

**GIDRA  
GONE MAD**

# Newsweek

Spring 2000 : Volume 1 : Issue 3

## ARE ASIAN MEN ON A ROLL

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...OR  
WHAT?

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## Everybody, Wayne Chang Tonight.

### Behind the Cover:

Lisa Rosevear and her Asian guyfriend, the aforementioned Mr. Chang, were the subject of a Feb. 21 Newsweek article which had us, that is, the rest of us Asian Guys & Company, umm, well, "rolling."

"Asian men are the next 'trophy boyfriends,' predicted Chang, an apparently horoscopic internet journalist who coasted through the highly circulated article on little more than a wack premise and a fact checker's nightmare.

And talk about high drama.

It was Chang who made himself out to be the literal object of his girlfriend's affection. And well, Lisa's looking like she just won an Oscar.

There may even be some fully circulating poetics to this S.E. Hinton-like love story, in that the harbinger of this *identi-exisiteni senti* is no more unlikely a messenger than the majority man's (like-complected but apparently not-quite-pleased, and sadly ex-) significant others.

In light of the humor and pathos offered in such well-meaning but ultimately flawed treatises on the state of the relationship race, this issue of *Gidra* is devoted to the po-mo notion that it's finally okay to be an Asian Man, bless our nerdie.com souls.

So, if you Asian Pacific American alpha-males didn't already know, This is Now, and now is the time to don those ped-jets and UV-coated Oakley tiaras. Ladies and gentlemen of *Gidra*, we are proud to say, it's finally, officially, time to roll.



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### EDITORIAL RE-COLLECTIVE:

**TEXT** Moe Chiba, Rodney Ferrao, M. Evelina Galang, Mung-Bien Gim, Ayako Hagihara, Sonjia Hyun, Naomi Iwasaki, Traci Akemi Kato-Kiriyama, Liz Sunwha Kaufman, Alex Ko, Donatella Mia Lai, Tram Nguyen, Vy Nguyen, Urvi Patel, Leland T. Saito, Nikhil Shah, Edren Sumagaysay, Richard Wang, Eric Wat, Ellen Dionne Wu, Bryan Yamami • **DESIGN** Paul Chan, Nancy Endo, Rich Garcia, Ayako Hagihara, Sheri Kamimura, Page Kishiyama, Jeff Liu, Mike Nakayama, Tram Nguyen • **ART** May Jong, Jenny Kim, Vicky Murakami, Felicia Perez, Jennifer Sun, Rickmond Wong, James Yuktanonda • **PHOTOS** Paul Chan, Page Kishiyama, Alex Ko, Corky Lee, Jeff Liu, Scarlet Sy, Ernesto Vigoreaux, Bryan Yamami, Additional pics courtesy of Visual Communications, Yuri Kochiyama, Japanese American National Museum • **COVER** Jeff Liu • **CYBERNAUT** Wataru Ebihara • **EDITORIAL COMMITTEE** Rodney Ferrao, Ayako Hagihara, Sheri Kamimura, Glen Kitayama, Alex Ko, John Lee, Jeff Liu, Tram Nguyen, Jennifer Sun, Ernesto Vigoreaux, Evelyn Yoshimura • **ADVISORS** Rocky Chin, Bruce Iwasaki, Mike Murase, Alan Nishio, Glenn Omatsu, Meg Thornton, Arvli Ward, Evelyn Yoshimura • **PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE** Bruce Iwasaki, Abraham Ferrer, Eric Wat • **MODEL MINORITIES** Nadya Guevara, Kennedy Kabasares, Alyssa Kang, John Lee, Brenda Lieras • **'NUFF RESPECT** Dennis Arguelles, Annalisa Enrile and GABRIELA, Abraham Ferrer, Peter Lee, Alan Nishio, John Saito, Jr, Diep Tran, Janice Harumi Yen, all generous donors, hereandnow, Liberty Hill Foundation, Little Tokyo Service Center, Sabrina and Asian Youth Center, Union Center Cafe, Visiting Violette, Foundation Funkollective, Visual Communications staff for putting up with us • **PRODUCTION FACILITY** Visual Communications • **FISCAL SPONSORSHIP** Aisarema, Inc.

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Dec. 9, 1999

Dear Gidra Folks,

Keep up the great work! We're always looking forward to the next issue. The range of coverage by Gidra is of great interest to my students in Asian American Studies [at De Anza Community College in San Jose].

The last article on Cambodian teenagers in Long Beach helped to motivate several students to form a club for Cambodian students on campus. We've just started to analyze what the community looks like in the Silicon Valley.

I'm writing to let you know of the impact of Gidra outside of L.A. and Southern California. And to offer you some support.

Please accept this contribution to further the publishing of Gidra and help you, the staff, achieve your goals for the newsmagazine.

I'd like to make this contribution in memory of Steve Tatsukawa, as you know, a long time staff member of the old Gidra, and a seminal figure in the development of Asian American identity.

So, good luck with the future development of Gidra. Best wishes to everyone for a happy New Year and millennium.

Always,  
Duane Kubo

(Note: Kubo was recipient of this year's Steve Tatsukawa Award, given out annually at Visual Communications' ChiliVisions event held every summer in Los Angeles. He was a member of the Gidra staff in the late 1960s and early 1970s.)



In memory of Steve Tatsukawa

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# You better care, dammit!

Pink and red party fliers are fluttering on the streets. Day-old red roses are on sale, in bulk. The department stores have moved on from Valentine's Day Sales to President's Day Sales. Now that V-day is past and Cupid has laid his arrows of love to rest for another year, we thought it was high time that Gidra had a "Relationship" issue.

Why look at the tired-old story of how boy meets girl or girl meets girl or boy meets boy? Because things aren't what they used to be (sorry, Austin, ain't no mo' Free Love, baby). We've got whips and chains, a guy who wants women (not girls, thank you), family members who aggravate an already trying relationship (ok, maybe this one's getting a little old) and boys from Pyongyang and girls from Seoul.

And like the dragon-esque monster we're named after, we stretched our wings a little further and nose-dived through our Asian Pacific Islander American communities to more interesting relationships.

Like how our community relates to our youth, especially those who get caught up in the juvenile crime and punishment system that we callously refer to as "the justice system."

And like relationships in the South Asian community. We know that domestic violence happens in Asian communities. But is it something in South Asian culture that condones domestic violence? Or is it a manifestation of a patriarchal society that uses culture to justify its actions?

We also got a glimpse of the relationship between women of color and war—both the Second World War and the ensuing war of denial by governments and struggles for reparations.

Of course, you can't ignore our relationship to pop culture. Parents and giga-parents will know what it's like to raise a tamagotchi; tapioca lovers will feud on where to find the best boba drinks; and since when have Buddhists been "in" on the haute couture fashion circuit?

Before we go all over the place with this relationship stuff, let's get back to the point of this issue — love, after all, makes the world go 'round, right?

"Love is man's natural endowment, but he doesn't know how to use it. He refuses to recognize the power of love because of his love of power," said Dick Gregory, a comedian, nutritionist and civil rights activist.

The point here is that too many people these days are fixated with status, money, educational attainment and a lot of other crap like that. For APIAs, add to these social values the pressures created by the Model Minority Myth, our precarious place in the affirmative action debate and increasing demographics, especially in the state of California, where we're expected to exceed 10% of the population during Census 2000.

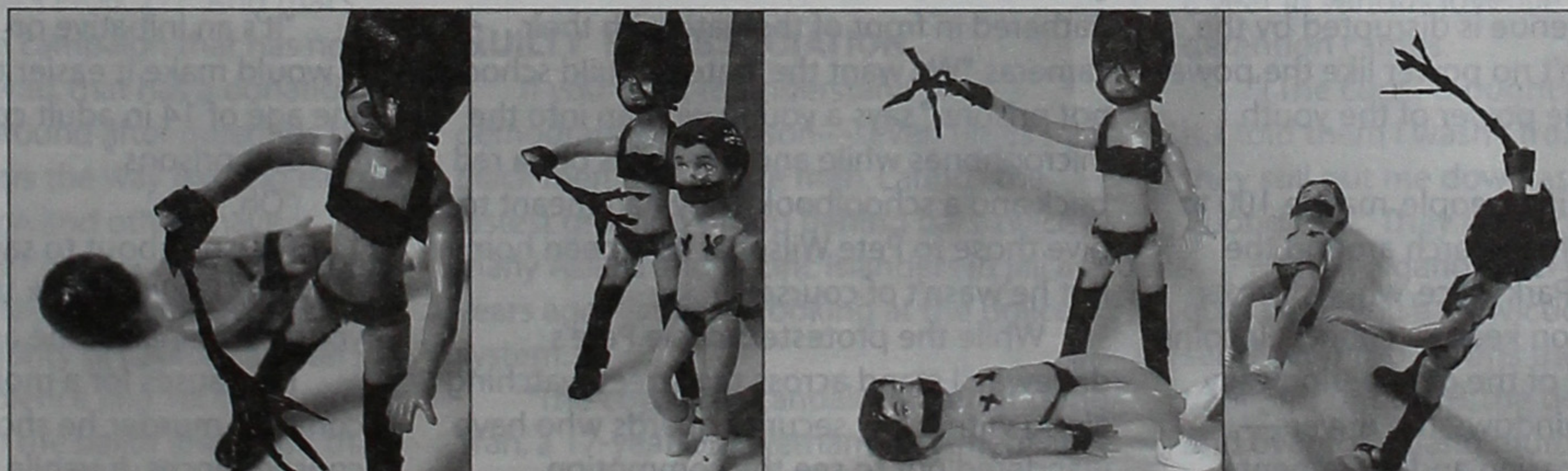
It's pretty messed up when people think we don't care. Apathetic, they call those Asian American engineering or computer science majors. Nerds, they jeer, not knowing that societal expectations of high skills and glass-ceiling income drive some Asian Americans to strive to become more than what they want to or can be.

All this is to say is, as individuals and as a community, Asian Americans have to understand and learn to work with each other and with other people of color. Not only that, Asian Americans will have to start making *noise* — register to vote, cast the ballot, talk to the media — in order to make sure our needs are addressed.

While we're on the topic of "nerds," a little physics lesson. Newton's Third Law of Motion says, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Basically, you gotta know that people give a damn about you. Whether you like it or not. And that means you have to care too. Every action creates a reaction. Everything you do has an effect on someone. Everything you do is affected by someone or something.

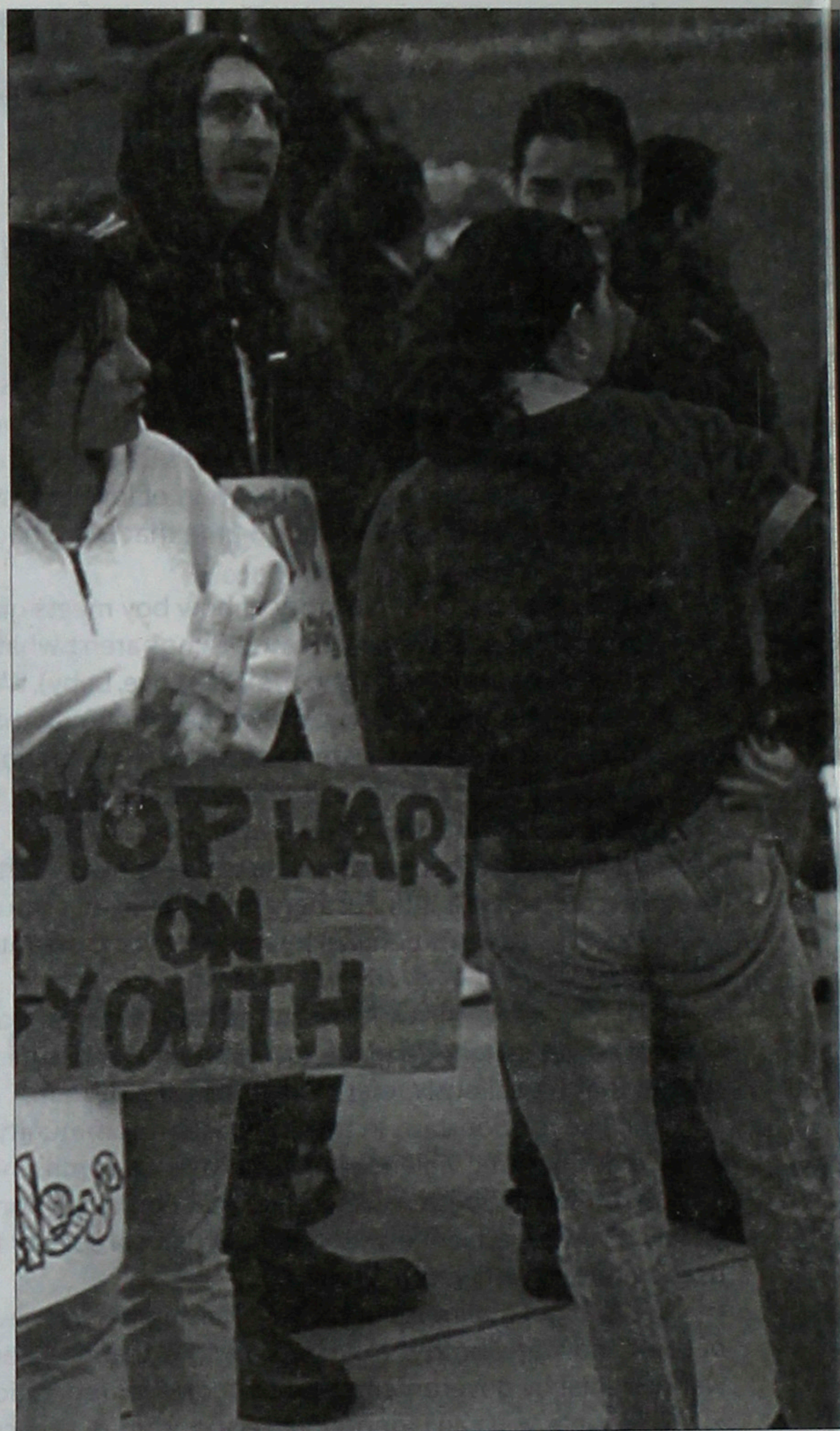
So this is how Gidra's relationship issue came about. We hope you enjoy it. Or better yet, enjoy it with a friend, family member, lover, co-worker, teacher, student — someone you care about.



Photos: Page Kishiyama



# JUVENILE CRIME ADULT TIME



By TRAM QUANG NGUYEN

**I**t's chilly on an early Saturday evening when the quiet of Century City's exclusive condominium neighborhood off Galaxy Avenue is disrupted by the shouting: "Ain't no power like the power of the youth 'cuz the power of the youth don't stop!"

A crowd of young people, maybe 100 to 150 strong, begin their march around the gated driveway of Park Place, where former governor Pete Wilson keeps a condo. Lincolns and BMWs pull out of the gate periodically. Behind rolled-up windows, the drivers—many of them Caucasian and retirement-age—mostly shake their heads as some protesters try to hand them flyers printed

with the words "No on Prop. 21."

The rally ends at 6 p.m. with a symbolic gesture for the news crews that have gathered in front of the gate with their cameras. "We want the state to build schools not prisons," says a young woman into the microphones while another holds out a red brick and a schoolbook. They had meant to give those to Pete Wilson if he'd been home, but he wasn't of course.

While the protesters circle Pete's driveway, I stand across the street watching along with a few security guards who have wandered out to see the commotion.

"What's this about?" a guard asks me. He looks Pilipino, in his fifties maybe.

"Well, they're demonstrating against Prop. 21. Have you heard of it?"

He shakes his head.

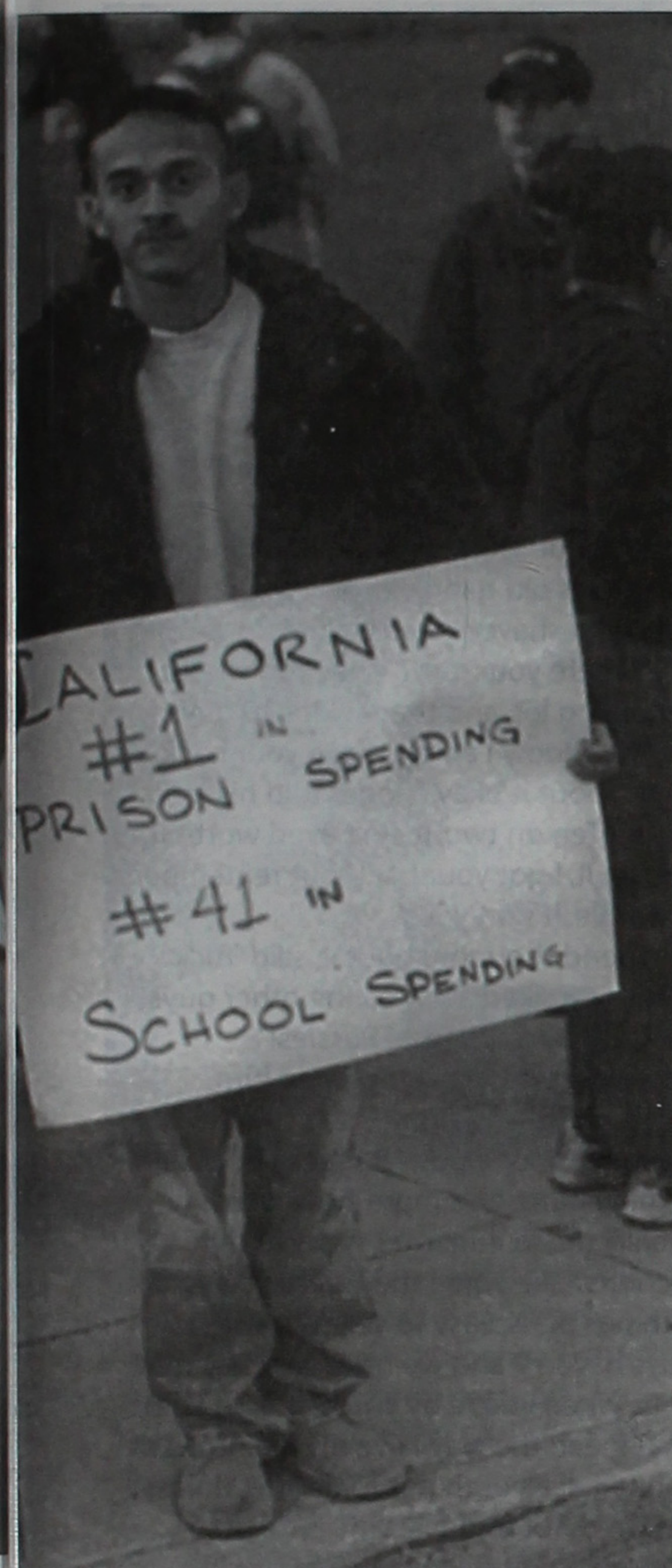
"It's an initiative on the ballot this March. It would make it easier to try juveniles from the age of 14 in adult courts and send them to adult prisons."

"Oh."

He isn't about to say anything more, so I ask him, "Do you think that's right, to punish young criminals same as adults?"

He pauses for a moment. "Yes. If a kid commits murder, he should pay the consequences. Juvenile Hall, that's too easy for him. They should go to prison, they should really pay for their crime."





## DEADLY ASSAULT ON YOUTH

The campaign against Prop. 21 so far has run up against two major hurdles: the popularity of tough-on-crime attitudes and widespread ignorance about what this proposition really is. When I talk to friends, even those who work with youth, a few of them still ask, "What's Prop. 21?" And that's been common in a campaign that has no money to buy a TV ad, that has a donation box for \$5 going around after meetings but no corporate donors the way gas and electric companies, Chevron and others have donated for Prop. 21 (to the tune of \$50,000 and \$25,000). The fear is real that, come election day, a majority of California voters will read "Gang Violence and Youth Crime Prevention Act" on the ballot and think, that sounds good to me.

Javier Stauring works for the Catholic

Archdiocese as a chaplain in Central Juvenile Hall. In his seven years at Central, he's seen kids he counseled sent on to county and state prisons to serve 25 years, 30 years, life—many of them 17 or younger.

"Even if this law passes, at least you have to know that you've done everything you can to fight it," he tells a group of youth workers one night at a meeting.

As Javier emphasizes every chance he gets, kids are already going to adult prison and kids are already doing life sentences. The vast majority—80% in L.A. County according to the public defender—who come up for fitness hearings for violent crimes get sent to the adult system. A recent study released by the Justice Policy Institute found that minority youths in L.A. County are twice as likely to get sent to adult court as white youths charged with similar violent crimes.

Prop. 21 is just the latest in what's been a decade-long assault on youth, especially those of color. And if passed, it would be the knock-out punch that sends juvenile justice in California back to its pre-reform, 19<sup>th</sup> century days of punishment for kids without even the semblance of rehabilitation. What's more, a proposition once passed would need a two-thirds majority of the legislature to overturn—unheard of in history.

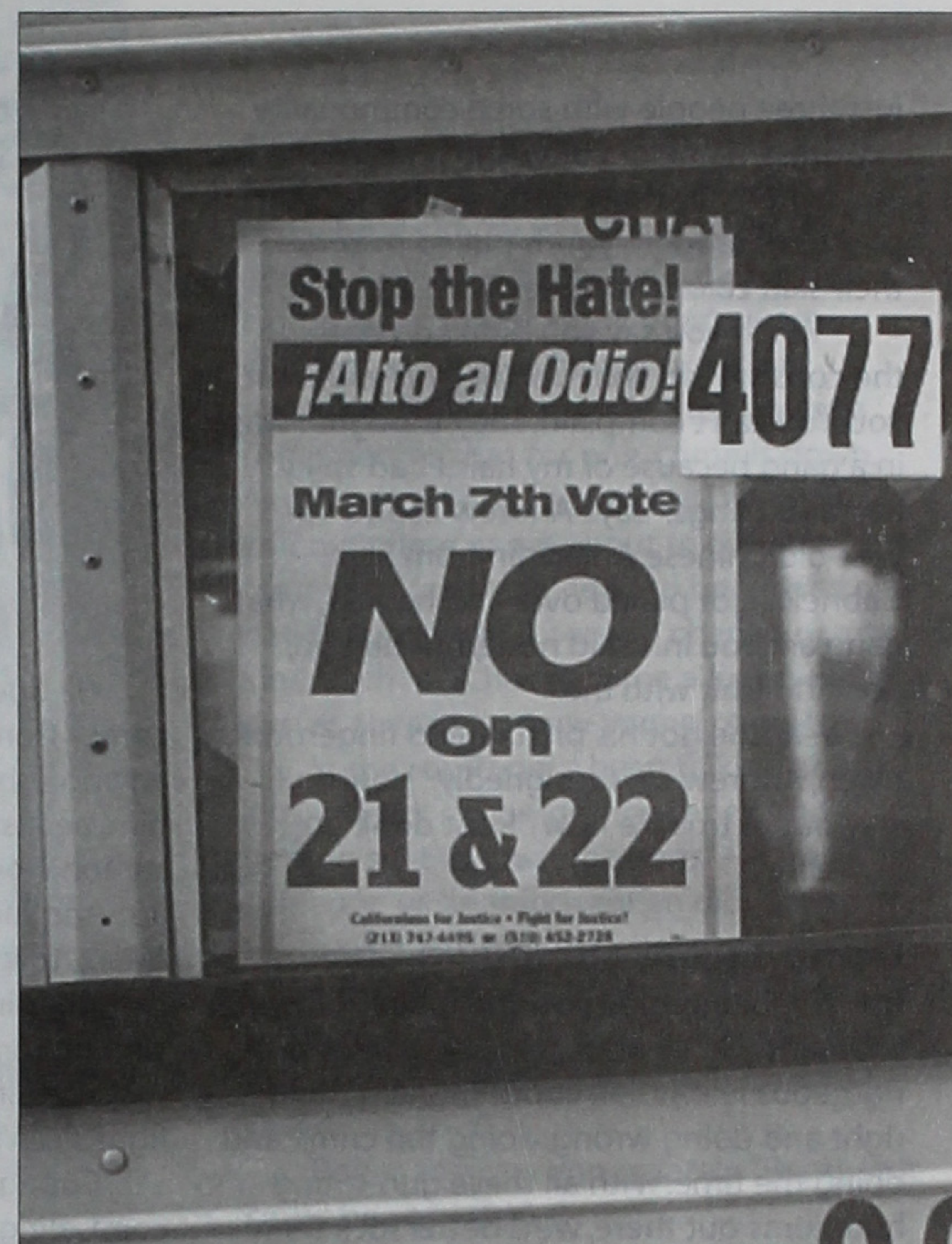
Robert Lizana, 22, an African American youth activist who did time for armed robbery, says bitterly, "They might as well drop us in the sewer. Forget about building more prisons. Turn every house into a prison, put a prison in the back yard."

## GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION

If you want to understand the demographics of prison—seven times more Black men than White men, Latinos the fastest growing group behind bars, twice as many Asians and Pacific Islanders in jail as 10 years ago—start by looking at the police system.

"The cops are scandalous," says Cuong Tran, a 17-year-old Vietnamese American from Rosemead.

Cuong is one of those youths who



illustrate how easy it is to get stuck with a gang label. In eighth grade he started getting into fights regularly at school, first by himself, and then backing one another up with a group of friends. They started calling themselves the Outlaws. As their group of homies grew, some later branched off and joined the larger V Boys and Asian Boyz gangs. Cuong, short at 5'5" with slicked-back hair, didn't claim and resisted his friends' urging to join the popular Asian Boyz. But when his homeboy got into a shouting match with a Mexican guy that led to an after-school rumble, Cuong and the "gang" were there to back him up with clubs and bats. Four of them were busted for attempted murder, which was later reduced to assault with a deadly weapon. Cuong did a year in various juvenile halls and detention camps.

"(The cops) thought the Asian Boyz did it. I told them I wasn't from nowhere, and they still put me down as Asian Boyz," Cuong said. "They don't care."

Having a gang label will almost guarantee you a conviction, and a longer sentence. Prop. 21 ups the ante to 25 years to life for under 18, the death penalty for 18 and over for a gang murder. The police don't even have to prove gang affiliation or association; the legal definition of a gang is



just three people with some commonality like dress, name or color. And it makes it easy when they have gang databases with photos of random youth pulled over for their skin color and style of dress or hair.

"When you say you didn't do nothing, the cops say no, shut up. They hit you, beat you. You can't complain. They thought I was in a gang because of my hair. I had spiky hair and bangs," says Andrew Lam, a 16-year-old Chinese American from San Gabriel. "I got pulled over and he said, what gang are you in. I said none, but he said, don't bullshit with me."

Yeah, he got his picture and fingerprints taken, Andrew says resignedly. "How do I stay out of trouble now? I just don't go nowhere."

## DOING CRIME AND DOING TIME

The people who are the most adamantly in favor of Prop. 21 employ a righteous line. It's all about morality, doing right and doing wrong, doing the crime and doing the time. With all these gun-toting hoodlums out there, we'd better lock them up and protect the law-abiding citizens. Why bother seeing these violent and dangerous offenders as kids, or trying to understand why they commit crime? It's simple, they're bad.

Admittedly, Cuong Tran is nobody's idea of a Boy Scout. He says it himself, "Yeah, I got a temper. I guess my temper's got me in a lot of trouble."

# JUVENILE CRIME ADULT TIME

He doesn't know where the anger comes from, and he doesn't start fights anymore, but when someone challenges him, he just can't walk away. He was at a gas station when a Latino guy with a baby accused him of maddogging the baby. "Man, how would his baby know I'm maddogging him! After school he was waiting for me, I'm just ready to get down with him. If I have to fight, then I have to fight. I can't walk away."

Cuong volunteers that he's never tried counseling before, that nobody's ever tried talking to him.

"Sometimes I just punch the wall, or just lift weights. I be having so much stuff in my head, sometimes I don't know how to handle it," he says. "I don't want people to think I'm a punk."

Roger Lee, 20, understands the pressure not to back down when you're constantly getting stared down or hit up.

"Sometimes I make eye contact with someone, I'll just look away. But there will be times when something inside says, who the fuck does he think he is?" Roger explains. A former gangbanger, he has done almost three years in a California Youth Authority for home invasion robbery.

"I understand what they're saying that trouble follows them. I have a lot of youth who tell me that, but I tell them you don't help the situation by shaving your head, wearing baggy pants," he says. "In an ideal society, we should be allowed to dress like that and not be harassed, but we don't live in an ideal

society."

Out on parole and working for the Gang Awareness Program at the Korean Youth and Community Center, Roger grew his hair out and avoids dressing in what could be construed as gang attire. But not looking gangsta can also mean some people see him as a punk, he says. He's had to learn some lessons about putting macho pride in check and the difference between words and actions.

Recently, he went bowling and ran into a guy from his old gang, Jefron. Five Pilipinos with shaved heads came up to them—"where you from?" They took it out to the parking lot, and there were 10 guys.

"Ay, you know I always have your back. But think about it okay," Roger told his homeboy. "Ten on two, it ain't even worth it. If it's worth it, I got your back, but remember I'm on parole. It's on you."

His friend thought about it, said "fuck it," and they walked away as the other guys yelled after them, "Bitches! Pussies!"

"I know it was really tough on him. Walking away from a fight, that's the toughest thing for a guy," Roger says. "Like now I know more and more, how words don't really mean much. It's more about your actions. Like when they were yelling all those things at us. Easy to yell that when you guys have 10 and we have two. Say that shit to us when you're by yourself. Also with actions, I mean the way I live my life now. I'm not gonna tell a youth not to do this, unless I'm prepared not to do it."

Gangbanging since the sixth grade, Roger explains the attraction his gang held for him. He was 12 when his church basketball team got cancelled, so he began hanging out at a nearby liquor store playing Streetfighter II. He met older guys from Jefron, a Pilipino and Korean gang, and they gave him what he was looking for—the feeling of having a *hyung*, or older brother.

But by the time he turned 17, he was already growing tired of the gang life. It was a lifestyle that had him carrying a metal shop hammer in his pocket because he didn't trust himself to carry a gun, and ordering glass bottles of Arizona Ice Tea or Snapple wherever he went in case he needed a quick weapon. Even now, his eyes casually track the police officers, the young Koreans and Latinos coming out of the coffehouse.

"Ay, see that guy over there. I know him from a gang. My homeboy beat up his little







brother. And he came with all his homies, he was trying to act the tough guy," he nods toward a tall Asian guy in sweats and a pager. The guy gets his coffee and leaves without looking at us, peels off in a lowered car with the music blasting and a girl on the passenger side.

"That was pretty funny," Roger chuckles.

In 1996 he did a home invasion robbery, not for the money but to show that he was "down for my gang, down to do crazy stuff like that." Two of the guys got caught, ratted out the others and by June of that year, he was locked up. He plea-bargained for 11 years, got sent to a Youth Authority upstate and paroled after two years and nine months. What if Prop. 21 had been law back then?

"I wouldn't be talking to you today," he says. "In that crime I was going in with a gun. The fact it was a crime I committed with my gang, I had a gun, I was 16, so if Prop. 21 had passed back then, I'm sure I would have been tried as an adult. I'm sure I would have got a minimum of 10 years, and I wouldn't be talking to you today. Who knows what would have happened to me then?"

In prison, he thought about his family, his victims, who his real homies were. He

decided he'd done the crime so he was going to do his time straight, and when he got out things were going to be different. But Roger doesn't credit the Youth Authority with its racial riots and negative atmosphere for "rehabilitating" him; it was his family, mentors from the Gang Awareness Program and the Bible that got him through.

### LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE

Roger drives me back and I'm thinking about the average law-abiding, hardworking person. Those of us who don't live the "underworld" lifestyle as he calls it, and come home every night to TV reports that feed our fear of young people. Crime must be up, doesn't it always go up? And those young (Black and Hispanic) kids, they've got guns and they're wild. Another shooting, another carjacking, nobody can feel safe these days.

The statistics point to a different reality: youth crime is down 20.8% from 1991 to 1996, according to the state justice

department. Youth violent crime is down 5.1%. Those who actually live these experiences know this. There's less gang graffiti, fewer gangsters dying, old gangs fading away; Roger knew things were different as soon as he got out of jail.

But still, it's a hard thing to convince some people that, for one, crime is down. And hardest of all, that young people who commit crime or are about to commit crime more than anything need to be helped and not thrown away. A second chance, or any kind of chance, has become a luxury society denies to far too many young people.

In the car, Roger's been talking about kids in adult prison getting raped and getting sent to "bust missions" — stab someone or do things for an older inmate.

I ask him, "What if I was to say, this kid killed someone. He's a menace to society, and he took someone's life. He deserves whatever he's getting in adult prison. Why should I care?"

Roger answers immediately. "Because it could be your kid."

"My parents never thought I'd end up in jail. I wasn't born a home invader. Before, my mom used to be like that—all those gangsters, fuck'em. Why don't you line them up in a row and shoot all of them, that's what she said. But then when she came to visit me in jail, she used to be almost in tears. She'd see all the other guys with their families. And they weren't any different from us."





# Why David Wong should be free.

By LIZ SUNWHA KAUFMAN



Photo by: Corky Lee

Cheng Fung Ying, mother of David Wong at a support rally for him in Chinatown, New York City 9/12/99.

*The role of the political prisoner is critical. His voice must be heard. From them, we learn of history, struggles, humanity's defilements, humanity's needs, prison life; human rights, government misconduct, truth, justice/injustice, human values, human frailties, societal ills and strengths. We learn of ourselves as individuals, and also as part of this society and part of this nation. We must know more about our political prisoners, who they are, what they did, how they think, what motivated them in the struggle in America, and thank them for their contributions. Support political prisoners! They are the heartbeat of struggle! They are the reminders of what the struggle is about!*

— Yuri Kochiyama, from her 1996 speech "The Role of Political Prisoners: Internationally and Here"

David Wong, an immigrant from Fujian Province in China, was a restaurant worker in New York City's Chinatown. In 1984, he was arrested and charged with robbing the owner. He was sentenced in Suffolk County, and transferred to Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York. Two weeks later, an African American inmate named Tyrone Julius was murdered in the prison yard, and 16 months later David was convicted by an all white jury of Julius' murder.

David Wong is now serving 25 years to life for a crime he did not commit. He has taught himself English and conducted his own legal research during the last 13 years in prison. David has continued to galvanize support despite prison officials' constant efforts to silence him, including a guard brutality incident in which an officer beat him

and broke his fingers.

David Wong was a convenient target for a frame-up since he had no family in the U.S., did not speak English and was unfamiliar with the legal system. David recognizes the vital role that racism, anti-immigrant sentiment and poverty play in criminalizing young immigrants of color. "I look at success or failure not in terms of whether my appeal will succeed," he said. "I think my success is how much I and those wonderful people (on my support committee) accomplish to make the system a little bit better."

Here are the facts of David Wong's case:

- From over 800 inmates in the yard, wearing the same prison garb, David and the only other Asian inmate (Tse Kin Cheong) were picked by guards for questioning.
- During the trial, the prosecution had only two witnesses: a tower guard who saw the incident from over 100 yards away, and an inmate who had a long record of forgery, grand larceny and other crimes, and received a letter recommending early parole in exchange for testimony. Initially, he could not distinguish between David and Tse Kin Cheong. Affidavits from prisoners willing to testify on David's behalf were suppressed and no evidence was ever found linking David to the murder.
- David's court appointed translator was found during a search of local Chinese restaurants. She did not speak his dialect (Fu Zhounese), did



not have any experience as a legal translator, with legal terminology or simultaneous translation. During the trial, she said on record that she and David were having trouble communicating, and the court had no response.

- No murder weapon was every found, and the medical examiner testified that the knife wound that killed Tyrone Julius was so deep that blood would have soiled the attacker's clothing; there was no blood on David. In lieu of concrete evidence, the prosecutor used racial stereotyping, stating that the blow was so precise that the assailant must have been a martial arts expert.

- David had never met Julius and had no reason to kill him. He had only been at the prison for two weeks. Inmates who witnessed the murder stated that David was not the killer.

- Mrs. Julius (Tyrone Julius' widow) had never heard of David Wong, was not informed that anyone had been convicted, and said, "I've always assumed that the real killers were still out there. Whoever really did it, I'd really like to know. I want to see justice served. Absolutely." (David Chen; New York Times)

- A prison guard who spoke anonymously stated, "I could not pin that incident on that guy. I was surprised, because he got along with people and he was never a problem." (David Chen; New York Times)

## HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED:

### Write to David

David Wong #84A5320  
Auburn Correctional Facility  
135 State Street, PO Box 618  
Auburn, NY 13024

### Contact the committee

David Wong Support Committee  
PO Box 525236  
Flushing, NY 11352  
(718) 461-4010  
Website: [www.geocities.com/tokyo/pagoda/7111/davidwong.html](http://www.geocities.com/tokyo/pagoda/7111/davidwong.html)  
Email: [dwongsc@ibm.net](mailto:dwongsc@ibm.net)

### Sign petitions

- Donate funds to David's legal defense
- Attend or perform in our fundraising events
- Invite the support committee to your community to speak about David's case
- Request information or press packets to distribute
- Join the support committee mailing list

FREE DAVID WONG! FREE MUMIA AND ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS!

## Dear Mumia Supporter,

Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter was falsely charged and convicted for a murder he did not commit, and served 19 years in prison. Even though a famous middle-weight boxing champion, he was implicated in the murder of three white people in a New Jersey bar on circumstantial evidence.

It is on such flimsy grounds, rooted in the foundation of America's flagrantly racist judicial system, that thousands of African American lives are so easily destroyed and herded into inhumane penitentiaries. And America's dirty little secret of spiriting away scores of political prisoners who have challenged the system's racism and abuse of power is now coming to light. The recent releases of Puerto Rican revolutionaries and former Black Panther Geronimo ji jaga Pratt have come after great public protest. These cases exposed the government's political vindictiveness which lacked any real evidence, but kept many political prisoners, from all backgrounds, incarcerated for decades just the same. Many remain in prison to this date, for fighting what they believe to be just causes against a corrupt and degenerate capitalist political system.

The impending execution of Mumia Abu Jamal, a former Black Panther and prominent journalist, is perhaps the most profound case in point. Mumia was targeted because he was an outspoken Black activist who wrote relentless criticism of the Philadelphia police department and the corrupt Mayor Frank Rizzo's constant abuse on the local Black community. In particular, he railed angrily against the police for their extreme assaults against a Black grassroots group called MOVE, resulting in a firebombed home which killed several innocent people while destroying an entire city block. The police subsequently framed Mumia in the murder of a police officer on circumstantial evidence. Today, Mumia's life is in imminent danger, as he sits on death row with an approaching execution date.

While you reflect on the compelling story of Hurricane Carter, keep in mind that the story does not end here. The lives of political prisoners such as Mumia Abu Jamal will only have a just ending if people like yourself pursue true justice and challenge the American judicial system. There are thousands upon thousands of inmates filling what has become a marketable prison industry. And within that massive prison population, there are political prisoners such as Mumia Abu Jamal, who have sacrificed their lives so that you and I can live in a more just and equal society.

FREE MUMIA ABU JAMAL & ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS!

In Unity and Struggle

Yuri Kochiyama and Greg Morozumi



# NATIVE INDIANS?

## CONSERVATISM IN THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

BY NIKHIL SHAH

When reflecting on immigrant societies in the U.S., an observation by Noam Chomsky comes to mind: "Diaspora communities tend to be... more extremist, chauvinistic and fanatical than people in the home country." Although Chomsky was referring to the Jewish community and their support for Zionist causes, this assertion also holds for the Asian Indian immigrant community in the United States, particularly those immigrants that arrived after 1965.

It wasn't really surprising then that in 1994 the Los Angeles-based Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA) gave its "Hindu of the Year" award to a known Indian fascist politician, Bal Thackeray, who was an avid admirer of Hitler and was responsible for instituting programs

prompted the relatively recent wave of Indian immigrants to the U.S. Most of these immigrants arrived as professionals. Later, some came under family reunification preferential categories. However, the number of professionals among Indian immigrants was high enough to proportionally outnumber those in other ethnic groups.

By 1975 the number of Asian Indians in the U.S. had risen to over 175,000.

Around this time, the question of self-representation and how this community wished to be collectively known to others first surfaced. Although these immigrants were economically successful on account of their professional backgrounds, they felt culturally marginalized.

The attitudes and many of the daily practices of these immigrants were alien to their neighbors

in the new homeland. This, combined with their darker skin color and their material success, made them susceptible to various forms of racism. In many aspects, the racism the Indian community encountered was similar to the discrimination faced by most other first and second generation immigrants. But

India was still the same country they had left in the 1960s and 70s. They were unable or unwilling to accept the various changes that had taken place in India, and on account of their marginalization in American society, decided to cling to an obsolete image of their homeland.

This false belief is seen in many orthodox practices that members of the Indian community insist on continuing, such as strict marriages and rigorous religious practices which many of their urban counterparts in India have discarded. Members of the Sikh community in the United States, too, have created a more orthodox form of the faith and are more particular about rules of their religion than are their counterparts in India. In fact, moderate members of the Sikh community in the United States who chose not to grow their hair or carry a Kirpan-dagger (which theoretically are symbols of the Sikh faith) were prevented from entering Gurudwaras (Sikh houses of worship). In some cases, these Sikhs even came under violent attack from their more orthodox brethren.

While these Indian immigrants sought to deal with their marginalization by seeking refuge in their culture, they still harbored a keen desire to be integrated within "the great American Melting Pot," in order to improve their present economic position. This is seen when various Hindu temples try to celebrate American holidays such as the Fourth of July as a religious event even though this date has no significance in the Hindu faith. This desire to "modify" the culture, in order to make it more acceptable to mainstream American society and ideology, is also an effort to facilitate interaction between Indians and other members of society.

But in trying to adapt to American society, these immigrants incorporated many negative features, such as chauvinism and hyper-masculinity, into their own culture. Thus, these features, along with the frozen image of their homeland and the persistent colonial mentality, led to the creation of a new pseudo-culture that is more fanatical, chauvinistic and extremist than what was practiced in their home country.

This culture generally centered on the individual's religious identity. After forming this pseudo-identity, South Asian immigrants began to feel their pseudo-culture was more "authentic." As a result, they felt that they had an obligation to impose their beliefs on their home country, which in their eyes had deviated from the right path. The similarity that this type of thought



PHOTO: REUTERS/KARNAL KSHORE

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of the BJP, flanked by fellow politicians.

against Muslims and other minorities in India.

The fascist nature of this immigrant community is due to a variety of complex factors, which include the nature of Indian immigration, a legacy of colonial mentality, the cultural marginalization of Indians in the US and their desire to properly integrate their "culture" and "values" within the framework of American society.

The passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which set a quota of 20,000 immigrants from each country,

there were also examples of extreme racism. For example, in the 1980s, a number of Indians were murdered in New Jersey by young white men who came to be known as "Dot Busters," a reference to the colored dot (bindi) placed by some Indian women on their foreheads.

Under these conditions it was only natural for Indian immigrants to take refuge in their culture and to try to form some kind of identity. But due to their alienation from their home country they found this hard to do. The image of their homeland was one frozen in time, as for them



process shares with the "civilizing" mission of colonialism is amazing.

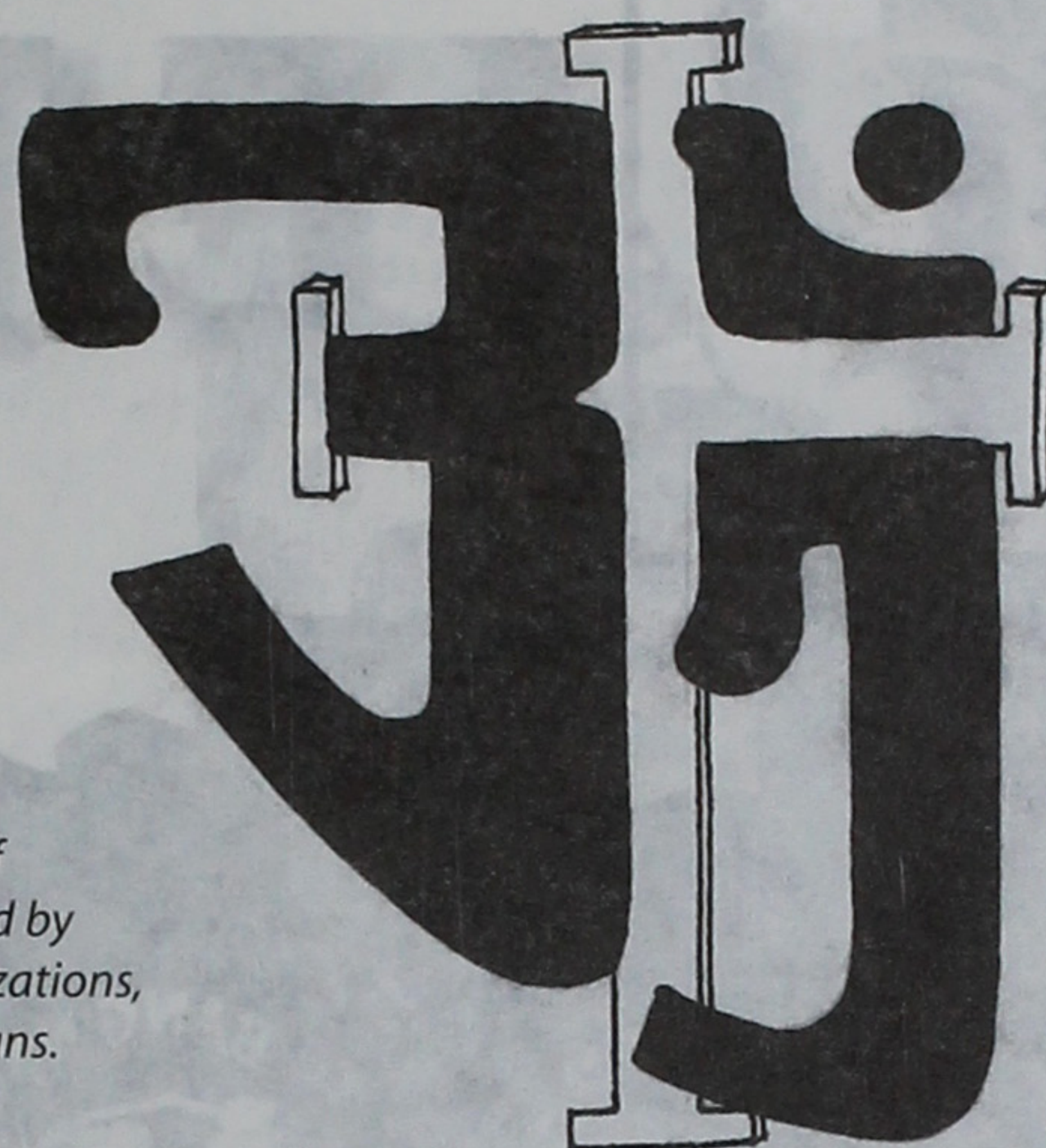
Examples of this can be seen in the South Asian community's overwhelming support of right-wing political parties and religious groups on the sub-continent. One such right-wing group that receives support from the Indo-American community is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which mainly serves Hindu interests and now governs India. Many members of the Indian community here rejoiced at the destruction of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Mosque in 1992 and have also poured money into the construction of a grand Hindu temple in Ayodhya (site of the destroyed mosque).

Indians here have also been known to contribute generously to the activities of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the parent body of the BJP and a worldwide organization created to promote fundamentalist Hindu culture. Such political involvement has given rise to religious conflict and has also threatened to change Hinduism in India into the ossified version chosen by members of the Indian diasporic community here. In many ways, this pseudo-Hinduism which people have termed "Hindutva" has accepted British colonial interpretations of India, such as the distinctness and incompatibility of different religious communities there, despite evidence to the contrary.

In the U.S., this behavior is not only limited to Hindus. Other groups, such as Sikhs, have followed a similar pattern. The Sikh separatist movement in the Indian state of Punjab has received much institutional and financial support from Sikhs in the U.S. The demand for an autonomous land for Sikhs called "Khalistan" continues to flourish within the Sikh community here, even though the demand has become greatly attenuated in India. Similar views might also exist among Indian Muslims in the U.S., but due to their small numbers their views on the insurrection taking place in the Muslim majority state of Kashmir have not been properly analyzed.

Thus, the political views and interests of Indian American immigrants also have a tremendous impact on separatist and nationalist movements in India and play a role in the direction of the Indian nation-state. While promoting nationalistic political causes in India, in the economic realm Indian Americans have been extremely supportive of the economic liberalization measures that India has undertaken in the last decade. This serves a dual purpose for these immigrants. Not only do they benefit from the

*This symbol was used on a protest banner in India by people expressing their anger at the conservative Hindu nationalist ruling party, the BJP. The image is a combination of the sacred symbols of the Hindu Om, the Muslim Crescent, and the Christian Cross. It signifies the coexistence of Indian people, despite the diversity of their religious traditions. This sense of community has been threatened by recent right-wing fascist organizations, many funded by Indian Americans.*



investment opportunities that arise from such liberalized measures, they also achieve more of a sense of security through contact with their former homeland. It appears that these immigrants have an active desire to see India adopt capitalism regardless of the socioeconomic consequences it might have on the population there.

Despite being relatively apathetic when it comes to involvement in domestic politics, when members of the Indian community do get involved they tend to align with conservative causes often espoused by Republican candidates.

Many of these immigrants also tend to distance themselves from other marginalized races in the U.S. This trend is visible in the prominent public presence of Indian conservatives, such as Dinesh D'Souza who states that professional Indians are "model minorities" and that the African-American community should emulate them. This shortsighted view does not take into account the different histories and backgrounds of the two communities. For the most part members of the Indian community have endorsed these views, hesitating to associate themselves with communities of color, or see themselves as "black" (as many South Asians in Britain have done.) The Indian community fears that such stigmatic associations might jeopardize its position in the U.S., keeping this largely professional community from entering into coalitions with working class communities.

Prejudice within the South Asian community also stems from the fact that these immigrants are products of the colonial education system

which the British left behind in India. Accordingly, they have internalized all the myths of national racial origin, including the theory of the invasion of India by a superior, White Aryan race. Even after immigrating to the U.S., these Indians have retained all the prejudices and carried them over to their new land of residence.

Although many Indian and other South Asian immigrants continue to be professionals, with every passing year the number of South Asians employed in working class positions, such as being taxi drivers, gas station owners and attendants, and subway newsagent vendors continues to grow.

The interests and politics of this group are different from their professional counterparts. These immigrants are more likely to bear the brunt of racial prejudice and ethnic jokes, but are also more likely to form progressive coalitions that represent their working class interests.

One such organization is a cab driver's association in New York, which is a coalition of South Asians and other immigrants of color. Other progressive South Asian immigrant voices include the Forum of Indian Leftists (FOIL) and Columbia University teacher, Gayatri Spivak. They are the exception to the rule, leaving some room for hope.

It is important that these individuals and groups do their best to counter the reactionary politics of the professional immigrants and cut short the resulting negative impact on South Asia. It is also important that these South Asian immigrants gain a broader consciousness of themselves as people of color, which will permit them to participate in a genuine struggle against all racism.





# VIET-ORIA'S

## THE ASIAN LOVE CATALOGUE

A SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION



1. The date  
T-shirt Item No. 9066  
Pull on one of these T-shirts before heading to the club. You're bangin' now.



2. Spirit by the dozen  
Buddha beads Item No. 90210

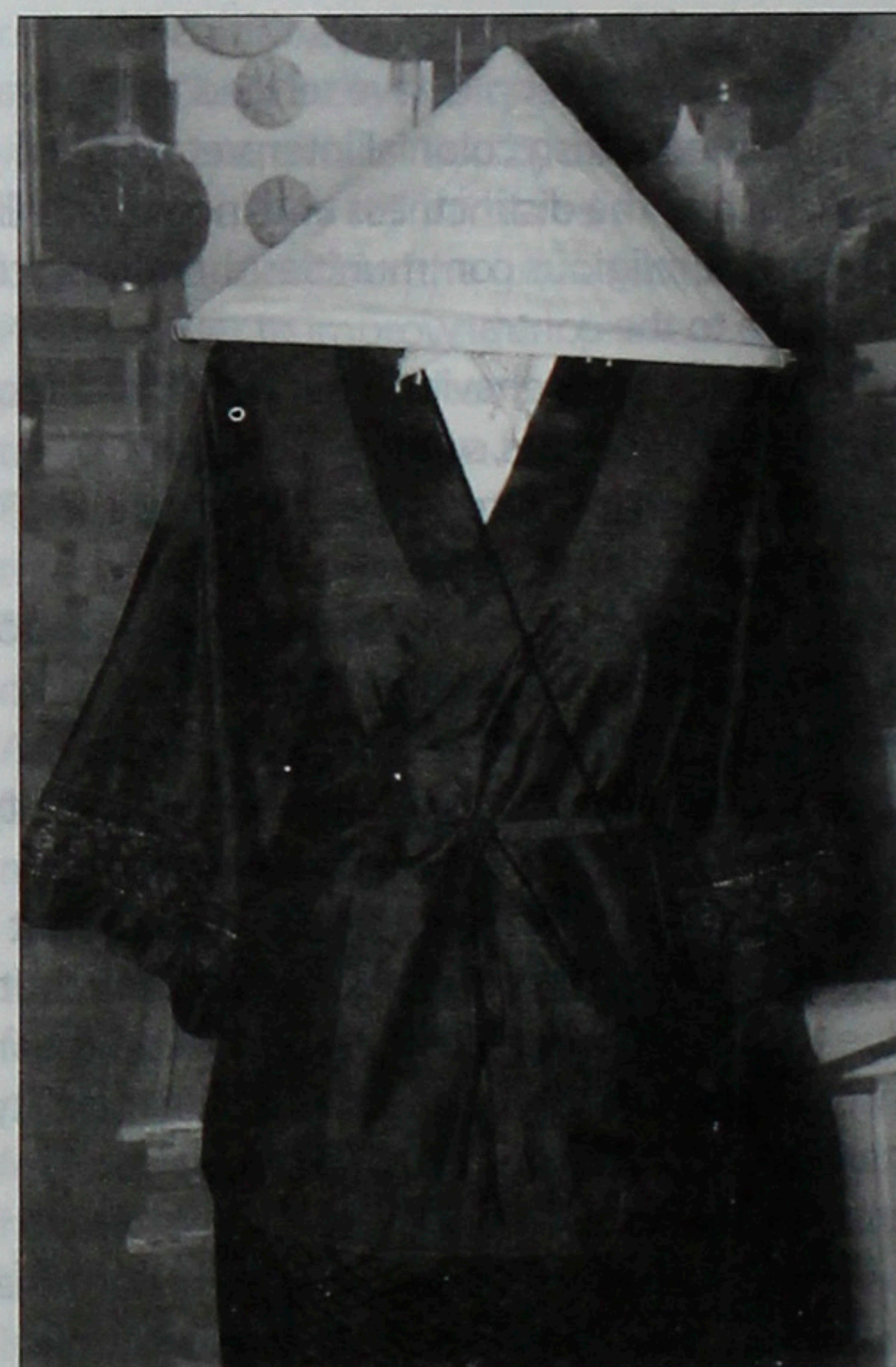
Wear one for good luck... or two... or three... or four.

3. Change into something more "comfortable"

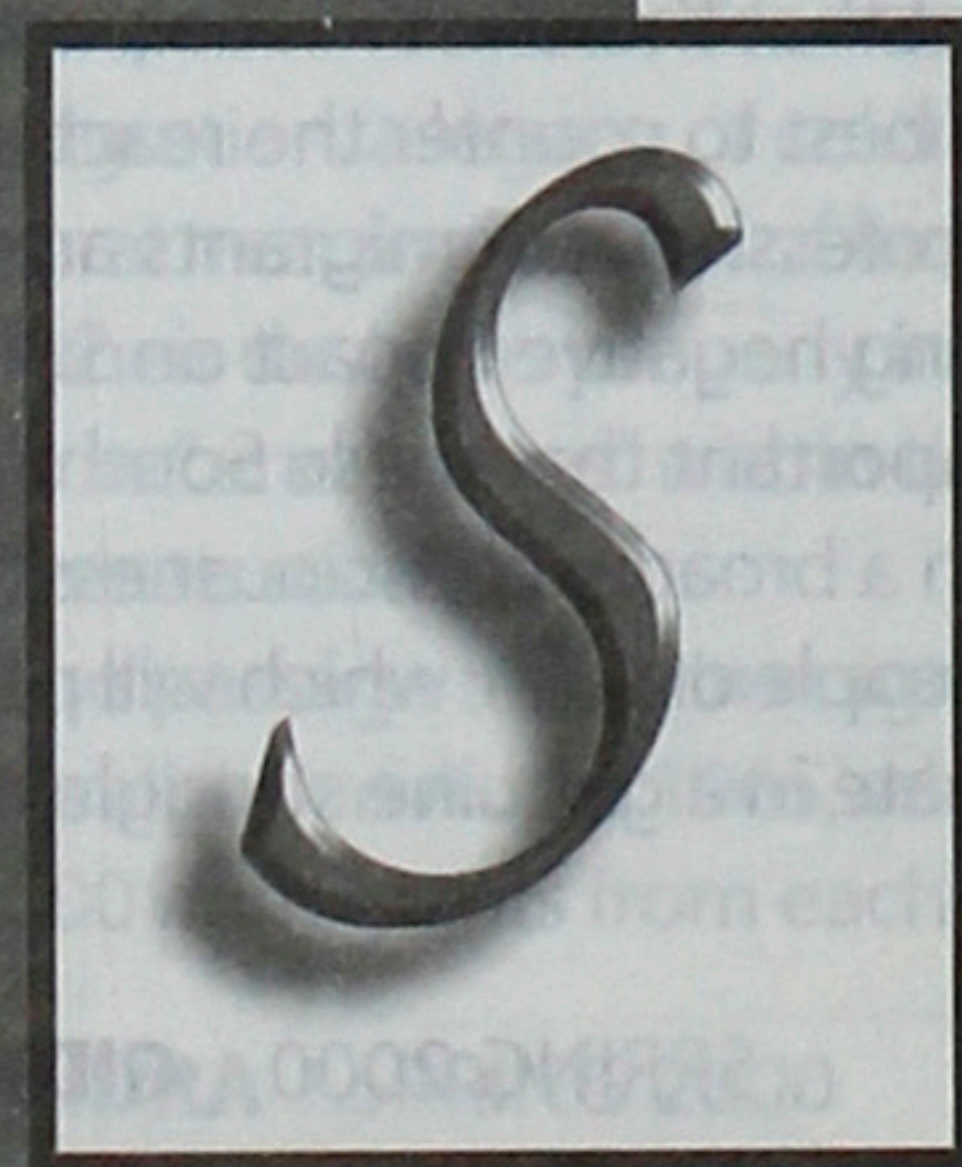
Conical Hat Item No. 21

Robe Item No. 22

You've got him back at the "love pavilion," now slip into one of these and let's chill.

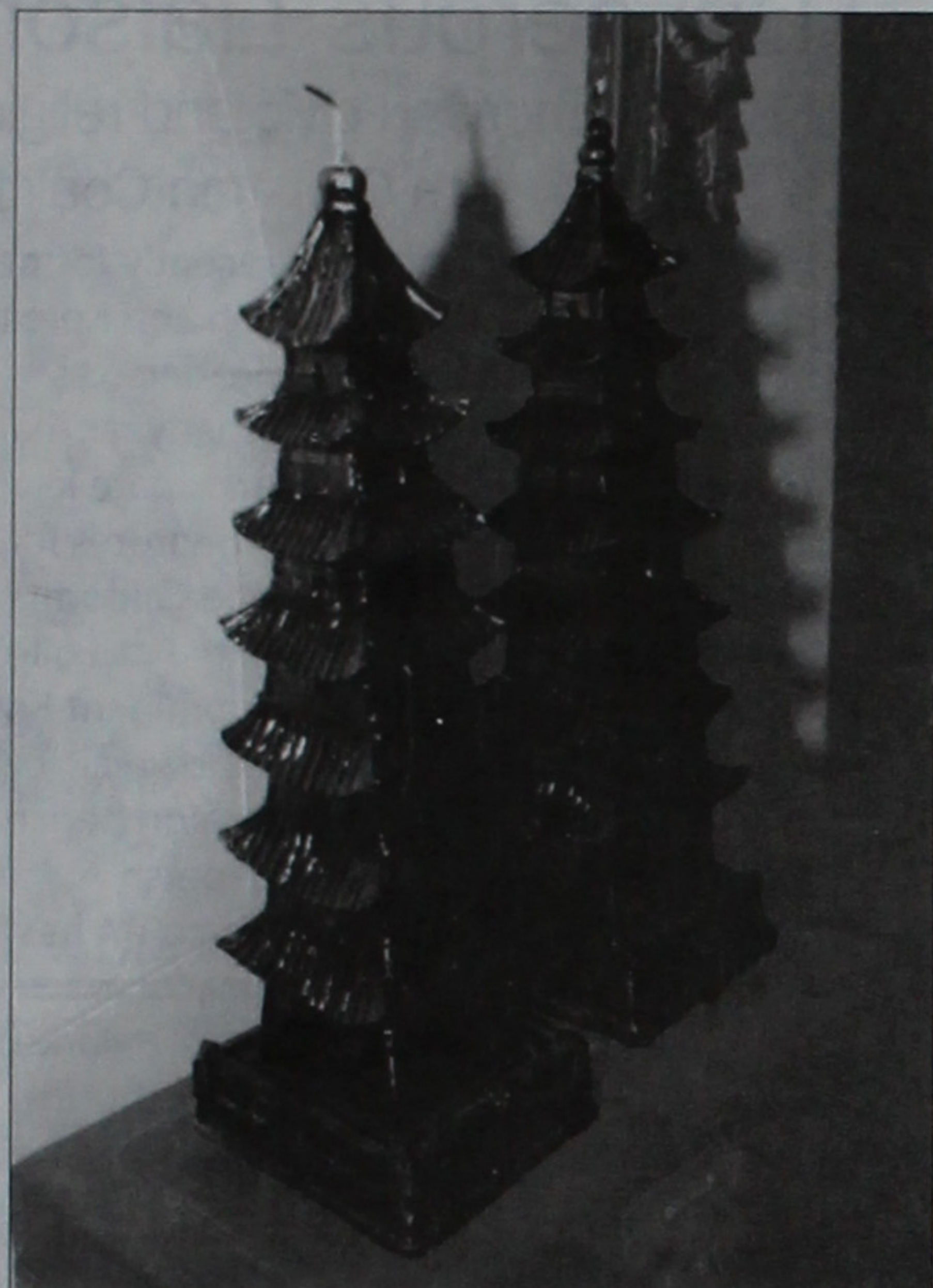


Photos by Ernesto Vigoreaux



# SECRET





#### 4. Set the mood

##### Candles

Item No. 227

You're in the love pagoda,  
set it on fire, baby!

#### 5. Now drop that robe

##### Shiva Print Tank

Item No. 187

##### Asian Deity Print

Tank Item No. 209

...And bam!

An eyeful of the divine.

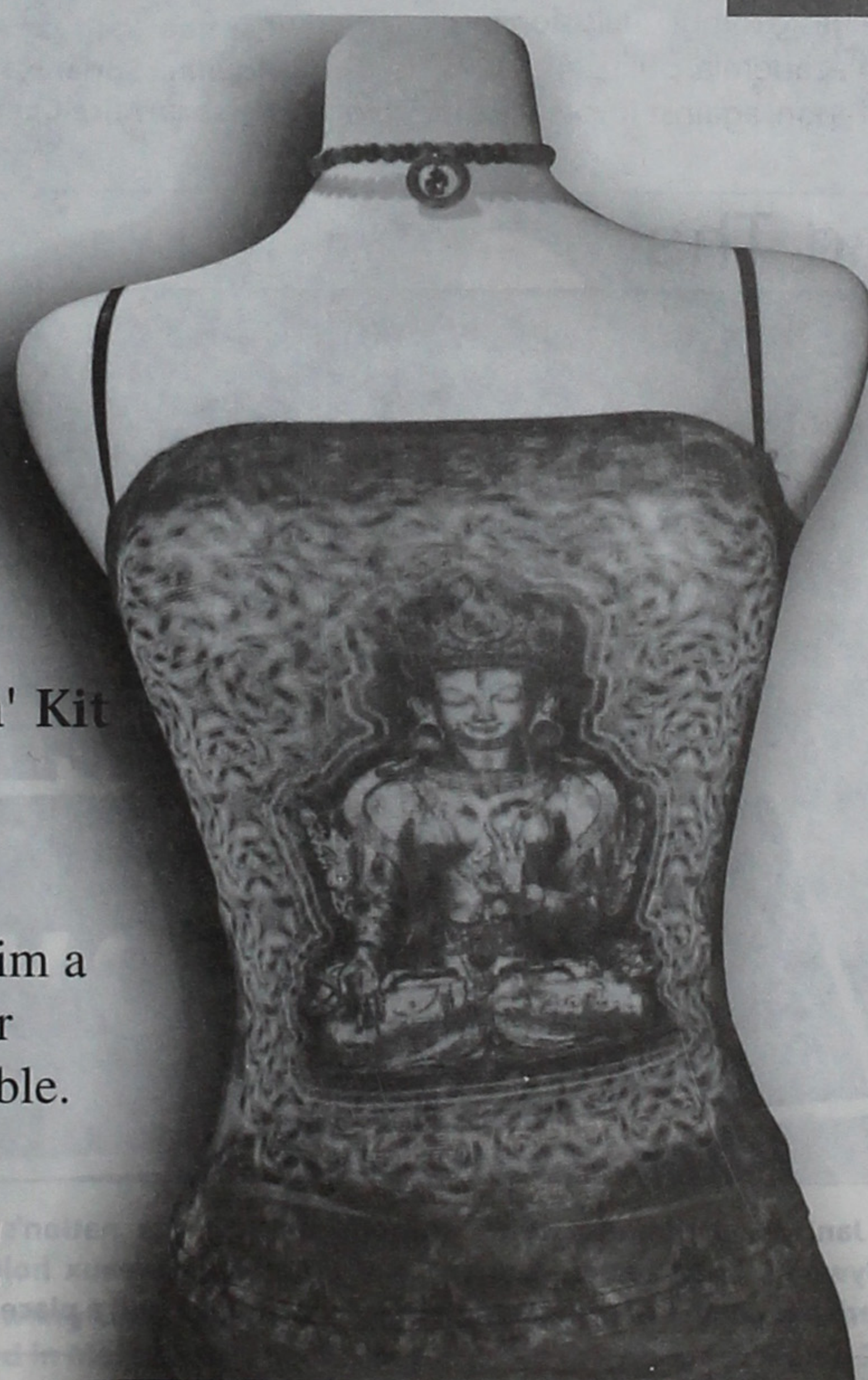


#### 6. Potion for your motion

##### The Sweet Lovin' Kit

Item No. 409

Incense, talismans,  
amulets... and some  
stationery to write him a  
letter, later. Hindu or  
Buddhist kits available.



## Let's git nekkid!

\*\* Sweatshop labor cost negligible but charged. Anyway.



## Fighting Inertia

A group of young Asian American activists have been meeting since last summer to plan a conference slated for early April 2000 in Southern California. The gathering would bring together those involved in a wide variety of causes to network, analyze issues and concerns and be able to coordinate action.

The 1965 Immigration Act, need for cheap labor in America and worsening conditions outside of the U.S. have brought an influx of Asians into this country.

"Despite increasing numbers, our voice in the American political arena is still minute," explains Lee Versoza, USC student and member of the organizing committee.

"After 30 years, we are still fighting for the same basic things: inclusion into American academia, political representation, against Imperialism and for

equality. What prevents proactive strategies is the lack of interaction and network-building within the Asian American community," he continues.

The conference grew out of last year's Summer Activist Training, a three-day workshop held annually by National Coalition for Redress/ Reparations, Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), Thai Community Development Center and Pilipino Workers' Center (PWC).

Students from UC Irvine, UC San Diego, UCLA, USC, LA Community College and other campuses have attended planning meetings, along with community activists from groups such as PWC, League of Filipino Students, KIWA and others.

For information on the conference and planning meetings, call Versoza at (213) 739.8803 or email [iconference@hotmail.com](mailto:iconference@hotmail.com).

**Caption: (L-R) Jay Mendoza, Lee Versoza, Aquilina Soriano, Arjuna Soriano, Lyndon Versoza, Alice Chen, Jay Jaldon.**



## Pad Thai



On Jan. 29, a ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the nation's first "Thai Town" in East Hollywood. Chanchanit Martorell and Ernesto Vigoreaux hold the sign that gives Thai Americans a voice of representation in Los Angeles, and a place in Asian American history.

## Dangerous Liaisons

Korean American civic and religious leaders ally with Christian Coalition

A disturbing alliance was recently formed between the Christian Coalition and Korean American civic and religious leaders. As December unfolded into another year, many Korean churches began to participate in an intense campaign to collect signatures for an anti-queer initiative entitled the California Defense of Sexual Responsibility Act. Full-page ads bearing names of many prominent Korean American churches and well-known civic leaders who support the campaign began to run in the Korean language papers.

The signature collection campaign has ended unsuccessfully. However, for a community that has never actively worked to create any initiatives in California, this first step into the legislative arena sets an alarming precedent.

The initiative would have "prohibited public entities from endorsing, educating, recognizing or pronouncing homosexuality as acceptable, moral behavior, and prohibited public entities from using the phrase 'sexual orientation.'

Fortunately, both queer and straight members of the Korean American community are fighting against the initiative and the nascent anti-queer movement in the Southern California Korean American community.

"There is simply no excuse for bigotry," said Judy Han, long time activist and coordinator of the newly formed Korean Americans for Civil Rights (KACR).

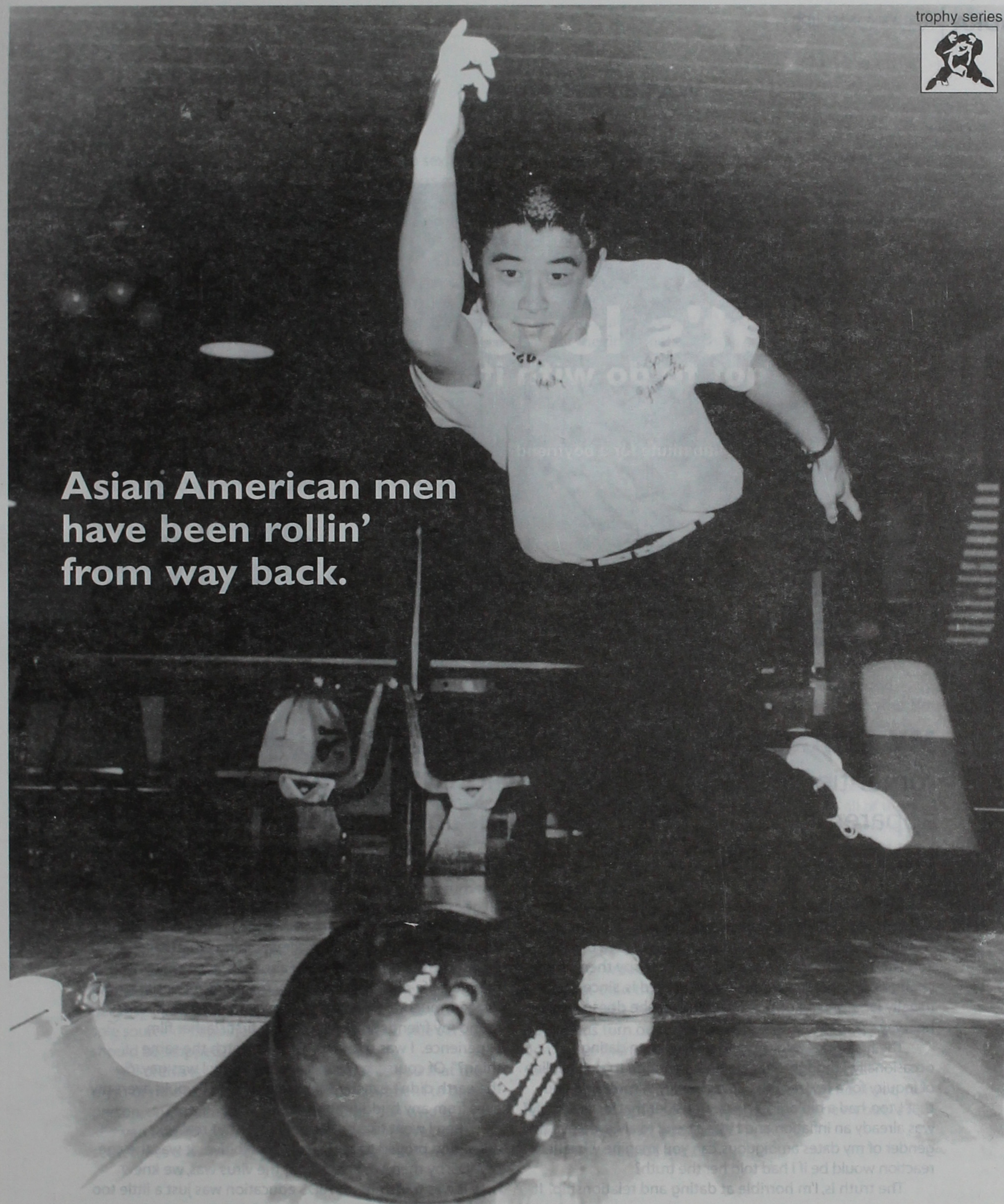
According to Han, KACR will work to educate the Korean American community about anti-gay initiatives, raise community awareness about lesbian and gay issues through a series of forums, and foster long term progressive alliances in the Korean American community.

On Monday, Jan. 17, KACR held a press conference with the support of members from the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, and the National Korean American Service and Education Consortium. The press conference inaugurated KACR's ad campaign, endorsed by over 300 community activists and academics across the country. Jeff Kim, director of legal services at the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center, explained the gravity of the anti-queer activity in the Korean American community by stating, "when society condones homophobia, anti-gay violence increases." KACR can be reached at [www.otherwise.net/justice](http://www.otherwise.net/justice).





**Asian American men  
have been rollin'  
from way back.**



(c. 1964) Throwing back-to-back 300s, Gary Yamauchi of the Western Professional Bowling League was one of So. Cali's big ballers during the post World War II years when bowling was a favored sport of JAs. The photo will be featured in *More Than a Game*, an exhibit which opens in March 2000 at the Japanese American National Museum. Photo courtesy of the Yamauchi Family, JANM.



## WATEVAH MAN | ERIC WAT



**MY GRANDMOTHER** has taken to asking me about my romantic life lately. I always tell her that I date occasionally, which apparently is no longer good enough in my ripe old age of twenty-nine. She then goes on to preach the virtues of marriage.

She says, "You don't want to end up like your uncles" — most of whom are confirmed bachelors. She continues, "I'm lucky to have so many children to take care of me. You should be more like me." (Fortunately by then I can change the topic to how lucky she indeed is, since she usually laments the opposite whenever she doesn't get her way.)

The first time I told G-ma that I had been dating occasionally, I thought that would be enough to stall her line of inquiry for a few months. I was frankly surprised to find that I, too, had a biological clock. Consider that "occasionally" was already an inflation and I was careful to always leave the gender of my dates ambiguous, can you imagine what her reaction would be if I had told her the truth?

The truth is, I'm horrible at dating and relationship. It

all goes back to twelve years of Catholic education by an order of Christian brothers whose idea of sex education was pro-life propaganda. After watching a particularly gruesome documentary of an abortion, I was ready to pledge a life of celibacy with my morally superior teachers. Instead, much to the dismay of my virgin mind, at recess I found my friends snickering at our first slasher film experience. I was thinking, "Did we watch the same thing?" Of course, by then, I already knew I was gay. So the earth didn't exactly shake when I said I would avert my eyes from any budding bosoms.

Then I went to a public university, but real sex education proved to be equally prohibitive. It was the age of AIDS: by then, we knew what the virus was, we knew how it was transmitted. AIDS education was just a little too



successful; I avoided anything that could lead to sex, like a conversation with a man. Instead, sublimation was my best friend. I was on the Dean's Honor List so often that you'd think I was invited to dinner at his house every Sunday.

I'm what you call a late bloomer. Half a life of sexual repression finally burst out in a vengeance when school was out. I discovered sex clubs and internet chatting. I experimented with role play and sadomasochism. I was living in a shadow of a sexual revolution that I had only read about. Still, I wasn't dating much. Dating is scarier. Bondage and discipline is no mindfuck compared to a first date.

So I had to force myself. For the last few years, I made a resolution every new year that I would date (at least) four times in the subsequent twelve-month period. (One good thing about being an obsessive-compulsive is that we actually keep our resolutions.) I figured, one date a season shouldn't be that tough. Well, I had to resort to stretching the definition of a "date." For example, does the other party have to know he was on a date with me at the time for it to count? Even with such a liberal and pragmatist interpretation that would make the Anthony Scalias of the Dating Supreme Court squirm, making quota had not been exactly a breeze. Let's just say, thanks to a warm front that stretched until mid-November, summer lasted a little longer this year.

My other recourse to boost self-confidence was to pick a date who is even more fucked-up than I am. (You know who you are .

.. unless, of course, you didn't know that was a date.) Recently, I found out from a mutual friend that such a guy, after a couple outings with me, decided to return to the primitive ritual of heterosexual dating. Although this was not explicit in my contract with myself, the day I started turning men straight should be the day that my dating resolution be declared null. The homosexual population should not be allowed to shrink anymore because Eric C. Wat is vain enough to think he could be a sole source of happiness for one person (and vice versa). I should be stopped.

All of this is just a long way to prove to you that the myth of monogamy — the idea of commitment to one person, one soulmate in your entire life span who is allowed to drink from your vast reservoir of love (and sometimes drown in it), you know, McBealism — is not for

everyone. I'm not trying to burst anyone's bubbles here. For the few of you who can identify with me, we need viable alternatives. Let me make a suggestion that doesn't require years of therapy. Separate form from function; dissect the ideal "boyfriend" and spread him out among people around you.

A classic "boyfriend" really has three main functions: (1) sex; (2) someone you can talk to and share everything with, blah, blah, blah; and (3) sex.

For the first function, find a partner with whom you can build a "relationship" that is solely based on the physical, or a sex buddy. Again, the masochist in me would like to offer my life as an example. My sex buddy, though a nice guy, is someone I have no chance of falling in love with. First of all, aside from the fact that he is sleeping with me, he is as straight as the defensive line-up of the Denver Broncos. I feel no jealousy when he goes out with a woman, and no guilt when I do the same. (As if.) Yet when we get together, we sometimes have the most amazing, imaginative, self-actualizing sex for four, five hours. (Hey, if nothing else, I've earned this bragging right after paragraphs of self-flogging and disparaging, however enjoyable.)

For the second function, you need a network of good friends (excluding most blood relatives). To share your life completely, I recommend at least five people. Not all of them will be available at

any given time. Plus, sometimes what you want to share may be about one of them. So you definitely need more than two.

Moreover, unlike "real" boyfriends, they are under no obligation to follow-up the next day with what you've told them. So you always have to be mindful of what you've told and to whom.

Other than that, this would give you at least the virtual feel of a "hands-off" boyfriend, which is what most boyfriends turn out to be after a year or two. (Or, if you don't have friends, try to wangle a "lifestyle" column somewhere. It's almost the same.)

Finally, for the third function of a boyfriend, if you still feel hot and bothered after you pour your heart out, it's time again for that booty call.

Which reminds me ....

I'm what you call a  
late bloomer.  
Half a life of sexual repression  
finally burst out in a vengeance  
when school was out.



**A**fter two maddening, love-filled, frustrating years, Michelle and I broke up.

Our relationship, which had been both rewarding and hard, is now friendly, but chaste. My family's refusal to welcome a non-Korean as my girl friend caused us pain that proved unbearable.

I met Michelle during the summer of 1997; a summer that was spent tediously working in UCLA's research library. Badly lit, musty and peopled by wrinkled retirees and nervous students, the library was an unlikely place to find a lover. When my parents first learned of Michelle, they thought so to. "Michelle is an unlikely girl friend for you Alex," they remarked during dinner.

My first conversations with Michelle left me uneasy. I was intimidated by her sharp mind, engaging personality, and the way her lips tempted as they curled into a smile. When she first introduced herself to me, she asked me about my taste in music and movies. I shied away from her words, and when I did speak, the words shot out in clumsy spurts. But my timidity was soon overpowered by my curiosity. We began to date and soon induced each other to laugh, but also into fighting and frustration.

The hot summer months soon cooled into the crisp days of fall, and I found myself in love with Michelle. Her complex mind excited me, and constantly challenged my perceptions and thoughts. We fostered each other's mutual appreciation for the absurd, surreal and psychedelic. I did my best to support her dream of making films and to assure her that she was blessed with a unique creative vision. Michelle believed in my talents as a writer, artist and thinker. She pushed me to pursue my goals. With no one else had I felt so supported and loved.

There were, of course, problems. The year before, I had fallen in love only to have it end with me nursing the wounds of Cupid's vicious arrows. Love, even warm feelings for Michelle, caused panic and confusion; the scabs from my previous entanglement began to itch, reminding me how much pain love could bring. Still, I would leave Michelle's

embraces and kisses pleasantly disoriented. The occasional raising of voices and disagreements made me recoil, but they were playful spats compared to the emotional turmoil that I used to associate with love. My fears slowly dissipated as I began to trust Michelle. I could let loose all my eccentricities and neuroses without worrying about whether she would judge or dislike me.

There was also Michelle's occasional bouts with depression, an affliction which left her distant and despondent, robbing her playful spirit. It was this melancholy that eventually drove us apart.

My parents noticed that I was spending a

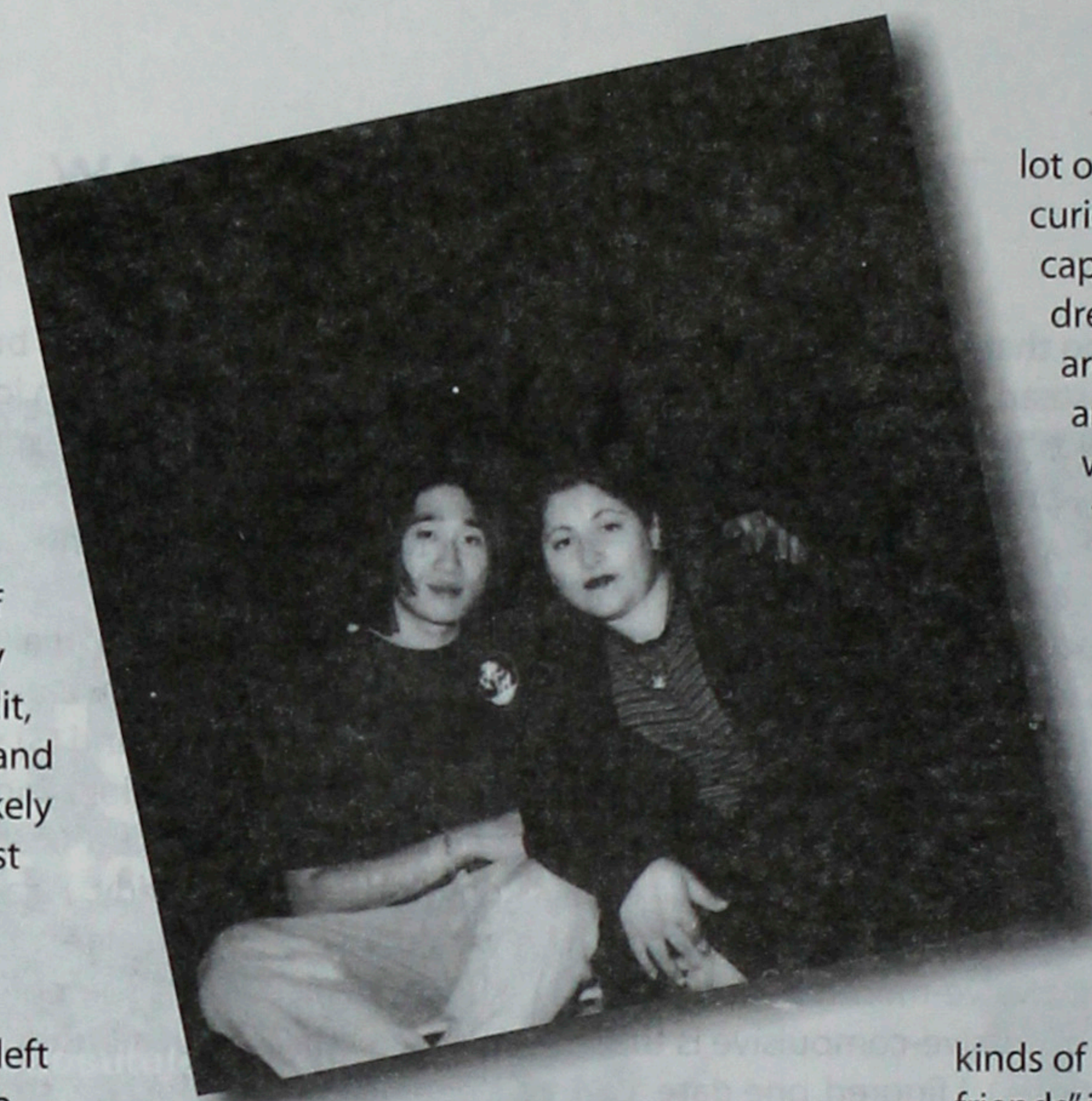
lot of time with Michelle, and they were curious to learn about the girl who had captured their son's fancy. While I was dressing for a night out, my mom got around to asking about Michelle's age and ethnicity. I told her that Michelle was a few years older than I was, and that she was Latina. My mother cocked her head to one side and said in a pensive and disapproving tone, "I never expected these kinds of things from my son. Your long hair, the earring, and now an older woman. I sent you off to university and I think it did something strange to you." She smiled and said, "It's fine for a young man to have different kinds of friends." She ended by saying "just friends" in English.

My parents never made adamant proclamations concerning the race of my girlfriends. They only started making gentle statements, when I entered in junior high, that it would be nice once I started to bring Korean girls home.

Rather, it was my grandparents, especially my maternal grandmother, who began to advise me once I reached the virile age of 14, that marriage should be reserved for a "pretty exchange student from Korea that comes from a nice family." Of course, I could have my carefree dalliances with anyone regardless of ethnicity. Love and serious relationships, however, were to be an exclusively Korean affair.

She explained the necessity of a Korean bride by saying, "Do you want to marry a Yankee and have an ugly baby with a jumbled face?" Grandma would wave her hands in front of her face, drawing a big nose in the air, while she said, "jumbled face." It is a surreal and disturbing experience to hear one's grandma explain the eugenics that guide her dispensation of love advice. Luckily, my paternal grandmother was always curious about Michelle and joked about when I went to see to her. Grandma would laugh when I told her I was going on a date the coming weekend.

The complete lack of parental admonitions concerning "jumbled faces" or



# Me & Michelle

BY ALEX KO



freshly immigrated Korean brides left me unprepared for my parents' rejection of Michelle. They never invited her to dinner or to family get-togethers.

This is not to say that I had not brought girls home in the past. I had dated non-Asians. Mom and Dad had cooked dinner for other girlfriends and had been genuinely friendly. But the crucial difference was that all of those relationships could be seen as teenage crushes or "Alex starting to meet girls." They assumed nothing would come of the relationships. My relationship with Michelle was the first time they heard me mention "love" as I spoke of a relationship. Before I was with Michelle, I had kept my parents at a safe distance from my relationships. I didn't want them to have too much involvement in my love life. They must have realized that Michelle was important to me if I was actually trying to let them in on our relationship.

To be fair, my dad did not stray far from his mostly *\*\*laissez faire\*\** attitude toward me and my life. He said to my mom, "Alex has brought girls home before. He is always going to be with a girl," and then made a "what's the big deal" shrug. Dad just wanted to know if I was ever driving Michelle around drunk or if I was having safe sex.

My brother Daniel's attitude toward Michelle was curt and reticent. He also didn't care to know her. He thought Michelle was weird and didn't understand why I was dating her. "You're weird, Alex," he would say.

Mom did her best to totally deny and question my relationship with Michelle. When we first began dating, mom asked me in a nagging and derisive tone what I saw in Michelle. A family friend would ask whether I was seeing anyone and mom would reply, "Alex has a friend." Her flippant tone implied that Michelle was just a youthful fling. I would have to interrupt and add what mom had omitted.

In contrast to my family, Michelle's mother and sister were always cordial with me. Michelle's sister was all grins and giggles when

she saw me. Michelle's mom was often slightly nervous when she spoke to me, but she was always polite. No rejections. No cold shoulders. No curt words. I was deeply embarrassed by, and angry with, my family.

Michelle was at first hurt and bewildered by my family's rude behavior. Then she got mad. Many a night, I was defending, then trying to explain, and finally cursing, my family's behavior.

Thanksgiving 1998 was approaching and we contemplated whether she should come over for dinner with my family. I explained to

cracked a few jokes, everyone remarked on the amazing flavor and texture of Mom's cooking. Michelle nervously played with her food and made thin smiles.

I dropped Michelle off at home that night and apologized about how weird the dinner was. She was upset, but she enjoyed the good eats and being with me on a holiday. We embraced and I saw her walk into her apartment. When I got back home, my aunt said something like, "that girl has tricked you into liking her." She then implied that I could do better than Michelle. My mom added

something equally as rotten. I felt sick. They both seemed far away and I felt disconnected from them. I told them to be quiet and to not disparage Michelle. I went into my room and slept. I eventually confronted my family and told them that their attitude towards Michelle was unacceptable. After a few harsh words from me, things got a little better.

Michelle continued to come over, but she was never comfortable in our house. We spent most of the time in my room. She had given up trying to really get along with or get to know my parents. In turn, my family was mechanically civil. My attitude about the relationship between my family and Michelle changed. I no longer cared if they

accepted Michelle or our relationship. I had tried my best and didn't know what else to do. I wanted them to get along, but it didn't seem possible. Fuck trying to bridge the gap.

It was Michelle's depression and not my family that eventually ended our relationship. A few months later, Mom told me that "the Western person can never truly appreciate and get long with the Eastern person. I have seen many mixed couples. It seldom works." This treatise was followed by, "Why don't you date a Korean girl?" (I will omit my own exasperated replies.)

After being confronted by this kind of madness from my mom and family, I have resigned myself to the fact that my family will never totally accept a non-Korean girlfriend. If I have a non-Korean lover, then I will just have to endure my family's nonsense and do my best to prevent it from harming my relationships.



**Alex and his brother Daniel (front center) in this family photo taken a long time ago! Actually, Alex just turned 22 and is not so old.**

Mom that Michelle was coming over for dinner and she responded by saying, "Why?"

Thanksgiving arrived and my mom and aunt had cooked an incredible feast. The small turkey was surrounded by various kinds of spicy and red kimchee, a plate of sauteed squid, a plate of tempura vegetables, various other *ban-chan* (side dishes), and a plate of Korean barbecue.

Michelle was nervous when I picked her up. She dressed. When we got to my place, my parents, aunt and brother were civil to Michelle. She offered to help, but Mom told her to relax on the couch. My extended family was strangely absent.

Dinner was ready and we all sat at the table. The lack of conversation made the dinner more awkward. The language barrier built a high wall of Korean and English words around everyone at the table, and ice-breaking jokes were kept to a minimum. Daniel and I





more!  
more!  
**more!**

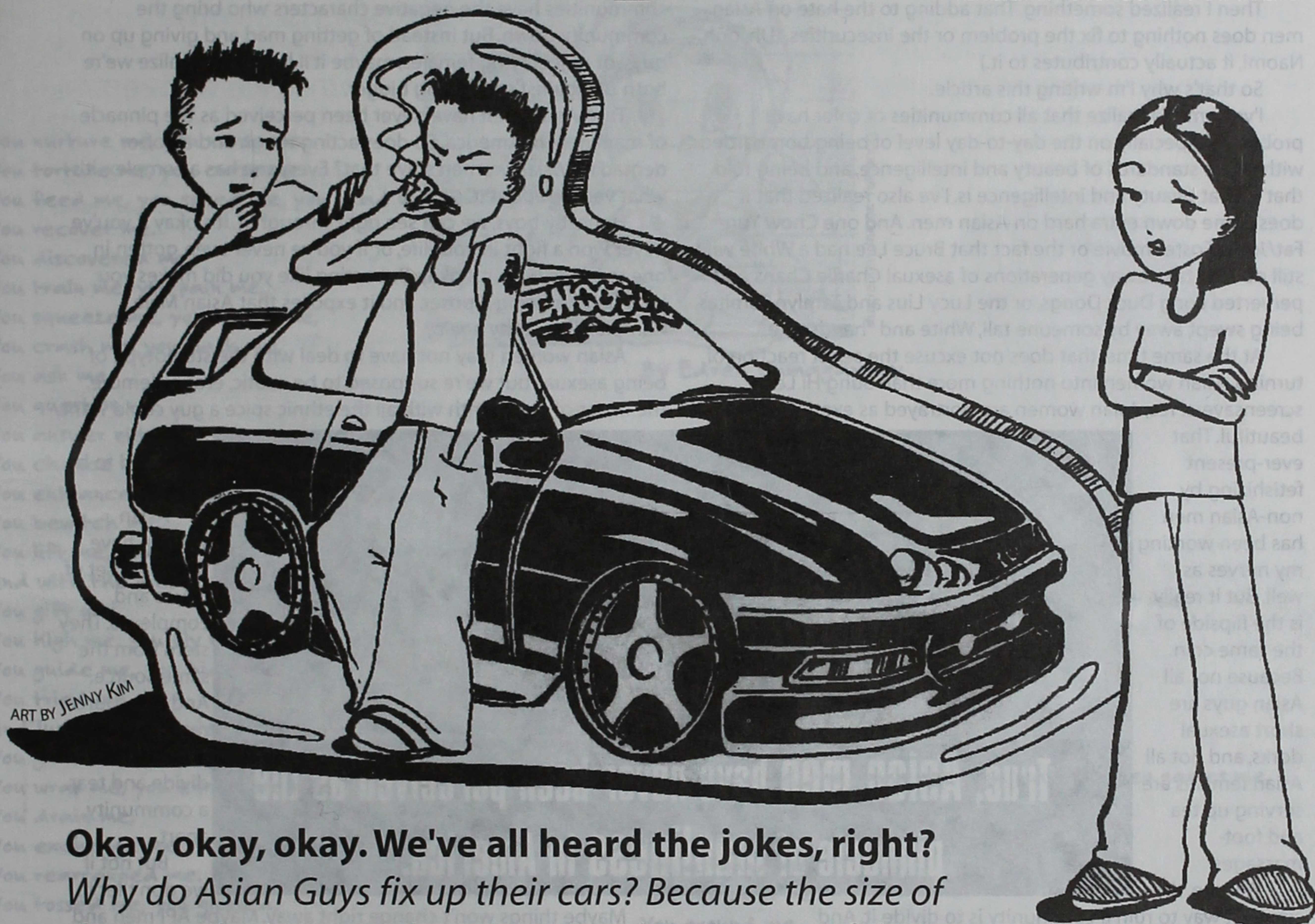
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# Don't Play Yourself

REPRESENTIN' FOR DA SISTAS: NAOMI IWASAKI



**Okay, okay, okay. We've all heard the jokes, right?**  
*Why do Asian Guys fix up their cars? Because the size of their spoiler is inversely proportional to the size of their...*

Well, let's just say there's been a lot of cappin' on Asian manhood floating around. It's on TV, the movies, 70,000 e-mail forwards, you name it. Clownin' how they all have the same hair, same clothes, same car. I'm guilty of knowing these jokes, even laughing at them, and yes, even forwarding them on to others.

And they all seem to have a central theme ... somehow or other, poking fun at the insecurities that plague men of color, but Asian men in particular. These insecurities place Asians bottom on the totem pole of masculinity. Like the unspoken rule of thumb that a guys' height or shoe size — where Asians often fall short in relation to others — are somehow correlated with other physical attributes; attributes equated with who's a "real man" or not in our society (wink, wink).

These insecurities make Asian guys feel they have to try twice as hard as other guys to prove their manliness. Insecurities that lead into a theory of what I've callously dubbed — the

Asian Male Complex.

This complex, which turns into a motor-revving so loud it sets off my car alarm, is the same one that causes me to roll my eyes and throw up my arms in disgust at the lack of Asian men out there who are secure enough to *not* have to front off and prove how hard they are.

I've shared many a conversation with my fellow Asian sisters who are as equally frustrated by this complex. And to be honest, up until recently, this article was going to be about that frustration and how it's almost driven me to the point of giving up on them boys.

Yes, *almost*.

Fueling me were those angsty complaints about "where are all the good men, men who aren't afraid to show public (or private) emotions?" I was all set to write a piece that was as equally harsh on half of the API population as the jokes that



perpetuate their insecurities.

I mean, how much longer are Asian guys going to keep whining? Whining about Asian women & White men, whining about the loss of mass-media masculinity, whining about how people never stop hatin' on Asian men.

Then I realized something. That adding to the hate on Asian men does nothing to fix the problem or the insecurities. (Uh, duh, Naomi, it actually contributes to it.)

So that's why I'm writing this article.

I've come to realize that all communities of color have problems, especially on the day-to-day level of being bombarded with White standards of beauty and intelligence, and being told that's what beauty and intelligence is. I've also realized that it does come down extra hard on Asian men. And one Chow Yun-Fat/Jodie Foster movie or the fact that Bruce Lee had a White wife still doesn't take away generations of asexual Charlie Chans and perverted Long Duck Dongs, or the Lucy Liu and Tamlyn Tomitas being swept away by someone tall, White and "handsome."

At the same time, that does not excuse the sexist reaction of turning Asian women into nothing more than Sung Hi Lee screensavers. Yes, Asian women are portrayed as exotic and beautiful. That

ever-present fetishizing by non-Asian men has been working my nerves as well. But it really is the flipside of the same coin. Because not all Asian guys are short asexual dorks, and not all Asian females are serving up tea and foot-massages.

You see, the simplest way to ruin a community is to divide it. And communities of color have struggles which can only be addressed with a unified front. I realized that an "all men are pigs" statement is something that White women can get away with. I know other women of color feel this sentiment with the men in their communities, too.

Even though many of us feel this same way at times, we are not White women. We cannot afford to turn our backs on our men, on half our community.

This is not to dog on interracial couples either. I mean as complex as love — or the idea of it — is, when race and tastes are thrown in, it gets way sticky-icky.

But I feel Asian men when they get frustrated that there can't be an Asian-Asian couple on one damn TV show, movie or billboard. There really is miniscule to no representation of Asian-Asian love. Guys, some of us women are frustrated, too.

So that's why I feel I've been blaming the wrong culprit.

Asian men didn't bring this stigma unto themselves. Nor did Asian women bring on theirs. I don't know anyone who'd want to have a rep of being "poorly-endowed." And I bristle when people ask if "me so horny."

It's easy to blame the scrubs and pigeons, yes. All communities have the negative characters who bring the community down. But instead of getting mad and giving up on guys, or objectifying females, maybe it'll help if we realize we're both up against something bigger.

True, Asian men have never been perceived as the pinnacle of manliness in America. So does acting tough and aloof, or degrading Asian women solve that? Everyone has a complex, it's what you do about it.

Honestly boys, we can see right through it. It's okay if you've never won a fight in your life, or if you've never even gotten in one to begin with. It's okay. But acting like you did makes you look bad for being a poser, and it exposes that Asian Male Complex insecurity again.

Asian women may not have to deal with the stereotype of being asexual, but we're supposed to be exotic, erotic, demure, the flavor-of-the-month with all the ethnic spice a guy could want.

Is this supposed to be better?

Asian women have their own set of issues and complexes. They stem from the same source. And this source really has potential to divide and tear a community apart.

But not if we don't let it.

Maybe things won't change right away. Maybe API men and women will always have complexes. So what if the term "once you go Asian, you never go back" doesn't catch on. We'll still be left with something greater—respect for each other as a people, as a community.

If I don't wind up with an API partner later on down the line, I'm still part of this community. I'm still an Asian American woman, and the men will always be a part of this larger relationship I'm a part of. That is, APIs in America. I'm hoping the guys feel the same way.

As Goodie Mobb so eloquently put it, "You're my beginning, my end/you're my sister, lover and friend."

We're more than just a meat market of chrome rims and Bebe tees. That racer/skater/clubber/wannabe thug may look foolish at times, but he might just be facing the same insecurities I am. Or he might just be the guy of my dreams.

Or not. Either way, I'll get his back if he got mine.



**True, Asian men have never been perceived as the  
pinnacle of manliness in America.**



## The History of You and Me



illustration: James Yuktanonda

By Edren Sumagaysay

You nurture me, you nurse me.  
 You torture me, you curse me.  
 You feed me, you speed me, you read me, you believe me.  
 You recover me.  
 You discovered me.  
 You train me, you pain me,  
 You squeeze me, you tease me,  
 You crash me, you bash me,  
 You ask me.  
 You question me.  
 You answer me.  
 You chance me, you romance me, you dance with me,  
 You entrance me, you chant me.  
 You bewitch me.  
 You lift me, you shift me, you set adrift me,  
 And with the presence of 100 tea lights,  
 You gift me!  
 You high me, you fly me, you then deny me.  
 You guide me, you hide me,  
 You tried me.  
 And just like a Hamlet mouse, you pied piped me.  
 You grab me, you capture me.  
 You wrap me, you enrapture me.  
 You drain me,  
 You exchange me,  
 You rearranged me.  
 You tossed me, you glossed,  
 So then you lost me.  
 But... you began me, you ran me, you lechiplan me.  
 You befriended me, you surrendered me,  
 At which I felt splendidly.  
 You book me, you took me, you shook me, you look me.  
 You move me, you groove me, remove me, and smooth me.  
 You cool me.  
 You direct me, you correct me,  
 You inject me, you ingest me,  
 You arrest me.  
 ... Hand cuff me.

You inspire me. You live-wire me.  
 You light me, you fight me, you banana delight me,  
 You insight a riot inside of me.  
 You flow me, you grow me,  
 You Bell Biv Devoe me.  
 You've shown me, grown with me,  
 And gone toe to toe with me.  
 You named me, the same see, and played video games me.  
 You've touched me, to much me,  
 And even double dutched me.  
 You astound me.  
 You surround me.  
 You ground me.  
 You make me, you made me,  
 You gave me, you give me,  
 You always will always continue to continue me.  
 And so  
 You have me.  
 I love you  
 Exclusively  
 Unconditionally  
 Uncontrollably  
 Traditionally  
 'Coz of history  
 That happens to be  
 Just happens to be  
 Between you and me.

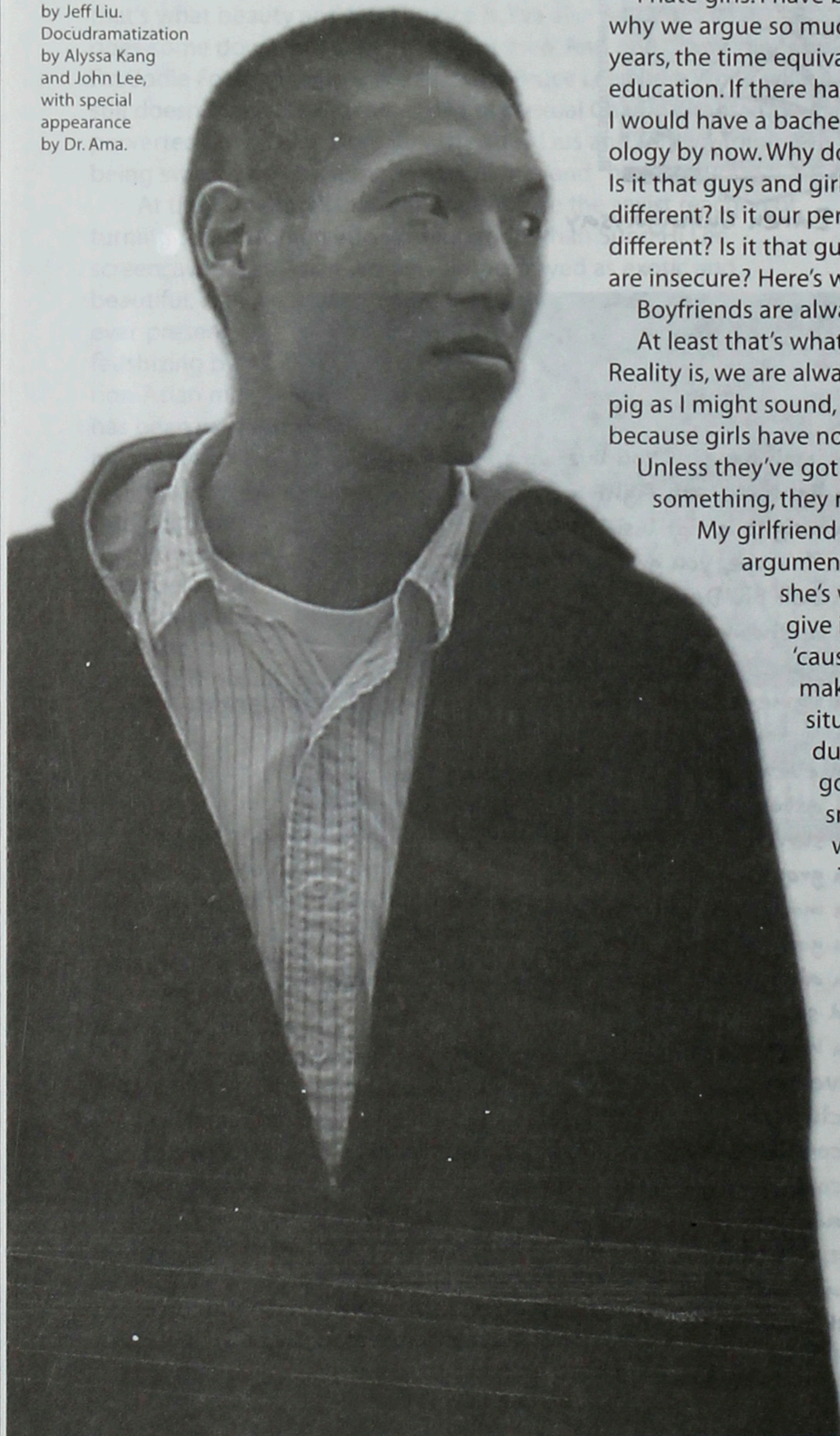


# Men Are From Pyongyang,

BY MUNG-BIEN GIM

One of the first arguments I can remember having with my girlfriend involved another girl. The last argument we had was over a girl. Eighty percent of the arguments we get into every two weeks over the past four years that we've been together have been over a girl!

Photo fiction  
by Jeff Liu.  
Docudramatization  
by Alyssa Kang  
and John Lee,  
with special  
appearance  
by Dr. Ama.



I hate girls. I have been thinking about why we argue so much for the past four years, the time equivalent of a college education. If there had been a class for this I would have a bachelor's in girlfriendology by now. Why do we argue so much? Is it that guys and girls are fundamentally different? Is it our personalities that are so different? Is it that guys are dogs and girls are insecure? Here's what I've realized:

Boyfriends are always wrong

At least that's what the girls think.

Reality is, we are always right. As much of a pig as I might sound, this is true simply because girls have no rationality.

Unless they've got "she-balls" or something, they make no damn sense.

My girlfriend never gives into an argument even if it's obvious she's wrong and I won't give into an argument 'cause I am right. That makes for a frustrating situation. One time during an argument I got so frustrated, I smashed the front windshield of her car. That was a \$250 argument.

Guys think silently, girls think out loud

A little too loud, if you ask me. Here's an example: A girl is having a tough day at work. She calls up her boyfriend for some sympathy and complains her ear off. Whine-whine-whine. The boyfriend gets annoyed. This is where the

argument starts.

The girl gets upset and tells him how much of a jerk he is, that he never listens, more whine-whine-whine. If anyone wants to make some money, invent a hearing aid-size noise filter, something to block out all that high-pitch whining.

Anyways, girls don't understand that guys take things as they come. We accept things for what they are, that's why we're able to deal with the bad days. Because we know you win some, you lose some. Girls, on the other hand, need to talk about it. If you're not there with an open ear, then they hate you, you're the lousiest boyfriend ever, or you're just like all the other unattentive boyfriends they've had.

Girls, when we get annoyed, it isn't cause of you, it's 'cause of your situation. You don't realize this, but deep down inside we just want to bash the person, place or thing that is causing you to come to us and complain, whine and hurt our ears. So, you see, we don't get annoyed because we're sick of you or don't find you attractive anymore, we get annoyed because we care about you deeply.

Guys can't have girlfriends, but girls can have boyfriends

What is that?!!! Girls are either hypocrites or they've got damn good intuition. Why? They say one thing one day and something else the next.

Example: A guy has a friend who's a girl. He met her long before he met his girlfriend. In the beginning of the relationship, the girlfriend is O.K. with it, but as time goes on and their relationship progresses, she starts to ask questions about this "platonic" relationship: "Did you ever like her?" "Were you interested?" "Did you date?" "Did you hold hands?" "Why don't they just ask, 'Did you fuck her?'"

Why don't they get to the point of their interrogation? "I'm just asking," they say.

See Guy Talk, page 26



# Women are from Pusan

By DONATELLA MIA LAI

Things were easier as a kid. If a boy liked you, he would either pull your hair or hit you or snap your bra (that is, if you were an early starter). I knew where I stood on a 12-year-old boy's hierarchy of needs. If he hit me enough times, then I ranked right up there with kickball and Nintendo.

Now that we've moved beyond the monkey bars (and into bars with monkeys), I find that I don't understand guys very well. My friends say that guys are as easy to read as a pop-up book. Obviously, they have never tried to read a pop-up book. For me, whatever pops up is always getting in the way of a real relationship.

For example, my friend, John, says that if a girl sleeps with him on the first date, he doesn't have to get to know her because the whole process of getting to know one another is all a sham just to get her in bed. Once the mystery of "will she?" or "won't she?" is solved, there's no point. In the end, I'm left to wonder if it really is all about the hunt. Whether he's feigning interest to get me into bed or he really is interested in me. And then of course, what happens when he does "bag" me? Is he like a heat seeking missile - once he hits his target, he'll blow up and ruin everything?

Talking to my guy friends, I don't think they even know. They're so goal-oriented that they sometimes make themselves believe that they really care about the girl when all they want is bragging rights. Then they blame her when things don't work out. She's so possessive (read: she won't let me hang out with my misogynistic friends). She's so insecure and jealous (read: she wouldn't let me check out those hotties in the bar last night, I mean, I was just looking).

I'm not saying all men are dumbasses, though plenty of them are at least some of the time. But the ones that aren't asses still hang out with the ones who are, and they're infected by them at least a little.

Sometimes, I think most guys have Christopher Columbus syndrome. They think they know where they want to be. But they end up totally lost trying to get there. And then when they do finally get somewhere good, they don't know where they are.

I don't hate guys. But I do hate it when guys pigeonhole women. A woman is either jealous, petty and irrational (the pretty ones) or man-hating and bitter (the ugly ones). If she happens to be pretty, then the whole virgin-whore complex comes in. She is categorized into either the "girl you can bring home to mom" or the "girl you can have fun with until you meet the girl you bring home to mom." In the end, I wonder if guys do that because it simplifies their life. It gives them guidelines on how to behave. After all, you don't have to respect the girl who sleeps with you on the first date.

Guys, even the good ones, say they want a strong woman but then many of them can't handle one. I've learned that they think strong woman = bitch. So these guys who are complaining about not finding "the one" end up with these impressionable 18-year olds, pre-strong bitches. When these 18-year olds become 20-somethings and are no longer impressionable, then the guy decides that he's not ready for a commitment and runs for his life(style). They do this because they don't know when they've got a good thing; they're either afraid of it or thinking of what else they're missing out on.

On the other hand, if you're the one who says you need some space, they're all over you. I hate it when guys need you to draw back, then

See Grrrl Talk, page 26





## Guy Talk *(continued from page 24)*

They're just asking, my ass! They want to know for future reference. They'll ask again in the future and if you slip, that's it, you've got an argument.

I also love the way they try to hold back their emotions when they ask those questions. It's written all over their face that it bothers them. They start with the simple questions and with each "yes" move on to more juicy questions.

The other funny thing is even if you didn't fuck the other girl, if you answer "yes" to any of the questions, they will ride you until the day you die. Either that or until you lose all possible contact with that girl friend of yours, she dies or becomes severely disfigured so that there is no way in hell that you'd be interested.

Tell them the truth, you're wrong. Tell them a lie and your wrong. Girlfriends know that the other girl is just a friend, but they're really uncomfortable with it. What are they thinking? That in case of a break-up we've got a back-up? They know it's not right to ask you to forget about her, but that's what they want.

The situation is different if they have a guy friend. In this case, the roles are reversed, but they can never see it from the guy's point of view. Girls don't understand that guys can have all the girl friends they want because they're in control, but girls can't because they are in control only if the guy lets them (any feminist-lesbian want to argue, feel free to write in).

So, is it that guys and girls are fundamentally different? Is it our personalities that are so different? Is it that guys are dawgs and girls are insecure? It's all of these things.

One of the last arguments that we had was because I danced with another girl. It was some random girl that I wasn't connected to in any way (no pun intended). Sure, no big deal. I didn't fuck the other girl or anything like that. I even told my girlfriend about it and then apologized for doing it. So, why the argument? Wasn't it good enough that I had told her the truth even though I knew she would get mad? Understandably, it went deeper than that.

See, I hadn't done anything like that to my girlfriend since we've been together, and for me to do that came as a shock to her. Kind of like when you wake up early to hit the freeways to go to work and one day there is no goddamned traffic. It would make you think (bad example, but you get the picture).

So we argued. She asked questions and I answered them. She asked more questions and I answered them again. She asked more questions and I got annoyed. Then she got mad at me for getting annoyed at her for asking me annoying questions!

To her, I was wrong to begin with, so where do I get off getting annoyed at her? Well, after a while of being inTERRORgated and getting each other pissed off, we both realized that all the times we had argued about how we didn't understand each other led to this.



And it was about trust. Me being a dawg didn't help her insecurities and her insecurities made me more of a dawg. I would never purposely do anything to hurt her, but she had doubts. For myself, all her questioning made me frustrated because she never believed me whenever I told her the truth.

Why this took four years to figure out, I'll never know. Maybe 'cause I always hated having to explain myself when my answers weren't what she wanted to hear. But I've never had that kind of relief come over me after an argument ... wait, let me think about that.

I always believed that to know what's good, you've got to know what's bad; to know what you have, you have to know what you don't have. Being with the same girl for four years, I've realized things about myself I would have never realized on my own. Namely, I am a hard-headed, short-tempered asshole who makes an effort to be nice.

My girlfriend, on the other hand, is the opposite. She's open-minded, forgiving and being nice comes naturally to her. I'm lucky to be with her, because in a lot of ways she's helping me become a better person.

As for being a better listener, I'll have to think about that.

## Grrrl Talk *(continued from page 25)*

they appreciate you more and realize they've been taking you for granted.

Why does it have to be that way? If we show our true feelings, then we're whiny, over-emotional and dependent. It's like taming some kind of wild furry little animal, you have to let them come to you. Every day is a game of advance and retreat.

And you always have to have something sweet to draw them. Any sudden movements will send them running.

They also say they want women to take initiative, make the first move. But we can't, even if we want to, because we know it would chase you away. We all know the guy has to feel like he's in control, that he pursued her and won her. Otherwise, she must not be worth winning. And, if we don't want to end up alone, women have to make some concessions to this primitive mating ritual. And it pisses us off, gosh darn it!

I feel like we have only progressed to more advanced game playing from our days in the schoolyard. Instead of hitting you, a guy will now hit on you with any number of cheesy one-liners. Instead of pulling your hair, he pulls your leg with stories about how he fell in love the first time he saw you. As for snapping my bra, some of the more inept ones still do that.

I suppose you can take the boy out of the playground, but you can't take the boy out of the man.



# But hey...

By Edren Sumagaysay

You think I need you? You think I need this?

Excuse me Miss, but I'm talking to you.

You whose heart bleeds, when there's no need, except to feed your own ego.

Flip the switch and turn it off.

It makes me nauseous, cautious, to watch this shit.

When I cry, when I wanna talk.

If there's no camera, you turn and walk.

Oh, I see, I see, you're too busy.

Prithree, I pray, confess today.

How astray you've gone.

'Coz one day you're here and the next you're not, off with that robot who's hot to trot.

Let's you see what you want to see, rose-colored glasses instead of me.

You think he's exciting, inviting, delighting?

I think he's trying, and lying, and biting off more than he can chew with you.

Screw this, you blew this, chance to dance with a real romance.

Fuckin' up our friendship is not the answer.

But hey.

It's your choice, I hear your voice.

Just remember one thing, whose phone did ring.

On those nights alone, when you moaned and groaned.

About getting stoned, and drinkin' Corona.

And getting caught by Moms and Pops.

With a sack of rocks, all bothered and hot.

Jumpin' in the sack, with that whack-ass quack.

Getting off the track, playing ticky-tack.

Who bailed you out, who's your only friend?

And despite all this, you're calling an end

To me and you, to you and me.

Just 'coz fuck-face is crowded with three?

Too bad for you, I'm through

With this consistent dis, ya Little Miss.

I guess I'll profess, with my last request.

And say, this day, with your bullets in my chest.

That it's not okay that you walk away.

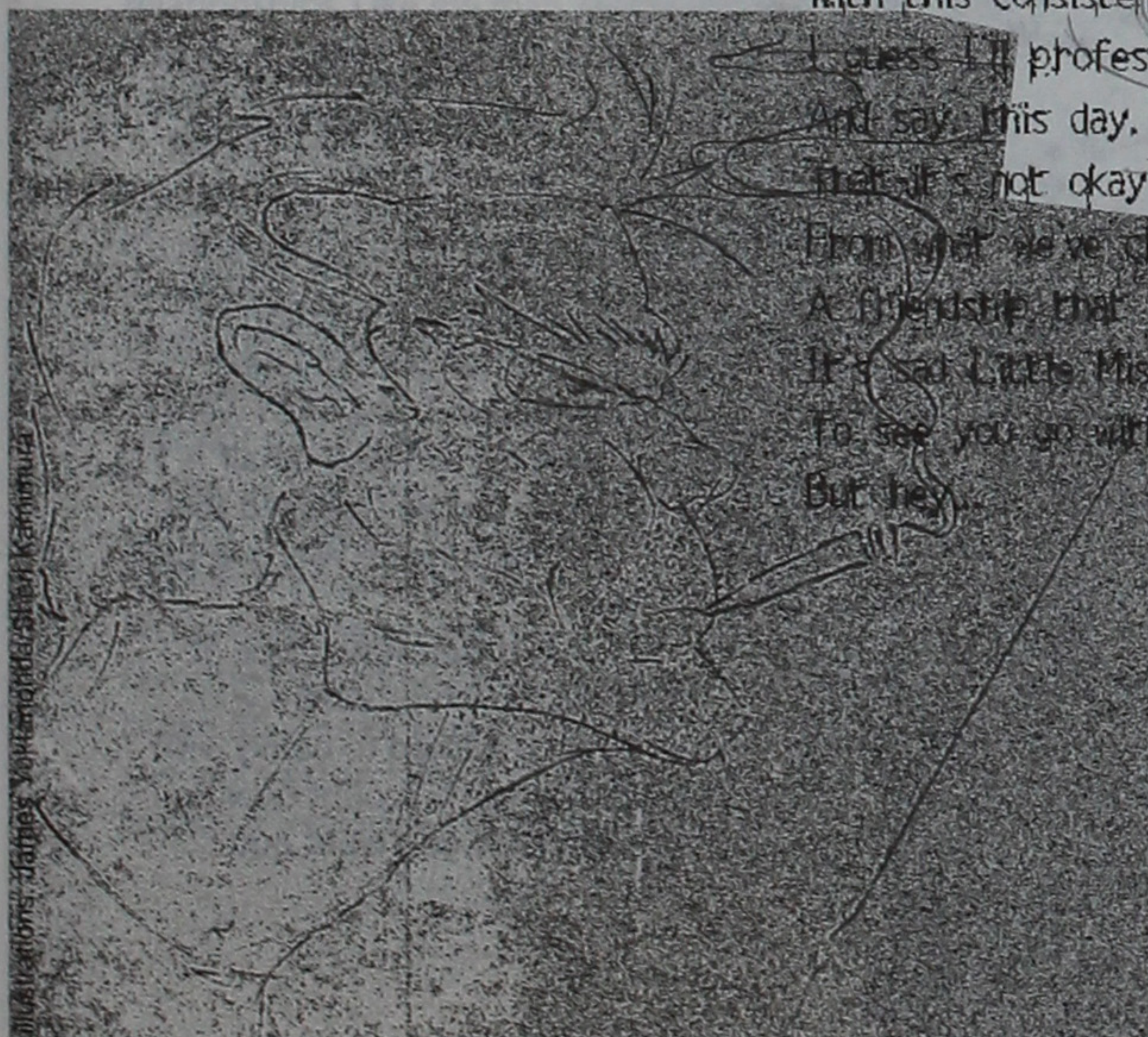
From what we've created, and made, and stated.

A friendship that I though would last longer than this, was stronger than this.

It's sad Little Miss.

To see you go with that punk-ass hoe and throw all this away.

But hey.





# Waiting to Exhale

*Weeding before moving from  
the ex-girl to the next girl.*

*By Moe Chiba*

**Y**ou know, you never really think about celibacy as a long-term thing. It kind of just happens. Okay, maybe you don't know. But anyway, it's been almost four years since I've "hit it" and I can tell you that not a day goes by without me thinking, dreaming or talking about sex.

And you know what? I don't think I've ever been happier my whole life.

Granted, there are days when I feel lonely. Many times I also feel like there's something missing, that I'm not complete. But damn, it sure feels good to be single and not have to put up with all the bullshit, the whining and the petty little fights.

Oh, let's not forget the drama. I still have to deal with shit in my life, and I guess I always will, but it's not at all like what I had to deal with before.

My first long-term relationship ended shortly after high school graduation with my girlfriend hooking up with one of my best friends. After a year-and-a-half, you figure things might have ended a lot smoother. But even after I confronted Lucy and Larry about all the skan-less

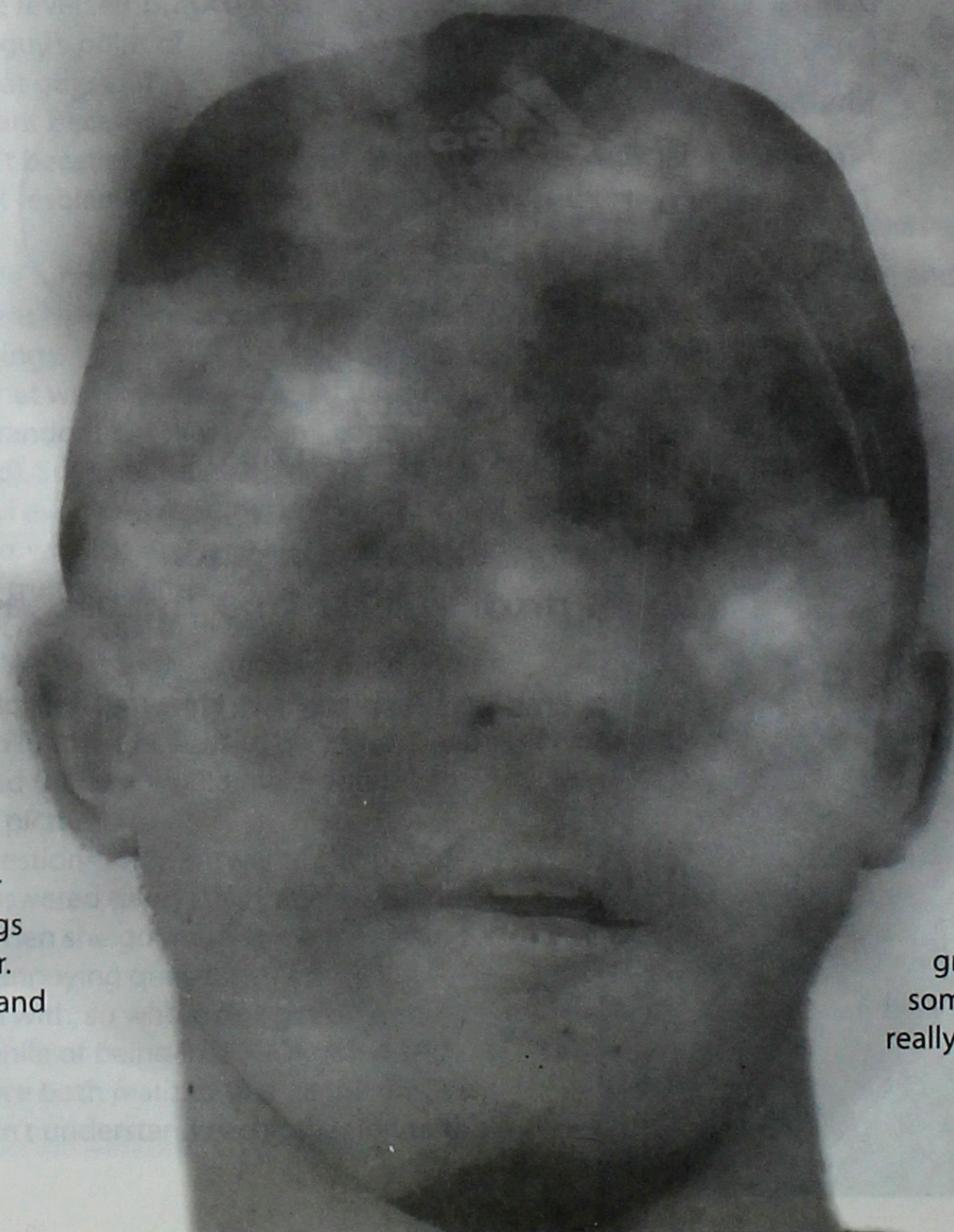
activity they did behind my back, she was still defensive.

The drama continued well into fall and winter, with Lucy calling me because she knew I still cared about her. She even got up all in my bizness and threw salt in my game with the next girl, talkin' all kinds of trash about her.

And Larry, whadda guy, I tell ya. To this day, whenever I'm fortunate enough to be graced by his presence, he'll ask me, "Hey, you're not still pissed at me are you?" Every single time, no joke.

I'd like to think that as you progress in life, you learn to make better decisions, especially with whom you date. That didn't happen with my next girlfriend. She and I went out for two-and-a-half years before I realized that the relationship was one big lie.

Sad but true, it was one of those relationships where you grow so accustomed to being with someone that you discount how you really feel--which is, you want out.





I mean, Lauren was a good girlfriend, but she wanted to mold me into who she wanted me to be: Someone who would be by her side 24-7. Someone who would never think about going out every once in a while with his roommates or friends 'cuz that would be "choosing them" over her. (Which, in her law school-bound logic, made me "gay.")

I guess I'm just as guilty for playing along, for telling her what she wanted to hear. But, you know, I was just sick and tired of arguing whenever I wouldn't answer in the affirmative about stuff like whether or not I loved her or whether we were going to get married.

It took three failed attempts—and three chances to make it right—before I finally ended it. Granted, it was a chicken-shit way to go out (I broke up with her over the phone), but I just couldn't take it no more. I had to be honest with her and, most of all, to myself.

This dry run began shortly thereafter, and life for me has never been the same since.

My friends from high school—all of whom are dawgs—made an interesting comment recently. (Much more interesting than the "Who's your girlfriend, Palm-ella?" jokes.) They asked me why I hate girls so much. I don't hate girls, I told them, I just prefer women.

I'm not bitter about my past relationships. Like my man Method says, "I've been there, been done that befo', and I don't need that no mo'."

I'm still checkin'. My radar's on. But now I know what I'm looking for in a person, so it's more a matter of weeding out the undesireables. There's a lot of funk to filter, you know. Some examples:

**Insecure Girls** The worst of the lot. *I cannot stand insecure girls.* Granted, everyone is insecure in some way, shape or form. However, extreme cases only foment unhealthy behavior such as jealousy, possessiveness and—my personal favorite—bad compromising. Before we broke up, Lauren wanted to make a deal: she would stop talking to all her guy friends if I stopped talking to the female

gender altogether. How could I say no? (Laugh with me here). Ladies, every girl (or ex-girlfriend) is not your enemy. And I'm not a hoe.

**Overly-Sororitous Girls** Ladies, not every girl is your best friend, especially the one telling you my ex-girlfriend's hair is ugly. Your homegirls need to get a life. We don't need to go there.

**Whiners** Yo, I feel you. Really, I do. Life as a shorty shouldn't be so rough. But don't make it harder on the rest of us.

**Girls Seeking Attention** It's one thing to ask for attention, but another to go out and actively seek it. Girls, don't be tucking your hair behind your ear, exposing your neck; subtly brushing your titties on our arms, or bend over in front of us and then

*You might say it's the maturity and confidence that makes a woman ...*

*Some girls don't always become women when they grow up.*

*They just become older girls.*

turn around and do the same thing to some other guy. I think "flirt" is the correct term to use here.

**Girls Who Act Like They Don't Know** This is directed to all the girls playin' ignorant to the fact that they attract guys who they themselves are not attracted to, and continue in their manipulative little games as if no one sees what they're doin'. I pity the court of fools, but I ain't a sucka and you ain't invisible.

**Static Cling-on** Don't give guys 30 calls a day and expect us guys to like it. Don't be clinging and expect that to be attractive. Restrain yourself. Otherwise, we might toss the "Snuggle" and opt for "Bounce."

**Cock-y Girls** Have confidence in the relationship, but don't be a beeyatch. Shit-talking about other girls only makes you look more insecure. And parading me around like you own me tests my patience.

**Gold-diggers** You need to go out and get a fuckin' job. A relationship has to

build. And if your happiness is tied to my wallet, then you ain't worth the investment. 'Cuz I know that when the going gets tough, you gets goin' (on to the next guy).

**Those Who Confuse Dick with Love** Do the math. Dick ≠ Love. I don't wanna be hearin' every other minute about some ex-dude of yours who fucked you over, that men are assholes, etcetera, etcetera. First of all, don't set yourself up for a negative situation. It's about time you learn to see through the bullshit. And be more careful with whom you share your punany with. (As a starting point, listen to Janet Jackson's "Let's Wait Awhile.")

**High-Maintenance Constructionists** It's perfectly fine if you want to primp yourself up, but do you really need to do it all the time? I hate going home with caked-on face powder on my shoulder, not to mention waiting an hour for you to get ready to go to the video store.

**Those With Identity Problems** Them colored contacts you're wearing don't make you "different." They make you look like that blind guy in "Kung Fu." Individuality comes from within. Why don't you start there?

You might say it's the maturity and confidence that make a woman. It's not necessarily an age thing. Some girls don't always become women when they grow up. They just become older girls.

This whole, being-on-the-solo tip doesn't have me bugged 'cuz I don't need to go out and start shit I know I ain't gonna finish.

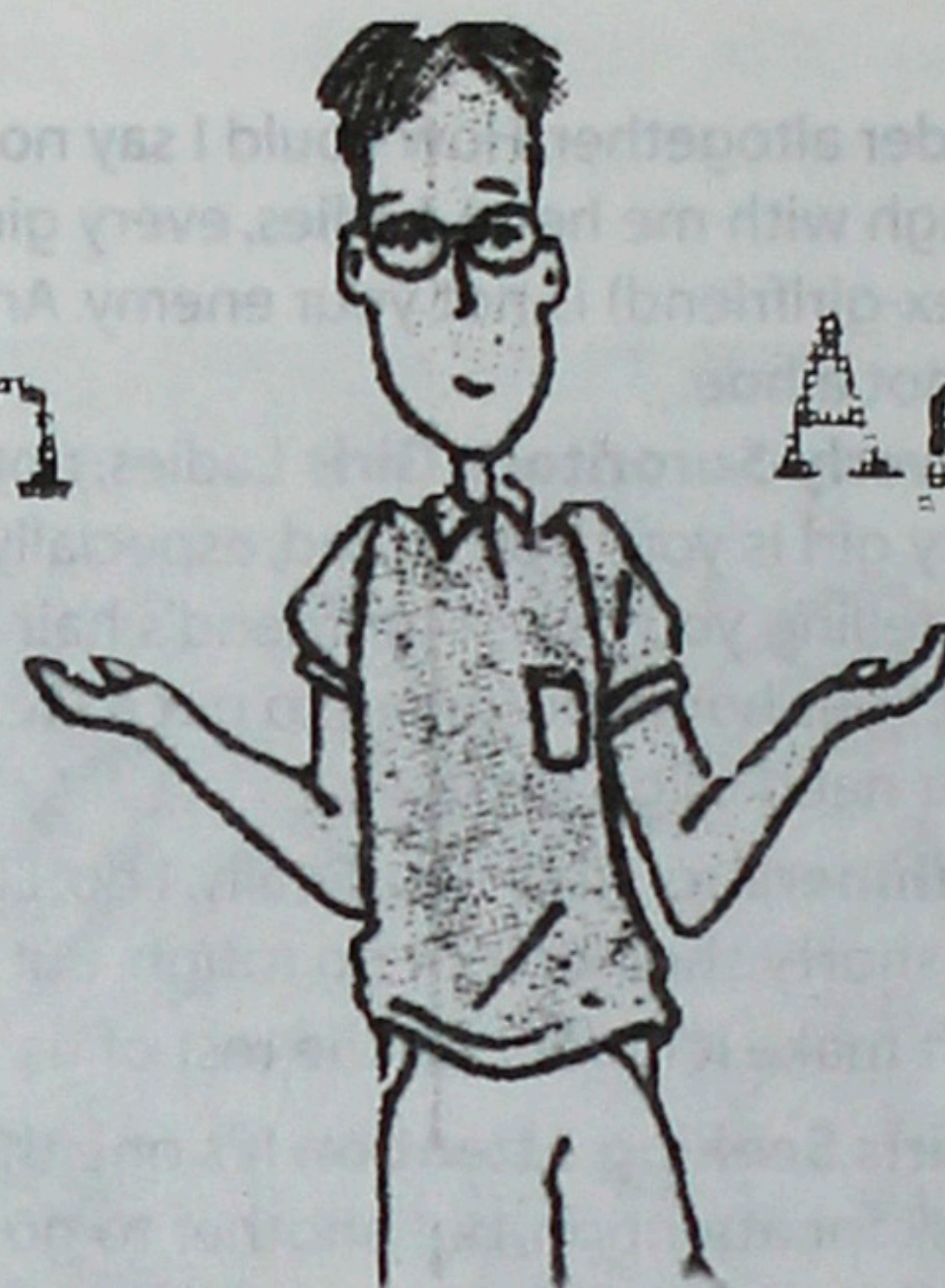
Some may say I'm being too picky, but I don't have time for any more drama in my life. And "weeding" saves me from unnecessary suffering. I don't have to insert myself in a potentially drama-esque situation just to get some na-na. I can just be their friend.

And that's just fine with me. 'Cuz when that special woman comes along (oh God, please let her come soon). I know I'm gonna treat her right. And just as more important, I'll know she'll do the same for me.

In the meantime, I'm just happy with me, my blunt and I.



# Asian Agender



By SONJIA HYUN

Illustrations By RICKMOND WONG

I'm really trying hard not to reduce things to essentialist gender roles, because I vehemently despise the Secretary School of Feminism's rhetoric that "the best man is a gingerbread man" and the frat boys oedipus complex of "the only woman you can trust is your mother." It's just so early '90s gender angst.

The problem with books that try to boil down the differences between XX's and XY's ("Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus") is they don't really answer contemporary Asian American gender stuff, reducing the whole male/female problem without the whole race thang.

The reductionist view on gender roles prescribes therapy for girls, while boys just need to masturbate more. But with the yellow factor, gender politics gets more complicated.

In Asian America, the boys and the girls have different issues. There are different gender phenonemons aside from typical white bread renderings of neanderthal and princess; Ross and Rachel; Jerry and Elaine; Dawson and Joey. For example:

***The reductionist view on gender roles prescribes therapy for girls, while boys just need to masturbate more.***

## **The Frank Chin Complex**

Symptoms include a compulsive need to call successful Asian American women Nazis and liars; marrying white women; prominent displays of Asian American male sexuality; and the compelling need to subsume the white male phallocentric ideal.

More youthful patients of this mental disease have been found obsessively playing NES 64's Golden Eye while taking big bong rips on the side. This psychological disorder usually infects partially successful Asian American men, who feel like they deserve more recognition than they've been given and have strong vendettas against Asian American women.

**Prada Obsessive Disorder (POD)** Mostly found in Chinese and Korean American women, POD is the desire to have a nice

Asian American boyfriend, who they can call oppah. The boy should preferably drive a European car, although Acuras are acceptable, to drive them to weekend Asian clubs where they drink Remy Martin with big anju plates of fruit.

These women are characterized by their need to carry around fake Prada, Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Gucci even though everyone knows it's fake except a few white people. These women travel in packs to the markets of Itaewon and Hong Kong to find the best knock-offs.

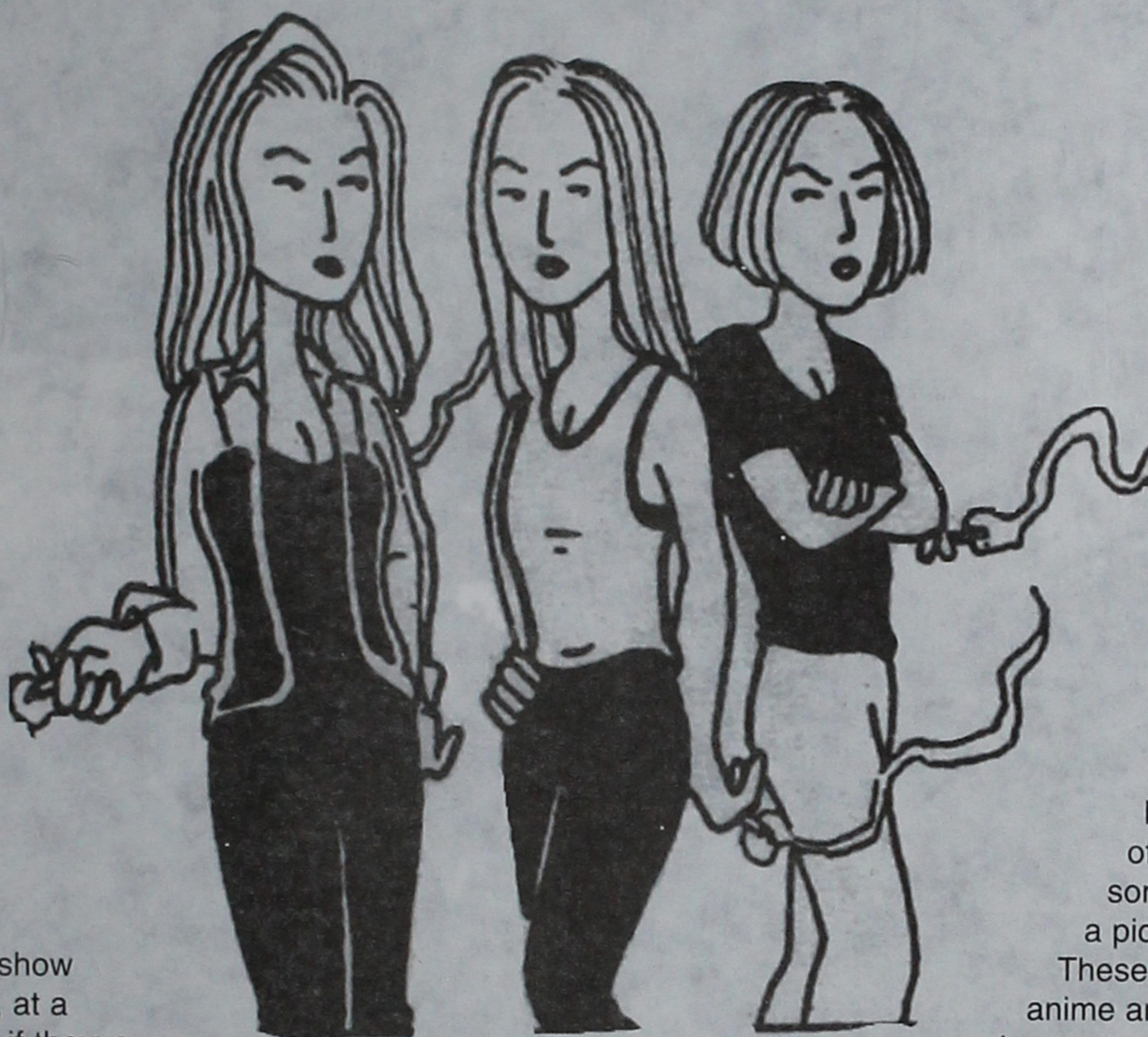
**Korean Christian Girl/Pagan Chinese Boy Mating Ritual** Aside from bringing home that new Japanese significant other to your grandparents (unless you're Japanese of course), this pairing often ends with fatal repercussions. The Korean Christian girl and pagan Chinese boy begin in

blissful love and muddle through untangling issues of existential spirituality and the Holy Ghost. The end result usually finds the pagan Chinese boy either broken hearted, gay or both and the Korean Christian girl is unheard from again as she embarks on a missionary trip through Guatemala for the next ten years. This ritual is most apparent in the Bay Area.

**Hipster Asian Kid Syndrome** Hipster Asian kids are usually defined by their







immense record collections and super-savvy wardrobe, mostly purchased at Republican vintage boutiques like Urban Outfitters. They can be found congregating at Unwound and Stereolab shows and, if they want to show a little bit more Asian pride, at a Seam show, but that's only if they've graduated from their whitewashed phase into race-consciousness.

***These women are characterized by their need to carry around fake Prada, Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Gucci even though everyone knows it's fake...***

Unlike other Asian American youth, these hipsters have a problem with dating within their own race. At shows, both genders may glance at each other to check out their hip quotient, but resume to assert their sexual prowess on the cute white girl bass player. The early '90s parallel of this phenomenon was marked by the kids who were listening to the Smiths and Depeche Mode instead of Boyz II Men.

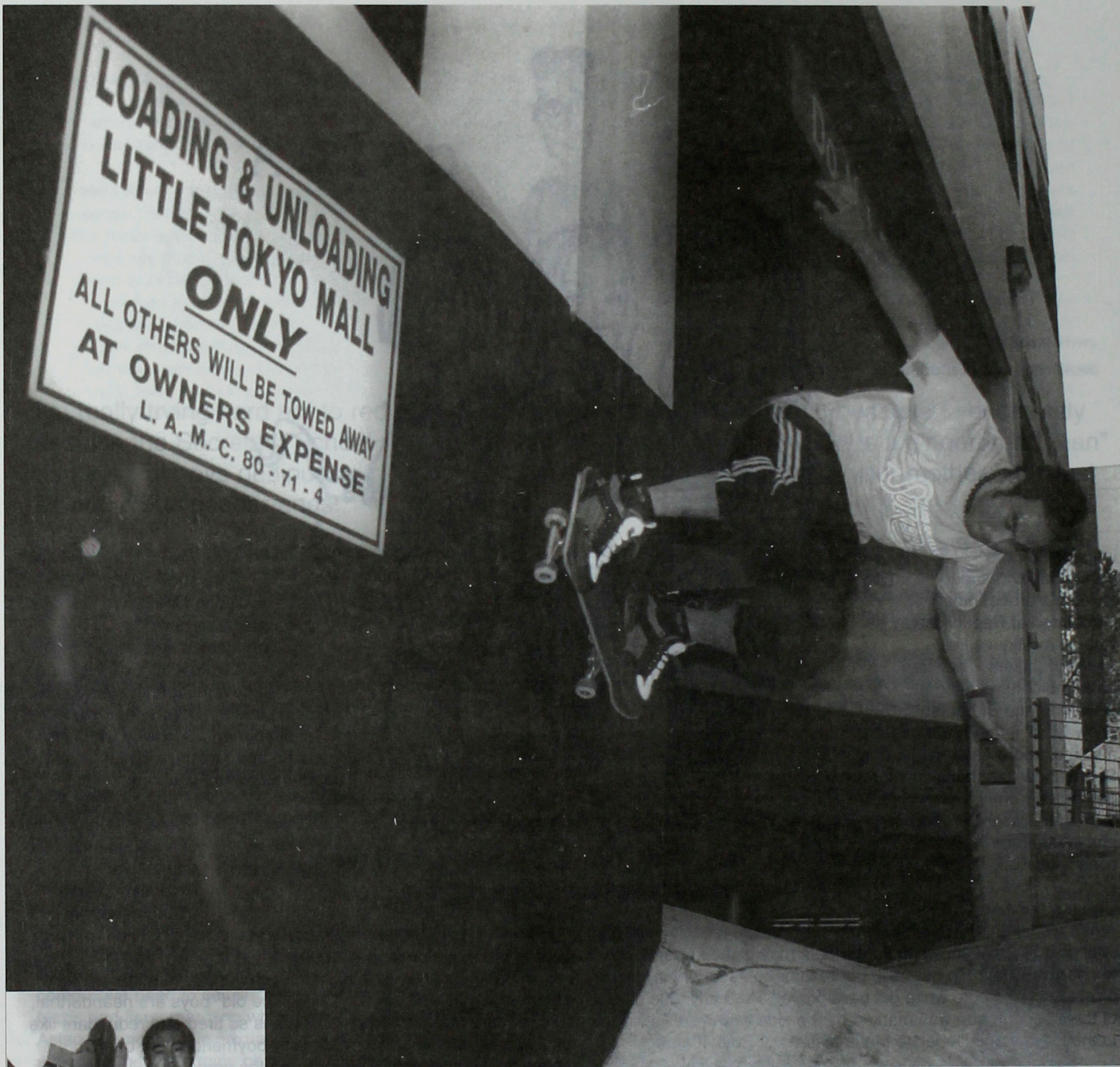
**Faye Wong Obsessive Disorder** Usually found congregating at Wong Kar Wai film screenings, people who suffer from Faye Wong Obsessive Disorder have a penchant for crushes and are secretly romantic. Mostly found in Asian American men, this disorder causes them to play their favorite Faye Wong album in intimate moments of make-out and trek to Las Vegas to see her perform.

The Asian American men who show signs of Faye Wong Obsessive Disorder usually own the DVD, Laserdisc and VHS version of "Chungking Express" and sometimes are known to carry a picture of her in their wallet. These men also enjoy watching anime and fantasize about girls in Japanese school uniforms.

These are only a few examples among the many Asian American gender phenomena that

have been made apparent in recent years. I'm still trying to figure out why all the homies I know like Nautica or why Asian American girls have that slight speech impediment that makes them talk with a lilt and say "like." The old "boys are neanderthal, women are feely" commentary seems so tired and redundant like the Barney theme song. Yeah, your boyfriend might be mad because you just landed that job on the verge of IPOing, but it might just be 'cuz they're suffering from Frank Chin Complex or perhaps you need to slip your girlfriend some Nyquil in her Remy Martin to catatonize her Prada Obsessive Disorder. Either way, reverting back to the whole men-are-from-Mars-blah-blah-blah is sooo passe because, hello, we're in the new millenium and us Asian Americans are much more transcendant than any of that boo-ha-ha '90s psychology.





**And we still rollin'.** Bennett Harada, Big wallride in Little Tokyo.

Latter 20th century, L.A.



trophy series



# The Day Tamagotchi Turned On Me

By Richard Wang



You just don't expect it from a round two-inch piece of plastic with an LCD screen embedded in it. When I first got my Tamagotchi, I cared for it as only an amused, curious post-graduate student could. Hatched from its digital egg, maturing into its shapeless rotund form, I fed it, played with it, disciplined it, washed it, even cleaned up its poop. Occasionally, I had to administer discipline, antibiotics and tuck him/her/it into bed — all with the three easy-to-use buttons.

Together we sang expressionless single-note tunes, played guessing games, even laughed and played.

We had our good times, but then T. became unreasonable, taking up more and more time, wanting more food, more things. The happy tunes became monotonous, and then T. started demanding more medications in a way that made me suspect drug dependence: no friends, isolated, withdrawn.

One day, I had terrible fights with T., constantly making it shut up. T. responded by interrupting my work continuously with expletives like BEEP BEEP. The little cute round tart used to fill my heart and its screen with love, and now it was heartbreak ....

In an early morning rush, after a particularly dreadful debacle with another Tamagotchi, I left T. next to my Palm Pilot. It was the worst mistake I'd ever made.

Finding his way into my Palm Pilot's IrDa port, he started munching around everything. Soon he was leaving piles of shit in little bundles of logs and pies all over the place. It was several hours before I found out and by then T. had become a digital menace. Whenever I turned on my pilot, his smirking face decorated the screen and he consistently got in my face whenever I tried to access something. I found he had made prank calls to my friends and business associates, screwed with my schedule and even read snippets of my personal memos to myself. At times like those, I dragged him away with the stylus or tapped on his head. But having mangled my data and schedules for the next five

months, I decided enough was enough and enlisted help from professional disciplinarians.

We decided to cut T. off completely, no food, no light, no energy. In short, we pulled out the AAAA batteries and left T. to wither into an electrical singularity.

I mourned for my little ball of happiness and kept the plastic egg shell as a memento.

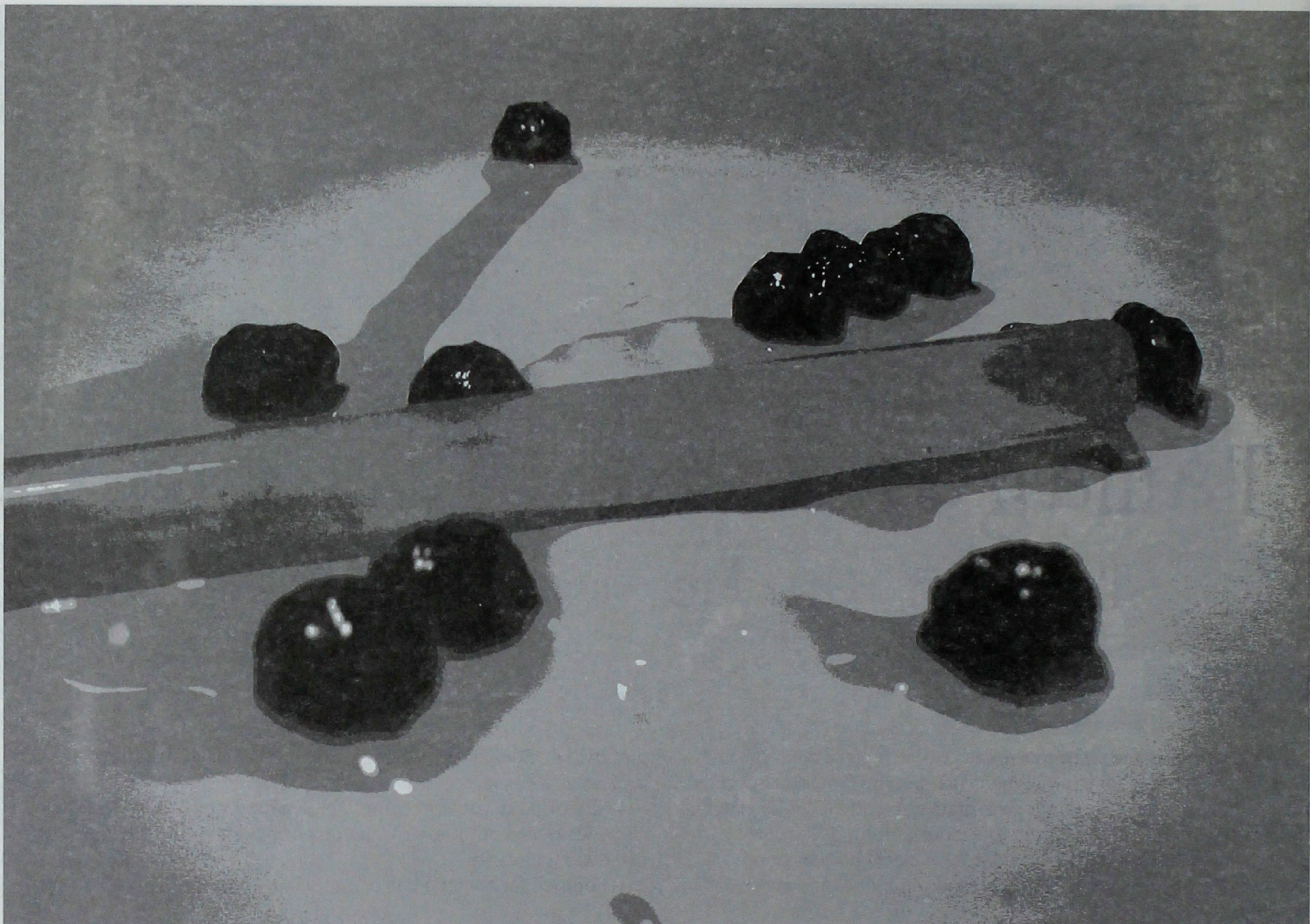
A week of using my Palm Pilot with no incident passed uneventfully, until one day, while Hot Syncing my recent data with my PC, I saw a little tinkle of poop land on the LCD screen. To my surprise and horror, T. was still alive — just more angry and irrational. Worse yet, he had been transferred to my PC!

Now everything was in jeopardy as my documents, contact lists, projects and personal information were all on my computer. Thinking quickly, I contacted the Good Guys who suggested that I put T. to sleep by turning off the screen. Once asleep, we obtained a digital dog to stiff T. out and transferred him via IrDa back into his egg shell. To be sure, he was furious when I woke him up, but not quite as furious as I. Having stripped valuable time and data, I was through with T. for good.

A digivet suggested that T. be put to sleep, and so with his help, I unscrewed his access cover and removed his battery. Just to make sure, we attached a 12V battery to the shell and zapped it 10 or 12 times, I forget.

The burned-out hulk of T. still sits on my desk — an eternal reminder that sometimes you do all you can but bad apples are simply bad apples. Just yesterday, though, I found T.'s battery and discovered that it had been leaking mercury. No wonder. Such behavior couldn't have been purposefully created, the toxic metal had made something of a psychotic out of T. My heart goes out to him. Perhaps he still survives as a stream of ones and zeros somewhere in this big electronic transistor we call life.





# boba love affair

By ELLEN DIONNE WU

*Boba* is my passion. When I'm happy, it makes me happier, and when I'm sad, well... it gives me a much-needed boost. There is nothing like slurping squishy translucent brown balls of tapioca awash in chilled milk tea (or some variant) through an extra-wide, neon-colored straw.

As a native (and, admittedly, sometimes deprived) midwesterner, I first encountered boba on my "Love Boat" Study Tour of Taiwan in the summer of '96. One evening at a Taipei night market, I saw my roommate Emilie clutching a see-thru plastic cup. Immediately my eyes gravitated toward the extra-wide, neon-colored straw within, and the rest, as they say, is history. Love at first bite. (Honest! It's a drink you actually chew.)

Lucky for me, I was transplanted to L.A. not long after my return from Taiwan. My first week in So. Cal, I gleefully discovered the omnipresence of boba at all the trendy Chinese cafes like Go-Go, Sunday and Shau Mei in the "suburban Chinatowns" of Monterey Park and Alhambra. Much later, I surveyed the 50 students in my Chinese American Experience class at UCLA on the best boba joint in Los Angeles—Tea Station, located on Valley Blvd. in the 99 Ranch plaza, was the unanimous reply.

Since I didn't have a car for my first two years as an Angeleno, I had to depend on the goodwill of my UCLA buddies to drive me



40 minutes from the Westside for my periodic fix. So even though I lived in a city with Chinese restaurants up the wazoo, boba was still a special treat. Great things have transpired in the last tri-annum, fortunately.

A couple of savvy teahouse entrepreneurs near campus have installed boba-drinks on their menus. When one of them, located in Brentwood, first opened, I scrambled to sample their boba. The co-owner must've recognized me as a true boba connoisseur, because he asked me—almost anxiously—how it tasted. "Needs more tea," I replied sagely.

Since my chances for boba have come few and far between, I've hesitated to venture out and try the "other flavors," like green tea, mango, taro, even coffee. On recent trips to British Columbia and the San Francisco Bay Area, though, a mysterious force overcame me and I decided to go for it. At the Oasis in Vancouver, I bravely asked for almond. It was aiiight.

At Ophelia and Fantasia in No. Cal, I gingerly ordered coconut and strawberry. To my surprise, not bad at all! Back home in L.A., I triumphantly reported these results to Teresa, my Pinay friend whom I've converted into a loyal boba fan. "Sounds okay, but nothing will beat OG boba," she emphatically declared.

On my tour up the Left Coast, differences in boba from city to city dawned on me. First—availability. The greater Vancouver area gets mad props for this one. Not only can you drink it at the more traditional venues, you also buy it at "regular" malls and even—unbelievable—golf driving ranges! Truly fantastic. However, you might get some stares if you saunter up to the counter and ask for a tall, cool boba. In Vancouver (and Toronto), it's known as "bubble tea." Somehow, that seems to match the wholesome image of our environmentally-conscious and cutesy-cadenced neighbors ("You looking at my bum, eh?") to the north.

In the Bay Area, boba pops up on menus as "Pearl Tea" and "Tapioca Tea." Here in L.A., we go by "boba." I'm not sure what they call it in New York—the only time I tried it there was at a little dive in Chinatown

called Sweet Tart. It was too small, too syrupy and too expensive (about \$4 a glass!).

Be aware too that in Chinese you can order it as *zhen zu nai ca* OR *buo ba nai ca*. "Zen zu" means "pearls," while "buo ba" translates to—no joke—"big breasts." Swear to god, my ex-boyfriend would be in heaven if they served this at Hooters. Anyways, be aware of this technicality—in some 'hoods, ask for "zen zu nai ca" and you'll get little dinky-ass tapiocas. Tip: stick with "buo ba."

I've also noticed that boba has been getting some press recently. It's not exactly a brand-new concoction, having originated in

Taiwan at least a decade ago. Just this summer, [asianavenue.com](http://asianavenue.com) included an article entitled "What's the deal with Bubble Tea?" along with a heavily trafficked bulletin board discussing the same topic on its popular website. But it

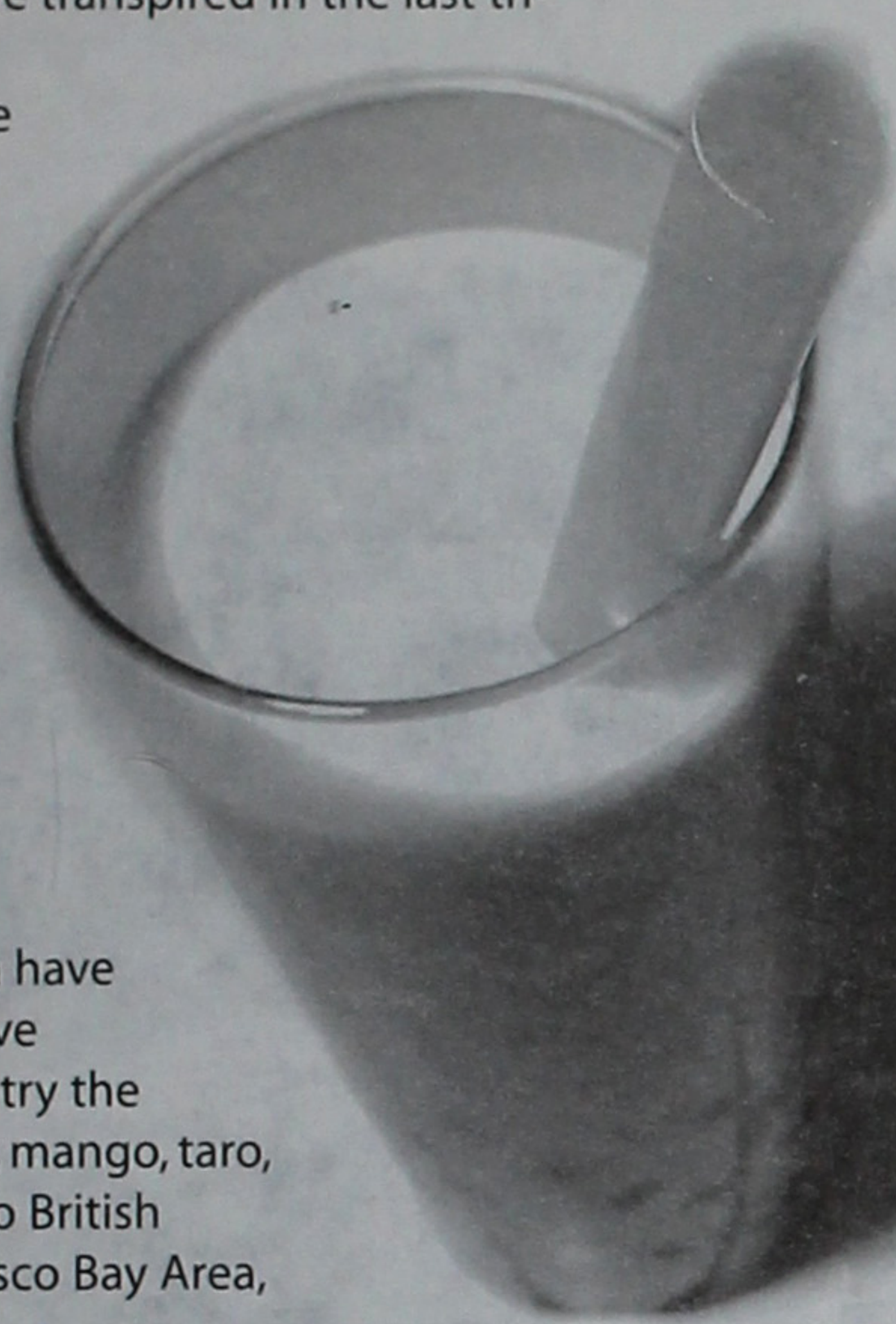
may not be the sole terrain of young, trendy APAs anymore—lately it seems to have caught on among the (gasp!) mainstream.

I've seen blurbs in places like *Time Out New York* and *The Los Angeles Times* highlighting the hip boba spots for yuppies to crash. While I was a bit ambivalent about this, I also happily observed a pair of brothas drinking boba just last week. So I guess it's all good. Bring it to the masses! Let them eat boba!

Last spring, I ran across an article on Chinese food written by Charles Ku for UCLA's Asian Pacific newsmagazine, *Pacific Ties*. It included an amusing graphic of him hugging a gigantic boba as well as this provocative question: "Can boba truly unify Asian America?" In truth, I think we might have to wait a few years until boba reaches the far corners of our community, from Alabama to Wyoming and everywhere in between.

Which is why I'm a little worried as I prepare to move across the country to Chicago in two weeks. I lie awake at night pondering such important issues as the accessibility and quality of boba in the Windy City. But in case I have to take the El for an hour to buy one, or in the event that it simply

tastes nasty when I do, I have Plan B laid out. I've bought a package of those extra-wide, neon-colored straws and a six-month supply of *Q fen yuan*, the uncooked tapioca balls. I've experimented and found that English breakfast or Lipton tea, plus half- and-half and sugar or condensed milk works pretty well. In short, maybe I'll just have to throw my own boba fite.



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Photos: Scarlet Sy

# Asians, Latinos Come Together in Monterey Park

Monterey Park, a city of about 60,000 people, 15 freeway-minutes east of downtown Los Angeles, has been transformed by migration over the past several decades. The city was primarily White in the 1960s when native-born Japanese Americans and Mexican Americans began moving into the city from nearby East Los Angeles.

BY LELAND T. SAITO



The transformation accelerated during the 1970s and 1980s, with the entrance of a large number of Chinese immigrants. As a result, the 1990 Census revealed, Monterey Park has become the only city outside of Hawaii with an Asian American majority population (57.5%).

However, Latinos, who make up 30% of Monterey Park's population, are a significant presence in the city. In the San Gabriel Valley—the region where Monterey Park is located—Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group and the dominant political force, holding many elected offices.

On the other hand, Chinese immigrants now dominate the commercial and business areas of the city, and San Gabriel Valley now

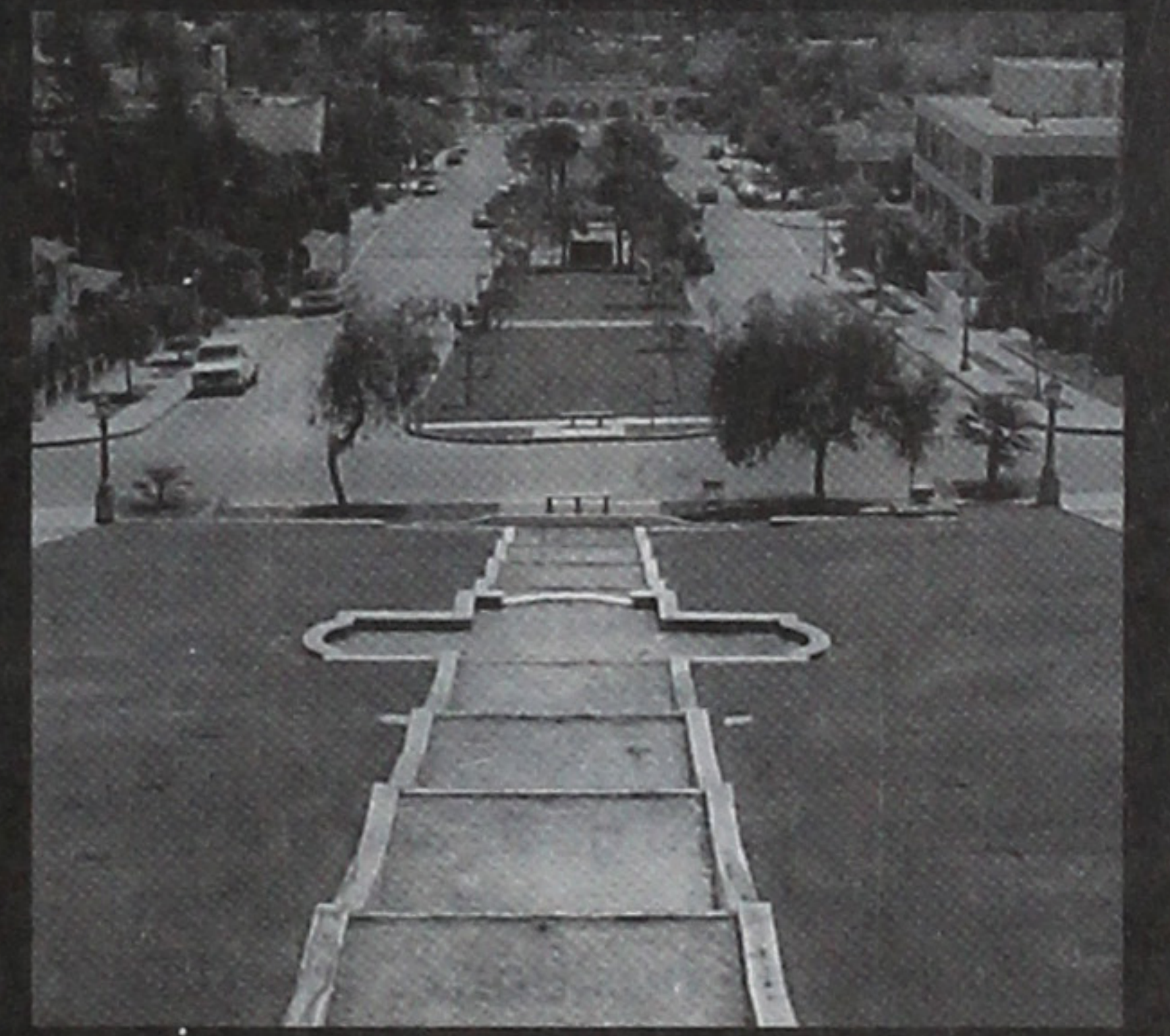
the political, economic and social character of their community. These changes create new challenges and new possibilities, a fundamental transformation, in terms of community politics.

In the 1980s, longtime residents and City Council members reacted to the growing demographic, political and economic presence of the Chinese immigrants by passing a resolution (since rescinded) to declare English as the city's official language. In addition, they attempted to ban the use of foreign languages on commercial signage and generated slow-growth efforts which some Asian Americans interpreted as anti-Chinese and anti-immigrant since much of the growth was fueled by Chinese immigrant capital.

Americans and verbal and physical assaults against Asian Americans.

In the 1988 Monterey Park City Council election, voters were able to cast votes for the two seats up for election. Significantly, in that climate of racial tension and slow growth, Judy Chu, a native-born Chinese American, received the highest number of votes.

A professor at a local university, she was viewed as someone who would provide thoughtful, competent and professional leadership at this critical period marked by heated rhetoric. Running a campaign that stressed her extensive involvement in community groups and political experience as an elected official on a local school board, she was able to gain widespread support among all



Photos: Scarlet Sy

Left to right: Monterey Park Chamber of Commerce, Midwick Estates Water Fountain, Estates Water Fountain, view from top.

has the largest Chinese ethnic economy in the U.S. in terms of number of businesses. This economy includes banks, computer manufacturers, aerospace contractors and medical centers, as well as the more familiar Chinese restaurants and supermarkets.

The new immigrants are altering

During this period, an alarming number of hate crimes against Asian Americans occurred in the San Gabriel Valley. Examples included cross burnings on the lawns of Asian American homes, swastikas and anti-Asian slogans painted on public buildings, including schools and churches used by Asian

racial groups, winning 30% of the White vote and 35% of the Latino vote.

Cooperative efforts between Latinos and Asian Americans in the multiracial coalition backing Judy Chu's City Council campaign emerged in response to distinctly new historical circumstances and



conditions in the 1980s. They also reflected a long tradition of shared struggle against racialized hierarchies and privileges.

Racial discrimination has channeled Asian Americans and Latinos into similar occupational, residential and political spaces, creating common interests and concerns as similarly racialized workers, consumers and citizens. The experiences of both groups forced them to confront the contradictions between promises of universal inclusion in the U.S. and the nation's actual practices of racialized exclusion.

Memories of racialization and the struggles mounted against it created affinities between groups that might otherwise see themselves as antagonistic competitors for scarce resources. From the poor labor conditions

excluded from the group. The Mexican members refused the AFL offer, expressing their solidarity with their Japanese co-workers.

Echoing the experience of the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association a half-century later, Asian Americans and Mexican Americans formed the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1966. Although Cesar Chavez has become synonymous with the UFW and the organization is seen as largely Latino in the mind of the American public, it was Philip Vera Cruz and other Filipino members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, who started the strike against the grape growers. Cesar Chavez and the National Farm Workers Association joined the strike a short while later and the two groups eventually joined forces to

In one of the early coalitions in electoral politics, a grassroots alliance composed of Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and Whites in 1949 backed Mexican American Edward Roybal, who became the first Latino councilmember in the twentieth century. Roybal grew up in Boyle Heights, from where many of the current Latino and Japanese American residents of the San Gabriel Valley migrated. They were his major base of support in the council district.

When asked if it was important that Roybal was Latino, Wilbur Sato, a Japanese American supporter replied, "Yes, oh yes. That meant that there would be a minority voice. At that time, everybody (elected officials) was White in East Los Angeles."

The San Gabriel Valley, with its

## ***Moving into urban areas, Mexican and Japanese Americans inhabited the same segregated neighborhoods, literally finding "common ground" once again.***

and low wages in the agricultural fields, to political disenfranchisement in urban barrios and suburban enclaves, Asian Americans and Latinos established "common ground" based on shared goals and a keen understanding of their subordinate positions in U.S. society.

There has been a long history of coalition-building between Asian and Mexican workers. The first major cooperative effort was the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association, who went on strike in Oxnard, California in 1903. When the group later applied for admission to the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the AFL agreed only on the condition that Japanese farm workers be

become the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, the predecessor to the UFW.

Moving into urban areas, Mexican and Japanese Americans inhabited the same segregated neighborhoods, literally finding "common ground" once again. The two groups encountered restrictive covenants that kept them from renting and owning houses, discriminatory lending practices by financial institutions and racial steering practices by real estate brokers. Mexican and Japanese Americans also established a shared political space as they united to combat residential and economic segregation and the politicians who ignored these low-income areas.

Asian American and Latino population, offers a window into the future of race relations and politics in an America where these two groups, as the fastest growing in the country—Latinos, with a U.S. population nearly three times the size of Asian Americans, are expected to surpass African Americans in number by 2020—will play increasingly prominent roles.

*Leland T. Saito is Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego and is the author of Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb. He received his Ph.D. in sociology from UCLA.*



**B**ut we don't talk about such things," my mother would say when I would ask her to talk to someone about what she was enduring. As I got older, I constantly asked my mother why we didn't seek family counseling. She would say that was how "Americans" dealt with things. I just didn't understand this logic. She would tell me that in [the South Asian] community we dealt with problems from within, without asking strangers for help.

As a child, the intense verbal fights were normal occurrences. My parents would often have small squabbles, which metamorphosed into emotional abuse, everything from intense shouting and threats to insulting the other's intelligence. My mother would tell us to go to our rooms and I remember shutting my eyes and attempting to make all the fighting and the noise disappear. I thought that all parents fought like this and this was normal, so I had to tolerate it.

It all changed when, in the middle years of elementary school, I first saw my father threaten to hit my mother. My understanding that something was amiss slapped me, but I felt just as helpless as my mother. Not until I was in Junior High was I able to understand the extent of the emotional abuse in my own home. I felt my mother should not have had to live in fear of my father's temper. It also seemed as if my mother was condoning his behavior by not seeking help. Further, it affected the manner in which I perceived my father and South Asian marriages.

I also observed the effects on my brother, who was in High School. He was very uncommunicative about his anger. He had changed in some way, growing up a little faster by witnessing the abuse and making a pact with himself that he would never disrespect his spouse in this way.

In order to understand the nature of the abuse that existed in my family, it is crucial to broadly define domestic violence. According to the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention in San Mateo County, domestic violence is "an escalating pattern of abuse in a relationship which occurs between husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, same-sex partners and parents and grown children in the household." A person utilizes coercive behavior to control and exercise power over another. Such abuse includes emotional/verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and financial abuse. The World Health Organization estimates that at least 20 percent of women in the world have been physically or sexually assaulted by a man. Therefore, domestic violence is an issue that needs to be dealt with through honest dialogue at home and if that

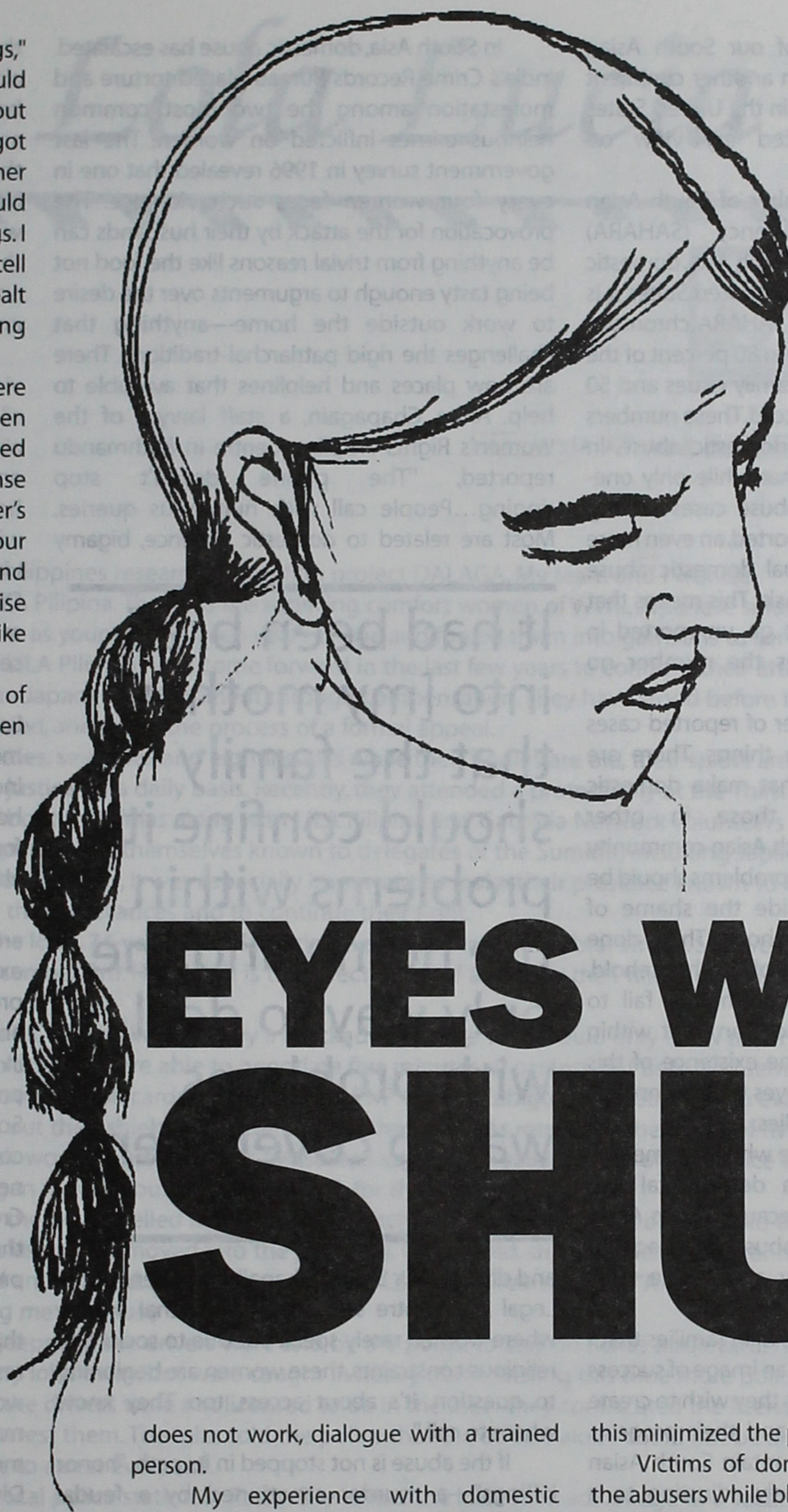
does not work, dialogue with a trained person.

My experience with domestic violence was seeing my mother being emotionally victimized. She was verbally abused and at times pushed around by my father. The most striking aspect of the emotions I felt was not blaming my mother for her denial of the abuse. It had been bred into her that the family should confine its problems within the home and the only way to deal with problems was to cover them up with a façade of humor or denial. The foolish reasoning behind this approach was to perhaps keep our problems from spilling outside of the house, believing that

this minimized the problem.

Victims of domestic abuse often condone the abusers while blaming themselves. As a Hindu woman, my mother justifies her current fate as reparation for her bad karma, wrong deeds from a past life. She often mentions that if she were in India, she would not have been as strong as she now is, because she probably would have been at the mercy of her in-laws who would blame her rather than their son for the domestic situation.

It is a common Indian tradition for brides to live with their grooms' parents once they are married. This was the case with my family, but my parents later moved to America so their children could have a better education. Our household is



# EYES WIDE SHUT

BY URVI PATEL



marked by the traditions of our South Asian descent. My parents are from another continent and generation. I was reared in the United States and this heavily influenced my view on emotional abuse.

As Sheila Metha, a member of South Asian Helpline and Referral Agency (SAHARA) mentioned, in many parts of South Asia, domestic violence is tolerated, but in the United States it is viewed as a violation of life. SAHARA chronicles that in Southern California 70 to 80 percent of the calls received are related to family issues and 50 percent are about marital discord. These numbers do not specifically refer to domestic abuse. In addition, Metha estimated that while only one-fourth of actual domestic abuse cases among South Asians in the US are reported, an even more horrifying one-tenth of actual domestic abuse cases are reported in South Asia. This means that compared to the three that go unreported in America, about three times the number go unreported in South Asia!

This insanely low number of reported cases can be attributed to many things. There are factors in our community that make domestic violence different from those in other communities. Within the South Asian community there is a belief that domestic problems should be dealt with secretly, to avoid the shame of seeking assistance outside the home. This is done to protect the *izzat* or honor of the household. Many in the South Asian community fail to believe that domestic violence can exist within one's own home. To admit the existence of this crime would be to open our eyes to the monsters that lurk within our own families.

A victim is defined as one who is harmed by or made to suffer from a detrimental act, circumstance or condition. Because South Asian women who have suffered abuse often equate victimization with negativity and failure, they refuse to see themselves as victims.

Most middle class South Asian families that I know feel the need to uphold an image of success and perfection. As immigrants they wish to create a better life for themselves and their progeny. Most struggle in an effort to retain South Asian traditions while simultaneously adjusting to a completely new environment. There is no room for failure in their quest for a "better future." Claiming to be a victim completely destroys this image, but it sheds light into what really occurs in many homes.

I do not support the notion that the nature of South Asian culture leads to or justifies domestic violence. I am just attempting to understand domestic violence in a South Asian context. This is not to say that all South Asian homes hide abuse behind a veneer, but there are instances where domestic violence exists.

In South Asia, domestic abuse has escalated. India's Crime Records Bureau placed torture and molestation among the two most common heinous crimes inflicted on women. The last government survey in 1996 revealed that one in every four women faces such violence. The provocation for the attack by their husbands can be anything from trivial reasons like the food not being tasty enough to arguments over the desire to work outside the home—anything that challenges the rigid patriarchal traditions. There are now places and helplines that are available to help. Anita Chapagain, a staff lawyer of the Women's Rights Helpline Centre in Kathmandu reported, "The phone doesn't stop ringing...People call with numerous queries. Most are related to domestic violence, bigamy

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**It had been bred into [my mother] that the family should confine its problems within the home and the only way to deal with problems was to cover them up.**

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and divorce." Dr Shanta Thapalia, President of the Legal Aid Centre said, "In a patriarchal society where women rarely speak out due to social and religious constraints, these women are beginning to question. It's about access, too. They know where to call."

If the abuse is not stopped in its path, "honor killings"—a murder sanctioned by a feudal society that sees women as the property of their men—occur. Beena Sarwar, a Pakistani journalist, reported that a Pakistani woman was killed by her own family because she wanted to get divorced from her abusive husband. This is an example of an honor crime because the woman supposedly maligned the honor of her family. Sarwar also stated, "Domestic violence is the biggest single cause of injury for women, accounting for more hospitalization admissions than rapes and road accidents."

Married women who recently immigrated to

the United States are also dealing with domestic abuse. Immigrant women are doubly susceptible, because they have left their families behind and are unfamiliar with the language and laws in their adopted country. Prema Vora, a volunteer at New York's Sakhi, a shelter for South Asian women, explained, "Many times the batterer threatens [the wife] with deportation if she tells anyone about the abuse." These women usually endure the abuse all their lives for this reason.

The common factor that brings all abuse victims together is the fact that it is a crime of silence. Experts say that many women keep quiet about violence perpetuated against them for economic reasons, low self-esteem, and fears of how they will be perceived by the world, along with the fear that the man may retaliate more violently if they try to leave. Dorothy Gregory, Director of the Women's Crisis Center, states that many women believe that domestic violence is a secret they must keep at all costs.

However, there is an inkling of good news. Lauina Melwani in *Femina*, an Indian women's magazine, reported that second generation Indian Americans are asking for help and "there is hope...in the fact that [these] women have formed groups...and are coming out and talking about the issues."

Various South Asian American communities are now acknowledging that domestic violence exists, but there has been a problem in preventing, investigating and prosecuting such abuse. There are now organizations, such as Sakhi in New York and Apna Ghar in Chicago in that provide helplines, shelters or legal aid to abused South Asians. Although women are more conscious of abuse today, education is still necessary to prevent future cases of violence. Creating a safe space for women to talk about their experiences is a crucial step toward prevention of abuse.

My brother and I now live with the notion that if we are not respected and, in turn, do not respect our significant others, the relationship is worth nothing. I know I would rather not get married than be treated in this manner. For my mother, however, the situation is rather different. Divorce is not an option for her, because she does not want to "break up the family."

But she has learned to fight back and talk about it with her children. My father has also attempted to control his temper, and when it does flare up we have learned to not let it get to us. Therefore, in our own way, we have dealt with it the only way we could. I still believe that open channels of communication are the most efficient way to deal with emotional abuse, because if a husband does not acknowledge the extent of emotional harm he has caused his wife and children, he will never stop.



# About Lola Lucia

By M. EVELINA GALANG



PAR AVION VIA AIR MAIL CORREO AEREO

## *Magkakailagan,*

I spent the summer in the Philippines researching my film project DALAGA. My team and I worked extensively with the lolas of LILA Pilipina. The lolas are surviving comfort women of WWII. Japanese soldiers abducted them when they were as young as thirteen years of age and forced them into garrisons to serve as military sex slaves. The lolas of LILA Pilipina have come forward in the last few years to confront their attackers and to demand justice from the Japanese government through compensation. They have stood before the courts of Japan, have been denied, and are in the process of a formal appeal.

The lolas are now in their sixties, seventies and eighties, and while their bodies are old, their spirits are strong, loud and young. They fight for justice on a daily basis. Recently, they attended a protest rally at the Third ASEAN Informal Summit at the PICC. About sixty lolas along with LILA Pilipina and Gabriela Network volunteers boarded jeepneys in an attempt to make themselves known to delegates of the Summit, including Japan's Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. For the lolas, it was especially important to make their presence known to Prime Minister Obuchi in order to air their grievances and to continue their fight.

During the protest, one of the lolas, 74-year-old Lola Lucia Alvarez, suffered a cerebral stroke. She went into a five-day coma and died on December 3rd. Her death is the direct result of abuse by the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Once the lolas arrived at the PICC, they were met by a blockade of police who would only allow them to protest silently. LILA Pilipina volunteers were able to negotiate five minutes of protest. But as they disembarked from the jeepneys and pulled out their placards and bullhorns, PNP Officer Cabigon ordered them to evacuate.

The police lined up, holding out their shields. They demanded that the lolas retreat by the count of five or they would be forced to, in their words, "hurt" the lolas. "*Masaktan kayo!*" they yelled. Some of the police were armed with guns. The lolas began moving, but not fast enough for the police.

"*Tulak! Tulak!*" (Push! Push!) the police yelled to one another. Ritchie Extremadura, head of LILA, told the police to be patient with the lolas as they moved into the jeepneys. They're old, she told them, they cannot move quickly. Still they pushed and pushed. During this time, Lola Lucia was heard saying, "*Ninerbyos ako dahil sa pulis.*" (The police are making me nervous.)

After the lolas boarded the jeepneys, the drivers were told by the police to stay on Roxas Boulevard. The jeepneys began to take the sixty lolas away, but were caught in heavy traffic. During this time more police stopped the caravan, claiming the drivers were not licensed to be in the area. They confiscated the licenses of the drivers and threatened to arrest them. The lolas told the police that the drivers alone could not be arrested and that the police would have to arrest everyone.

The jeepneys were led to a local police station in Pasay City where the lolas took advantage of a vacant lot nearby and began their program of protest. It was then that Lola Lucia felt severe pains in her neck and head. When LILA staff members requested the police release one of the drivers and a jeepney to take Lola Lucia to the hospital, they refused, saying it was not their commander's orders. She would have to wait. The PNP detained Lola Lucia fifteen more minutes after her attack. Finally, Maribel, a LILA staff member, was able to secure a taxi and took Lola Lucia to San Juan de Dios Hospital in Pasay City.

Even as she was being taken to the hospital, Lola Lucia was saying, "*Gusto kong lumaban!*" I want to fight. Shortly after her arrival at the hospital, Lola Lucia slipped into a five-day coma.

Many of the lolas are angry at the treatment and abuse they experienced. Lola Anastacia Fortes said, "We witnessed the same violence, the same brutality we suffered in the hands of the Japanese soldiers. We were once more stripped of our dignity."

Lola Fedencia David added, "We want justice. What does the Estrada government give us in return? Estrada has not in any way extended his support to the lolas, now he has responded to our cries with violence, with





PAR AVION VIA AIR MAIL CORREO AEREO

further injustice. He gives first-class treatment to his foreign guests and treats us like rags, he treats us like criminals. Perhaps he is unaware that he is host to a Prime Minister of a nation, who is more of a criminal, as Japan still refuses to recognize the crimes committed against humanity over 54 years ago."

Lola Lucia was living in the Lola House in Quezon City. While the other lolas had their homes and families to retreat to, Lola Lucia had nowhere else to live. We knew her as a tiny woman who ran the errands for the Lola House without complaint. She'd run off on foot up the hill at a moment's notice. During our stay in the Philippines, she got close to the *dalagas* (the young women on my trip) for they'd join her on her walks. Or they'd sneak off with her to have a cigarette. Or we'd dance with her in the company of the other lolas.

There is no money for her burial, or for the time she stayed at the hospital. I've spoken with members of LILA Pilipina who just returned from meeting with the Commission on Human Rights. They are demanding an investigation into the behavior of the PNP. The lolas are seeking justice once more. They are asking the PNP to take responsibility for Lola Lucia's untimely death. They seek the resignation of the head of the PNP. They are also asking for funds to cover Lola Lucia's medication and burial.

I'm writing not only to inform you of this atrocity, but also to ask you to help in any way you can. What can you do?

1. Spread the word to everyone you know.
2. Donate money to Lola Lucia's burial and hospital fund

You may write or send donations or call:

LILA-PILIPINA-GABRIELA

Telefax 433-5061

49 Matimtiman St., Central District

Quezon City, Philippines

3. Write letters of protest and appeal to the following:

GEN. PANFILO LACSON  
Philippine National Police  
Camp Crame, EDSA  
Quezon City, Philippines

COMMISSIONER AURORA RECINA  
Commission on Human Rights  
Commonwealth Ave., Diliman  
Quezon City, Philippines

PRES. JOSEPH ESTRADA  
Malacanang Palace  
Manila, Philippines

HONORABLE MANUEL VILLAR  
Speaker of the House  
11th Congress of the Philippines  
House of Representatives  
Batasang Pambansa, Batasan Road  
Quezon City, Philippines

HONORABLE MAMINTAL M. ADIONG  
11th Congress of the Philippines  
Batasang Pambansa, Batasan Road  
Quezon City, Philippines

Committee on Human Rights  
11th Congress of the Philippines  
Batasang Pambansa, Batasan Road  
Quezon City, Philippines

The family has just brought Lola Lucia's body back to Samar for burial. You should have known her. She was a small woman who liked to sneak out of the green gates to light up. Mia, one of our *dalagas*, was fond of sneaking out with her. She once brought out a photo of her own lola and showed it to Lola Lucy, because she was sure there was a resemblance. During our stay there, Lola Lucy was quiet at first. Then we coaxed her into a drama and she played Tara's *novio* (boyfriend). The other lolas teased Lola Lucia, saying, "What kind of *novio* carries a *py py* (fan)?"

On the last week of our stay, Lola Lucia revealed her story, her abduction by the Japanese soldiers to us. It broke her heart to tell us, she said, but she tells it so that it will never happen again. This is our Lola Lucy. And the other lolas fighting for justice? Our lolas too. That they are still experiencing brutal abuse after all they've been through, after all they have survived and in their old age when their lives should come to some sense of peace, breaks my heart. Angers me. All I can say is join the lolas in their fight for justice. *LABAN!* is the cry of the women at LILA Pilipina. It means FIGHT! So please send letters to the agencies above. *LABAN!*

All the best,

*M. Evelina Galang*



benign

my arm is suspended in air  
and I'm searching for a lump  
i'm waiting for it to show

because cancer runs in my family  
and i feel it coming as i ask  
does history repeat itself?

and you old man  
you tell me it doesn't matter  
it's in the past  
it was to another  
no need to worry 'bout your future

is that what you told yourself  
when you were someone's sun/ son  
standing proud on that  
military base  
disguised as home  
to a culture bred in  
violence

in that  
war  
tour activity  
disguised as necessity  
within a history of  
domination

and history swallows me  
as your disease  
spreads  
and bleeds all over us  
while you  
stand with ease  
and  
flippant fantasies of the past

but unlike disease,  
you have no excuse, son  
and sad to say  
it was there before you  
and it lived through you, son  
and it lives through  
your sons  
and their sons  
and their sons

but does history repeat itself  
bet your mother remembers  
because her mother remembers

Japan and America  
playing  
jump rope  
Okinawa folk  
double-dutching for their  
lives  
all the womyn getting caught  
tied in knots  
somewhere inside  
their lives  
inside their lives

and I  
realize  
history  
doesn't repeat himself

it never changed

because cancer runs in this family  
because violence runs in this culture  
because frustration and aggression  
run rampant in clogged veins

because  
you grieve  
as I begin to  
see  
the legs of your pedestals are made  
of old wood

and what you forget  
is that as wide as  
your cancer spreads

womyns spirit grows

so those legs are rotting, twisting,  
turning 'round, falling down  
and  
it's time now for you to  
join us level ground  
look us in the eye  
cuz  
i'd rather die

no

i'd rather unleash my mind  
let my mouth fly  
sit up straight, then stand  
i'd rather  
SHOUT  
than let you see me  
cut away  
i'd rather let my voice  
squeak slowly  
than  
allow  
you  
to make  
me  
vanish

because what you forget  
is that  
as wide as  
your sickness spreads

our spirit soars

# WHAT IS BENIGN?

BY TRACI AKEMI KATO-KIRIYAMA

benign - adj. 1: of a gentle disposition ; 2: of a mild kind; esp : not malignant (tending to produce death or deterioration).

sometimes we have benign attitudes about serious issues, large issues (like cancer, the military, the objectification/ exploitation of womyn that is commonplace) until it hits us in the face and changes us forever...

here's to a century of sisterhood and womyn working together.  
here's to those who understand that the issues of exploitation and violence against womyn are important for all of us to engage in, and they are not random aspects of the past.  
here's to a century of waking up from our complacency and fighting for each other's justice and the peace of all before it's too late, before we deteriorate.



Photo: U.S. National Archives

Comfort women resting (nationalities uncertain).



# The Glamourest Life

This is Vietnam, wherein each week our intrepid correspondent makes a cool \$15, doing certain things Vietnamese girls don't. But the babies love her.

By MISS VY NGUYEN

A shortage of pink stationery kept me from writing letters for a while, but I think this paper beats all — handmade from tree bark in a rural craft village called Duong O, it is actually used for calligraphy. So, the study abroad program reaches its halfway mark as Ha Noi weather turns drizzly and cool. It's been raining steadily for the last 2 days and everyone is in ponchos or plastic bags with holes cut in them. Maybe the biggest news since last time's writing is my new job.

One day three weeks ago I visited the offices of the Viet Nam News, which I think is the biggest English language publication here, with a makeshift resume. Before I knew it I was taken on as a copy editor at a cool \$15/day. At 5 days a week I calculate around \$300/month! I like it lots — there's mostly Vietnamese staff who translate stories from Vietnamese papers and Government press releases, which then get edited by a group of expatriate copyeditors. The Vietnamese staff is hired more for English skills than journalism training, which could get frustrating if this weren't just a lark-job for me. There's 2 Australian guys who've been there for years, and an American woman on a year-long fellowship from Newsweek of all places, and an Indian man, and a Scottish man who was a reporter in Scotland and then China. On Sunday everyone's going to the editor's daughter's wedding at the Daewoo (I can't go because have to go to my relatives' for the anniversary of my grand dad's death) — and then that night some of the staff are performing in a Gilbert and Sullivan production called Trial by Jury. It's nice not to feel too invested in either the organization or the profession, but just hum along — I've discovered I have virtually no journalistic standards, and feel just enough interested in making a story sound alright so that the day passes before I know it, and uncommitted enough to enjoy the inevitable lapses in correct English and professional standards. I love that they use British spelling, and find s's replacing my z's, and extra u's in my writing all the time. There's a funny random quality I like in how the expats can take relatively seriously their work editing recipes and strange movie reviews of movies that theaters here aren't showing. The business briefs I sometimes edit are endless with "year on year increase," and "with a capital of VND\_." Information in stories is almost always unattributed and people seem to throw in the useful "experts say" or "according to officials" at random points.

People seem a little random too. The Newsweek woman is professional and really trying to improve things. She's only 26, went to Princeton, and was a senior editor at the national desk for years. The Aussies have Vietnamese wives and so does Hari, the Indian man who showed me sarongs his mother sent for his wife and gave me some cassava chips from his restaurant in India. The Scottish man makes very British quips all day long. The Vietnamese staff seem to have a more philosophical grasp on their jobs and the inherent limitations of journalism here — they all nap in the afternoons and at night the Korean soap operas come on. I have noticed the business editor wears the same outfit maybe 4 days in a row before he'll switch. One week it was a black and white horizontal striped shirt with jeans, now it's a long sleeve pullover with slacks. I get through my pieces pretty slowly and usually leave later than I should at around 8 p.m. Biking home fast and hurrying at night feels good, but there are greater chances of certain en-counters — it's a slow week when I don't get "romantic"

propositions from at least 2 long-clawed men on motor-bikes. But they're more annoying (and at best pretty funny) than dangerous.

If it's relatively early by the time I'm done I go to my uncle's house for dinner, where I'm pampered and the little babies love me. If it's too late I eat in any one of dozens of food stalls in the neighborhood. I like the outdoor ones better, because inside you occasionally glimpse scurrying mice and big cockroaches. The little mice are actually pretty cute.

Taking on odd jobs in different places sounds really appealing right now. I'm harboring fantasies of bumming around for a while working in restaurants and bars or something. I want to learn all sorts of random and handy skills. And different languages, too. There are lots of French speaking people here from Belgium, Cameroon, France, so I've been airing my high school French a little. I actually can't really tell any more how my Vietnamese is going because I've lost all frame of reference — can't remember how well/poor it was before coming and can't judge it now either. But other things are familiarizing themselves better. I know the main streets relatively well, haven't gotten into any road accidents, am helping earn my keep, and meeting people doing interesting things.

The Groupe irks me less and less. There are some cool students from CIEE, an international study abroad program with East Coast Americans, a Japanese woman, one guy from Alaska and another from D.C. And a big Finnish cadre came to the guest house not too long ago, all tall and Nordic. They are nice and drink all the time. I like Nori, my neighbor, a Japanese student who's studied in Idaho for a year, where he was befriended by nice Vietnamese Americans and so decided to come here. Ah, the Japanese — so whimsical in their own way.

One thing I'm coming to understand is that coming here as a Viet Kieu (overseas Vietnamese) carries with it a lot of issues I wouldn't be dealing with as a tourist in any other country. The tricky thing is that there was really no "culture shock" when I first got here, because so many things were already familiar; which in the end turns out to be a little misleading, because in some ways I do need to approach it as a new and different culture that I'm trying to understand — not as "mine" as I had assumed. I'm still having trouble reconciling student life with family life here.

Student life in America was Asian American, home life was Vietnamese. And now the compartments have uncomfortably been done away with. It's more than an identity issue — not one at all really — but something that comes up a lot with little things. Like if I go to a club or a bar here I'm more aware that it means certain things for a Vietnamese girl and this is something my cousin wouldn't do. Or if I go to



Vy goes to town



an expat restaurant staffed by Vietnamese it reminds me of my other cousin who works as a sort of attendant at the British embassy and I felt weird being on the other side of the service. One cool thing is I can "pass" as different nationalities — Japanese, Chinese? — to different people and adjust language capabilities accordingly. Especially when Western tourists think I'm Vietnamese-Vietnamese it's fun — I feel like a little spy.

Have I given a fashion summary on clothes in VN yet? All the students are crazy about getting tailored clothes and consult fashion magazines for styles. I think I'm not meant to buy anything significant again for awhile — there've been a series of notable purchases recently. One was a pair of fake Polo jeans that I got badgered into buying — I didn't want them at all in the first place and wound up paying 100,000 dong — the lady was asking for 300,000 but I didn't have enough on me and she settled for 150,000. I was supposed to bring her the 50,000 the next day but looked 3 days in a row and never saw her again. But for the tapered-drawstring jeans in my suitcase I'd think I imagined the whole incident. The other purchase was good — a Cannon camera to replace my bulky and nonfunctional Minolta automatic-everything built-in zoom lens. The Cannon is a basic point and shoot I got for a little over \$50. It's small and doesn't make too much noise so I feel much more excited about taking photos, though it's still awkward taking pictures of people. Third purchase was a cute pair of pajamas for 50,000.

Each night riding home I'd eye these peasant-style shirts hanging from this one shop. Then one time I found it highly convenient to duck into someplace lighted and populated — the guy left and I took it as a sign that I should get the shirt. It has little windmills all over and no border, at the bottom there's kissing Dutch couples. Also should save \$ for next week's trip to Sapa, the mountainous province in VN's north-west corner and borders China. It's famous for its variety of tribal ethnic minorities including the Hmong. I wanted to get something for Shingly and the woven tapestries can run up to \$30.

To return to fashion, an article in my paper says VN's young and privileged are emulating Korean soap opera stars, clothes and hair-styles. Must admit, the shows have me hooked as well — there's a good one where 2 sisters are divided over the same man — he and the nice one love each other but he may just have to marry mean sister to pay off some outstanding debts. I wonder how people can afford the clothes on their salaries — jeans aren't cheap, even for Vietnamese. Though I have noticed that the outfits tend to be well utilized — my professors keep turning up in the same things day after day too. Now that the weather's been chilly people are breaking out the winter wear to a totally unnecessary degree — turtlenecks, leather jackets, London fog-type raincoats. They tell me ominously that it gets down to 6-10 degrees C during winter, but I don't know what that means in Fahrenheit.

Living here in the city is so fun as a foreign student. I'm almost surprised to be reminded every so often by the poverty and how not so long ago the wars just ended and everything was pretty rough. People who stayed and lived through the fighting, especially in the North, had it worst because of the American bombing and food rationing. There seems to be consensus today that things improved a lot in terms of living standards and economic liberalization after '86, but are slowing down now. Foreign aid looks more plentiful and is apparently doing good things with rural development and environmental education. Our Group had its own run-in with complexity and humility Third World-style last month or so in the form of what was at least to some of us an ethical dilemma of sorts.

Maybe I've already written about cute street kids? Well one in particular everyone loves — and it's well-deserved. Thuy is around 12, hangs out with some friends near the guest house — on the day of the Harvest Moon Festival she invited some of us to her "apartment"

for fruit and festivities and it was one of the more sobering holidays I've experienced. Anyway, Thuy's dad she said had some serious sickness, had to take out a loan for medicine, and now her family in the country-side (where they make salt) couldn't pay back the 500,000 dong loan. Some of the students collected a pool to give to her, and didn't seem to be taking into consideration what this might mean or if it was even the right thing. People would buy her things like clothes and school-books before. I had conflicting feelings about the whole thing and wanted some group discussion, left for the weekend at my relatives, and came back to find things resolved in maybe the worst way they could've been. They decided to give her just half the \$, even though they'd collected the full amount. Which sounds like going in for all the consequences of starting this sort of dependent relationship

and making yourself feel charitable, without helping Thuy fully.

No one's really talked about it since, though I still feel unresolved about how to best deal with poverty on a mass and individual scale. There are some students who think that you should never give \$ in those situations because it creates certain unsustainable

relationships and doesn't change things systematically. Which of course makes sense but at the same time seems cold-hearted in the face of things. All of this being further complicated by the contradictions in the Groupe, where those who wanted to give are business and economics majors ready to start import-export corporations or something, and those who don't want to are in Development Studies and intern at NGOs. Ah life.

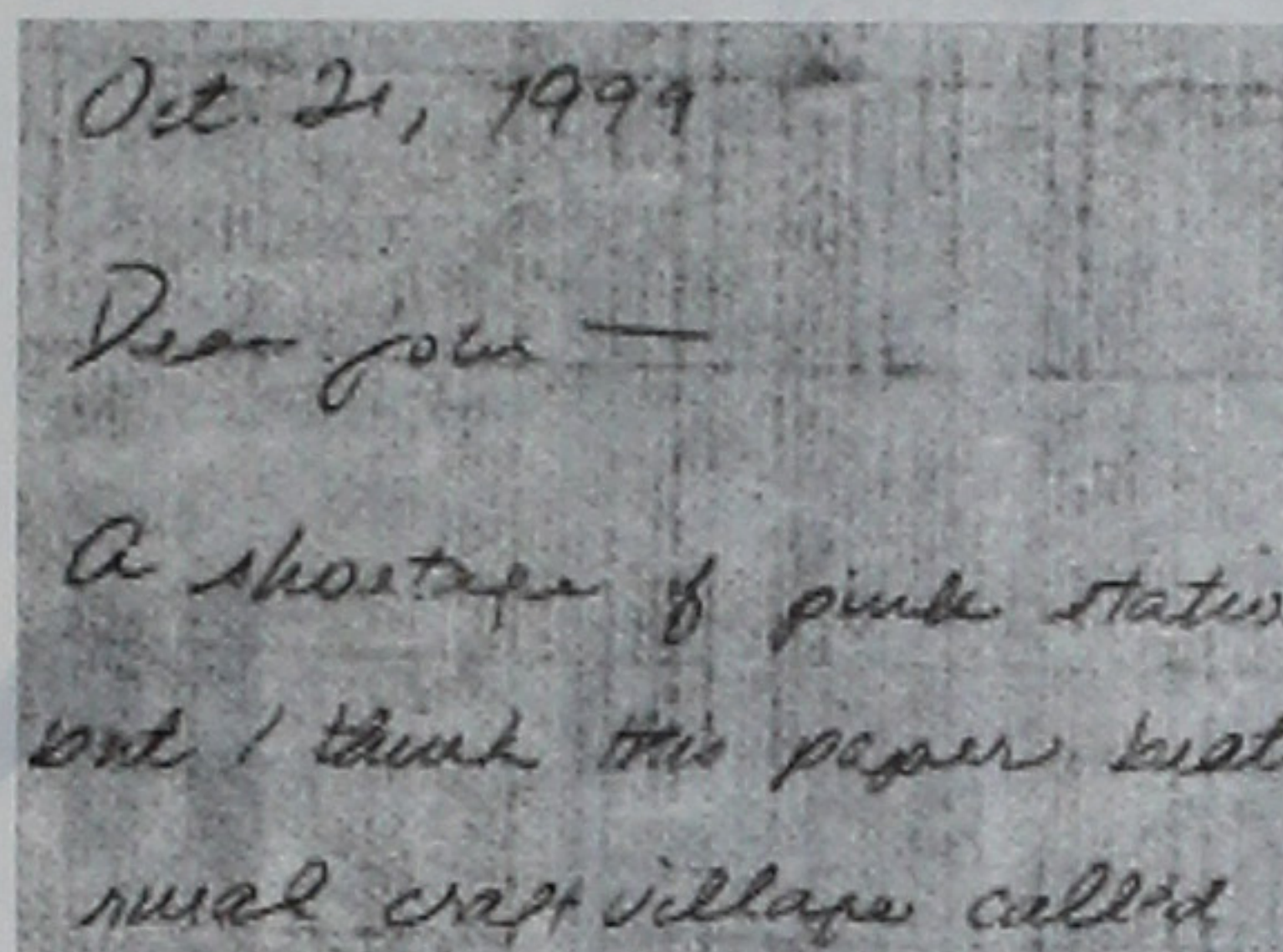
And where are my email updates on Gidra gossip? Tram says the next issue isn't due till February or something, so if you maneuver to delay things long enough I just might be able to be back in time (for what I'm not sure). I miss cooking my own meals and reading magazines and watching TV, and sometimes friendships here are too quick to form on the basis of language exchange/instruction or mutual tourist status. But I don't miss cars or suburbs or shopping malls and supermarkets.

Here I am again — failure to send letters promptly.

I was just starting to develop an office crush on the guy who wears the same clothes and it turns out he's engaged. I sit across from him and listen in when his fiancée calls him on his Mobifone. :( I'm meeting nice and interesting people doing international aid work in development and environmental protection, which is neat. Newsweek woman is nice too and took me out to lunch. And even discovered a place to hang out at that's "upscale" and semi-expatish but still cool — a jazz bar/rest. with a live Vietnamese jazz band. It's new and nice to see Vietnamese jazz musicians — they play standards and it reminds me of Grand Star.

Except one night there was a troupe of Dutch musicians in the crowd — one of them stepped up on stage and started singing "Freedom" by George Michael and all these Dutch people came swarming out of the woodwork, dancing and singing along. I thought to myself, "this isn't jazz." I wonder if the place would hire me as a bartender. Had my first gin & tonic in 2.5 months there.

Truly ending this letter now — Tram says she's trying to arrange a January visit and Amy, who's studying in HK, is thinking of coming in December to spend Christmas. Kelli Nakayama was talking about traveling too, but I haven't heard from her in a while. Wouldn't it be crazy if you and Jeff came too? I shudder.—Chao, Vy.







In a cavernous auditorium in East L.A., the strumming of guitar strings evokes solitude and contemplation. A woman's voice sings softly with soul and sincerity. Next to the guitarist and singer, a group explores movement, striving to embody the music through the image they create together. It is an alchemical mixture of music and theater, a dynamic, changing picture of musicians, actors and dancers.

Then, just as magically as it develops, it ends. The final resonance from the guitar fades, the last bit of breath is exhaled in song, movements slow to a standstill.

"Fucking cool, man." Glenn Suravech breaks the silence with his evaluation of what transpired. Suravech, lead guitarist for local alternative rock band Visiting Violette, looks to the band's lead songwriter and vocalist Lee Takasugi, who nods her approval. Cast members of *hereandnow* theater company unfreeze from their final poses and assemble onstage with water bottles and notebooks in hand.

Artistic director John Miyasaki asks, "So how did that feel?"

For the past year-and-a-half, these two groups have been collaborating to create new artistic works together. Music inspired by theater. Theater inspired by music.

Visiting Violette, known locally as VV, is based in the

Silverlake neighborhood of L.A. They formed in 1992 and have since played over 300 club and campus dates all over the West Coast. They perform all original music and have also written and recorded two movie scores with Sundance award-winning director Kayo Hatta ("The Picture Bride"). Featured on KSCA (101.9 FM) in their Local Artist Spotlight, VV has written and recorded for the United Nations' Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. They also worked an educational CD-ROM by Warner-Whitby Media Productions.

The band is composed of Takasugi on lead vocals, guitar and keyboards; Daniel

Groisman on bass; Suravech on guitar; and Rich Lambert on drums and percussion. The band's first album, a five-song debut, sold over 6,000 copies from venue sales. They plan to finish recording

# IN

# SEARCH

another five-song CD in early March 2000.

The *hereandnow* theatre company was founded in 1989 by a group of young Asian Americans frustrated by stereotypical roles in plays, musicals, television and film. Under the artistic direction of Miyasaki, *hereandnow* has grown to a cast of 20 and is currently the Artist-in-Residence company at East Los Angeles College in Monterey Park.

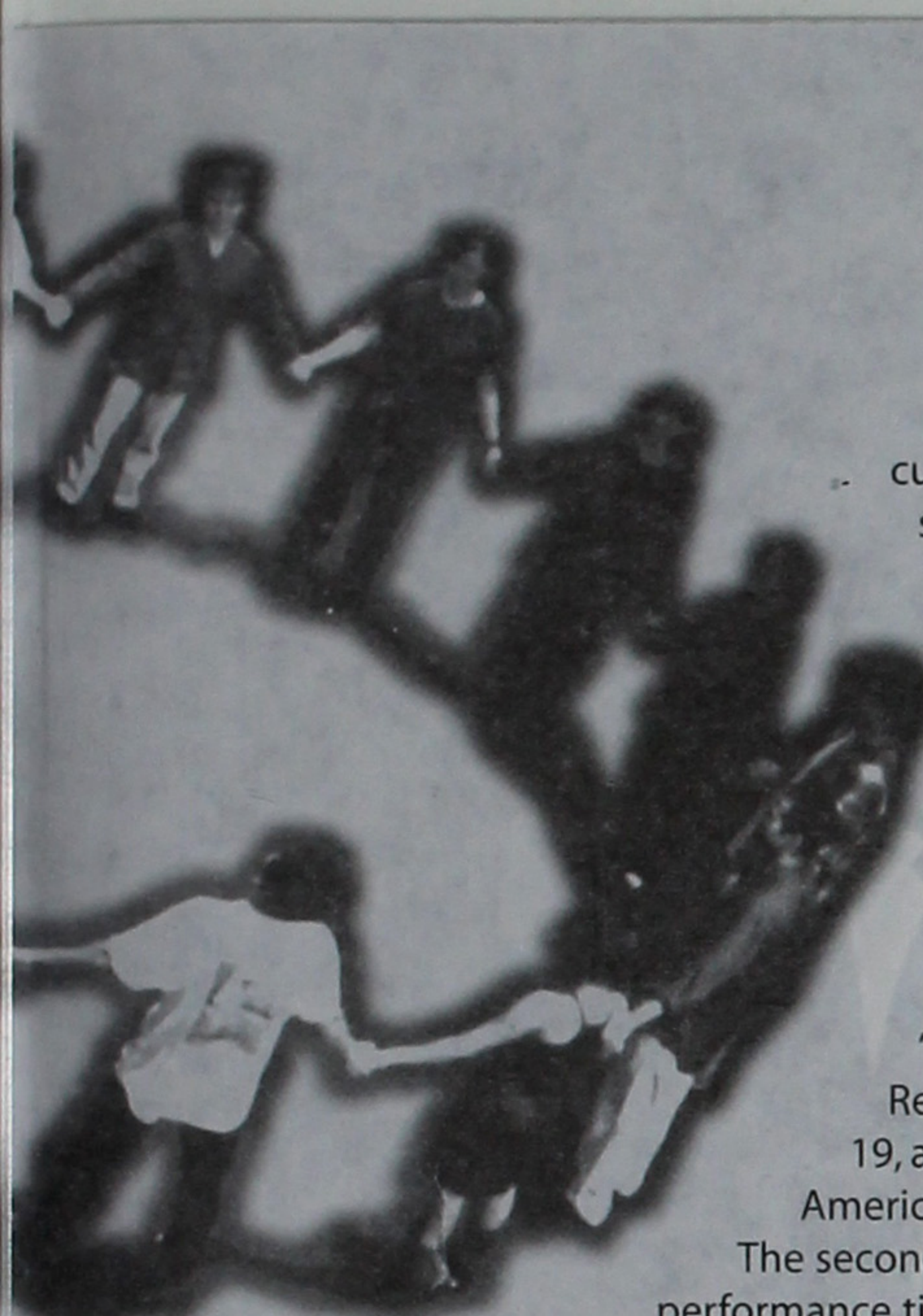
In addition to its regular touring show, the group has produced three successful runs of "Romeo & Juliet Pinoy/Pinay Style," and the world-premiere play "fentor" written by veteran cast

member and assistant director Jason Fong. The group is

# OF THE







currently planning a summer series for the year 2000.

The groups had two major collaborative performances this year. The first was for the National Coalition for Redress/Reparation's "Day of Remembrance," on Feb. 19, at the Japanese American National Museum.

The second is a one-night performance titled "Real" at the 800-seat Japan America Theatre at the

Japanese American Cultural and Community Center on March 11. Both performances were in Little Tokyo.

These collaborations flowed from earlier work together in spring 1998 when *hereandnow*'s Traci Kato-Kiriyama contacted VV to play at Art Attack, a youth-oriented event of political and artistic expression. This was followed by another joint performance at the Okinawan Womens' Peace Caravan.

# REAL

STORIES AND PHOTOS BY  
BRYAN YAMAMI

When Takasugi wrote a song to accompany "Why Me?" one of *hereandnow*'s vignettes, the two groups discussed ways to build on the work together, which led to the joint concert. The first was a one-night performance with the groups performing different sets. Seeking to do more, they put together another show that would integrate into each other's work to create one collaborative experience.

For Takasugi, working with *hereandnow* has influenced her as a musician and person. "Traci was one of the first women and people in general to take an interest in my lyrics and what each song meant to me. It made me realize that I don't want people to just bob their heads to our music, but really listen and appreciate what the songs are about.

"The music world is very 'safe' in some ways ... performers often create a wild *persona* and hide behind it. It's just another mask that doesn't reach the core of the music or anything important. It sells, but it's not truthful."

Even their former manager wanted Takasugi to dye her hair blonde and become more of a fantasy object so more men would be interested in the group. During this time, the band began to lose focus on why they played music.

"*hereandnow* helped us to be more honest with ourselves, be more willing to take risks, fuck-up, but still feel accepted," she explained.

Guitarist Suravech said, "Often, as musicians, we only have our music to express what we're trying to say. *Hereandnow* gives us the mediums of movement, dance, spoken word and theater to transmit those messages that we so passionately believe in."

*hereandnow* company member Ronalee Par has been equally inspired by the work between the two groups, noting that many theater company members are exploring music as a new form of expression, as well as a couple of members experimenting with drumming and back-up vocals.

"It's very inspiring to see people that look like us doing the rock scene. Personally it has given me a sense that 'Hey, maybe I can do this stuff too,'" she said.

VV continues to record and write new work in order to get their music and message heard. *hereandnow* continues their annual nation-wide tour schedule and original productions at ELAC. And both groups will still make time to work and create new work together.



*Bryan Yamami is a company member of hereandnow. He also works as a grants and programs administrator for the JACCC, and likes to play drums.*



# Against All Odds

**B**orn in Amritsar, Punjab in 1899, Dalip Singh Saund came to the US at the age of 21. Shortly thereafter, Congress passed laws which declared Asian Indians and others ineligible for US citizenship.

As documented in Jayashri Hart's film, "Roots in the Sand," Dalip was among the many Indian farmers against whom California laws, bred from prejudice and racism, maintained strict codes on marriage and land ownership.

Dalip married Marian Kosa in 1928. Due to anti-miscegeny laws, which did not allow inter-racial marriages, Marian was forced to give up her US citizenship. She had to wait 30 years for the laws to change before she could regain her citizenship.

In 1950, Dalip was elected judge of the Justice Court in Imperial County, Calif., but was denied the seat on the grounds that he had not been a citizen for a year. He was able to regain the position in 1952, however, and served for five years.

The former California lettuce grower then became the first Asian from the mainland to be elected a Congressman in 1957. He served three terms as a Democrat.



Photo: Courtesy of Visual Communications





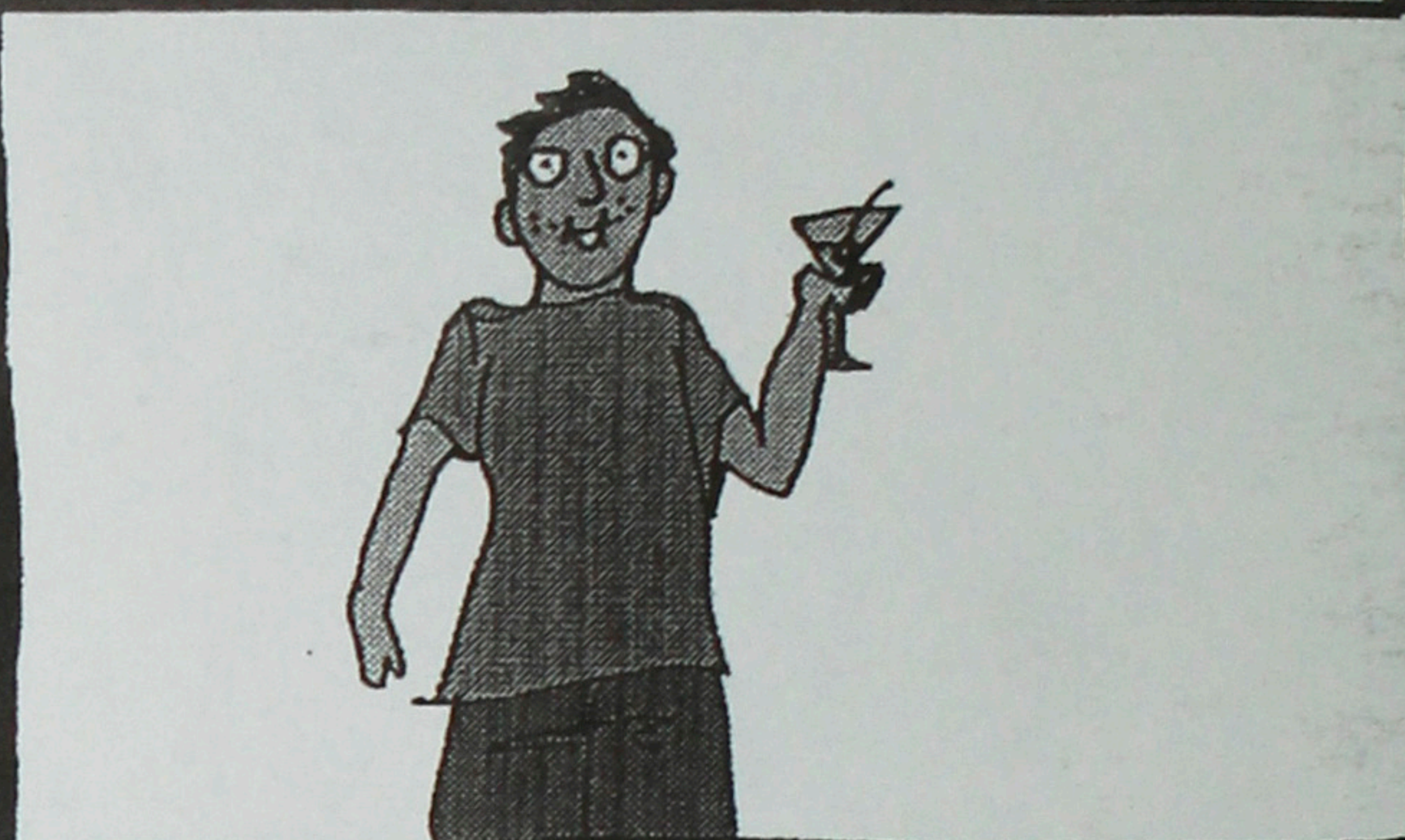
**SMOKY VODKA**





I have to be 16 to drive.

I have to be 21 to drink.



I have to be 18 to vote.

But I only have to be 14 to hang out with these guys.

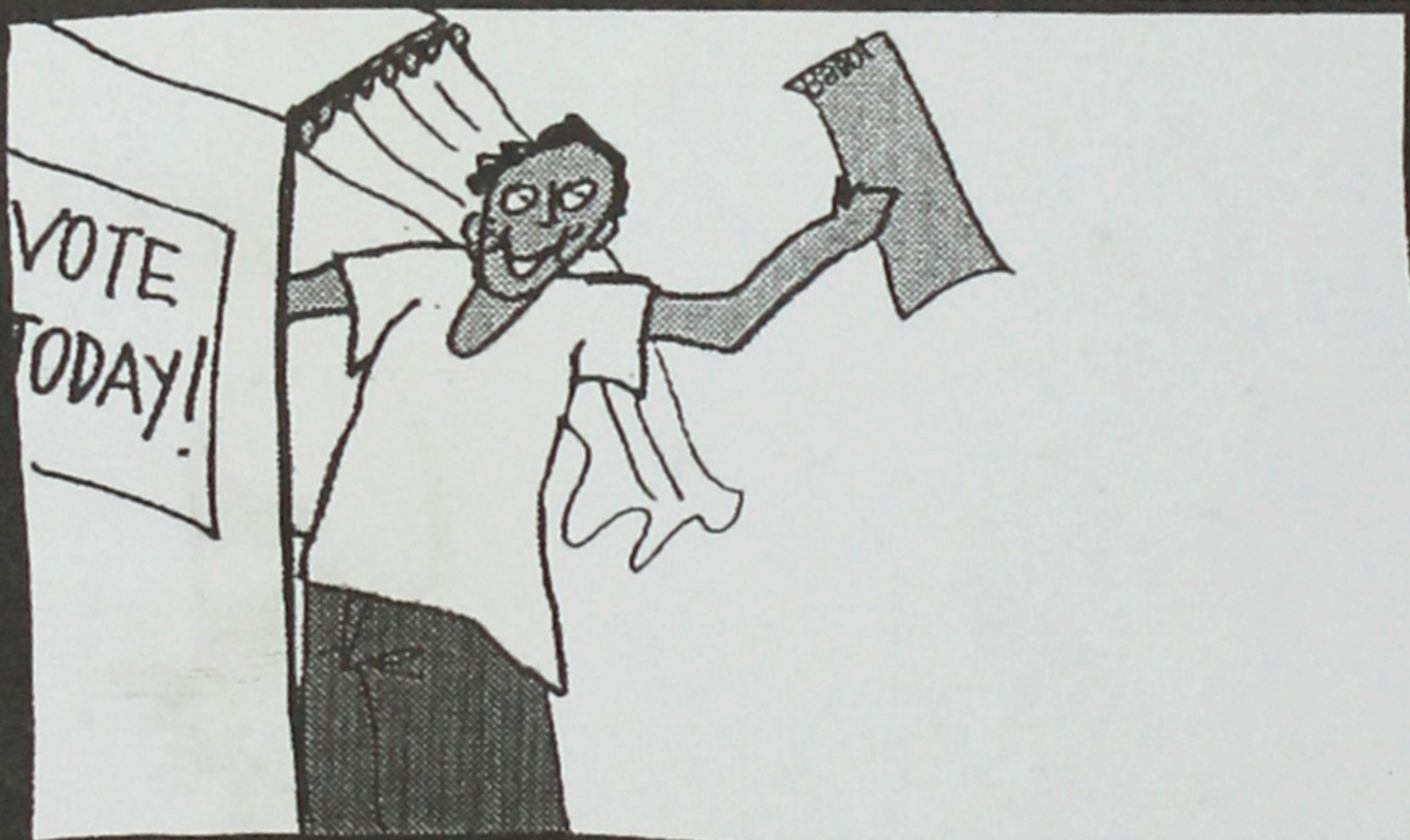


Illustration by: MAY JONG/FELICIA PEREZ

**More Schools  
Not Prisons**

**VOTE NO ON PROP. 21!**

**Don't give up on our youth**



A Gidra public service announcement