

30TH ANNIVERSARY

GIDRA

SPRING 99
VOLUME: 1
ISSUE: 1

SEEING **RED**
IN LITTLE
SAIGON

K-TOWN
WORKER
BLUES

BROWN ART



Japanese American Community Services

JACS

JACS is a small foundation which seeks to provide funding for new Asian American non-profit agencies or new programs in the Southern California area which will have significant impact on the organization and the community it serves.

For more information,
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National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR), founded in 1980, has been fighting for civil rights of Japanese Americans as well as all people of color in the United States and abroad. Most notably, NCRR was one of the organizations involved in the decade-long grassroots movement for redress and reparations for wartime incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans. NCRR continues to fight alongside those whose civil liberties remain violated - from workers at the New Otani Hotel to Japanese Latin Americans who continue to be denied redress despite having been kidnapped and incarcerated in US concentration camps. At the 19th Annual Day of Remembrance in Los Angeles, NCRR awarded the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee (pictured) and other draft resisters of conscience with the Fighting Spirit Award, for their opposition to the US government's draft of Japanese American men into military service. The Education Committee and Seigi, committees of NCRR, have conducted teacher workshops on the internment, preserved videotapes of the 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians hearings, and led historic community tours of Little Tokyo, Los Angeles.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS

231 E. Third Street Suite 6104 Los Angeles, CA 90013 (213) 680-3484 seigi@smp.gseis.ucla.edu

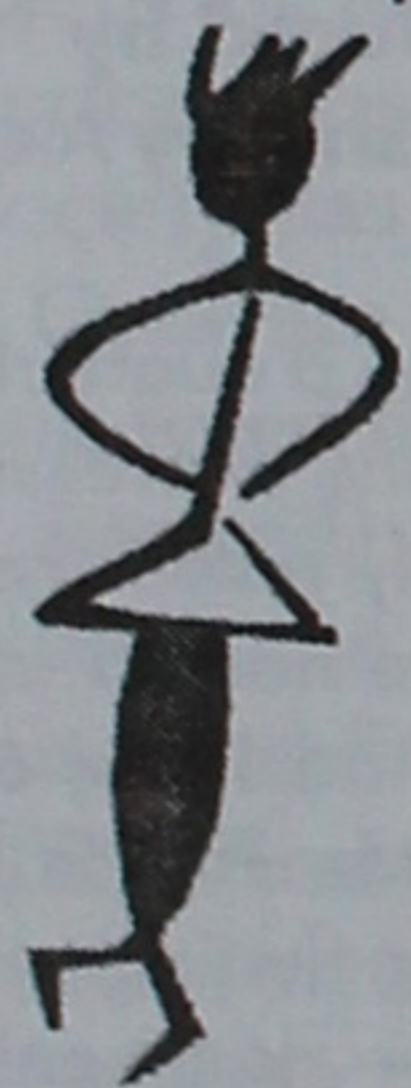
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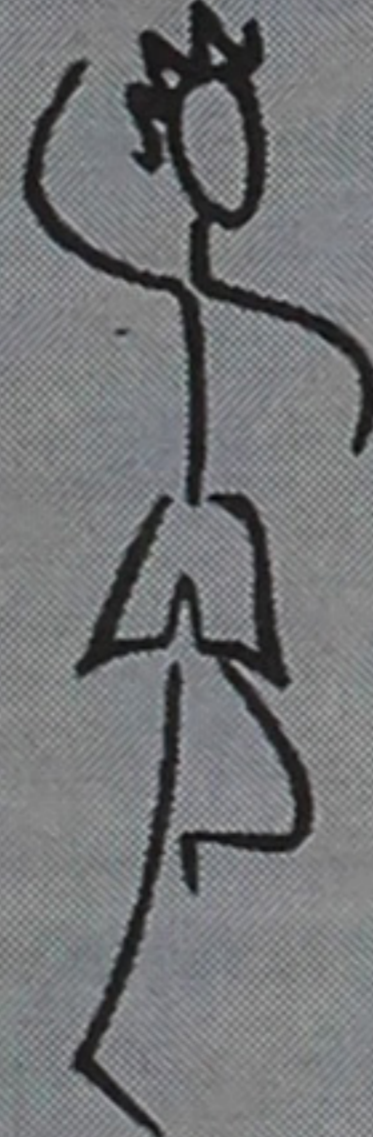
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I. SheSpeak: an all women writers revue



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The Coffee, Tea & Writers Reading Series showcase the talents of emerging Asian & Pacific Islander writers in Los Angeles.

Leilani Chan was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. Her simple fact accounts for the heart and soul of her artistic inspiration. She is the founder and artistic director of TE-A-DA productions, producers of kalo projects. Carol Chung was born in the year of the dog and under the zodiac sign, scorpio. She's drawn from Octavia Butler, Arthur Sze and Patti Smith for inspiration. Cheryl Deptowicz is member of Radical Women, a socialist feminist organization that hails the leadership and militancy of the most oppressed women, people of color, youth and gays and lesbians. Carol Lem, born in Los Angeles, teaches creative writing and literature at East Los Angeles College. Her poems have been published in The Asian Pacific American Journal, Blue Mesa Review, Hawaii Pacific Review and many others. Diep K. Tran currently teaches writing workshops for Cambodian high school girls. She is working on a series of poems on fish and welcomes any fish data from marine biologists & fellow fishers of Santa Monica, Seal Beach, or Huntington Beach piers. Paula Villanueva reaffirms the power of the word every day. In writing she hopes to tell stories that create peace between the intellect and emotions while gracefully expressing a truth deeper than both.

This project is funded in part by the California Arts Council (CAC), a state agency and part of the 1999 LA Poetry Festival support the Union Center Cafe!
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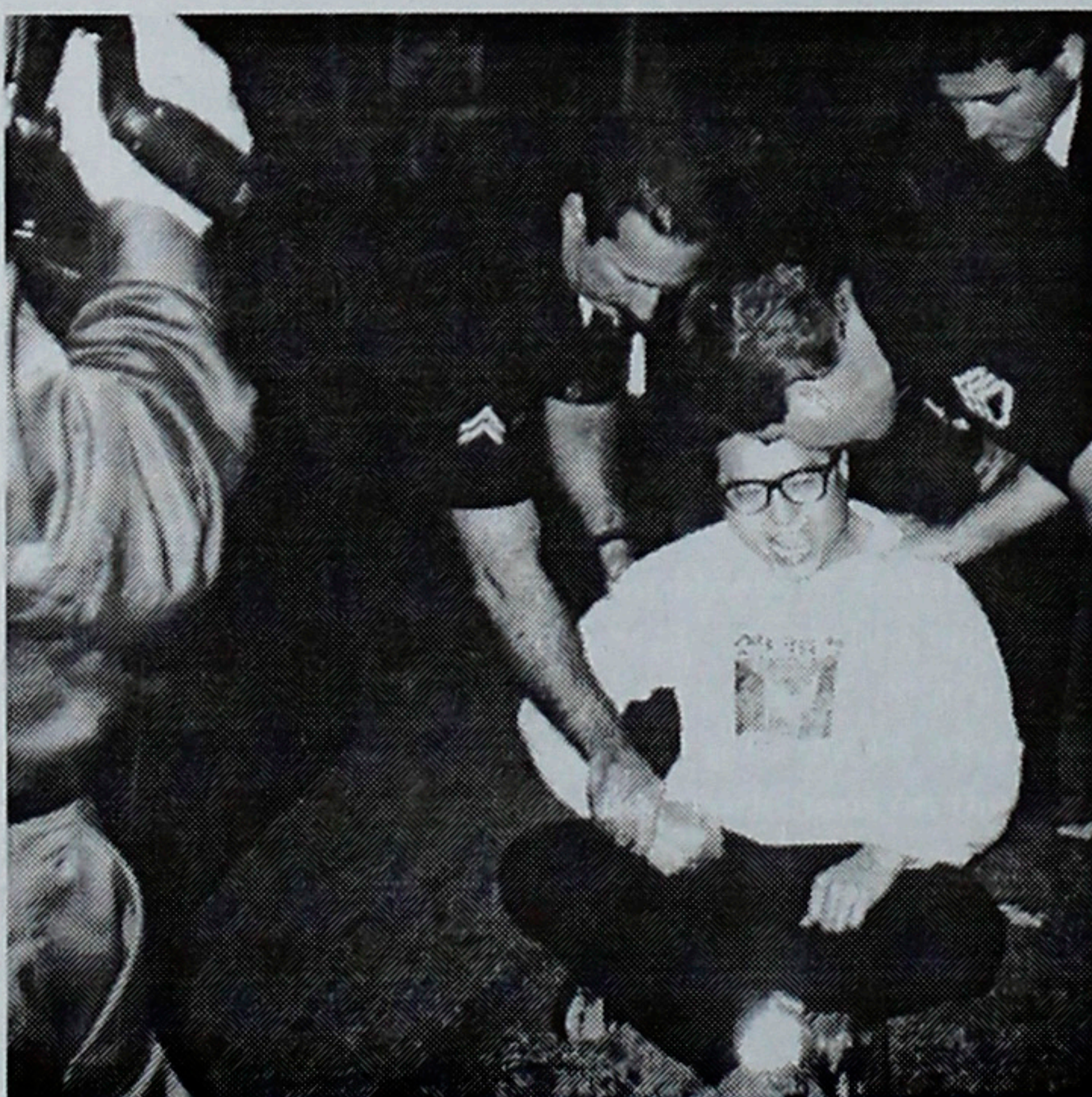
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GIDRA
GIDRA

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Bring It Back, Come Rewind

How we came to re-create a monster

Thirty years ago, a group of UCLA students got together and decided it was high time to start a publication that expressed the concerns and issue facing Asian Pacific Americans.

Out of that discussion, and with a couple hundred dollars, they came out with *Gidra*, an in-yo'-face monthly newsmagazine that reflected the people, the attitude and the emotions of the Yellow Power Movement at the time.

The name "Gidra" was borrowed from what was thought to have been the name of a kindly giant turtle that fought on behalf of the people in the old Godzilla movie series.

It turns out that Gidra — or "Gihdra" — was actually the name of the three-headed dragon that thrice terrorized the people of Japan.

Given the other two finalists vying for the magazine's masthead were "Epicanthus" and "Yellowstone," one may appreciate their judgment, erroneous as it may have been.

It turns out that the *Gidra* staff did, in fact, keep true to its movie counterpart's reputation, spreading its wings over the community and storming through the streets of Los Angeles. But rather than leaving death and destruction in its path, *Gidra* left words and pictures, poetry and song.

For five years, they represented the voices and expressions of the Asian Pacific communities. In San Francisco and other cities, similar publications like *Rodan* joined in the ruckus. How they managed to balance the responsibilities of the newsmagazine while being active in anti-Vietnam War protests, starting up Asian American Studies courses and getting bent is anyone's guess.

Society has undergone massive changes since those smokin' sixties. Gone are the days of Movement groupies, mass sit-ins and toking weed like there is no tomorrow (alright, only some of that has changed).

Now is the time of immigrant backlash, "merit" based college admissions, Starbucks Coffee chains, Fubu Wear and Lexus GS400's. And with these changes, Asian Pacific American media has taken on a new form and function as well.

Changing times and pop culture have also seen the metamorphosis of Asian Pacific American print media from its grassroots origins to slick, full-color, high-fructose eye syrup publications.

On newsstands across the country, you can now find *A Magazine*, *YOLK*, *Transpacific* and *Giant Robot* on the shelves. Newsmagazines like *Asian Week* are not just coming out of San Francisco, but also from college campuses across the country.

And in Southern California, a new breed of publishing has also cropped up — Asian car culture magazines — *RPM*, *SXY* and *Tuning Concept*.

While more magazines are now available to address our varied interests, it seems that more often than not, they adopt traditional mainstream magazine styles — editorial content, style, advertising, et al. The only difference is there's an Asian face behind it.

Too enamored with the past and present, they have shown little interest in sharing a vision for the future, other than reporting trends in fashion and entertainment.

It's about time the youth of today get off our collective asses, look ahead and define the world of tomorrow.

In the same way the media guerrillas of the sixties helped create awareness during the Yellow Power Movement, a publication is now needed to speak the truth and enable the youth.

It is with these thoughts and convictions that we did something that

would seem outwardly foolish. We brought back a monster.

In 1999, we will not only be celebrating the eve of a new century, but also the rebirth of a community newsmagazine — the rebirth of *Gidra*.

This isn't an East Coast/West Coast/We Boast-type rag. In these pages, we aim to build connections; to bridge gaps between people of different ethnicities, cities, states and lines of thinking.

As hip-hop lyricist/educator KRS-ONE put it, "It's time for all the scholars and playas to unite."

With a mission to move people beyond the mental and physical boundaries separating us, we hope to do just that.

So this is *Gidra*, once again breathing fire into people's hearts, minds and imaginations.

Gidra's back. Spread the word, yo.

In love and respect,
the *Gidra* re-collective.

THE WORM'S EYE VIEW:

Do you ever notice something about birds? Sometimes, they sing beautiful melodies as they sit perched on their trees outside your bedroom window. But chances are as they take flight and watch life at a comfortably safe distance from above, sooner or later, they're going to swoop down and shit on you. Worms are considered the lowest of the low, but consider this: they dig to the very core of an apple, they travel beneath the surface of the earth. As we seek truth and stories that bring out that truth, we call on our worm's eye perspective for guidance.

Bring It Back, Come Rewind

Happy New Year!

Does that sound a little late to you? Not necessarily so, in greater Asian America. **BY DEAN TOJI**

As a Japanese American, I appreciate the doubled celebration of the regular New Year's Eve plus Japanese New Year's Day. Instead of just one night, we also get another full day of celebration. My wife, Gisele, is Chinese American, and so in the last few years I've also been in on Chinese New Year, which this year was February 16.

Around this time last year, I was gloating over my good fortune at Sermit, our favorite Thai restaurant, with Jeep, whose family owns it. He told us that Thai New Year was on April 13, which he thought coincided with Buddha's birthday. The potential for a long pan-ethnic Asian American New Years' season loomed into view, so I began to investigate.

Here's what I found.

Other Asian groups from the Chinese culture realm also use the same lunar calendar. For example, the Vietnamese Tet this year was also on February 16. And the Tibetan New Year was February 18 (I don't know why it's a couple of days off).

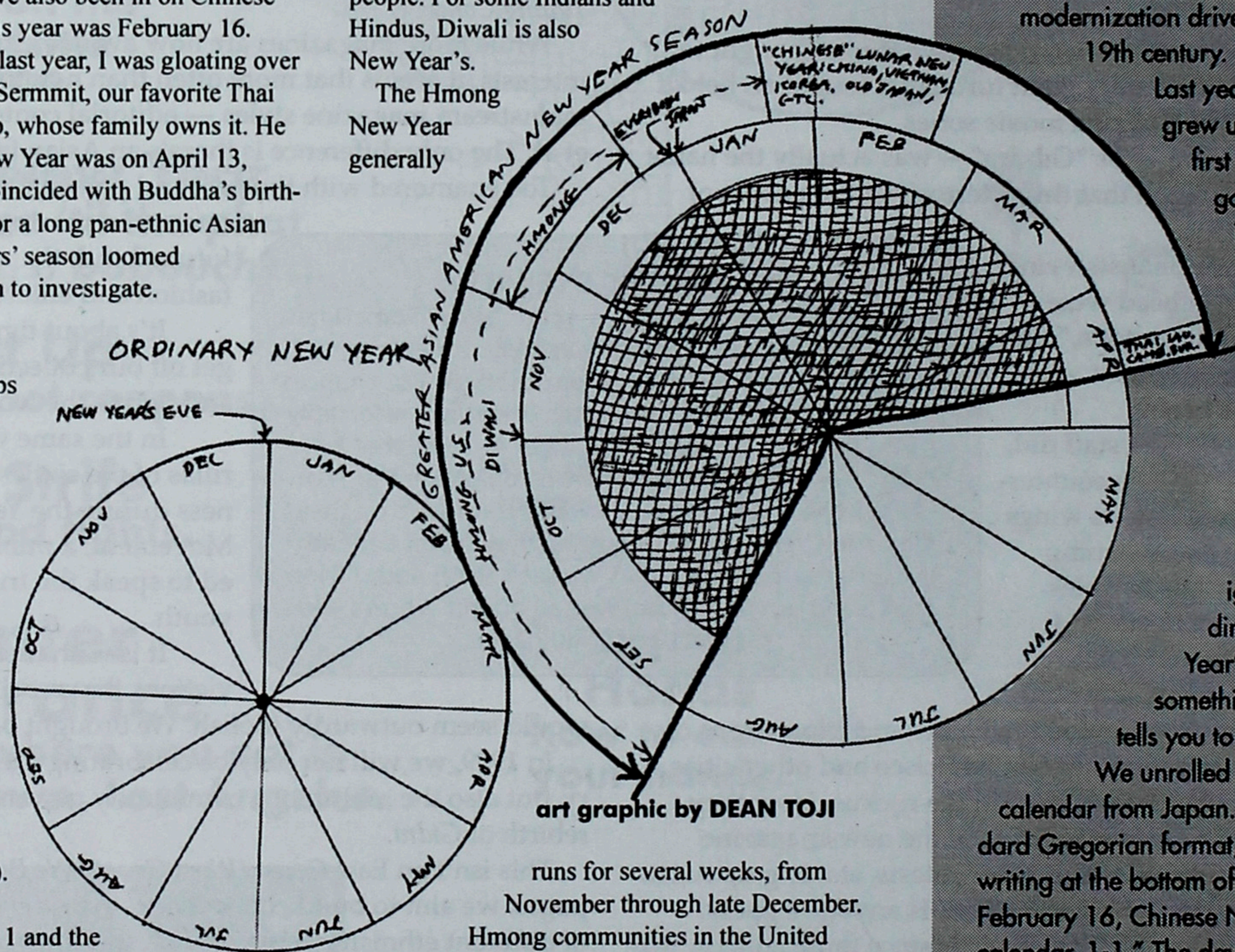
I've heard that in Korea, both January 1 and the Lunar New Year are celebrated.

Filipinos also celebrate on January 1. The "Chinese" New Year (is it OK to call it that, since they invented it?) can fall anywhere from January 21 to February 19, so when it's included, New Year's is extended not just into a two-day holiday, but into a season over two-and-a-half months long.

In addition to the Thai's Songkran, New Year is in mid-April for Cambodians, Laotians and Burmese as well. This date seems to be based on ancient Indian calendars, and many Asian Indians also celebrate New Year's this time. This would stretch the season to around four-and-a-half months.

There are also celebrations that occur before January. Last year, on the first weekend in November, a few of us went to an Asian Indian Hindu Diwali (Festival of Lights) celebration in Cerritos, which drew an enormous number of people. For some Indians and Hindus, Diwali is also New Year's.

The Hmong New Year generally



art graphic by DEAN TOJI

runs for several weeks, from November through late December. Hmong communities in the United States intentionally schedule New Year's celebrations around Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, and on different dates in different cities. (In Asia, they also move the date to accommodate harvests.) But I hear that celebrations occur anywhere from September to January.

Thus the Asian American New Year's season, if we count from the beginning of November to past the middle of April is five-and-a-half months long. Or if we start with September, seven months.

Like many things under the big tent of Asian America, as a consequence of everybody chipping in, we can have a New Year's season that lasts for more than half the year. **G**

A MODEST PROPOSAL TO JAPANESE AMERICANS

Doesn't it seem a little odd that the "traditional" Japanese New Year's is observed on January 1st? Since when? It must have once been the same as the Chinese Lunar New Year. The Meiji government must have changed it during the big modernization drive in the second half of the 19th century.

Last year I asked my father, who grew up in Japan, about it. He first said something like, "We got up early on January 1st and went to the schoolyard, and someone would give a speech." After a pause he added, "But on Chinese New Year, the farm families celebrated on their own at home." I liked the idea of the "farm families" ignoring government directives on the New Year's question. (Don't do something just because The Man tells you to do it.)

We unrolled and examined a 1999 calendar from Japan. It was set up in the standard Gregorian format, but there was Japanese writing at the bottom of each day's box. On February 16, Chinese New Year, it said, "Old calendar, 1-1." The day before is 12-29, the last day of the old lunar calendar, New Year's Eve. The next day is 1-2, and so forth throughout the year. There, beneath the official Westernized façade, is the old traditional calendar humming right along.

I do believe that Japanese New Year's can legitimately be celebrated twice a year, once on January 1st and again on the Lunar New Year. Let's do it. It would be more in line with what other Asians — and what the Japanese "farm families" (which probably means your people) — do. My mom is worried about all the cooking involved. Don't worry, we'll go out to eat. **G**

On the outside looking in

BY JULIE HA

a journalist's search for connection to her community

It's amazing what a feeling of purpose can do. It gave me, formerly a reporter for an Asian American community newspaper, motivation, energy and the drive to do crazy things like work on my days off and not complain about it.

I must admit, it's harder to feel this sense of purpose now. That may change in time, once I can define a new role for myself as I write for a mainstream audience at a bigtime mainstream newspaper.

But sometimes I wonder. I wonder if I became a journalist for the wrong reasons, and that is what has made this job transition from in-community to outside-community so rough.

Let me explain.

...

In the summer of 1990, I met one of the most influential persons in my life, K.W. Lee, then-editor of the *Korea Times English Edition*. From that encounter, I trudged down this journalistic path and never looked back.

Lee, a funny guy who cussed a lot and often broke out into uncontrollable fits of laughter, had a dead-serious passion for the pursuit of truth and especially for fair, accurate and contextual representation of Korean Americans, whom he believed were being so blatantly misrepresented in the mainstream press.

This was the Soon Ja Du/Latasha Harlins, aka "Black-Korean conflict" era, so I tended to agree with him. After all, the paper I now call my own would have the people of Los Angeles believe that Koreans were so racist and greedy that a merchant from this community would kill a Black teenager over a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice. From that example, I learned about the power of the printed word, the great responsibility journalists held and how journalism could

become so personal.

From Lee, I learned about the need to have a "worm's eye view," that is, to go beyond reporting a people or an event from a comfortable bird's eye distance from above. One needed to get down and dirty and humbly seek understanding of the minority and immigrant communities' experiences especially, in order to properly document them.

Lee's passion was infectious, inspirational. Then a recent high school grad, I adopted a life's mission: to provide fair, accurate and contextual coverage of Asian Pacific Americans and do it on our own terms - in our own presses. This mission led me to *The Rafu Shimpo*.

After graduating from college in 1994, I landed my first real reporting job at *The Rafu Shimpo*, the oldest and largest Japanese

American daily in Los Angeles. For the nearly four years I was there, I could walk into work every day and know that with each story I reported on and person I interviewed, I was in some small way in tune with Asian Pacific America, our collective issues, triumphs and defeats.

More than that, though, my assignments weren't just work. The human lives behind these assignments touched me. They inspired me to want to touch others with their stories.

I witnessed the human impact of welfare reform through an 80-year-old Korean woman who turned out for a demonstration with hundreds of other Asian senior citizens on Labor Day 1995 to protest the proposed denial of public assistance to noncitizen immigrants like herself. She had hobbled to the site of the protest march in 90-degree heat with a cane in

each hand. I could barely keep up with the marchers.

I followed the evolution of a language policy in the Los Angeles Police Department. The change was triggered by the death of an elderly Korean man who got lost one day and was picked up by police who never attempted to communicate with him in his native tongue. After figuring out he had done no wrong, the LAPD released Tong Sik Chong. Disoriented and alone, left to the streets, he was robbed and beaten. A few months later, he died.

Community outpouring and media attention caused the LAPD to develop a language policy more in tune with the ever-growing immigrant residents of the city.

I recognized the opportunity to bear witness to these events and document them as a privilege and honor. On a selfish note, my work gave my life some sense of purpose, a mission that spoke to something inside. I don't know how else to explain it.

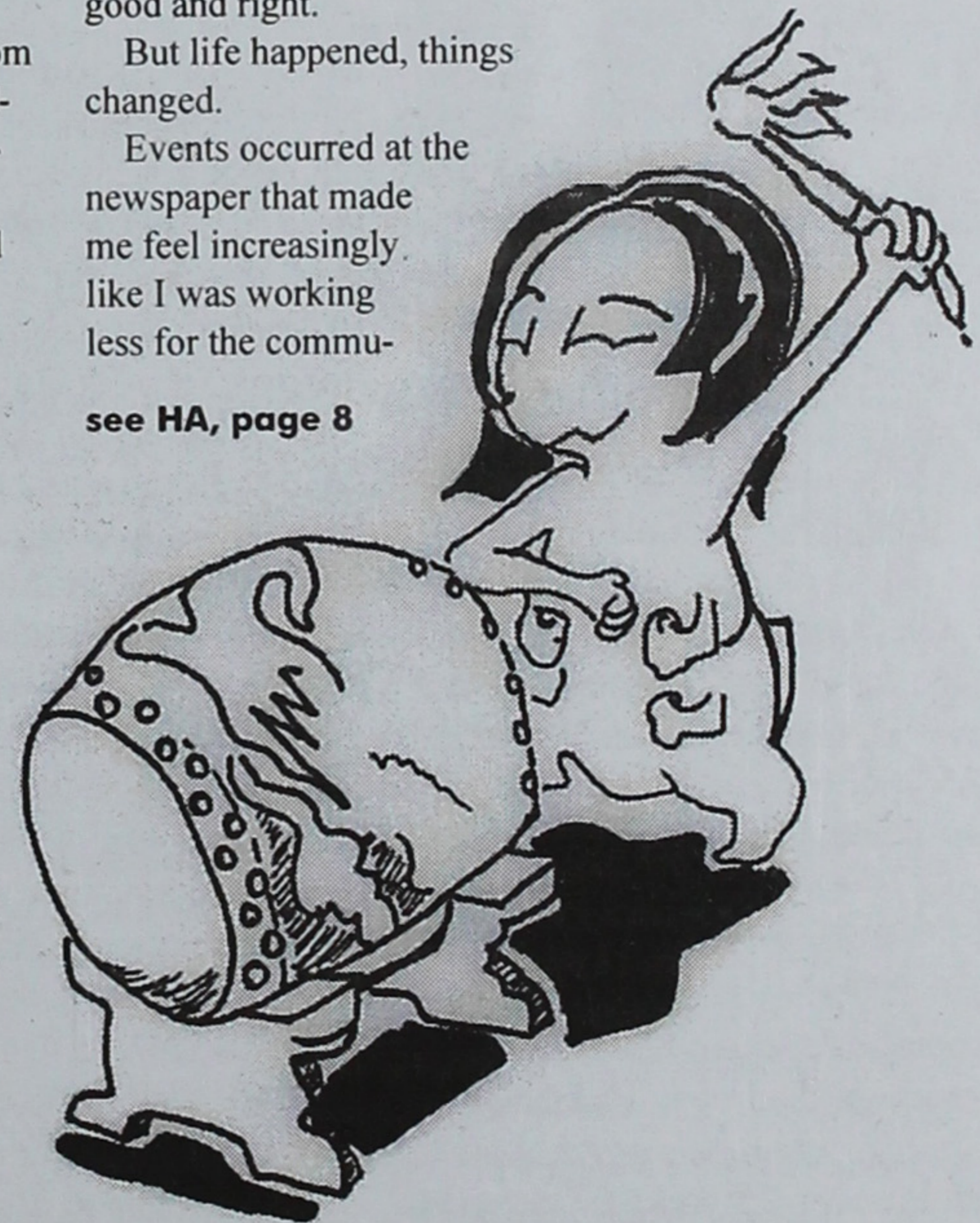
Perhaps, it also represented my search for truth about a community called Asian Pacific America with which I could identify with on a phenotypic, historical and experiential level, but of which, for most of my life, I had limited or only stereotypical knowledge.

I was finally connected, and it felt good and right.

But life happened, things changed.

Events occurred at the newspaper that made me feel increasingly like I was working less for the commu-

see HA, page 8



artwork by MICHELLE BANTA

nity and more for a company, the values and goals of which I disagreed with and even resented. Even before that frustration set in, I had always wanted to see what else was out there in the world, beyond Asian Pacific America.

...

Last June I joined a training program for minority reporters at the *Los Angeles Times*. I've covered a brush fire, robbery, mysterious double murder, the rescue of a man-stuck-in-a-sinkhole and, of course, horny chimps who can't stop making babies.

I haven't covered a single APA-related event or issue in about eight months, and that's left me somewhat confused.

"God, Julie, you're so out of the loop," an Asian American insider friend said to me a few months into my new job.

The statement, though delivered play-

fully, hit me in the deepest parts of my consciousness. Questions and self-denigration filled my mind. How could I have allowed myself to get out of touch so quickly? What is my role in the world now?

But, even as I struggle with these questions, I am reminded of why I left the *Rafu*: that larger world.

If I hadn't come to the *Times*, I'm not sure if I would have ever made contact with members of the Kurdish community in Southern California and been forced to give myself a working knowledge of what is behind the ongoing conflict between Kurds and the Turkish government.

An article I did on same-sex marriage spurred letters and calls from gay persons sharing more stories of struggles, as well as those trying pass off information on how to "convert" from homosexuality to heterosexuality. The response made

me realize what a broad and sizable audience one could reach at a mainstream paper.

When I talk about "my community" now, I have to pause and think about what that means. It doesn't just denote Asian Pacific Americans anymore; it's grown ever broader and more inclusive.

Basically, I think it's about touching and being touched. The people we touch, the people we are touched by — that's my working definition for now.

Having said this, I must also say I miss so deeply the work I used to do at the *Rafu*. I can truly appreciate now, more than ever, how good I had it there: working for, on a symbolic level anyway, a community-owned newspaper. I had an obligation to serve the people of the Asian Pacific American community — a community I was a part of, making my profession deeply personal.

Perhaps, that personal dynamic, that

longing to work from inside the community again is what has led me to *Gidra*, even as logic and rationale have argued against it.

There have been plenty of moments when I've pondered, "You don't have the time to be working on this volunteer project. You should, instead, be digging up a juicy story for the *Times*, finalizing that budget for your wedding reception or even researching a good mutual fund."

But I find myself trekking to that *Gidra* meeting after work, where I join up with several others with full-time jobs who seem to be caught up in this whole connection-to-our-ethnic-community thing too. Sometimes, I think our wiring's all screwed-up, but maybe we're just responding to an inner drum that beckons us to do this work. It can be frustrating and annoying at times, but without it, we are left feeling hollow.

Do you hear it too? **G**

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE TOKYO

by EILEEN TANIZAKI

Parking lots are a common urban sight, especially in Little Tokyo, located just on the outskirts of downtown Los Angeles. To some, they are welcome alternatives to overpriced parking on upscale Bunker Hill. To others, they represent broken promises of large-scale developments. Either way, what exists today is a community with random pockets of asphalt that serve downtown employees more than those who live, work and visit Little Tokyo.

One lot in particular, a 5.4-acre city-owned lot bounded by Alameda, Temple, Judge John Aiso and First streets, has been the subject of much debate. A community-based plan, called First Street North, incorporated a gymnasium, underground parking, and outdoor space with walkways. The proposal died after 18 months of discussion when the gymnasium, sought for over 25 years by many in the community, was opposed for that block by the City Council office and

the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA).

MOCA, Japanese American National Museum (JANM) and other arts organizations are now planning to turn this lot, currently used for city employee parking, into an open-air performing arts space and Japanese garden. The project, named the Central Avenue Art Park, was presented to the Mayor-appointed Little Tokyo Community Development Advisory Committee (LTCDAC) in Oct. 1998.

The proposal shocked many in the Little Tokyo community, including residents of the San Pedro Firm Building, a low-income housing complex adjacent to the proposed Art Park. Concerned community members at the LTCDAC meeting demanded that MOCA come up with concrete solutions to address lack of security, noise control and cost.

In an attempt to alleviate these concerns, MOCA commissioned an architectural firm to design a model of the Art Park. The model is on display at the Little Tokyo Koban, a community

police sub-station. A survey has been developed to solicit feedback on the Art Park concept and design from Little Tokyo businesses, residents, property owners, workers, organizations and visitors.

The cardboard and wood model now sits quietly at the Koban, waiting to be discovered. Occasional passers-by glance into the Koban window and, for the most part, keep walking.

Despite the lack of community input, the Art Park is hailed as a panacea for Little Tokyo's woes. Historic Little Tokyo, once a center of activity for the growing Japanese American community during the 1930s and 40s, has been suffering from a decline in Japanese tourism, the flight of Japanese businesses after the bubble burst and a general lack of interest in and need for Little Tokyo as an integral part of being Japanese American.

Not only has community input been less than welcome in this process, acts of retribution have been dealt to those who question the so-called "community sentiments" behind the project.

The curator of the opening exhibit at JANM has just been laid off — less

than a month after the successful grand opening of the \$45 million Pavilion. A few weeks before the opening, he wrote a column in the *Rafu Shimpō*, a Japanese American community newspaper, that questioned MOCA's motives and process for the Art Park and revealed MOCA and JANM's previous lack of support for the gymnasium at the Art Park site.

The crowning exhibit at the new Pavilion is titled "Common Ground: The Heart of Community." Yet there seems to be no heart in the community envisioned by JANM. The Pavilion is now filled with names of Japanese Americans who wish to leave a legacy of the Japanese American people and experiences. But the very institution they look toward to preserve Japanese American heritage does not seem to be working to build a cohesive community.

The future of Little Tokyo seems to be in the hands of those with money, regardless of their connection to the community. It is now up to the Little Tokyo residents, business owners, and organizations, as well as the larger Japanese American community, to see to it that MOCA and JANM do not spite the community in which they reside — Little Tokyo, Los Angeles. **G**

TWO CUTS Above

BY ABRAHAM FERRER

I usually don't let on to people my thoughts on a "best" Asian American film or video. Having programmed scores of films and videos over the years, I've seen 'em all — shorts, features, works about identity, heritage, pop culture and so on. More recently, I've had the opportunity to view works by Asian Americans who don't wish to see their work aligned with "old-time" Asian American cinema.

And still others of a newer generation are finding that topics considered passé by more acculturated filmmakers and audiences remain pertinent and vital to them. The fact is, I admire the works of a wide variety of filmmakers, no matter how modest or "high-concept" they are. I learn valuable things about people from the many productions I watch, and ultimately come away comforted in the knowledge that our creative output places a very real "face" on our communities and heritage.

Though we are well into 1999, I thought I'd have a little fun and offer my thoughts on the "best" works produced by Asian American cinema that either was produced or gained maximum exposure in the last year.

Two works leap out at me right away. The first, Diep N. Bui's *I Am Viet Hung, Vietnamese Hero*, is a sensitively rendered documentary portrait of an elderly Vietnamese man who is considered a master of the now-dying art of *cai-luong*, or Vietnamese opera. Now living in Mission Viejo and in poor health, Viet Hung Huu Nguyen is shown as the embodiment of an art form that no one in the relocated Vietnamese community of Westminster, California seems to appreciate.

Elders with stronger ties to the old country act rather ambivalent toward him. The comments of younger adults, and teenagers especially, are more pointed: they deride Viet Hung as a yodeler of something akin to hillbilly music, entertainment more suited to the old folks. Still, Viet Hung goes on stage — at a Tet festival, a debutante dinner or any num-

ber of different community functions where his presence lends a bit of "home" to a displaced community.

And yet, there is a very real — and saddening — sense that the viewer is witnessing the passing of not only a national treasure, but also another part of a community's heritage. Repeated efforts to maintain a storefront *cai-luong* school fail, due in part to student disinterest, and finally, the closure of the restaurant in which Viet Hung is obliged to hold his classes.

At the same time, Viet Hung stubbornly confronts his own mortality as a bout of colon cancer and, later, a heart attack render him nearly incapable of caring for himself. It is to director Bui's credit that this otherwise bleak story is leavened with doses of wry humor, as evidenced by Viet Hung's chain-smoking habit. It becomes a cruel running gag, sure — toward the end, his smoking becomes solitary exercises in contemplation and escape from an increasingly ambivalent existence.

I Am Viet Hung is understated, powerful stuff, the kind of work that increasingly fewer emerging Asian American mediamakers know how to produce accurately or sensitively.

While Viet Hung Huu Nguyen approaches the end of his colorful life, Kathy, the central character of Perry Lin's astonishing *17 Years to Earth*, is just starting her adult life. More to the point, Kathy is doing a well-enough job of trashing hers.

As the youngest daughter in a broken home, Kathy suffers the latest in a series of slights that have occurred long before the story begins. Her self-absorbed older sister, preening for a date, slips a thoughtlessly-wrapped Christmas present through the bedroom door before locking it shut. Inside Kathy finds an empty diary, which she uses to record the events of the day. But instead of describing the latest indignation at the hands of Big Sis, Kathy's first diary entry describes a day of fun playing in the snow with sibling and friends. Thus begins a 17-year parallel journey, one played out cinematically for the audience, and another imaginary one that becomes the stuff of Kathy's diary.

Her entries describe an absolutely peachy life: a childhood frolicking with friends in the neighborhood, fantasizing over the "perfect" dream guy in seventh grade, a fantastic senior prom, college and a budding career as a novelist, graduation and the challenges of a rewarding adult life.

The images, however, paint a more painful portrait of Kathy's psyche: a childhood loner, she is constantly harassed by white kids for her "orientalness." Her dream guy turns out to be a blond-haired surfer type cut out of a junior high yearbook, while a picture of a Chinese youth rates as something lower than a brother. Her attempts at high school romance are shockingly unfulfilled as well — she's sexually assaulted by her senior prom date, and a first fling at sexual awakening crumbles under the weight of her total frigidity. Kathy manages to graduate from college, but relentless career ennui and creative inertia forestall any kind of meaningful career.

The only constants in this revolving door of delusion and denial are the comforting lies in her diary and the ever-presence of Kirby, the dorky Filipino guy she befriended in junior high. Only Kirby is no longer a dork, but a strapping lad who is Kathy's one true supporter, and maybe her one really true love as well.

Here, for the first time in her life, her secret thoughts betray her: Kirby finds the diary and turning the pages, discovers Kathy's long-intended plan to dump him. Kirby, though, walks out on Kathy. All alone now, with the diary waiting to record the first entry of the eighteenth year, Kathy must decide: Will she consummate the pattern of delusion, or will she come clean and admit to herself that she's been running away from reality for the past 17 years? **G**

Abe Ferrer coordinates the annual Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film and Video Festival.

SUGGESTED WORKS TO VIEW

- *I Am Viet Hung, Vietnamese Hero* by Diep Bui
- *17 Years to Earth* by Perry Lin
- *Almost the Cocktail Hour* by Lana Lin
- *Double Solitaire* by Corey Ohama
- *No Milk, But There's Always Coke* by Ernesto M. Foronda
- *Crickets* by Jané Kim
- *Kelly Loves Tony* by Spencer Nakasako, with Kane Ian Saeteurn and Nai Saelio
- *Hi There! Angry Little Asian Girl* by Lela Lee
- *Ekleipsis* by Tran T. Kim-Trang
- *Virtue* by Camera Obscura

A heartfelt
documentary and a
corrosive dramatic
short top this
writer's list of the
best in recent
Asian American
cinema



Tagalog Hands

words and heart by Michelle Banta

A story based on my brother's experience.

“Speak Tagalog”, the elders told us, but we had been raised to speak English. All the cartoons on TV and the books in school were in English. In the neighborhood, the kids we played with spoke English and Spanish. No one spoke Tagalog, except me—or at least I tried.

I'm the eldest, I have two sisters—both were born in Long Beach. I was born in the Philippines. I'm the only one with pictures of the relatives holding me when I was still a baby. I look at those pictures now and I don't know anyone's names. But I'm still Pilipino, even when our family left the Philippines—when I was two—I'm still Pilipino.

It must have been my grandfather Daddy En who made me feel more Pilipino than my sisters. While Mom and Dad were working, Daddy and Mommy En took care of me and my sisters. Daddy En woke me up really early to go fishing in Long Beach. Sometimes we would find baby crabs. We would take them home with the fish we caught, and Mommy En would steam it. We ate the entire crab—we'd bite into the shell and meat. We dipped it in vinegar with our hands and ate it with hot rice. Daddy En taught me that the best way to eat with your hands was to hold the food tightly with your fingers.

When school started, although I couldn't go fishing with Daddy En, I was excited to see him waiting for me after school. Together we walked to the park before going home. On the way home, it was my mission to help him collect cans.

Once, our can collection grew to six bags full of cans. I was proud to help him collect so much, and even more proud that we recycled the bags of cans for eight dollars.

We made all sorts of things from the objects he would collect. He made a screen for drying fish. From the scrap wood he would find, Daddy En made a sturdy sawhorse. He tied plastic bags to bamboo sticks to scare the birds away from the eggplants.

One day he asked me if I knew the Pledge of Allegiance. I stood up, took a deep breath, put my right hand over my heart and recited:

*“I pledge allegiance
to the flag of the United States of America*

*and to the Republic, for which it stands,
one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty
and justice for all."*

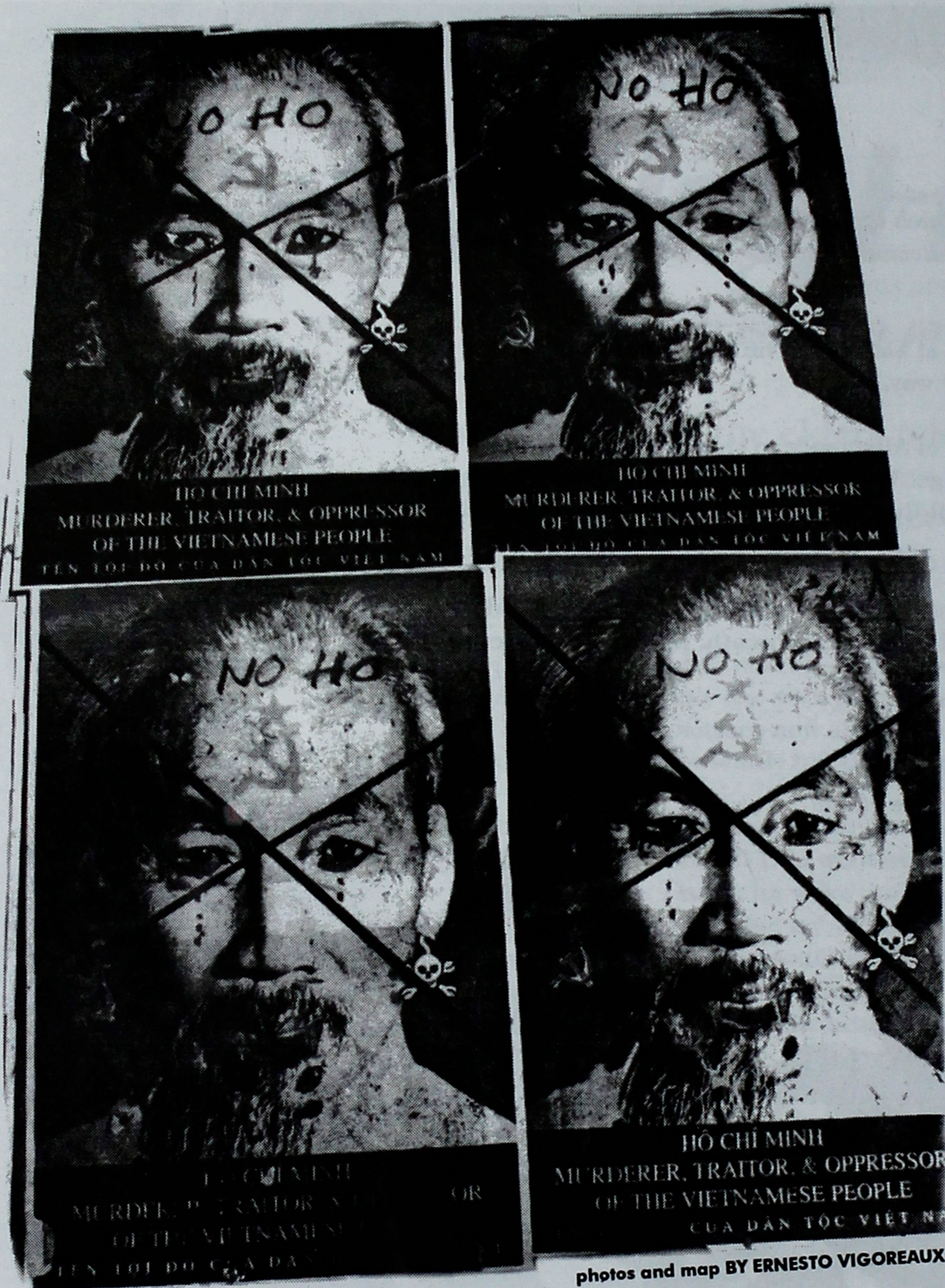
I said it without breathing twice. Then, looking at Daddy En, he nodded and said, "Good. You know their way. Now I teach you my way."

During school the next day, I had a new Pledge of Allegiance to share. Every morning, Ms. Little chose someone to lead us in the Pledge. Trying to restrain myself from jumping out of my seat, my arm shot up and my hand waved wildly. I caught Ms. Little's attention, and she chose me to lead.

My classmates stood up next to their desks. I waited for absolute silence. In my mind, Daddy En was in the back watching me. Just like before, I took a deep breath, put my hand over my heart and said it in the exact way he taught me:

*Ready, begin—
I pledge allegiance
to the Pilipino flag in America,
and to the Pinoys, together we stand
we eat fish and rice with
our hands.*





photos and map BY ERNESTO VIGOREAUX

BY TRAM QUANG NGUYEN

My grandfather was a Vietnamese communist. This is enough to get some people extremely upset, but that's not the purpose of this piece. In Little Saigon, up to 15,000 people demonstrated this year because of a couple of communist symbols. That a red and gold-starred flag and a black and white picture of Ho Chi Minh could galvanize thousands is testament to the power of those symbols in summoning complex and painful memories of a refugee community's war-marked past. These memories are highly personal, though they haven't always been treated as such, and that is why I am writing about my grandfather.

I've often thought about him and the war he fought for most of his life. This man, who I never knew, has come to represent everything I've struggled with as a Vietnamese refugee child grown up in America. You see, one side of my family — starting with my mother's father — fought on the side of North Vietnam, while the other — including my father — fought for South Vietnam. This is not so uncommon among other refugees of a civil war, but having communist relatives or any association with communism isn't something to proclaim loudly if you want to avoid trouble. Yet there are many Vietnamese Americans with family members who fought and were killed on both sides of the 17th parallel. For all the thousands at the rallies, there are also others not in attendance or standing on the sidelines, watching with more ambivalent feelings. And for all of us, the community crisis sparked by Truong Van Tran has thrown submerged conflicts and difficult questions of our history and identity into the public eye — and the often distorting glare of mass media.

It's simple to say some of the things that have been said. That Vietnamese Americans are McCarthyite red baiters, so burned were they by the devastating war that tore a country in two and ended in millions of refugees unleashed upon the seas and camps and uncertain futures in foreign lands. That Tran must be a front man for the Communist regime of Vietnam, backed by them to test the level of expatriate resistance to communism. That the protesters must be crazy fanatics to respond with so much passion to one troublemaker.

But in talking to other Vietnamese Americans, in my family and myself, I find experiences and ideas that don't fall into clear categorization. The war and its aftermath continue to occupy our consciousness in ways that elude easy solutions or even First Amendment-guaranteed expression.

THE RIGHT TO SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT

I didn't start this story wanting to write about Tran or Little Saigon. But in the days since Tet (the Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebration), the growing fervor in Little Saigon and its intensifying media spotlight encroached on my thoughts ever

a Vietnamese American examines the
turmoil in Little Saigon

Black and White, Red All Over

more disturbingly.

I went home to visit my family during Tet. As expected, conversation around the dinner table was about what had happened so far in Little Saigon. My father, a former officer in the Southern army who spent two years in a re-education camp, has long since made his peace with the war. He can reflect now with equanimity on its causes. He admires his late father-in-law the communist and he accepts that we have family on both sides. Expecting him to disapprove of the vehement reaction to Tran, I was surprised that he stood firm with the community — you don't disrespect your people, free expression or not.

I had been thinking up to that point of Tran's actions as a First Amendment issue. For an aspiring writer raised in America, what could be more important than free expression? Yet I got an even bigger surprise talking to my older sister Quynh, a former student activist and now a community organizer. Freestyling thoughts for my story, I complained to her about the climate of fear created by such reactionary measures and how we suppress free thought and progress by clinging to old wounds. Somewhere in there, I said, "This makes me so mad."

But Quynh stopped me short.

"You're mad? You were just a kid. You didn't have to go through any of the war. And you're mad about your right to say whatever the hell you want?" she said.

My sister, the one who's always advocating change by any means necessary, was telling me to leave this alone. The magnitude of people's trauma over the war is still too great, she said, and as long as those survivors are alive, there is no changing their minds or their memories about the suffering they've endured.

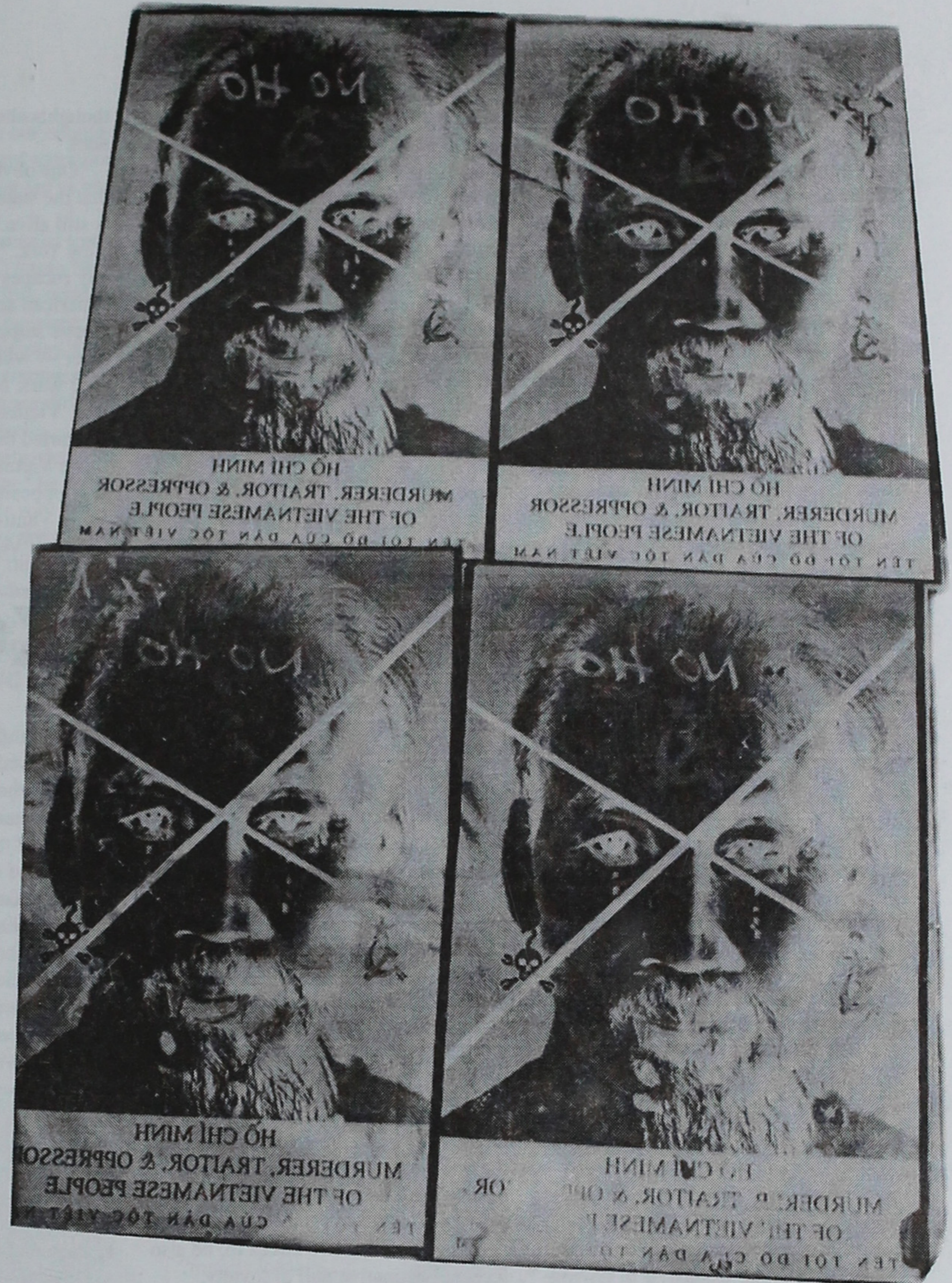
"We're not going to solve anything, that's for damn sure," Quynh sighed. "You could have a respected community leader say let's stop this and nothing's going to happen. Why open those wounds and hurt people? Just for the right to say whatever you want."

Several others I've talked to since then have echoed the idea that freedom of speech is rather beside the point in trying to understand this issue. "Remember, the protesters consider themselves victims of the current government of Vietnam. What is the rational, logical reason why their strong and genuine feelings must be made submissive to the abstract free speech concept?" wrote Hao-Nhien Vu, a 34-year-old lawyer, in an email.

Let's be clear, I don't like what Tran did, whatever his motivations. A man with an eccentric past, he wrote to community leaders after posting the communist symbols in his shop and dared them to do something about it. It's ironic that Tran invoked Martin Luther King, Jr. in launching his protest, because nonviolent free speech is exactly what we need to encourage community discussion, yet that message has been embodied in so unlikely and inappropriate a messenger.

But, as my sister reminds me, what's involved here runs deeper than the notions of free speech and legal rights. Ky Ngo, a protest organizer, was quoted in the *Orange County Register* as saying, "We understand freedom of speech. We respect the law. But the law is not everything."

In Vietnamese, the word I am thinking of is *thu*. It can be translated as



vengeance, but its meaning is much stronger, something more akin to a vendetta where there is no forgetting or forgiving of the wrongs inflicted. It is this feeling I am considering to explain the intensity of resentment against communism and the reaction against anything that can be construed as favorable to communism.

CUNG ONG NGOAI

Later that night at my parents' house, I contemplated the ancestral altar over the fireplace full of fruit and flowers. Every year around this time, along with Tet, our family also commemorates the anniversary of my grandfather's death. I came home too late for the actual ceremony but lit my stick of incense anyway and set it in the urn below his picture.

My grandfather died in Vietnam, a high-ranking official of the Communist Party. My sisters and I never knew him, but we were always

taught to think of him as a hero. He was a patriot, a man with strong principles and a gentle spirit, my mother said. My mother adored him. As a result, I was always curious about this man who left his village outside of Hanoi to join the Viet Minh, losing contact with his young wife and newborn daughter for 20 years or so as war dragged on. By the time he found them again, my grandmother had long ago started a new family and my mother had grown into a young woman married to an officer in the Southern army. My grandfather spent all his life in the service of communism, dying as a decorated revolutionary and government bureaucrat.

Though we honored his memory, we were also taught to fear and suspect communism. My dad in those early days of our American re-settlement would intone ominously over the dinner table about the dreaded Viet Cong who were capable of untold cruelty and the ideology that sounded so good in theory yet was responsible for so much suffering.

I used to be confused by that. I wanted to believe in my grandfather as an idealistic revolutionary, though I was surrounded by testimonials in our family and others of the evil in the system he stood for. Growing up Vietnamese in America, you can't escape one over-riding version of the war, made so compelling as to be almost irrefutable by the suffering of parents and relatives and every other person forced to flee Vietnam and re-settle in this country. In this version, the communists took away our freedom, our homeland, and everything we had, setting into motion the exodus of "boat people," the horrors of *vuot bien*, escape by boat on high seas, the dislocation and bitterness of having to start all over again as refugees.

Nowadays I'm still confused. It's been 24 years since the end of the war, the same age I am now...enough time for me and others like me to have come of age on American soil and become fluent in American ways, but not enough time yet for many of us to develop our own understanding of what happened in Vietnam, or to come to terms with the pain and bitterness of our parents' generation.

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

Back in Los Angeles, I turned on the evening news in my apartment and saw

a live report from the Bolsa strip mall. Hundreds of people marched across the screen, yelling loudly. The camera zoomed in on one of the protest organizers for a sound bite. "What do you expect when you put picture of Hitler in Jewish community?" he said heatedly in a heavy Vietnamese accent.

Despite myself, I was cringing. My discomfort made me think of the words of Quynh-Tram Nguyen, a community activist who worries about the effect such portrayals will have on young people.

"The media's stereotypes about the community only add more forces on the young Vietnamese generation," she says, "to pull far away from their own community, feel inferior and deny their ethnic identity."

David, a 22-year-old friend who works with Vietnamese college students, tells me he's tired of the mad-eyed, war-ravaged image we've become associated with.

"I love the fact that all these newspapers only interview the craziest person, the one who can't speak English but thinks he can," he complained. "And there's a lawyer there and a doctor standing there, but they don't go to them. They go to the wacko, they go for the one wearing the army jacket and the bloody bandanna that he hasn't washed since the war."

But, like others I've talked to, he also feels an instinctive pull of loyalty, bound by an inescapable sense of duty to respect the collective suffering our parents and grandparents have experienced.

"I get swept up in it too, I get emotional too," he said. "When you see a bunch of old people out there protesting, you gotta feel something for that."

THE STATE OF WAR IS STILL ALIVE

"Things are deeper than they seem," began one email I got recently. I had just joined an Internet forum for Vietnamese Americans and floated a message to the group asking for

thoughts about the Little Saigon incident.

"One obvious point we can observe is that the state of war in our community is still alive," wrote Ngo Thanh Nhan of New York. "The second point that usually escapes our debate is that the American and the Soviet Union leaders ...have stopped their wars against each other — while we still fight a part of their wars. Note the newspapers call it the 'Vietnam War' as if we Vietnamese started this war among brothers, as if we Vietnamese are born into two opposite camps, Communists and anti-Communists, as if we Vietnamese are born hating each other..."

Such is the still-smoldering mentality of war that the threat of black-listing, violence and even death continues to dodge anybody who publicly defies the anti-communist cause.

Eight of the 10 ethnic journalists killed since 1981 because of their work were Vietnamese, according to a 1994 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

My Vietnamese friends and I routinely joke in private about being persecuted if we were to voice heretical thoughts. We laugh uneasily that this could get us killed, but it's really not funny at all.

"I'm a believer in socialism — but I would never say it," David told me. "I think socialism has a lot of qualities that we can use. But I'd be killed. You can't even joke about it."

Others in my email group hope that Tran's actions have created an opportunity for more moderate forces to "raise a voice of reason to the community." But like a sapper on a minefield, the first efforts are bound to set off some explosions.

"Even if you were in a large group, there's so many more people who would be against you," David speculated. "It would be like a fight, a losing fight for you, but you'd be raising enough awareness so that more people would question, you know. It's a guaranteed loss for you. The first one running in will always go down."

So far though, there hasn't been much of a voice of reason that bridges the

older and younger generations of Vietnamese in America. Those who are older nurse lifelong sorrows and wounds, while those who are younger struggle to make sense of a many-sided and often misunderstood historical tragedy.

"For a minute I thought I was the only crazy one," Claire Tran of San Francisco emailed me. "I have had many talks with my father about the war and what he thinks about communism. There are so many contradictions in what he says — and it has made it very difficult for me to figure out what really happened during this war."

"It is not only difficult to really question and think critically about what my own father is telling me, but also to have to sift through all of the U.S. propaganda."

There's a small but growing number of young people like Claire, many of them shaped by ethnic studies programs in universities across the country.

These Vietnamese who join movements for social justice encounter a common dilemma. Among leftists of other ethnicities, we often find enthusiasm for Marxist ideology and interpretations of the war that contradict everything we've grown up hearing from our families.

I remember attending a protest as a freshman at UCLA where a Black woman wearing an Afro and a dashiki approached me and asked my ethnicity. When I said Vietnamese, her face lit up. "Go Ho Chi Minh!" she said.

I've run into this sort of approval from activists since then, and it never failed to bewilder and disturb me. While denouncing the ills of capitalism and U.S. economic imperialism, I was aware all along of that flip side I had been raised with, where people like my own family risked everything to reach the freedom and escape from totalitarianism that America represented.

David, despite his socialist sympathies, feels alienated and annoyed among activists who he thinks idealize a system they never experienced directly.

"They don't understand the practical aspects of communism. You think, man, these people are so naive," he said. "I can't stand it, because they don't understand people's history. They think, oh yeah, it's a victory (against imperialism), but it was also the death of a lot of civil rights."

WHAT THE SQUASH SAID TO THE CALABASH

I'm thinking again of my grandfather. He gave all his life to communism, re-marrying a comrade within the party and sending his two sons from that marriage as soldiers into the same war. He must have believed strongly in the rightness of his choice to sacrifice so much for it, at least in the beginning, before the victory in 1975 and the ensuing years of post-war deprivation and continued government corruption.

He loved my grandmother, for whom he carried a gold necklace for years, painstakingly bought and saved in the midst of warfare, to give her when he returned. He loved my mother, whom he met for the first time as a young woman and mourned the rest of his life after she left for America. Yet his choices and the circumstances of war resulted in his life being dedicated to a country and a cause, of which he must have been conflicted about in the end too.

Looking at the Little Saigon protests — mothers pushing baby strollers, old men and women in wheelchairs, posters and effigies of Ho the "mass murderer" — I know their memories of rape, death and torture are harrowing, their trauma still palpable.

Expecting strident propaganda, I instead find poignancy in a flyer circulated at the rally. "Each and every one of us Vietnamese who had to leave our homeland has suffered personal loss and family tragedy caused by the bloodthirsty communist regime, murderers in Vietnam. Millions of Vietnamese were jailed with thousands dying in the horrid and dehumanizing concentration camps of communist Vietnam. Thousands more lost their lives on the seas during their journey to Freedom."

Ho Chi Minh, the protesters insist, belongs in the category of Hitler, Pol Pot and Saddam Hussein. I know their experiences convince them of that, but I also can't look at the posters and effigies without thinking of my mother's father. I can't see him in the same camp as mass murderers, the vanguard of a bloodthirsty regime.

I long for the day when the Vietnamese diaspora, we who left as refugees and losers of a civil war, will

be able to look back at our country's tragedy with less *thu* and more compassion for the suffering we've endured on both sides.

"We have a deep humanist tradition surpassing ideologies," wrote Nhan, quoting a Vietnamese folk saying, *Bau oi thuong lay bi cung, tuy rang khac giong nhung chung mot gian*. Oh calabash, show the same compassion to this squash, though we are different, we do share the same trellis.

"That's my community, that's the depth of my community," he wrote. "There must be a better way of treating each other than the way we treat Mr. Tran Truong, or better than the way we treat anyone else of different opinion?"

AT THE CROSSROAD OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Though the mentality of war has not retreated from the Vietnamese collective consciousness, there are also other forces quietly proceeding along different paths.

Tung Pham, the co-chair of UCLA's Vietnamese Student Union, is one of a growing number of young Vietnamese Americans who are finding ways to work on improving the community without stirring up divisive tension. Along with three other students, he started an academic retention program for Southeast Asian students, a group whose economic disadvantage and educational problems are often overlooked in the shadow of the

Asian American "success story."

We should be putting our energies into improving our community, not fighting the war all over again, he said. "That's the problem we have, we aren't very vocal. We're only vocal on the wrong things," he said. "Only now do we have a retention program. We should have had one when we first came here, when we were even worse off."

Tung and I, along with many of our peers, are torn between feeling an obligation to respect our parents' past yet not wanting to continue the legacy of war.

More and more of us have gone back to visit Vietnam, often to a country we have never seen or recall only vaguely. There, memories of war, even in the defeated South, have little of the vitriol found here. Perhaps because they've been forced to move on, unlike Vietnamese abroad whose connection to their ethnic identity still remains intertwined with bitter memories of the lost country.

And, as Vietnam rushes to develop economically, the government's ideology has become increasingly irrelevant in the face of global market pressures.

But for the refugee community here in America, the trauma of war and the psychology of loss means that quick resolutions to situations like the one in Little Saigon will not be easy to come by.

At the time of this writing, the latest protest reportedly drew thousands of people. Crammed into the small strip mall, they listen to community leaders,

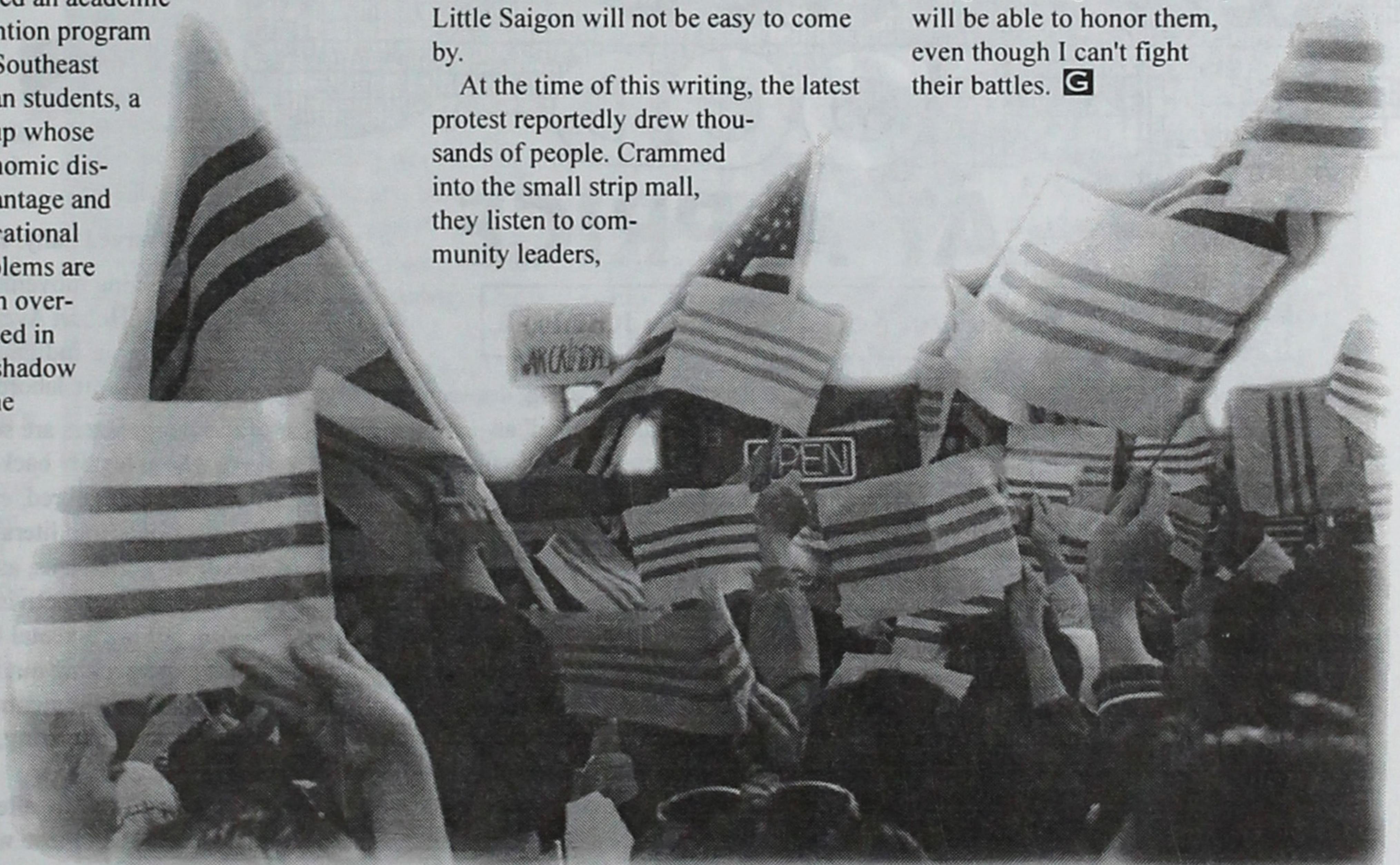
rally around Vietnamese pop singers, wave hundreds of small yellow flags. It's a pride-building, community-unifying kind of gathering now. I wonder, though, why having an enemy to confront is always so much more unifying than trying to look within and work on problems without the media drama.

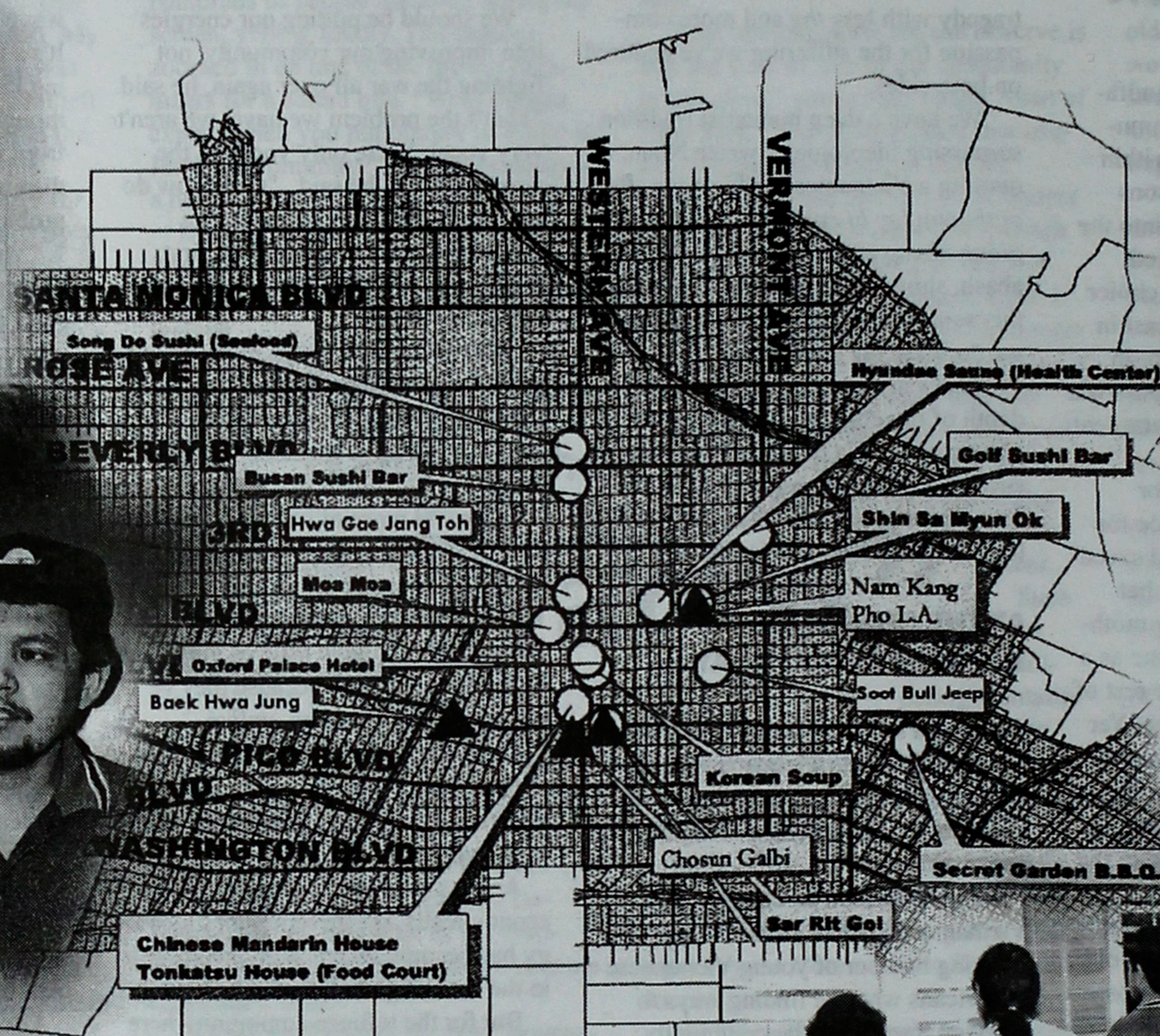
"We are capable of finding a way to overcome the past. Otherwise, we just react to situations," Ngo Thanh Nhan wrote. "Many of us have relatives lost on both sides. I emphasize this to add to the balance and the complexity of the situation, and to the complexity of the solutions we seek."

My dad says his family is his country now. Unlike my grandfather, he has been a refugee, and like so many other displaced people throughout the world, has been forced to re-make his life outside the old allegiances of national boundaries.

He decided his life would be shaped by dedication to those around him, his wife and children, not to ideologies and nationalities. In so doing, he has allowed my sisters and me the freedom to think for ourselves and to make our own choices.

I don't know what I would have done in either my father's or grandfather's shoes. But I believe they did what they thought was right. And I hope I will be able to honor them, even though I can't fight their battles. **G**

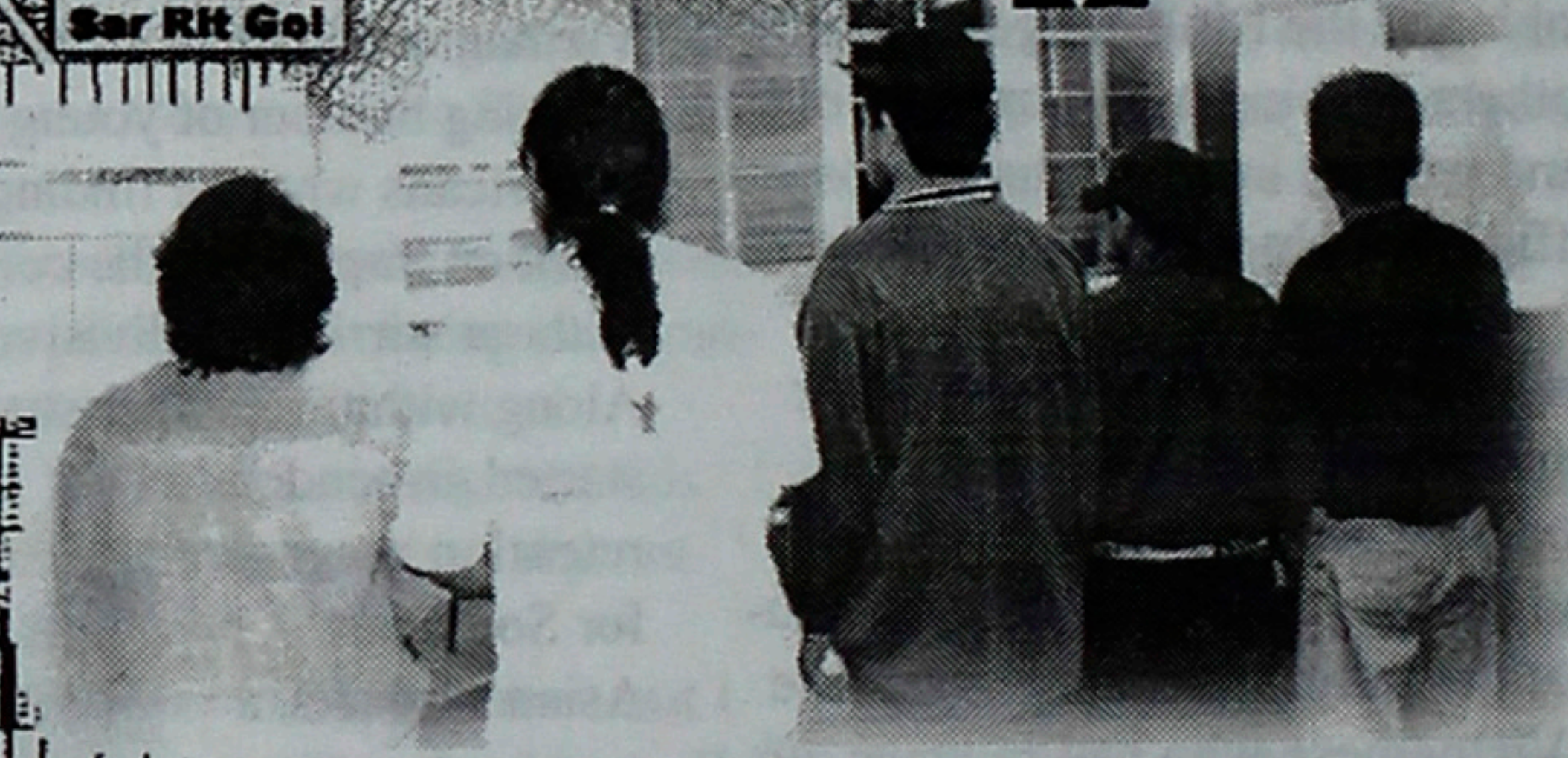




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KOREATOWN RESTAURANTS WHERE WORKERS HAVE FILED CLAIMS WITH KIWA

- ▲ Past KIWA Disputes
- Current KIWA Disputes
- ▨ Koreatown
- City of LA
- Jung Hee Lee
- Francisco Perez



REAL GOOD FOOD AT A PRICE

the economy of scale in Koreatown **By JOHN LEE**

In Koreatown, there are 280-odd Korean restaurants humming along, drawing thousands of customers daily from distant corners of the county as well as just around the way. Home to o.g. scary-spice sidedishes and barbequed shortribs of renown, the area's restaurants also house more than 2,000 low-paid workers, without whose patience and effort this industry could not survive.

Contrary to appearances, and profit margins slim though they might be, the recent history (and daily reality) of the restaurant worker bears out a simple but disturbing truth: Someone's making a killing here.

And while livelihoods *are* at issue in worker rights campaigns being executed out of Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates' modest, second-story, shared offices, the aforementioned killing isn't just about the money. For us passerby consumers or, rather, we who form this ephemeral concept known as community, is it not our sense of fairness that's at death's door? And just how exactly does one go about improving a problem as subterranean and seemingly intractable as the subminimum-wage plight of the workers staffing these food service purgatories? The

answers are being served daily. If only we look closely.

There's an organizing movement afoot in this town. It emanates from the corner of 8th Street and Hobart Avenue where, going on seven years now, KIWA has tapped into the righteous indignation and muscle ache experienced by workers, and marshaled those same laborers' many talents to start changing the industry.

Most of these organizers are self-selected from the same ranks of downlow-paid workers whose legally backed protections are categorically, and some would argue, officially being ignored, even at the most minimal legal safeguards from abuse. Living and working literally in the concentric middle of the nation's largest enclave of Korean Americans, as many as 30 percent of workers are Latino. Perhaps the least likely of activists, they, whose rights have been most trampled upon, are eking out incremental but still grand victories with KIWA's help.

We've seen hope peeking out from some of the city's least likely places, too. There have been heady moments, when momentum is palpable: at the picket line, in a crowded townhall gathering, or even just a well-attended weekly organizing meeting with workers.

Knowing all too well how often the mere hint of good intention presages disaster, we have spoken with those worker-activists who have over the years devoted time and attention to these matters. We hope to convey with their cooperation and

a somewhat random sampling of their words, how it came to be they have so much heart.

We went looking for the lesser represented and found ourselves (staggering about) in the world of the less understood. The jury is still out on whether public drunkenness counts as an acceptable organizing or reporting tool.

This story is about workers, especially the ones, who at the end of a 12 hour day still have the motivation and clarity of vision to become labor activists. They organize because they deserve more. And as it goes, there's a lot to be said for having nothing to lose. They are mapping the underground economy in ways that people outside of this enclave can learn from, and use perhaps as they help society start inching in the proper direction. For the sake of everyone.

...

"[W]e have not seen a corresponding growth in consciousness—of what it means to be Asian American as we approach the twenty-first century. Unlike African Americans, most Asian Americans today have yet to articulate the "particularities" of issues affecting our community, whether these be the debate over affirmative action, the controversy regarding multiculturalism, or the very definition of empowerment. We have an ideological vacuum, and activists will compete with neo-conservatives, mainstream conservatives, and others to fill it.

We have a political vacuum as well....During the past decade the fundamental weakness for activists has been the lack of grassroots organizing among the disenfranchised sectors of our community: youth outside of colleges and universities, the poor, and new immigrant workers. Twenty-five years ago, the greatest strength of the Asian American movement was the ability of activists to organize the unorganized and bring new political players into community politics. Activists targeted high school youth, tenants, small-business people, former prison inmates, gang members, the elderly, and workers. Activists helped them build new grassroots organizations, expanding power and democracy in our communities. Can a new generation of activists do the same?

—Glenn Omatsu, from *"The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation."*

With a citing in *The 'Four Prisons'*, Glenn Omatsu's nascent and prophetic article on Asian Pacific American activism, KIWA was entered onto the map of grassroots activism. Even before KIWA established in March 1992, Omatsu wrote, founders Roy Hong and Danny Park joined militant protests and civil disobedience in support of 175 union workers who lost their jobs when Koreana Hotel Co., Ltd., purchased the Wilshire Hyatt in Los Angeles. Significantly, KIWA members sided with the mostly Latino staff and, in doing so, opposed the South Korean, union-busting corporation that became the hotel's new owners. Throughout the campaign, Hong and Park promoted labor consciousness in the community and, Omatsu

emphasizes, their actions served to ameliorate some of the ethnic and racial strife that was poised to engulf the city. Those first actions taken by KIWA members set the tone for organizing to come.

Hong and Park pooled their savings then followed through with plans for a workers center in Los Angeles' Koreatown. In June 1993, a recent graduate of UCLA, Paul Lee, joined KIWA as an intern and later became the group's third member. There, the three have weathered seven years of advocacy work, and have assumed a panoply of roles while organizing around civil rights, legal and educational issues. The current eight-member staff is rounded out by Meela Chon, Seung Min Kim, Julia Joo-Yon Song, Eduardo Espinoza, and Soyon Cho.

As tempting as it is to heap attention on the KIWA organizers, they are the first to set priorities straight. KIWA's job is to focus attention on the people who need it most.

"Whenever I have the chance, I always try to put a worker out front, so they can tell their story," says Paul Lee, our unofficial guide through the economic alley-

ways and worker greasetraps of Koreatown. In this underground labyrinth of exploitation, he says, are "stories that will break your heart."

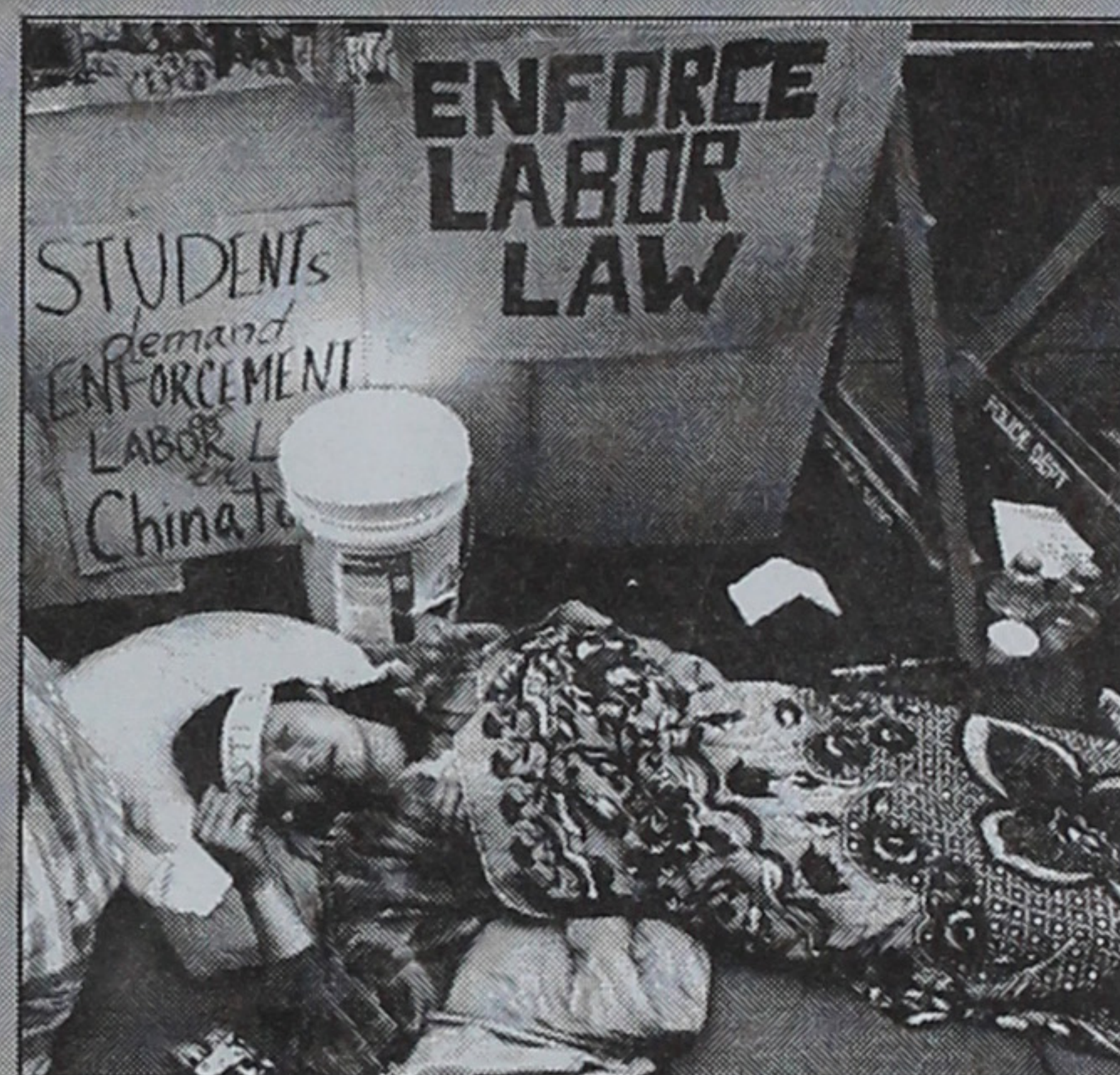
"The only way to improve the quality of life in these so-called ethnic enclaves is for the organizing groups to come from that community," Lee says. "Which is built on the whole idea of self-determination. I don't think we could go to another area, and expect to be as effective as we are in Koreatown. Look at the work being done at social service centers, like Chinatown Service Center. Or Thai-CDC. They're the only social service center in that community. Can United Way do that? Outside groups probably aren't going to know how an immigrant community functions, their history, the culture; how the internal leadership functions."

Where visibility is the most important agent for change, exactly how KIWA has been able to focus media attention on problems in the work force is a subject that would do well for any six-figure media buyer to go figure. Frontpage L.A. Times coverage, when

This Is How They Do New York

The Chinese Staff & Workers Assn. has been putting it down for restaurant workers in New York since 1979. No friend to unions in the NY. that either fail to address immigrant concerns or straight-up ignore, CSWA founders Edward Dun, Jimmy Ong, and Wing Lam started doing for themselves and workers of all trades in Chinatown. Among the programs run by the association are the Women's Empowerment Project, Chinese Construction Workers' Assn., Youth Group, Occupational Health and Safety Project, Garment Workers' Committee, National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, English and citizenship classes. Now with a lean, five person staff and a membership of 1000 plus, worker members are doing the bulk of the organizing work out of drop-in centers in Chinatown Manhattan and Sunset Park in the BK.

(top) Trinh Duong, an NYU econ student in the sixth day of a hunger strike outside of Jing Fong Restaurant, June 1995. Duong is now a volunteer organizer with Chinese Staff & Workers Assn. working on health and safety issues while wrecking sweatshops in Brooklyn, NY. (to bottom) Kwong Hui, an organizer with CSWA, points to fire bomb damage at the association office February 29, 1997, days after the New York State Attorney General slapped a \$1.7 million law suit on Jing Fong Restaurant. At the time, word on the streets was some of the Jingsters were publicly predicting two days prior that some bad was about to befall the boycott organizers. And boom!—they were right. Under pressure from the a.g.'s office, Jing Fong management later agreed to pay \$1.1 million for employee backwages, overtime and stolen tips to 58 active and former employees. The lone worker who was fired from Jing Fong was hired back, and the hole in the ceiling has since been repaired.—c./j.



photos and indisputable representation by Corky Lee



Taking 90210 to the streets. The Jessica McClintock anti-fanclub makes some noise on the stretch of Wilshire Boulevard facing JM's boutique at the corner of Rodeo Drive and Profit Street. Bi-weekly picketlines begin in July 1994, and eventually meld into a series of actions on behalf of garment workers. KIWA joins SweatshopWatch and helps take to task retailers profiting from goods made under sweatshop conditions. They later host maquiladoristas from Mexico and embattled trade unionists in South Korea. KIWA file photo.

even the Korean- and Spanish-language vernaculars have shied away or consciously blacked out coverage, is a commodity that's difficult to put a monetary value on.

California Labor Commissioner Jose Millan, whose office investigates and administrates claims for backwage and overtime violations, said the rate of non-compliance is high across the city, but particularly where "non-chain, independently owned restaurants" abound.

"Non-compliance is not unique to Koreatown," Millan said, after a town hall meeting in the fall. He said as much as 80 percent of L.A. restaurants were in violation of the state labor code, and that the high visibility raids conducted by the state last year were due in part to workers speaking out about their substandard work conditions.

"The number of violations we've been able to cite has been very dramatic in Koreatown because of KIWA's help," Millan said. "They're very organized."

Also at the townhall meeting was Jung Hee Lee, an injured worker who has been active in weekly workers meetings at KIWA. "I have worked as a waitress in Koreatown restaurants for many years. One year ago, I was injured and hurt badly. At this restaurant, the floor near the entrance to the kitchen is covered with a cardboard box, not a mat. Within a few hours, the box gets soaked with water and grease, and it gets very

slippery. So when waitresses move quickly in and out of the kitchen with heavy trays, there are a lot of slips and falls. During the one year I worked at this restaurant, I fell about seven to eight times. There are so many restaurants in Koreatown that make no effort to prevent the kinds of accidents that I suffered. They often don't have even the simplest, inexpensive first aid medicines. People who work in the kitchens suffer from constant headaches because they breathe hot gas and grease and because there is no ventilation where they work. They slip and fall on kitchen floors covered with water and oil, or cut their hands on sharp knives or cutting machines. They also burn themselves while cooking or hurt their backs while lifting. Why is it that I have to come to a place like this and yell at employers to follow the law?"

a painful chapter

It would be difficult to deny the integral role of women in the industry, being that they make up the overwhelming majority of restaurant workers. In many people's estimation, KIWA lost respect and credibility because of the handling of a series of sexual harassment incidents involving an ex-in-house attorney and three former organizers on staff. Over the course of two years, the incidents persisted until the women came forward to implicate their harasser—then to vacate the organization.

Although news of the severing spread through a broad network of activists and community organizers, it failed to surface as an issue of debate and examination until more than two years after the first incident took place. To this day, most parties acknowledge the discussion has been less than adequate, and, according to the women who left, several individuals and groups still harbor animosity toward KIWA over the way the matter was handled. And while individuals in activist circles have made sideways reference to the harassment (see the women's issue of Ryan Yokota's *apa* Movement infused zine, *The World is Yours* #6), open discussions about sexism in progressive organizations are still somewhat the exception.

Not to hold ourselves in too high regard or miss an opportunity at gratuitous mention of a *Gidra* staff member, but our own Vy Nguyen served in a quarter-long academic internship during that time, as have several other young men and women over the years.

"Hey, that's when I was there," Vy said recently upon spying a July 27, 1996 memo signed by the offending attorney, "and I was completely oblivious. I had heard things, but I didn't feel it was my place to go any further."

Others were not as demure. Alyssa Kang, who first worked with KIWA during the Jessica McClintock campaign, and now meets regularly with staff members who also participate in the Asian Left Forum and another coalition supporting famine relief in north Korea. Kang spoke of the impact of the harassment and firing.

"People nationally saw KIWA as a model for organizing, and talked about their progressive politics," Alyssa said. "No matter what you think about their politics, even if I believe in the issues they're organizing around, if they're not offering safe place for their own employees to work, what does that say? It's hypocritical to work on immigrant rights and Thai garment worker issues, if you can't deal with this kind of internal gender dynamic.

"Part of the problem was so much attention was placed on one person. It took away from the bigger issue, which was the role women played at KIWA. The fact that it happened more than a few times over a couple years is even harder to swallow. Or tolerate.

"The people at KIWA are making efforts to try to deal with this. There's more women on staff now. They really are good people, but I was disappointed it hadn't come out sooner. To be fair, part of the problem was the women weren't talking about it. Things would have been easier, if Roy would have come out and said, 'Hey, we fucked up. Let's fix this.' But they tried to hide it. Roy did do damage control. [One of the women] is figuring out how to find closure. It's still bothering her. I want them to be held accountable."

...

Mar. 8—KIWA worker and organizer members importune the Community Redevelopment Association to adopt a living wage hiring policy similar in terms to the 1997 Living Wage Ordinance governing employers contracted by the City of Los Angeles.

Feb. 25—Before a phalanx of mostly Korean-language media and the L.A. Times, KIWA and the Korean Restaurant Owners Assn. form a cooperative mediation group. The terms of arbitration include a form contract to be used during dispute resolution. The agreement signals a tentative breakthrough in relations between the two groups, with a member of the clergy and Federal Mediation and Conciliation Board member Jan Sunoo, presiding over the agreement. Afterward the two share lunch at a former site of conflict. An incremental cause for celebration.

Dec. 1998—Won Taek Park's Baek Hwa Jung Restaurant settles a back wage claim filed on behalf of three workers. The five month campaign involves a call for boycott, weekly pickets and demands for more than three years of \$2.20 an hour salary, at 12 hours a day, six days a week. Final settlement: \$14,000.

Nov. 1998—KIWA and supporters pack the house at a town hall meeting designed to give area restaurant workers an audience with state and federal labor officials. The panel and audience members grimace as waitresses, dishwashers, buspersons and cooks describe the squalid conditions they are routinely subjected to in the workplace. Overtime and minimum wage violations, lack of workers comp. insurance, hazardous conditions, and the jacking of workers' tips top the list as most common forms of exploitation. Across the hallroom, reactions range from sobbing to outright

anger.

April 1998—A six-month campaign of pickets, boycott and a hunger strike, ends at one of K-town's largest employers, Cho Sun Galbi restaurant. Chef Myung Jin Park, who was fired when he refused to renounce his rights as an employee, is reinstated. Roy Hong goes nine days including Christmas without taking food. Korean news media suspend coverage of the demonstrations under pressure from the restaurant owner pressure. In support of the restaurant, a rowdy and elderly contingent shout epithets and expectorate on protesters. As the curbside attrition takes a toll on Cho Sun Galbi's patronage, the imbroglio ends. The owner signs the Model Employment Agreement with KIWA and allows Park to resume work. For Korean restaurant owners the message is now clearly writ upon the wall: Mess with workers and you just might suffer their wrath.

Feb. 1997—After Siyeon Restaurant negotiates a collective bargaining agreement in March 1996, tough times hit one

of the largest restaurants in K-town, at 40 workers. The agreement—which dictated wages, meal times, conditions for firing, and protects workers participating in organizing efforts from retaliation—doesn't account for slow business. The owners go down, but not without a fight. Si Yeon Restaurant closes its doors.

Oct. 1996—Koreatown Workers Defense Fund founded. Given the conditions and issues workers now face: up to 72 hours a week, as low as \$2.20 an hour, unjust firing, and uncompensated injuries on the job, KIWA pledges to reach its goal of establishing an industrywide seniority-based pay scale. This is in addition to a just cause termination policy, health insurance for workers, and, of course, observance of the laws governing basic minimum labor standards for wage, overtime and workers compensation insurance. The Fund also presages the dispute mediation committee that was agreed upon in March 1999.

...

"Unions won't handle every community and industry," Paul Lee muses in


front of a beer. "Frankly, some just aren't interested. They pretty much go where the membership numbers are, the major employers in industries where workers already make at least minimum and, more likely, a living wage—a few dollars more than minimum. There's more bang."

The workers who meet at KIWA, he says, are in the midst of forming a comprehensive association of workers that will have little resemblance to what we have come to expect from the modern-day labor union. The Koreatown restaurant organizers are, the way few others are, looking out for the workers. Chances are good you'll be hearing about them soon. Until then, spend wisely. And support those who do right by you.

Some places to watch out for, and we'll leave it at that, B.

Workers at the following restaurants have initiated claims through KIWA:

• Busan Sushi Bar, 201 N. Western Ave., LA, CA 90004 • Chinese Mandarin House

(in the Koreatown Plaza food court), 928 S. Western Ave. #147, LA, CA 90006 • Golf Sushi Bar 239 S. Vermont Ave., LA, CA 90004 • Hae Woon Dae Galbi, 946 S. Vermont Ave., LA, CA 90004 • Hwa Gae Jang Toh, 543 S. Western Ave. Suite E, LA, CA 90020 • Hwang Ga Nae, 15410 S. Western Ave. Gardena, CA 90249 • Hyundai Health Center (Sauna), 3625 W. 6th St., LA, CA 90020 • Korean Soup Restaurant, 3524 W. 8th St., LA, CA 90005 • Marronnier, 3470 W. 6th St. #8B, LA, CA 90005 • Moa Moa, 3900 Wilshire Blvd., LA, CA 90010 • Nam Dae Moon Jip, 3470 W. 6th #2, LA, CA 90004 • Oxford Palace, 745 S. Oxford Ave. LA, CA 90006 • Saritgol, 3189 W. Olympic Blvd., LA, CA 90006 • Secret Garden B.B.Q., 1925 W. Olympic Blvd., LA, CA 90006 • Shin Sa Myun Ok, 3470 W. 6th St. #6, LA, CA 90006 • Song Do Seafood, 377 N. Western Ave., LA, CA 90004 • Soot Bull Jeep, 3136 W. 8th St., LA, CA 90005 • Todai Sushi, 20401 Ventura Blvd., Woodland Hills, CA 91364 • Tonkatsu House (in the Koreatown Plaza food court), 928 S. Western Ave. #127, LA, CA 10006. 

MAY 13-20, 1999 DGA MAY 13-15 • JAT MAY 16-20

H I G H L I G H T S

- Opening Night: Philip Kan Gotanda's **LIFE TASTES GOOD** May 13 at the DGA
- Closing Night: Milke Takashi's multi-award-winning **THE BIRD PEOPLE IN CHINA** May 20 at the JAT
- Spotlight on Asian American & Asian International Cinema
- Asian American Independent Feature Workshop III
- "Afternoon with a Filmmaker" at the DGA
- "Godzilla Attacks L.A." at the Japanese American National Museum
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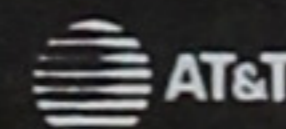
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- **GIDRA PROMOTIONS PRESENTS** -

photos by Ernesto Vigoreaux



IN ASSOCIATION
WITH
DONG KING

VS.



IN THE BROWN CORNER:

Frances "Mañila Thrilla"
Tiogson
5 feet 6 inches (with
clubbing shoes)



IN THE YELLOW CORNER:

Audrey "Tokyo Rose"
Shiomi
5 feet 3 inches (with
pumps)



Their commercial managed to catch my elusive attention for about five seconds. "Fancy that," I mused, "they named a bunch of pretzels after us."

But the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. Somewhere, there is a genius Filipina Nestle employee laughing out loud at her clever plot. Well, I'm here to let her know that her "Pretzel Flipz equals Filipino People" scheme has been found out!


First of all, why pretzels? I believe the answer to this lies in the general status of Filipinos in the world. A Filipino was never world-renowned for literary achievements, breakthroughs in science, or really anything else. We're mediocre.

Pretzels are mediocre, too. When you're in the mood for an exciting snack, you snap into a Slim Jim, or even bust a nut with Corn Nuts. But never pretzels!

Flipz, even though they're made with Rold Gold-brand pretzels, are still wack. Upon initial mastication, you note the bland, waxy chocolate. Then you come to the horrid discovery that the crunchiness comes from the salt crystals that cover the pretzel within! To eat Flipz is to taste salty chocolate—two tastes that do not taste great together.

But to give it a little twist, this snack comes in two varieties. There are white fudge covered pretzels and milk chocolate-covered ones. Flipz showcases the obvious! There are two types of flavors representing the two types of Filipinos. The white fudge relates to white-washed Filipinos and chocolate corresponds to those that try to act black. I'm guessing that the Nestle mastermind behind this has her sympathies more in tune with the chocolate types because the white fudge Flipz taste especially nasty.

Perhaps she is one of the darker skinned Pinays that feel angst against the more diluted, light skinned Filipinos which are considered more conventionally beautiful by Western standards. She probably gets great satisfaction in this white pretzel nastiness—not only does she get to take a stab at the Spanish-blooded and white-washed Filipinos, she has a hand in robbing the Man out of profit through the creation of a sub-standard snack.

The mind boggles from her genius! Her conniving wiles put her on par with the other famous Filipino, Andrew Cunanan. 

Recently, I spotted a new "Nip" product at the market. Yeah, the same term that has been used with hatred against the Japanese people (and other Asians) throughout this

century is born-again in yet another snack form.


Unlike the cheddar cheesiness of its predecessor, this one has a "creamy, long lasting" sweetness. It comes in seven flavors — Caramel, Chocolate Mint, Butter Rum, Chocolate Parfait, Licorice, Coffee and Peanut Butter Parfait — and varies in different shades of brown: from shit to deep shit.

After wondering how they went about naming these things "Nips" in the first place, my epicurious curiosity led me to the 800-number on back of the box. I dialed the digits, only to be welcomed by 10 minutes of the best of elevator music.

Just as I was about to switch to speakerphone and head for the potty, a friendly-voiced operator got on the line. But before I got to ask my deep, probing question, she requested I read off the UPC numbers on the back of the box. Then she put me on hold for another 10 minutes. It wasn't until then that I finally got my question answered.

"Nips," according to the Webster's dictionary, means "to grab, bite or pinch," or "to drink in small sips," she recited. In no way did they intend to imply the offensive and disparaging term for Japanese, she continued. The operator then came out with a barrage of consumer-based questions and asked me for my personal information, making me realize their incentive for putting the 800-number on the box in the first place. I answered as quickly and randomly as possible, then I gave her my neighbor's address.

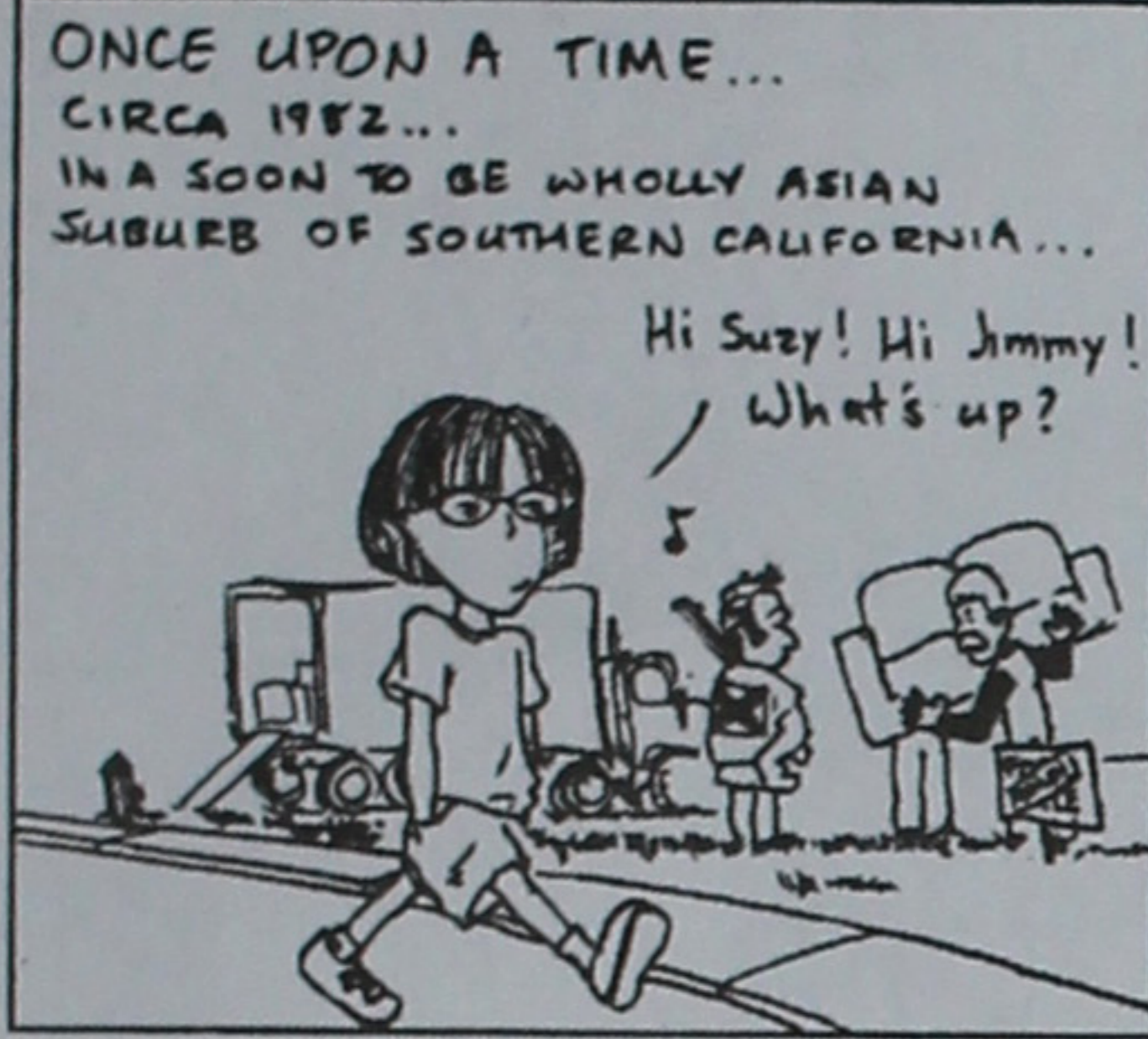
In all honesty, I'm not offended by a snack being named Nips. It could be a disparaging term, but, never being the victim of the word, it doesn't stir any painful memories in me.

As for the taste, I dared try a "nip" of the chocolate parfait but, as expected, it was a disappointment. As it said on the box, "rich, creamy and hard" it was, but it lacked in strength and vigor. And the gooey chocolate center coated my teeth like tar. This one's not worth the money or the time. Neither is the 800-number on the back, unless you like junkmail. 

HIGHLIGHTS: THE BOUT ENDED PREMATURELY AFTER BOTH CHOCOLATE PRODUCTS MELTED FROM THE HEAT OF THE FIGHT. IT WAS RULED A DOUBLE K.O. EVEN THOUGH THE PRETZELS WERE LEFT STANDING. UPCOMING BOUTS INCLUDE THE KEEBLER GOBBLEDY GOOKS VS. HOSTESS CHING-CHONGS. CATCH IT ON PAY-PER-FOOD.

Two Item Combo: Home-stir-fries

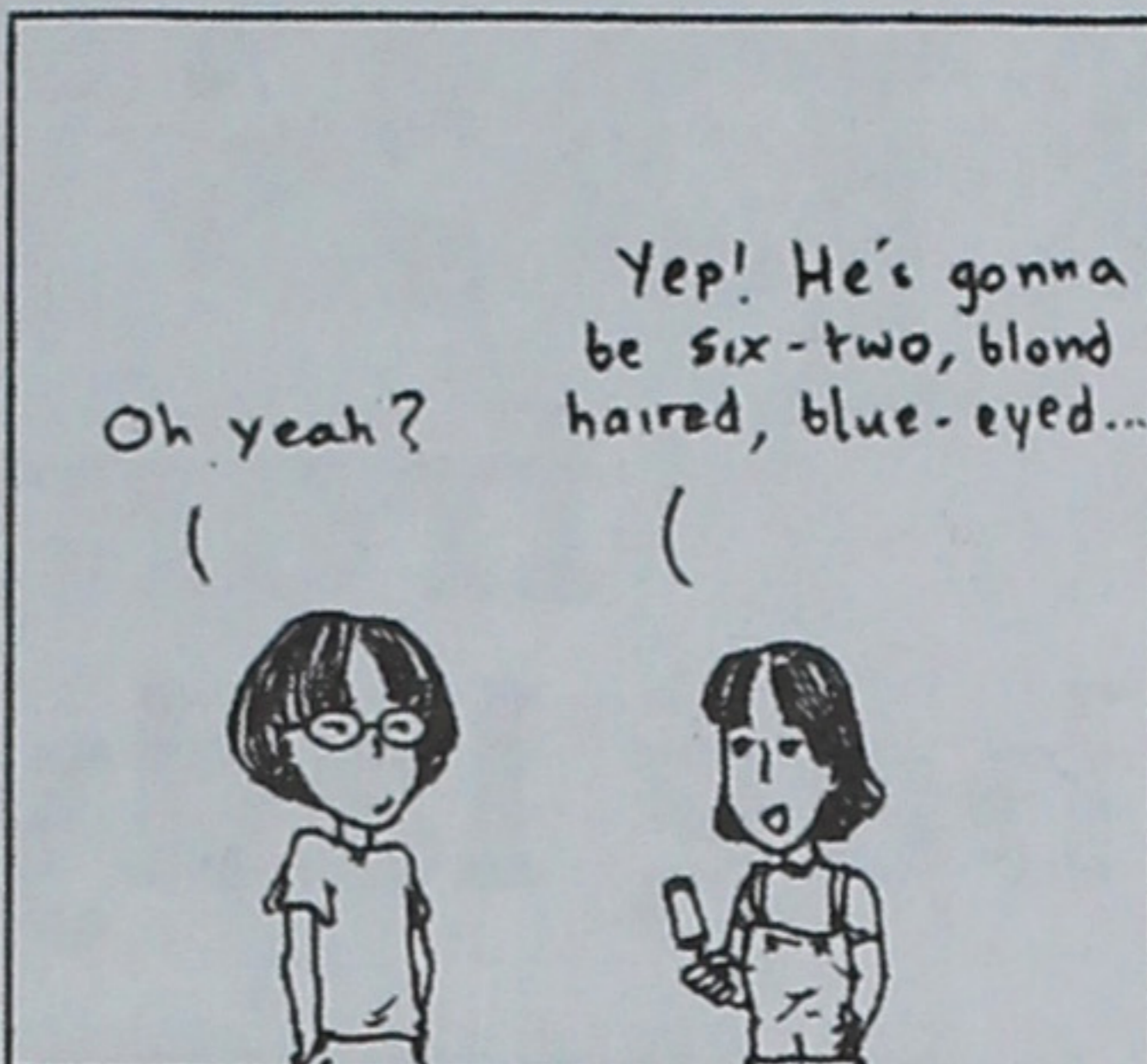
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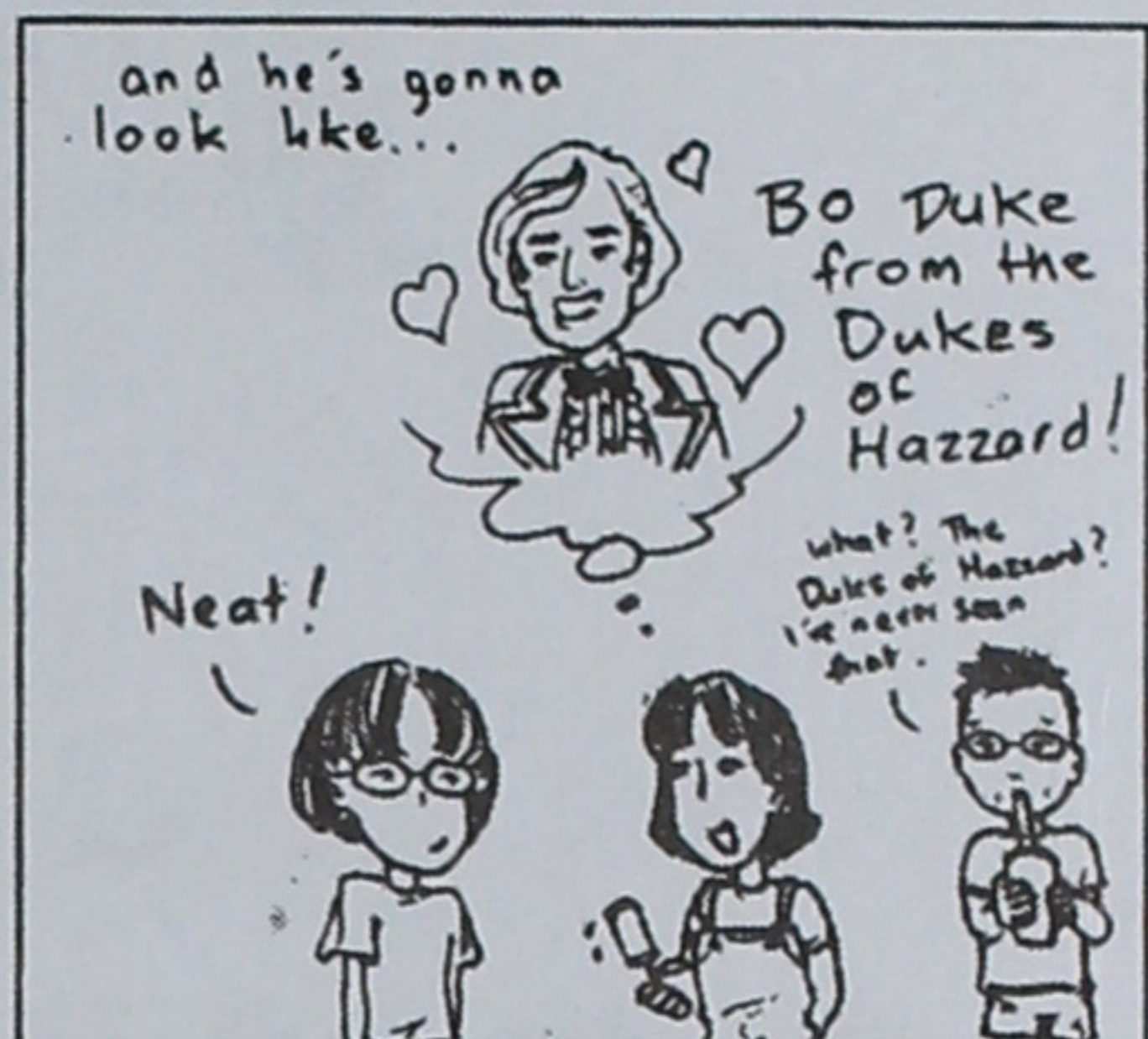
ONCE UPON A TIME...
CIRCA 1982...
IN A SOON TO BE WHOLLY ASIAN
SUBURB OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA...



I was just telling Jimmy here about my future husband!



Oh yeah? Yep! He's gonna be six-two, blond haired, blue-eyed...



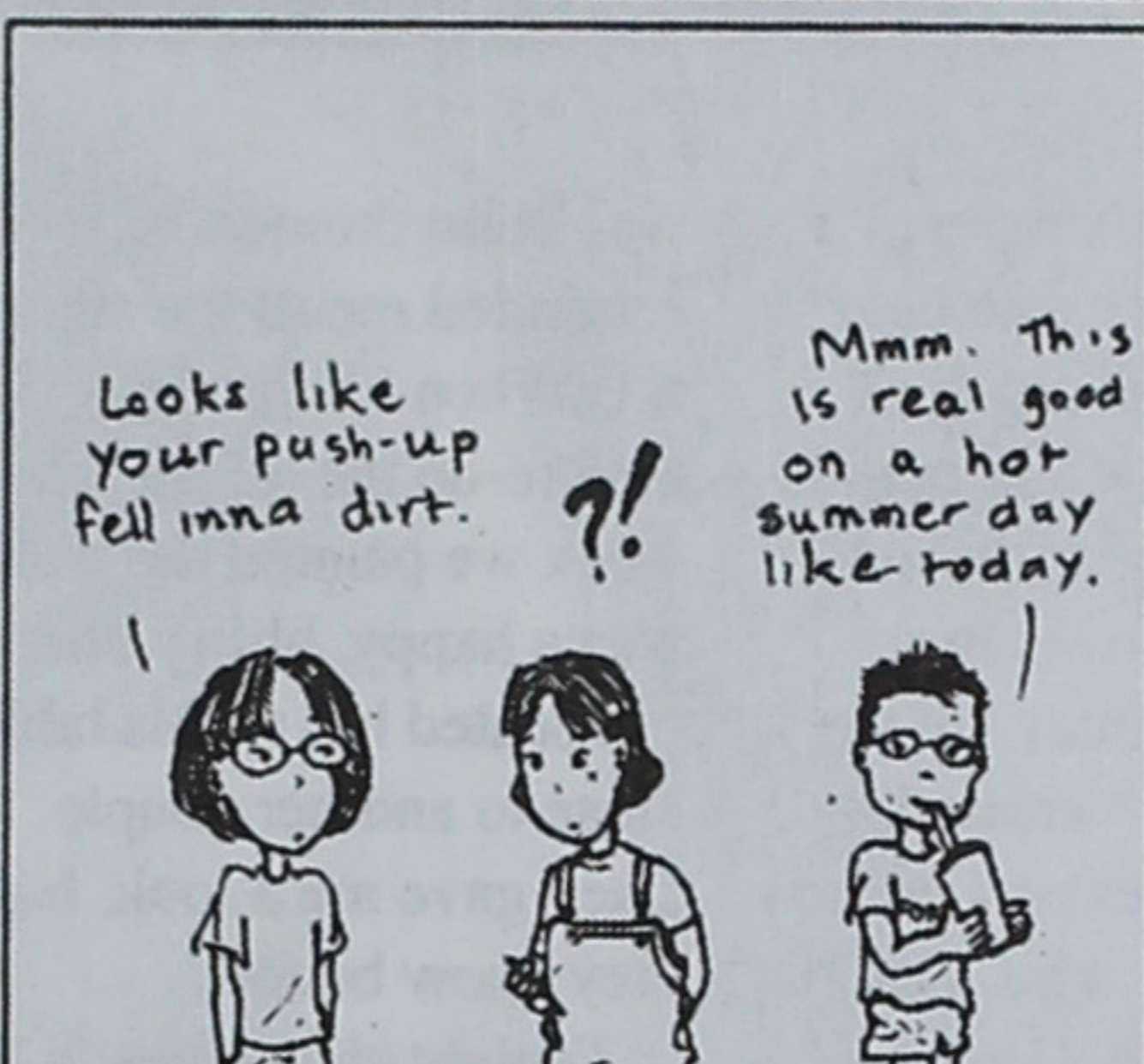
and he's gonna look like...
Neat!
Bo Duke from the Dukes of Hazzard!
What? The Duke of Hazzard? I've never seen that.



Hey, Suzy! Wanna sip of my milk tea with boba balls in it?



Eew!! Are you drinking that Chinese fobby stuff again?
Gross!
Mmm. Oh well. More for me, then.



Looks like your push-up fell inna dirt. Mmm. This is real good on a hot summer day like today.



Guess what, Jimmy! I changed my mind! Kin I try some o' your tea, please?

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no class\$

< school's out, suckafools.

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- > money matters
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<watevah>

Tips from a bag lady

BY ERIC C. WAT

photos BY ERNESTO VIGOREAUX

She has been here a few times before, this woman with dirty hair and tattered clothes that drape over her like an old blanket who has not seen much of the inside of a washer. She smells of alcohol, although it's nothing like the beer or wine or saké that we serve. There is something practical about that smell. She loves the shrimp tempura and has ordered it a couple times before.

The first time she was here, the boss wasn't around. I took her order but didn't write it up. I didn't expect her to pay or pay in full. If that was the case, I'd let it go. But she paid, with a lot of change and a few one-dollar bills, even a five. She didn't leave a tip.

We think she is mentally ill. If I were homeless, I wouldn't be blowing ten dollars on Japanese food. Even now, I don't even eat out like that. But I filled up her water just the same. In fact, I might have even been nicer to her because I was so determined that I wouldn't treat her bad just because she looked the way she did. I might have been nicer to her than to my other customers who know from my scowl when they're making an annoying request.

One time she showed me about five dollars in change and asked what she could get. She was asking other questions after I presented her several options. I had to move in closer because she was mumbling. Then I realized she was having a conversation with herself. "They" were deciding what was for dinner (shrimp tempura again — but not the whole dinner). I recognized the smell. It

was paint thinner. It reminded me of the summer when I helped my parents re-do the house. The week we painted the walls was a happy, blurry one.

I seated her at this table close to another couple. They gave me a look, but they knew better.

Tonight she comes to borrow food. She wants the shrimp tempura dinner and says she will pay us later this month. "She probably gets a check every

month," I tell my boss, partly to put in a good word, though I know it would be futile, and partly to reassure myself that a check might not be that far-fetched. Tonight is packed. The boss puts some rice and vegetables in a styrofoam box to send her off.

A few minutes later, a woman from a party eating at one of the tables outside comes in to ask me to do something about this woman who has been hovering over their table for some saké. When I get out there, she has already assumed the complaining customer's seat.

"You have to go now," I tell her.

Nothing. She just mumbles to the rest of the table.

"You have to go now," I repeat and tag on another exhortation. "You can't bother these people."

Still nothing.

The boss comes out, and he is more forceful. It's a busy night and a few tables inside are waiting to order. I leave him to resolve the situation. From the inside, as I watch catching up with the orders, I see her take to the street.


But she comes back a few minutes later to another outside table. I alert the boss. He runs out. The next thing I see, his arms lock around her body and he picks her up. She is as tall as him, and he has to bend backward to get her feet off the ground. His eyes are closed, the way they do when maximum strength of a body is exerted. She puts up a good fight, her hands holding tight to a pillar as if she was chained to it in a twister. She is no match. He relies on his familiarity with the premises to maneuver

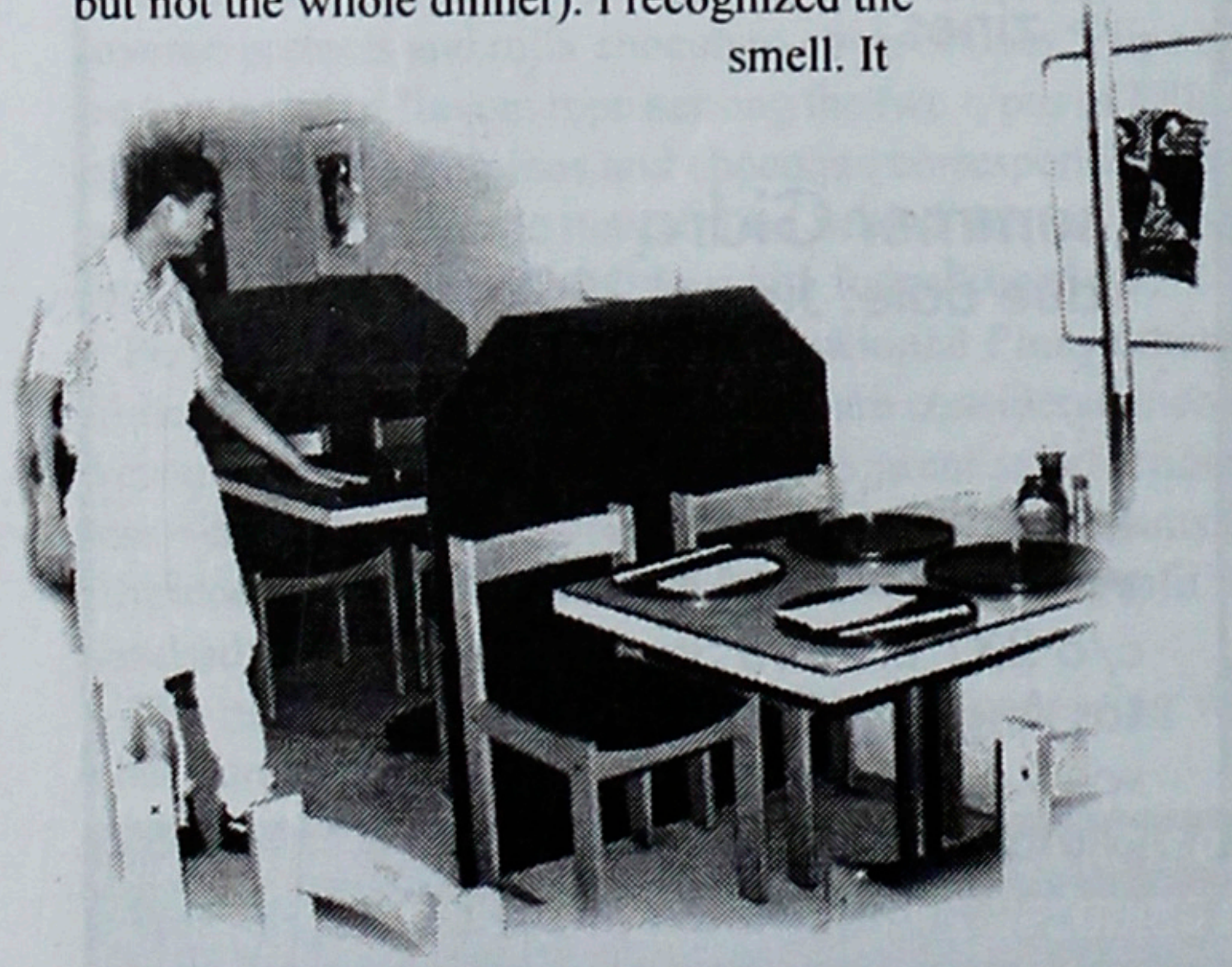


past the tables. I watch with a sinking heart as he forces her to the street where he releases and pushes her. The woman shouts back, but the words don't make it past the windows to me.

For the rest of the night, I am lost in a profound sadness. I don't know how to feel about my boss using that force. I imagine my face in horror, in very much the same way I see on the other witnesses outside. I couldn't do what he has done, but I couldn't blame him. He has every right. I tell myself, if anyone else had been that disruptive, he would've done the same thing. The sadness is not for the woman, either. I wish it is; I really do. She is tougher than I'll be, and she has much more to worry about than easing my conscience. The sadness is reserved for me and me alone. I would never use that force, and my quiet entreaties have been lost on her. All of my ideas about fairness and equity are dull and without dimensions to a mumbling vagrant, pretty and useless. If I were in my boss' shoes, I know my first instinct would be to call the cops. Me - Mr. Progressive who waits on the upscale with moral superiority calls on the LAPD to chase off a helpless woman.

My last customer tonight is a discriminating eater. He asks what bread and oil we use to fry our tofu and what part of the tuna we use for our sashimi. I tell him — if he doesn't mind waiting — I will find out for him. He nods and smiles.

I smile back. 



Ads depicting an Asian woman on a cell phone with the headline "Meet me at Denny's" recently greased the pages of *A. Magazine* and *Asian Week* as Denny's Restaurants began a \$2 million advertising campaign to refinish their tarnished image. The campaign follows on the heels of a string of discrimination suits against the restaurant chain for refusing to serve people of color. The most publicized case occurred in April 1993 when six African American Secret Service agents waited for nearly an hour while their White colleagues at a nearby table were served their seconds.

- The ads cite a *Fortune* magazine survey which ranked their parent company second in "The 50 Best Companies for Asians, Blacks and Hispanics."
- However, recent events have shown that people of color continue to be discriminated against at Denny's.

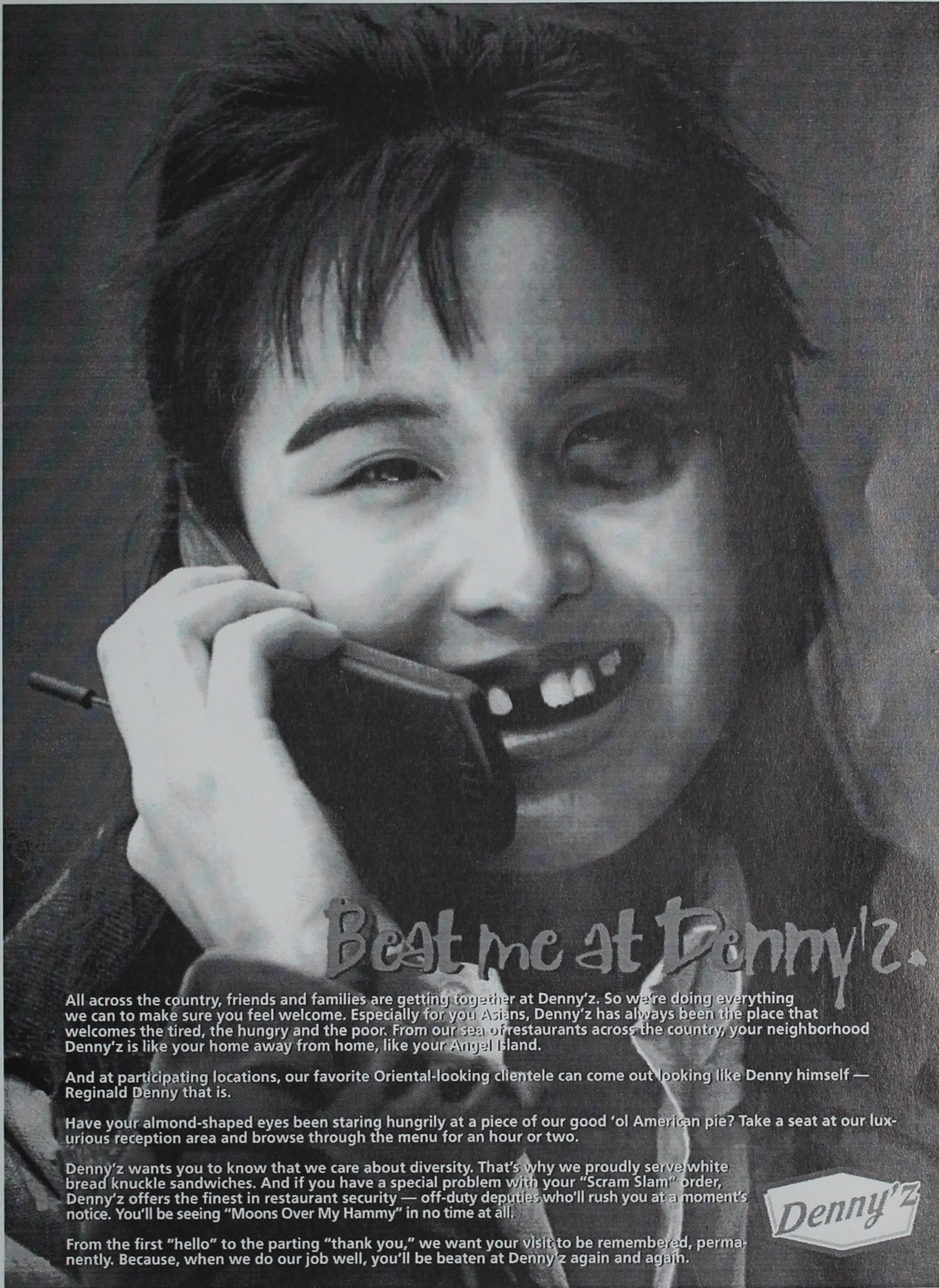
April 1997: Seven Syracuse University students—a Pilipino American, a Chinese American, a Japanese American, three international students from Japan and a Caucasian—were forcefully expelled from a Syracuse, N.Y. Denny's after they complained that others who came after them were seated while they were made to wait. As the group walked toward their car, over 20 White customers left their seats and attacked the group in the parking lot.

- Four Asians were injured, including a man and a woman who were knocked unconscious. Denny's security officers refused to stop the attack, and the melee ended only after a group of Black students intervened. The attackers returned to the restaurant and finished eating.
- The Onondaga County district attorney concluded that the beating was "orchestrated" by the Asian group, as medical reports show only bruises, cuts and a sprained thumb. No one was arrested in the incident, but Denny's fired all management, staff and security guards involved. A discrimination suit is still pending.

March 1998: Two Muslims claim to have been deliberately served swine at a Billings, Montana Denny's after telling their waitress that their religion prevented them from eating pork and ordering pork-free meals. They were served ham hidden between layers of hash browns and eggs. After discovering the meat and then complaining, the two were offered new meals. One accepted; he said the second dish contained bacon.

- A religious discrimination suit was filed in January and a hearing with the Montana Human Rights Bureau is set for July 19.

April 1998: Employees at a Denny's restaurant in San Jose apparently refused to seat a group of about 20 Latinos, and refused to offer them menus, water, coffee or take their orders. Restaurant employees called the police to have the group removed without telling them why.



Beat me at Denny's.

All across the country, friends and families are getting together at Denny's. So we're doing everything we can to make sure you feel welcome. Especially for you Asians, Denny's has always been the place that welcomes the tired, the hungry and the poor. From our sea of restaurants across the country, your neighborhood Denny's is like your home away from home, like your Angel Island.

And at participating locations, our favorite Oriental-looking clientele can come out looking like Denny himself — Reginald Denny that is.

Have your almond-shaped eyes been staring hungrily at a piece of our good 'ol American pie? Take a seat at our luxurious reception area and browse through the menu for an hour or two.

Denny's wants you to know that we care about diversity. That's why we proudly serve white bread knuckle sandwiches. And if you have a special problem with your "Scram Slam" order, Denny's offers the finest in restaurant security — off-duty deputies who'll rush you at a moment's notice. You'll be seeing "Moons Over My Hammy" in no time at all.

From the first "hello" to the parting "thank you," we want your visit to be remembered, permanently. Because, when we do our job well, you'll be beaten at Denny's again and again.



LOS ANGELES 1999



RESTAURANT WORKERS



GARMENT DISTRICT



MEANWHILE AT WESTMINSTER....

