court of Canada also denied the council's appeal in 2003.

In September 2003, the CCNC began the Last Spike campaign, a cross-country tour to educate and mobilize communities to support the redress movement. Pierre Berton even donated an actual railway spike found near Craigellachie BC, the site of the historic Last Spike ceremony in 1884. Berton, a noted Canadian author who wrote a history of the building of the CPR, endorsed the campaign. In the press release for the Halifax kick-off ceremony, he wrote, "The last spike marked the end of a nation-building project in Canada. It also signified the beginning of a shameful era of the exclusion of Chinese immigrants. Let this new journey of the last spike bring about the rebuilding of our nation by redressing our past wrongs towards Chinese-Canadians."

In April 2004, Doudou Diene, the United Nations special rapporteur on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, gave the redress campaign an added boost. He presented a report to the federal government that, according to Lynda Lin of the *Pacific Citizen*, recommended that the government consider making reparations on the head tax issue.

While the federal government maintains its no-compensation stance, there have been two private-member motions put forward in the House of Commons. Each favours different types of compensation. The CCNC prefers individual compensation. Another activist group, the National Congress of Chinese Canadians desires community compensation.

Manitoba Conservative MP Inky Mark introduced a private member bill in Parliament on behalf of the National Congress of Chinese Canadians. Bill C-333 asks the federal government to negotiate with the NCCC to arrange for community compensation, rather than for individuals.

In a recent interview with Charlie Smith of the *Georgia Straight*, Mary-Woo Sims, former chair of the BC Human Rights Commission, criticized the bill for singling out the NCCC as the main representative of the Chinese-Canadian community. "I think if the government is serious about negotiating redress, whether it's with Japanese-Canadians, or now with Chinese-Canadians, they ought to develop a process whereby the community identifies who the legitimate agents for that negotiation should be," said Sims.

Vancouver East MP Libby Davies recently put forward another motion. Private Member Motion M-102 suggests that the government negotiate with the individuals affected by the head tax and the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 as well as with their families or representatives. The motion calls for parliamentary acknowledgement of the injustices of the legislation, an official apology by the government to the individuals and their families for suffering and hardship, individual compensation, and a trust fund set up for educational purposes to ensure that such injustices never occur again.

The Chinese Canadian National Council favours individual compensation, something that Bill C-333 eschews. "It stinks," says Tan about Bill C-333. "Libby's is a better way to go. If we get what Libby has, that would be fair."

Too much bureaucratic debate, however, can stall any progress on this issue. When the redress movement started in 1984, the CCNC signed up over 4,000 claimants, including 2,000 head-tax payers. "There are probably

only 20 to 30 left in Canada. Are they waiting for our people to die?" asks Tan.

A fifth generation of Chinese-Canadians has recently taken up the cause. Karen Cho's documentary *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* premiered nationally in 2004. In the film, the 25-year-old Concordia graduate explores the disparity between the two sides of her heritage. While her British grandparents were welcomed with open arms, free land, and instant citizenship, Cho's Chinese ancestors faced blatant discrimination. She set out to find others who shared similar backgrounds.

On her journey, Cho encounters a handful of characters, including three remaining head-tax payers, widows of payers, and their children. She hears tales of incredible discrimination. In the film's most moving moment, Gim Wong, an 82-year-old son of a head-tax payer, tearfully recounts a painful childhood memory of being chased and beaten by older white boys. Cho was overwhelmed by this story. In a phone interview from her Montreal office, she commented on the number of emotions that surfaced on her journey.

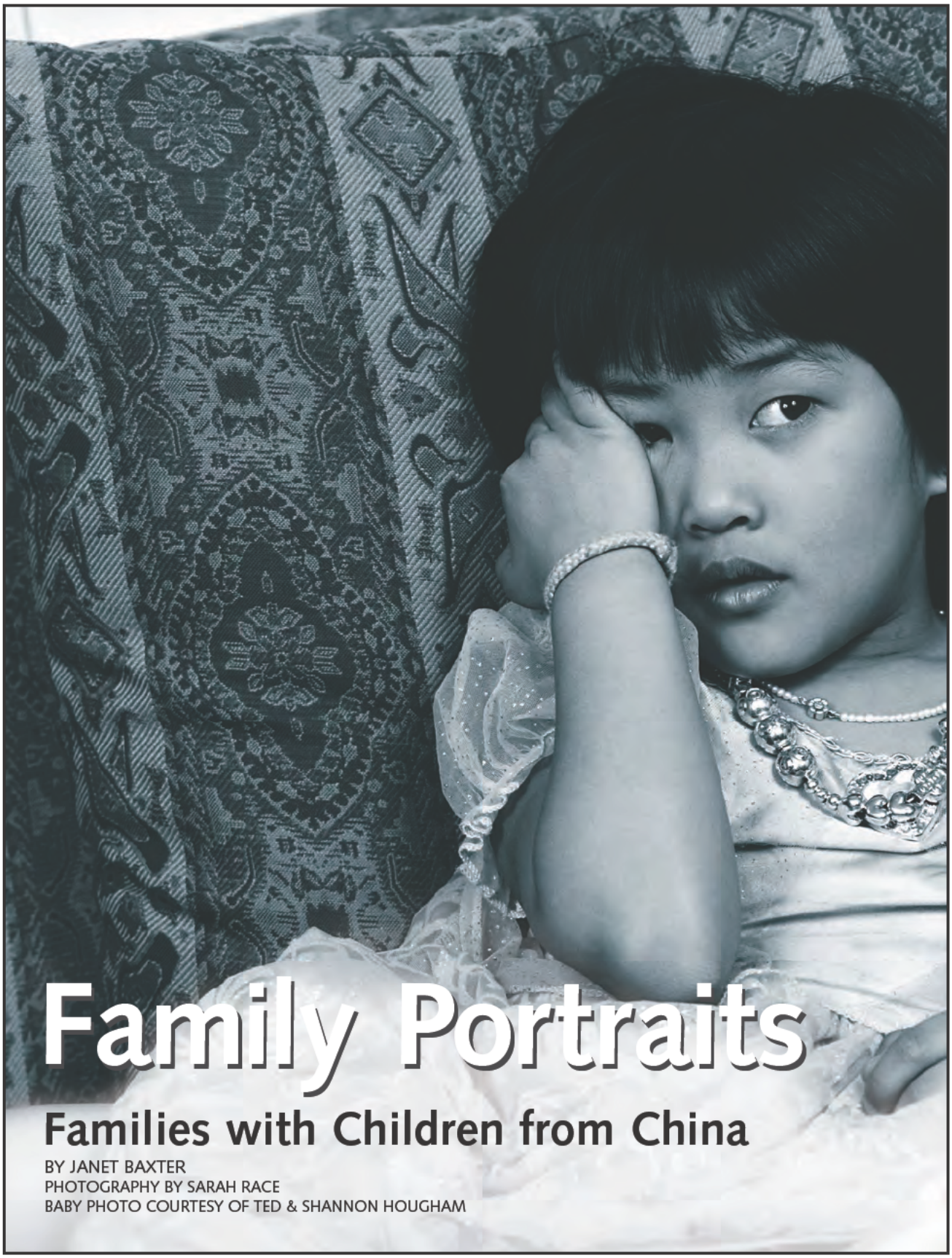
"When Gim was telling me that story, I sat there and cried." She is also angered by the injustice of the head tax and the era of exclusion, especially as it impacted families. "Look at Charlie Quan and Mr. Wing," she says, referring to two surviving head-tax payers who were featured in the film. "They were both separated from their wives for 30 years. In Chinese culture, everything is about the family."

When asked about the implications of the film, Cho maintains it is mainly about Canadian identity. She challenges the commonly held, Euro-centric approach to Canadian history. "This is a Canadian story, and I think it is important to tell it that way," she says.

Cho hopes her film will serve as a catalyst for social debate, and will renew interest in a chapter of Canadian history – one that is overlooked in most high school curriculums and college history courses. She also hopes to advance the redress cause. "The bottom line is that this is a human rights issue," she said at the post-premiere question and answer period. "I think that when people of my generation hear of this, we are less forgiving. Younger generations will fight for this."

Undoubtedly, the movement will lose some of its impact when the last head-tax payer is gone, but Tan does not predict any loss of momentum. He views the current Canadians for Redress campaign as a success and its goals more attainable than ever with a minority government in power. "I think it is a winner," he says. "There is more and more publicity. These things take time, but I think it may happen before the next election."

"This is my grandfather's story," says Tan. "It is one of the darkest chapters of Canadian history, but also one of the brightest because they overcame the elements and the people. The lo wah kui are the ones who deserve the refund. They paid it, so they should get it back first." ⊠



Family Portraits

Families with Children from China

BY JANET BAXTER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH RACE
BABY PHOTO COURTESY OF TED & SHANNON HOUGHAM

Since opening its doors to international adoption in 1992, China has become the country of choice for an increasing number of Canadians wanting to start families. In 2003, the number of Chinese children adopted in Canada had increased by 30 per cent from the previous year. For some of these families, their children's heritage is an important part of daily life.

Steve Whan and Danielle Soulodre are waiting in a hallway. Within moments, they'll welcome two daughters into their lives. Other expectant parents anticipate similar moments. Some have been through this before; others – Steve and Danielle among them – are first-timers. They wait, not outside the delivery room, but in a hotel hallway in China. They wait for employees from the local orphanage to arrive with the children they are adopting. "It's amazing," says Whan joyfully. "Suddenly you're parents."

Whan and Soulodre are just two of a growing number of Canadians with adopted children from China. Of the one million children available, about 15,000 are adopted internationally. In fact, there are over 120 families in British Columbia with children from China. Some of these families have found unique ways to ensure their children's heritage is a central feature of their everyday lives.

Steve, Danielle, and their daughters Samantha and Virginie belong to Families with Children from China, BC. Part support group and part advocate agency, FCCBC grew out of informal gatherings started in the mid-1990s. The organization plans events that reflect the culture of the children's birthplace. It strives to enlighten the public about the experience of – and the issues around – adopting from China. The group also raises funds for Chinese orphanages, and is also a source for people who seek information on international adoptions.

China at a Glance

The One Child Law

The government introduced the one-child policy in 1979 to help control population and to ensure that the country could afford to feed and care for its people in case of flood or famine. Couples living in cities are permitted to have only one child unless they are part of an ethnic minority or both are only children. In rural areas, enforcement of the policy is somewhat spotty. Families are permitted to have a second child only if the first is a girl. Still, the New York Times reports that families with three or more children are common throughout the countryside.

Over One Billion People

According to 2000 census results, China's population is 1.26 billion. Officials estimate it will reach 1.6 billion in 2050. The government believes that the one-child policy has been an effective method of controlling the population and says it has prevented 250 million births since 1980.

International Adoption

In 1992, China enacted its first international adoption law. Since then, thousands of children have come to North America. The China Center of Adoption Affairs is the branch of the central goverment that oversees the country's international adoptions.

China Leads the Way

According to the Adoption Council of Canada, Canadian families adopted 1,108 Chinese children in 2003. Adoptions from China made up 51 per cent of all international adoptions in Canada that year. Ninety-five per cent of these children were girls.

A proposal picture: The first photo Ted and Shannon Hougham ever saw of Jia came with a package of background information.

During the 14-month-long adoption process, couples are carefully scrutinized before they are matched up with a child. Applicants must be over 30 years old. There is an eight per cent quota for single applicants, and same-sex couples are not accepted.

Once they are matched up with a child, applicants receive a profile that should include medical history, some background information, and possibly a photo. Unfortunately for some, their background is nonexistent. In the case of abandoned children, their home address is usually the place where they were found. In some cases, the address is made up.

Age motivated Ted and Shannon Hougham to adopt. Ted was 50 years old and Shannon was 44 when they decided to start a family. Both worked with children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the Northwest Territories and wished to avoid having to deal with its effects on their child. They chose China because drug and alcohol abuse is rare among Chinese mothers.

In 1999, the couple flew to China with 10 other families and the adoption agents. Those who were adopting for a second time were a valuable resource for first-time parents. They swapped baby clothes that were either too large or too small. Collectively, they dealt with their children's health problems, such as scabies – a common affliction among children living in crowded quarters.

The families used the same agency to arrange adoptions with an orphanage in Gaoming, in Guangdong province. When the Houghams first met their daughter, she was 11 months old. Her name was Gao-Xiu Jia. All children from the Gaoming orphanage are given the surname Gao. Xiu means girl. Jia means beautiful and pretty. Ted and Shannon chose Jia as her name.

Six years later, Jia sits quietly, drawing pictures of butterflies and princesses while her parents flip through a scrapbook they assembled to document her arrival. A passport-size, colour photo of a baby girl with rosy, cherub cheeks is near the front. This is the first image the Houghams ever saw of Jia. Ted kept it close to his heart until they finally met. Other photos in the book show a smiling little face staring up at the loving faces of her new parents. On one of the documents from the orphanage, an employee wrote: "We hope she grows up cute and able to be adopted by a good family and have a happy life." They are very open with Jia about her adoption. They use storybooks, such as Robert Munsch's *When You were Born in China*, to explain to Jia how she came to be with them.

"We hope she grows up cute and able to be adopted by a good family and have a happy life."

The Houghams have a photo of the children who were adopted by the group. Most were babies; some were between three and five years old. The oldest girl in the photo was 12 years old and was adopted by a couple from Nova Scotia. A few years prior, a Halifax family adopted the girl's best friend. Once the friend arrived in Halifax and got to know the neighbourhood, she convinced a family on the block to adopt the girl from the photo.

Nancy Ryder and Francis Ouelette live in a tastefully renovated, older home in North Vancouver with their daughters Maya and Pascale. Maya is a spirited five-year-old. She models the new horseback-riding hat that her grandmother gave her. After a quick costume change to a shiny blue dress, Maya pirouettes around the room. She studies French Immersion at school and loves horseback riding and ballet. Her mother hopes to enrol her in Chinese dance, but feels Maya isn't ready for the strict discipline the art requires. "Maya has a little trouble with authority figures, just like her mother," Nancy says with a laugh.

Pascale puts on the riding hat and signs Maya's name in baby sign language. Nancy and Francis sign to ease Pascale's transition into English. It was especially helpful when she first arrived. Pascale shrieked violently until she learned to communicate her needs through sign – most notably the signs for bottle and food.

Francis and Nancy chose to adopt after they found out they weren't able to have children of their own. Instead of spending large sums of money on fertility clinics, the adoption route seemed a better alternative. Friends who'd adopted from China recommended they consider it.

Francis and Nancy believe it's important to integrate Chinese culture into their family life. They actively participate in FCCBC events, and until recently, hosted a monthly meeting for families waiting to adopt from China. The idea of being a family is paramount. Each night, Francis and Nancy say "I love you" in Mandarin to both girls.

Nancy and Francis appreciate Vancouver's rich Asian culture. The children get to see "other people they look like." Nancy has, however, been followed around the supermarket on more than one occasion being bombarded with questions:

"Are they your daughters? Your real daughters?"

"By blood?"

"Are they sisters? Real sisters?"

Although brazen, the questions aren't asked maliciously. People are curious about a white mother with Asian children. "You get used to the intrusiveness of strangers," says Nancy. Some people even enquire about international adoption.

Sometimes strangers are supportive. Francis found that the Chinese encouraged international adoption. He remembers getting the thumbs-up sign when people saw him with his daughters. "The Chinese often see the situation as sad," he says. "They say 'they are better off with you.'" Francis is a grateful man. "We are better off with them."

TURN ON, LOG IN, DROP OUT

Online addiction: youth's latest ailment

BY STEVE QUILALA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE QUILALA

South Korea is a technological utopia, holding the title of world's most wired country. This honour, however, comes with a price: obsession with technology is adversely affecting this country's citizens.

Several centres have recently opened in South Korea to treat online addiction. The Centre for Internet Addiction Prevention and Counseling (CIAPC) is the first government-funded centre of its kind. There, researchers study online addiction and its side effects. They have put together a list of symptoms, which include preoccupation with the Internet, inability to perform everyday tasks, uncontrolled behaviour, disruption of daily routines and nervousness or anxiety when not online.

These symptoms are not exclusive to South Koreans, as more Vancouver youths are devoting their free time to online gaming. Nikki Popow, a mechanic and online gamer says, "I'm sure everyone's had the feeling that they couldn't get off their seats and stop working or playing a game." UBC student and avid gamer Shawn Hanna, agrees. "It's all about knowing your limits. It's hard to set a time limit for yourself sometimes." He adds, "I've had dreams that I was playing [computer games]. Sure I was surprised, but I went right back to playing again in the morning."

When presented with CIAPC's list of symptoms, both Shawn and Nikki laugh in agreement. They admit they have experienced the symptoms, but also say it could be the case for anyone using the Internet. For many people, however, online addiction is no laughing matter.

In September 2002, an extreme case of online obsession made headlines around the world and sent a shockwave through households in Korea. An avid gamer, Kim Kyung-jae, collapsed and died at a 24-hour PC café in Kwangju, South Korea, after playing computer games for 86 hours. Parents, concerned over online proliferation, are now attempting to control their children's Internet habits. They are employing strict curfews, and some are even cancelling online accounts. PC rooms, known in Korea as "PC bangs" have been ordered to send underage players home after 10 pm. These PC rooms are now fixtures in Vancouver suburbs as well.

Sitting in a dark cyber den in New Westminster, I saw how easily online gaming can become an obsession. A large group of teenage boys, playing games on powerful computers, let out a collective "ouch" after a character is killed in a brutal, bloody gunfight. On screen, guns are purchased and cocked while rap music plays in the background. I feel like an outsider among the regulars in the room. Being a former online gamer, I barely recognize the scene. Interfaces, displays, technologies, and software versions have changed over the past year. Games are more real and bloodier than I remember.

There is a learning curve with single-player, action simulation games. The objective is to eliminate your oppo-

nents: kill all the other characters before they kill you. Hardcore gamers are more dangerous than ever. It's not in our nature to kill, especially not with a mouse, keyboard, and computer screen. I am shocked to find the level of skill in the room so high. It's obvious these players are practising. A lot. Sadly, this is a typical night for many computer savvy teens.

Suburban PC rooms cater to a young, largely Korean clientele, many of whom are students from nearby high schools. The rooms sell food and drinks to keep players from leaving. These suburban cyber cafés are focused on gaming and are unlike the cyber cafés in Vancouver. The drink of choice among young customers is Coca Cola, not cappuccino. Not surprisingly, peak times are lunchtime, after school, and late nights. But there can also be an increase in business during the day when school assemblies are in session. Greg Mack, a former student at Gleneagle Secondary in Coquitlam, admits, "I've skipped a couple of school spirit assemblies and the career fair in Grade 11 and 12. And I used to play [at Cyberworld] after school a lot before I got the game at home." The majority of cyber cafés in Coquitlam's Westwood neighborhood have closed down recently due to lack of business. Most gamers now choose to play from home and few play in cafés during school hours.

Online gaming is growing at a fast pace in South Korea and abroad. Competition in South Korea's technology sector combined with government ambition, is building a bright future for online industries in the country. In the Lower Mainland, the market for cyber cafés is shrinking as more gamers are playing at home, but it has taken hold around local high schools. The negative effects of South Korea's plunge into the digital world are just now becoming evident. As new technology begins to catch on in Canada, we can look to Korea for guidance so that we may avoid the pitfalls of online obsession. ⊞

A PRICE TOO HIGH

Examining Shark Fishing and Shark-Finning

BY BRIAN BAXTER
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF IB G. HANSEN

Off the coast of Taiwan, a fishing boat reels in a small hammerhead shark. The shark thrashes in shock as fishermen tie it down by the dorsal fin. With several swift slices of a large knife, its fins are cut off. The fish writhes in pain, as the deck turns crimson with its blood. The fishermen untie the shark and carelessly throw it overboard. It sinks to the bottom and awaits a slow, painful death. If other predators don't seize the opportunity for a meal, the hammerhead will flounder for hours – perhaps days – before it suffocates on the ocean floor.

Needless to say, this practice has sparked widespread condemnation of shark fishing. Harvesting of shark fins and over-fishing has strained the global shark population. Although Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US have already banned shark-finning, the practice is still common in Southeast Asia and parts of Central and South America, while Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan serve as fin-trading centres. The international conservation group WildAid reports that 100 million sharks are killed each year and 8,000 tonnes of fins are shipped around the world. Despite growing public awareness and a decline in the demand for shark fins, activists stress that more still needs to be done to protect the fish.

A recent study at Dalhousie University claims that the ocean has already lost 86 per cent of its large predatory fish. The great white shark, one of the larger ocean predators, is already on the endangered species list. Unfortunately, environmentalists receive insufficient funding to study and protect this animal. Instead, money is invested in fisheries in hopes of greater profits. This overt negligence infuriates conservationists. "Shark-finning is an absolutely disgusting practice," says Steve Campana, head of the shark research laboratory at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography. "There's no reason to cut the fins off a shark and then throw it overboard still alive."

Years of over-fishing have taken a toll on the global shark population and many fisheries have closed. "Some sharks grow very quickly, producing lots of young, and they can support lots of fishing," Campana says. "Many, however, grow slowly, living a long time and producing few young. It's not so much harvesting a resource, but mining one."

Despite the ongoing damage, Campana's response is not to ban shark fishing completely. Instead, he advocates selective fishing practices and protection for certain species, such as the great white. "Fisheries need to try to eliminate incidental by-catch [when fish are caught unintentionally by fishing gear]."

Patrick O'Callaghan, vice-president of education and conservation at the Vancouver Aquarium, is passionate about the delicate balance between sharks and fisheries. "What is clear is that for many types of sharks, the number killed far outweighs the number of baby sharks surviving to adulthood to replace them," he says. Sharks can take up to 15 years to reproduce and this has resulted in their dwindling numbers.

Any significant damage done to a particular shark species is almost irreversible. "The lower you drive the stock, the less resilience it has to respond, even if the pressure is removed," says Sandy McFarland, a research scientist at Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre.

O'Callaghan agrees. "We are at a critical point in time where personal decisions about which seafood we do or don't eat are having a direct impact on the health of the oceans. This isn't something that we need to be thinking about in two or five years; this is happening right now, and our decisions on things including the use of sharks is making an impact on the entire ocean."

O'Callaghan understands the economics of the situation. A high demand for shark fins feeds the practice of shark-finning. "The same space on a fishing boat filled with just fins is currently worth hundreds of times more than a whole shark or two." Still, the waste bothers him. "If the shark is going to be harvested, my preference would be to see all of it used: fins for soup, flesh for jerky, cartilage and teeth for tourist necklaces."

The bounty on shark fins is high because demand is equally high. According to WildAid, China is the fastest-growing market for fins. Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong all have large markets. Several species are hunted solely for their fins. Blues, hammerheads, and silky sharks are the most highly traded; makos, threshers, and great whites are close behind.

WildAid points out that while there are markets for shark by-products such as skins and oil, one item in particular uses shark fins as a measure of affluence. Shark-fin soup is a popular delicacy in Southeast Asian culture. The dish has a rich history. It first appeared in China during the Northern Sung Dynasty (907-1126 AD). Shark-fin soup became a regular item on banquet menus during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Today, the dish is a delicacy, often served to impress upper-class businessmen.

To prepare the fin for soup, it must be dried, bleached, and then dried again. It is then cooked until it separates into needles of cartilage that look like clear noodles. The fin itself is virtually tasteless until the appropriate amount of chicken stock is added.

"A chef I know told me that you could easily drop a stone into the soup instead of a shark-fin and it would tastes exactly the same," O'Callaghan says. The fact that the dish has very little nutritional value only enhances the senseless cruelty inflicted on the shark. Connoisseurs of shark-fin soup should be concerned, however. WildAid reports that one-third of shark fins contain more mercury than is considered safe for human consumption.

Although sharks are eagerly hunted, much of their lives are shrouded in mystery. Nature programs documenting sharks seem more interested in getting the perfect shot than in promoting the idea that sharks are a necessary link in the food chain. There is still much to discover about them. Indeed, a large portion of the public views sharks merely as malicious eating-machines.

"It's not so much harvesting a resource, but mining one."

"There's no question at all that *Jaws* sparked it," Campana says of Steven Spielberg's 1975 film.

Apparently, many don't see the need to show compassion toward an intimidating predator. Campana once received an e-mail enquiring about the best strategies for fighting a great white with a knife. "There are some people who like to kill something that could eventually hurt them," he says. The tide is changing, however. Campana says he now gets a large number of positive e-mails supporting shark conservation.

With a shift in public perception about sharks, new sympathies are arising. "Eventually people will become less afraid of sharks, and begin to think of them more as an integral part of the environment," says a hopeful McFarland. The era of haunting imagery derived from cinema is coming to an end. People are saying "no" to shark-fin soup. The most feared predator in the sea takes on a brand-new image as a better-educated public views these giants of the deep with more compassion.

See more of Ib G. Hansen's stunning underwater images of great white sharks at: www.ibghansenunderwaterphotographer.com

Grand Honour Hot Pot

5668 Granville Street, Vancouver

BY SHERISE LACEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAMARA SLADE

Grand Honour Hot Pot is well lit, and has the feel of an eating hall. The room is authentically Chinese, as there are signs dotting the walls written in Chinese characters. A bright and colourful illustration of koi fish watched over us as we cooked our own meal.

When we were seated, a server asked for our tea preference. I ordered the green tea, which was spectacular. It smelled of honey, and had a slight mint flavour. I have yet to taste another green tea this naturally light and sweet. For appetizers, we had Shrimp Dumplings and Deep Fried Squid with Spicy Salt. The squid was mildly spicy, and splendidly tender. The Shrimp Dumplings were aromatic and succulent.

We chose the Hot Pot as our main course. A hot pot is a wok-like pot of soup broth placed in the center of the table, with a heating element underneath. The boiling broth is used to cook the meal. You can have both chicken and spicy broth, but we opted for the chicken broth only. Many items are available for the hot pot, including unusual ingredients, such as cow tongue and goose guts. Not up for a culinary adventure, we chose spinach, baby bok choy, sirloin steak strips, Chinese vermicelli, and shrimp wontons. The portions of each item are substantial so a large group of diners is ideal.

The servers were prompt and informative. They explained to us the process of cooking and retrieving items from the hot pot: when the broth boils, you cook your food in it using a metal strainer. This way, everyone can cook their portions individually.

Vegetables cook quickly so it's best to put items like wontons and meat in first and cook the vegetables when you're ready to eat them. Three sauces are provided: a slightly spicy sauce, a peanut sauce, and soy sauce. All the food smelled and tasted delicious. The only pitfall was that the wontons were a little tough.

When making dinner plans for Grand Honour Hot Pot, it's best to reserve your table in advance. It's a unique experience if you've never eaten in this style before, so enjoy yourself and try not to feel intimidated. The friendly staff will be happy to answer all your questions.

New Mekong

1414 Commercial Drive, Vancouver

Dining at New Mekong is a transcendent sensory experience even for the most discriminating lover of Asian food. This unassuming eatery offers a Thai take on Vietnamese cuisine, presented with a French flare. The menu is extensive, featuring a huge selection of tempting appetizers, delicious soups, and hearty main courses. The prices are reasonable and the portions are generous.

New Mekong is delightfully unpretentious. Guests are welcomed into the cozy environment by courteous and enthusiastic servers. The restaurant's butter-coloured walls and subdued lighting create a feeling of warmth and serenity. Decorative trellises and delicate French doors, which open out onto eclectic Commercial Drive, allude to a Parisian café. The aroma of spices and grilled vegetables dances in the air.

New Mekong offers a selection of appetizers in the $3 to $5 range. The vegetarian spring rolls are a tasty prelude to the restaurant's savoury main courses. These flaky, non-oily delights are delicious without being overpowering. Their sumptuous crusts are generously stuffed with vegetables and tofu and come with a sweet chili sauce sure to excite any palate.

The soups are meals in themselves. The small size, for $3.25, makes for a filling lunch, and the large size, for $6.50, easily feeds two. The Hot and Sour Soup is a delicious departure from the norm, its extra spicy broth full of bean sprouts and enormous tofu chunks. New Mekong's famous Pumpkin Soup with Coconut is divine. This delicate taste sensation soothes the taste buds with sweet creaminess. All of New Mekong's soups are available in vegetarian and non-vegetarian versions.

BY PHILIP C. BREAKENRIDGE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEN OSBORNE

New Mekong's entrées are served in generous helpings for under $10. The most popular main courses are the Sizzling Hot Plates, for $8.95. Each plate comes with beef, chicken, shrimp, or tofu served on a bed of crisp vegetables, topped with a delectable sauce. They are brought on metal dishes, still crackling and smoking. The Mekong Special Sizzling Hot Plate features broccoli and baby corn in a rich coconut sauce. The Siamese Thai Spicy Chili Sauce Sizzling Hot Plate is perfect for those who like their food fiery. Topped with sliced marinated tofu, it is a healthy and flavourful dish. Rice or noodles are included with the sizzling hot places, at no extra charge.

With its stellar service, down-to-earth ambiance, and appetizing menu, New Mekong Restaurant has a lot to offer. Plan on many repeat visits to sample their variety of offerings.

Kitanoya Guu

838 Thurlow Street, Vancouver

BY ALISON PENGELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALLISON SATO

You can't go wrong with something truly authentic - next time you dine out, try Kitanoya Guu. As unpretentious as they come, this authentic Izukaya meeting place will linger in your memory.

Expecting a weekend line-up, my companion and I arrived at 8 pm, fashionably late and hoping for the best. Although there were seven groups ahead of us, we waited only 35 minutes. As customers opened the door to leave, we heard the staff shout good-bye in Japanese. Likewise, when we entered they greeted us with enthusiasm. We felt fantastic. I even blushed a little. The staff was having a ball and so were we.

As a former server, I'm hard to impress, but at Kitanoya Guu I recognized genius right away. As our server approached she yelled out a few orders to the cooks on her way. Genius, pure genius. I had Sake for $3.80 and my date had the vodka with lemonade for $4.25.

In Japan, people go to an Izukaya primarily to drink. But since food was on the agenda, we perused the menu, our stomachs growling audibly. Most tempting were the shouts of "Beef tongue!" as servers delivered this intriguing dish to neighbouring tables. Vowing to try it next time, we chose six small dishes that varied from $4 to $5.50.

Kitanoya Guu provides a lengthy special sheet. Our favourite was the Grilled Scallop in Shell. I've never seen such a huge scallop: it was like a seafood steak, and delicious. Also on special, the Marinated Octopus with Wasabi Stems was odd in texture but satisfied our curiosity; and yes, wasabi stems do taste like wasabi. As usual, Deep Fried Tofu and Tuna Sashimi did not disappoint. My companion, who would crab-walk backwards over hot coals for bacon, was ecstatic over the Asparagus Bacon Maki. We were pleased to note that the asparagus was only a vehicle for the bacon. In fact, you wouldn't know it was there if you hadn't read it in the menu. I, for one, respect a chef who isn't afraid to wrap bacon around other foods.

There are few things in life as enjoyable as the moments before and after ingesting a raw oyster. The Fresh Oysters (four piece) were the best raw oysters I've ever had! And the cheapest! Who would have thought those two statements would ever be said in conjunction?

Satisfied with a successful evening out, we headed for the door vowing to return for drinks, oysters, and beef tongue. We were so immersed in our reverie that the enthusiastic good-byes startled us. We turned to wave and saw chefs and servers smiling back at us. At the end of a long night's work, that is a rare sight indeed.

DISCOVER: THE PACIFIC RIM

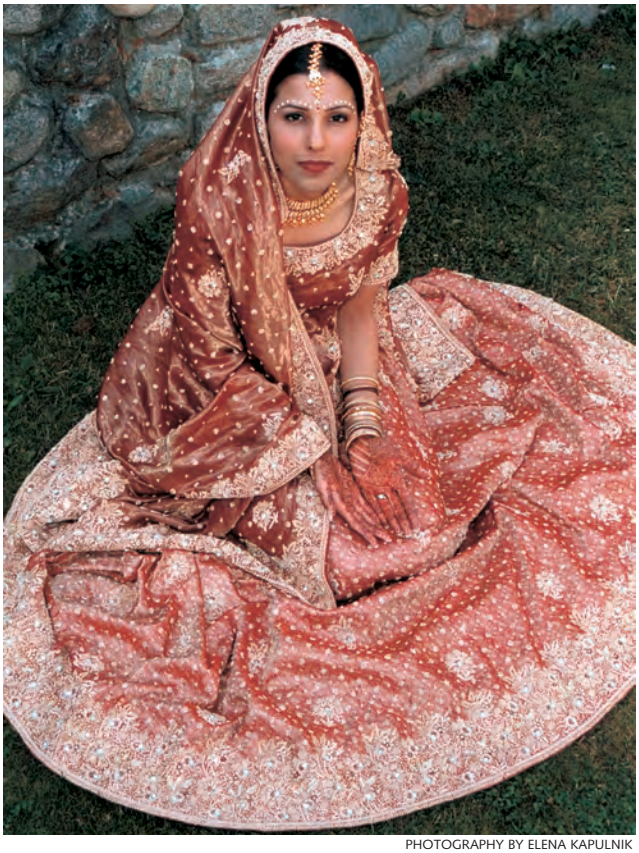
CHINA

Basics: The capital is Bejing, formerly known as Peking. Although China is officially atheist, practised religions include Daoism and Buddhism.

Climate: January, the coldest month, ranges from -15°C in the north to 8°C in the south. Travel is best during May, September, and October.

Miscellaneous: Be careful with food. Drink only bottled water. Tourists must register with the Public Security Bureau of China within 24 hours of their arrival. China is a cash-based society. Changing money on the streets is illegal and counterfeit money abounds. Tipping was considered an insult, but is becoming more acceptable.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM BALDERSTON



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELENA KAPULNIK

INDIA

Basics: The population is 1.06 billion. India does not have an official religion, but 81% of the population practise Hinduism and 14% are Muslim. The national languages are Hindi and English. The capital is New Delhi. The climate is cool October through March, hot from March until June, and has monsoon rains June to September. Health: Be careful with food and water.

Transportation: Public buses are very crowded, noisy, and known for having bad drivers. Taxis can be prepaid but watch for scams. If there is another male in the taxi, females should not enter.

Females: In some regions women are not allowed to go to the market alone, so it's natural that female visitors will be looked at with curiosity. Dress conservatively by wearing loose-fitting clothing that covers arms and calves. Never walk unescorted at night. The southern parts of India are safer than the north.

Travel Warning: Terrorist attacks can occur along any area bordering Pakistan in Rajasthan, Punjab, and Gujarat. In the western state of Gujarat curfews are still imposed and enforced. Travel in this area should be limited.

Tsunami update: Nearly all areas are fully recovered. The most affected areas are the Tamil Nadu coast, the Andhra Pradesh coast and the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

INDONESIA

Basics: Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous nation, with 235 million people. The majority, 89% are Muslim. The language is Bahasa Indonesia. Jakarta is the capital. With temperatures from 21°C to 33°C, the climate is tropical.

Etiquette: One should never touch the head of another person. The left hand is not used to shake hands, touch others, point, eat, or give and receive objects.

Travel Warning: As of February 26, 2005, Foreign Affairs Canada advises that Canadians should not travel to Indonesia due to an "ongoing terrorist threat to westerners and western interests."

Tsunami Update: The province of Aceh, which is the closest land mass to the epicenter of the Indian Ocean Earthquake of December 26, 2004, was the scene of much death and destruction from the tsunami. Thousands of bodies are still being found daily. Recovery has been slow and much of the area has been off limits to tourists since February 26, 2005.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS LECLERC

Travel Tips

Water may need to be boiled before drinking, making ice cubes, or brushing teeth. Boil unpasteurized milk. Avoid dairy products made from unpastuerized milk. Meat and fish should be well cooked and served hot. Cook vegetables and peel fruit. Carry a card with your hotel's name, address, and phone number written in the local language in case you get lost.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS LECLERC

SRI LANKA

Basics Plus: The population is 19.9 million. Since the outbreak of hostilities between the government and armed Tamil separatists in the mid 1980s, Tamil civilians have fled the island. At the end of 2000, approximately 65,000 Tamils were housed in 131 refugee camps in southern India while another 40,000 lived outside the Indian camps. More than 200,000 Tamils have sought refuge in the West.

Seventy per cent of the people are Buddhist and the country is dotted with stupas and sculptures of the Serene One. The official language, Sinhala, is spoken by 74%, while English is spoken competently by about 10% of the people. The climate is tropical monsoon with a lowlands average yearly temperature of 29°C. Health: Rabies outbreaks are common. Bring bottled water.

Transportation: Buses are extremely crowded. Trains are slow, unpredictable, and quite often late. Beware of pickpockets. Females should watch out for males with wandering hands.

Money: Credit cards are widely accepted. Many people working in the tourist industry rely on tips to bolster their modest wages. Tipping is a way of showing appreciation and understanding of the realities of life for these workers.

Traditional art includes woodcarving, weaving, pottery, and metalwork. Sri Lanka is known for its gems. Food is often fiery hot, with hoppers (pancakes) to wrap it all up.

JAPAN

Basics: Over 127 million people live in Japan and 84% practise Shintoism and Buddhism. Tokyo is the capital. You will find that many people speak English which they learned at school. Japan restricts which medications may be brought into the country. Consult the Japanese Embassy for a list of prohibited prescription drugs.

The train is the most efficient and popular method of transportation. The two other main forms are bus and taxi. If driving, please note that traffic rules are generally adhered to.

To show your gratitude, tips are given as gifts by placing them in specially printed envelopes.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELENA KAPULNIIK

Travel Tips

Carry prescription medicine in the original container along with the prescription. In tropical climates, drink lots of fluids, use a high factor sunscreen, wear a hat, and reduce your exposure to the sun. Always use a good insect repellant. When visiting temples or churches, dress appropriately according to the customs of the country.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS LECLERC

THAILAND

Basics: Ninety-five per cent of Thailand's 62 million people are Buddhists. Although Thai is the official language, English is widely spoken in major cities and business circles. The capital, Bangkok, is also called Krung Thep, meaning *city of angels*. Thailand has a warm, humid, and tropical monsoon climate. Temperatures in March and April average 33°C.

Miscellaneous: Avoid tap water. To reduce the risk of avian flu, avoid exposure to live poultry or birds. Renting cars is not recommended for visitors.

Etiquette: The head is the most sacred part of the body. Do not touch another's head or hair. Do not point your feet at people or religious images and figures. Women should maintain a distance of two feet from Buddhist monks and never hand anything to them directly. Use your right hand to pass a gift or other object of importance, such as a business card. The Thai custom is to support the right arm at the elbow using the left hand.

Tsunami Update: Popular tourist destinations in the Andaman Sea, including Phuket, Phi Phi, and parts of Krabi Province, were hard-hit by the tsunami of December 26, 2004. Life along the south Andaman coast is quickly returning to normal. Phuket has restored most services and many hotels are operating as normal. Khao Lak and Phi Phi Island remain severely affected.

THE FUTURE OF E-COMMUNICATION

A VANCOUVER COMPANY DESIGNS TOMORROW

BY SHERISE LACEY
ILLUSTRATION BY STEVE QUILALA

Your Canadian-based business is growing and moving into the Japanese market. First impressions are key. You must present your company in a professional manner, and committing a cultural faux pas is unacceptable. When faced with a language barrier, for example, there is help available to you. Two companies have combined strengths to create tools aimed directly at global communication.

Vancouver-based InSpot Development builds customized web tools for e-learning, recruitment, and performance improvement. "Our vision is to continue to use Internet technology to provide better services for e-learning," says Sebastian Okada, president and founder of InSpot Development. The company's InXstream Audio technology allows people anywhere in the world to instantly send and receive sound. "InXstream allows you to make a recording [audio or video], encode it into a streaming format that is web-page compatible, and transport it to a specified location, making it instantly available on a website. Files could be formatted in Real Audio, MP3, Windows Media, or even in Java." This creates instant access between people around the planet.

Meridian Resources, a Human Resources consulting company based in San Francisco, chose InSpot to develop tools for its online services. "InSpot seemed to be more on the cutting edge than the other developers that we spoke to," says managing director and founder Ted Dale. With the aid of InSpot's software, Meridian has created online services to offer clients a direct transfer of knowledge through web-based tools. Present clientele, such as Adobe, Cisco Systems, and Hewlett Packard, use Meridian's innovative and interactive products. "I think what's unique about Meridian," says Dale, "is its blend of the service and the tools. Plenty of competitors are in the area of seminars or workshops, as well as many people who do various kinds of consulting and coaching, but there are very few who combine it with web tools in the way that we have."

Born and raised in Japan, Dale recognized, even before the Internet existed, that businesses needed cultural unity. "When I came back to the States, the whole intercultural field was pretty new at the time, so I started doing business-related training for Americans going to Japan." When the Internet emerged, Meridian's services expanded beyond Japan, and their technology grew beyond VHS tapes. "Where we add value is when companies are working globally, or outside of their cultural milieu."

Meridian has developed several tools for communication; one is called GlobeSmart. A combination of InSpot's technology and Meridian's content, GlobeSmart works by providing companies and employees with knowledge of a

given country. Information on culture, customs, greetings – even information on presenting gifts – is accessible. Using GlobeSmart technology prevents a company from making costly mistakes, and prepares employees for potential challenges in foreign countries.

InSpot did all of the programming for GlobeSmart, and provided the audio technology as well. Using InXstream Audio, the company creates sound clips, which are translated into different languages. Employees listen to common phrases from their chosen country, and then practise them by recording their own audio clips. By listening to the original audio translations, and then practising them, the user perfects his or her presentation skills. Something as simple as mispronouncing a person's name is a costly mistake that GlobeSmart easily prevents.

Meridian Resources plans to incorporate even more of InSpot's technology within GlobeSmart. "I talked to someone who came back from India," says Dale, "and they were talking about their discussions with Hewlett Packard in India, actually about GlobeSmart. One of the feedback points they had was that GlobeSmart would be much more useful if it had some short video clips in it." The addition of video into GlobeSmart allows clients to see, as well as hear, other cultures.

"People want to learn about cultures and how to relate to people from different countries," says Sebastian of InSpot. "To understand the culture of a country and the people, sometimes it's not enough to read. It may not create a visual interpretation for someone trying to learn the exact mannerisms of the country they're planning to do business with. You can see how people greet each other, how they behave in a group."

The future of InSpot's technology is evolving. "We are about to launch a new tool called SpokenTest," says Sebastian. "The service is going to be used to assess candidates' oral skills before they are called, or invited, to an interview." For example, a company creates a survey for potential employees. SpokenTest then evaluates their personalities and how they respond to given circumstances. Sebastian continues, "This information can be completed either by telephone or over the Internet. The candidate records their response. The candidate's recorded audio clips are now stored on the server, and can be listened to by several people. Managers can group together with supervisors, and employees, to see what they think of this person based on their responses to the questions."

> "To understand the culture of a country and the people, sometimes it's not enough to read."

Using SpokenTest, a larger group of people within a company can assess job candidates. Additionally, a candidate's responses can be sent to people in different locations, or evaluated through Internet or telephone conferences. "Any person can make a well presented resumé, but listening to that person speak makes a far greater impression of what that person's character is really like, and whether or not you want to hire them."

The Internet started a revolution in human communication. Innovative companies like InSpot Development and Meridian Resources are taking this technology to new heights. In the face of so much cultural misunderstanding, these two companies are dedicated to connectedness, proving that the unison of people with similar ideals can produce astounding results. Entrepreneurs Ted Dale and Sebastian Okada are using these ideals to benefit international business.

Worth Its Weight in Gold

A Look at Kobe Beef

BY STEVE QUILALA
ILLUSTRATION BY MEILYNN DATAYAN

For over 150 years, Japan's Kobe beef industry has struggled to find the balance between modern production methods and a deep-rooted appreciation for craft and tradition. In the 21st century, the struggle between old and new has intensified with Kobe beef's newfound popularity. The sweeping reforms of the Meiji Restoration of the 1860s attempted to modernize Japan's feudal society and put the country on equal footing with the industrial world. All aspects of Japanese life adopted or adapted western institutions. For the beef industry, this meant importing European breeds of cattle to improve domestic stock. The imported breeds, including Shorthorn, Devon, Holstein, and Angus, were crossbred and became known as Wagyu cattle. Wa is an old term for things Japanese; gyu means beef.

There are two main breeds of Wagyu: Black Wagyu and Red Wagyu, with many sub-strains between them. Tattori and Tajima, the two main sub-strains of Black Wagyu, are most closely associated with Kobe beef. Wagyu beef is genetically predisposed to high amounts of marbling, streaks of fat within the muscle. This is measured in the rib eye cut of muscle. The highest grade in Canada is Canada Prime; in the US, it's USDA Prime. According to Joe O'Connell, past-president of the California Barbeque Association, Wagyu beef contains 14 to 20 per cent more marbled fat than USDA Prime or Canada Prime cuts. In fact, Tajima Black Wagyu has significantly higher fat content than any other breed of cattle.

All Kobe beef is Wagyu, but not all Wagyu becomes Kobe beef. Traditionally, for Wagyu to qualify as Kobe beef, the cattle had to be born, bred, and slaughtered in the Kobe province. Japanese ranchers believed that Wagyu needed pampering. They ate organic grains, barley, and wheat. The cows were treated to sake massages and drank the occasional beer. Some were even exposed to the works of Mozart and Beethoven. Ranchers believed that happy, relaxed cows made for more tender meat. Unfortunately, few Japanese ranchers, and even fewer foreign Wagyu ranchers, follow these traditions today.

The cows were treated to sake massages and drank the occasional beer. Some were even exposed to the works of Mozart and Beethoven.

Today, most Black Wagyu are exported to Australia, the western United States, and parts of Canada, where land and grain are less expensive than in Japan. They are still subjected to the traditional Kobe beef diet. And unlike their North American cousins, Wagyu aren't exposed to bovine growth hormones. The cattle are returned to Kobe weeks before slaughter so they can earn the title of Kobe beef; those that aren't processed in Kobe are sold as "Kobe-style" Wagyu beef.

John Cadieux, executive chef at Monk's Grill in Whistler, believes that Wagyu beef is a better alternative for people who appreciate the importance of a cleaner, natural lifestyle. However, a pound of the highest-quality authentic Kobe beef can cost several hundred dollars, two and a half times more than the best organic meats.

Times are changing, however. As ranchers begin to sell "Kobe-style" beef on the North American market, authentic Kobe beef may lose some of its cachet. It is doubtful, however, that traditional Kobe beef will become as pedestrian as ground chuck.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