

Bob Wing | Life Stories & Photos



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Preface: Seven Generations in the U.S.



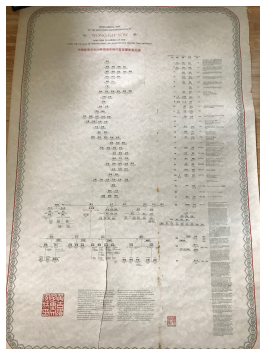
This is my paternal grandmother Mary Wing's extended family when she was ten years old in 1912. She is in the second row from the top, far left. Her grandparents Lee Bo Wen and Mary Wong Ching are photo center. Her Dad, James Bowen is top row, 3rd from R. Mother Susie is 3rd row from bottom, 2nd from R.

My daughter, Josina, prompted me to write these stories by signing me up on the app, Storyworth, whose purpose is to help people write their life stories. I set out to write a short book, but somehow it kept expanding.

The book is dedicated to Josina, Cornell, Kai, Mei, and Tamierra in hopes that it will help them to understand their crazy Gong-Gong (me), his life and times. Special thanks to my lifelong buddy, Frederick Douglass (Smokey) Perry for photo shopping many of the photos and for editorial advice.

This book is written from my memory, not from research. Memory can be selective or even downright unreliable, but I have done my best.

My life is premised on the many generations of my family that preceded me. On my mother's side, we have a family tree going back 33 generations.



In May 1994, I published “The Bowen/Wing Family: Six Generations in the United States” that tells stories about my paternal great-great grandparents and great-grandparents but focuses on my father’s parents.

My sister Linda published stories about our Mom’s parents in a November 1982 booklet, “Legacy.” I wrote a short monograph of my maternal grandparents for an Asian American Studies class in 1969 that my Auntie Beah Wing expanded upon in her biography of 1974.

Here is a summary excerpt from the Bowen/Wing book:

THE FIRST GENERATION

Lee Bo Wen came to the U.S. in 1854, part of the very first wave of Chinese who came to the U.S. Our family has a continuous history of seven generations here since then.

Lee Bo Wen immigrated at 12 years old, accompanied by his uncle. Mary Wong Ching (his wife) was one of the few Chinese women to come to the U.S. in the 19th century, especially who married and raised a family.

Mary Wong Ching was a very powerful and independent woman who openly lived with lovers, brought three grandchildren to live with her when she was with one of them, and was a member of, or strongly associated with, the Hop Sing Tong. She eventually

returned to the family home and died there.



This is my Dad's extended family at my grandmother's 92nd birthday in March 1992. Mom, Dad, and Josina are in the first two rows on the left. I am in the second row from the top, center.

Lee Bo Wen, Mary Wong Ching, and their family lived through the Gold Rush, the building of the railroads, labored for agribusiness and the canneries, and survived the anti-Chinese riots, Chinese exclusion, and legalized racial discrimination in all aspects of life.

THE SECOND GENERATION

At a time when literacy was rare in China and a mark of good education in the U.S., James Bowen was biliterate. Susie Wong, James' wife, was also born in the United States, in Monterey. Like his father, James was a laborer, mainly in canneries.

After being driven from San Francisco Chinatown by the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906, the Bowen family broke the color line in the Fruitvale District of Oakland, and their children were among the first Chinese to be admitted to public school.

THE THIRD GENERATION

All of Po-Po's (my grandmother) siblings (but not herself) married other American-born Chinese. The third generation of Bowens and their spouses were part of a small but self-conscious community of American-born Chinese that formed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Bowens were founders of the first Oakland Chinese semi-pro baseball team and Al Bowen, my Dad's uncle, was the first Chinese-American professional baseball player.

Po-Po, her siblings and their spouses are among the most energetic, modern and adventuresome people of their generation of any race and nationality that I know. The same holds for my parents' generation.

Gong-Gong (my grandfather) successfully traversed one of the few routes to economic success available to Chinese early in this century: he became a member of the Hop Sing Tong and ran a dry goods store with a gambling house in back. He and Po-Po operated these businesses through the World War II boom.

THE FOURTH GENERATION

The fourth generation of Bowens (the Vallejo Wings) and their spouses were part of the first wave of Chinese-American graduates of U.S. colleges, particularly the University of California at Berkeley.

This generation partook of the post-World War II prosperity and helped to break residential color barriers in white middle class neighborhoods.

They were among the first Chinese admitted into the professions. Like so many of their Asian colleagues, some of them eventually hit the glass ceiling in government or large corporations.

THE FIFTH GENERATION

Much of the fifth generation became the first Asian-American student, racial justice, community, labor, peace, and socialist activists.

In 1994 when the above was written, the sixth generation (my daughter's) was too young to try to summarize and the seventh (my grandchildren's) was not yet born.

Bob Wing

September 10, 2021

1. I Hit the Jackpot When It Comes to Parents



On family vacation in Monterey, Calif., ca. 1990.

Your parents are probably the single most important factor determining the course of your life. For example:

*What country, town, and neighborhood did they live in when you grew up?

*What was their health, educational, economic, and housing situation?

*What was their race and ethnicity?

*What languages did they speak?

*And finally, how did they live their lives, how did they make decisions, and how did they parent you?

On each one of these, I hit the jackpot when it comes to parents.

Mom and Dad were college-educated Chinese Americans coming into parenthood exactly when Chinese and other Asian professionals were starting to be allowed to work for U.S. corporations.

Each had a healthy dose of self-respect, but they were very humble folk and great neighbors who adored children.



Christmas 1978. Front row, l-r: Linda, niece Teri, Josina, Dad. Back row: nephew Joel, Laraine, Mom, Me, Butch, sister-in-law Jean. Mom died the next year, at 74.

They loved their children with no beginning and no end and were excellent planners and decision-makers. They had an exceptional gift for pragmatic intelligence.

One hallmark of their great parenting was though they had virtually no rules, rarely punished us, and never spanked, we children still knew what to do and when to do it.

Mom and Dad's biggest parenting goal was to help us become independent people and then support us in what we decided to do.



1995, at home in Loomis, Calif. Dad passed in 2010, at 85.

All four of us became very independent people, and we put our folks to the test: three revolutionaries, only one with a mainstream professional career, two marriages and one divorce, two of three grandchildren born out of wedlock. Well, at least we all became economically independent at a young age and didn't abuse drugs.

Two of the four of us mainly partnered with African Americans, but that turned out to be a non-issue for Mom and Dad. One of the most wonderful gifts my parents gave me is they loved my mostly Black friends and girlfriends.

My siblings and I are among the very few Asians whose families are majority Black. (In my family, four of the six of us.)

I was fortunate to have two exceptionally intelligent, strong, and capable older sisters. Along with my incredible Mom, they made it easy for me to have a positive attitude about women.

I have also received privilege from being the oldest son of the only son on my father's side of the family. My grandparents and great aunts and uncles had high hopes for me, and loved me thoroughly. When I became an adult I was the "natural" leader of the cousins and did my best to perform that role in the best way I could.



Two of my fabulous great aunties, Auntie Flo (l) and Auntie Betty.

This was pretty easy for me, as I truly enjoyed my grandparents and their siblings. I actively sought their companionship and knowledge, and enjoyed working with them when I wrote the

family history on both sides of the family.



My Mom's folks were both immigrants. They operated two restaurants in tiny Evanston, Wyo., where my Mom was raised.

I somehow eventually acceded to that role on my Mom's side of the family as well despite not being first in any birth pecking order. I had no such role within my nuclear family.

2. Born in East LA



Each of the four Wing siblings was born in a different city, mapping my father's search for an engineering job.

Dad graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a degree in mechanical engineering. Despite the post-war boom in

engineering jobs, Asians were largely prevented from gaining such employment, so Dad initially worked as a machinist.

Day was born in Berkeley in 1947 while Dad was finishing his degree and the family lived in University of California student housing. No one offered Dad an engineering job after he graduated, so he worked as a machinist in San Francisco. Moy was born there in 1949.

Finally, the City of Los Angeles offered Dad his first engineering job, and the family moved there. I was born at General Hospital in East LA on April 8, 1951, when we lived in Boyle Heights. Although widely known as the oldest Mexican community in Los Angeles and our upstairs neighbors were Mexican-American, at that time the residents of Boyle Heights were mostly Jewish and Japanese. We lived on Hollenbeck Drive, across the street from Hollenbeck Park.

Dad's father had been insisting for years that Dad return to Vallejo to run the family store. Once Dad had shown that he could succeed as an engineer, he assented, and my family moved back to Berkeley. We lived in the family home at 1308 Stannage Way that Mom's parents had bought for all their children who went to Berkeley for schooling. Butch was born there in 1953.



Jews and Japanese were the primary residents of Boyle Heights in 1951, when I was born across the street from Hollenbeck Park.

After only a year, Gong-Gong released Dad from the store obligation and our family moved to Sacramento where Dad had secured an engineering job at McClellan Air Force base. Dad then spent thirty years working for Aerojet General Corporation, an aerospace company based just outside of Sacramento.

Although corporations and the government finally allowed college educated Asians to enter professions during the booming 1950s, virtually all hit the “glass ceiling.” Precious few were allowed to enter the upper tiers of management and almost all were underpaid relative to their white counterparts.

I’ll never forget Mom fuming when she recounted that the Aerojet CEO told Dad at his retirement party, “he was sorry that Dad had not reached his full potential at Aerojet.”

3. Discovering the Color Line in Idyllic River Park



My family, l-r: Linda (Day), Dad, Butch, me, Mom, Laraine (Moy), ca. 1956

Chinese have called Sacramento the “Second City” (after San Francisco) since the middle of the 19th century. It was the gateway to the gold fields and to the building of the Central Pacific Railroad and had the country’s second biggest Chinese population for decades.

I grew up in River Park, a sparkling new post-WWII suburban community just inside the Sacramento city limit. Formerly an orchard, River Park was located less than a mile from Sacramento State University’s main entrance. It was bordered by the American River and elevated railroad tracks.

There were only two roads in and out of this insulated community of a few thousand souls. It boasted its very own public elementary school, shopping center, swimming pool, and three baseball diamonds, as well as river access.



I grew up at 5330 Roger Way, Sacramento.

Like many post-WWII suburbs, River Park was a utopian socialist community for the middle class, the white middle class.

It wasn't until I reached college that my older sisters told me that our family had broken the neighborhood color line back in 1954. The neighborhood realty company and some residents passed a petition to try to keep us out. According to my sister, Day, the petition argued that "our children and yours would be better off if your family did not move into River Park."

This wasn't the first such racist incident. At the memorial for my parents in 2010, my cousin Pudgie recounted a story told to him by his mother, my Auntie Do, Dad's sister. Apparently, prior to purchasing in River Park, Sacramento realtors and sellers refused to allow my parents to look at homes or to make offers based on race.

Pudgie was told that my Mom expressed frustration about this to my sister, Moy, who suggested, "Next time, don't tell them we're Chinese."

Nonetheless, we quickly became very close friends with our across-the-street neighbors, the Morcombs, and soon my older sisters and parents had won the admiration of many families in the neighborhood and the tolerance or at least silence of most of the rest. Before we knew it, the Nakanos moved in next door and the Matsumotos across the street.

Nine years later we moved two blocks into a new house designed by my Mom and once again a petition was presented to us arguing that we should not move in. Though I was twelve at the time, I just heard about this incident from Day this year. This year Moy also told me that some neighborhood parent had called mine in 1963, asking them to keep their son (me) away from their daughter. I don't know who this family or their daughter might have been.

One of my life regrets was never having discussed with my parents how racism affected us in River Park and Sacramento.

I remember being “ching chonged” once or twice. I took Mom and Dad's advice to ignore it and be “better than that.” While my parents never said this directly, we all knew it was our job to be better than any bigots and, for that matter, white people generally. Overall I had a happy and secure childhood.

Before long, a few Mexican families also bought into River Park. As was common during the ultra-conservative McCarthyite 1950s, they called themselves “Spanish” and never spoke the language outside of their houses. In the fourteen years that I lived in River Park, not a single Black family lived there.

Sports enabled me to be among the precious few in River Park with Black friends during junior high and high school days

(1964-1968). And I will never forget the first two or three times my African American friends came to visit: they were beaten by white teens. I never found out who the perpetrators were. But my friends never returned.

My parents left River Park right after my younger brother graduated high school in 1971. But sometime in my twenties, I returned to attend the wedding of the daughter of our closest friends in River Park. I was so close to this family that her mother asked me to be her partner when the traditional first song was played for the new couple to dance since her husband had passed and her son was momentarily absent.

As the wedding celebration wound down, I had a chance to chat with the groom. He asked where I lived. When I answered, "Oakland," his response was, "Don't let the niggers get you."

In the decades that followed, I was told that one or another African American family moved into River Park but never lasted long. I'm not sure whether Black families are living there to this day. Whites in River Park learned to accept a few Asians and "Spanish," but they drew the color line at Blacks.

Many white families came to live in River Park to escape their European ethnic hyphenations and join the Great American Middle Class. But they brought the color line with them.

These post-WWII suburbs and their naked color line were not a product of natural market forces or individual inclination. Without government sponsored freeways, streets, telephone lines, water and sewage, schools, redlining, racially restrictive government-backed mortgages, parks, recreation, police and fire services—and millions of new suburban corporate jobs—there would have been few if any suburbs.

The massive white flight to the suburbs of the 1950s-1990s was government and corporate sponsored.

4. Car Crazy



Porsche racers, 1958

From a toddler til about age 7 or 8, my thing was cars. I could tell the make of a car by its hubcaps. My dream car was the Avanti, especially in the cream color. Dad would take me to local races which were usually dominated by Porsches.

I had dozens of scale model cars, each about a foot long. I had so many that Mom and Dad either built or acquired a special “car case” for me to store them. Dealers freely gave scale models away as part of their marketing for each year’s new cars.



I had a big collection of model cars.

Cars were a very big deal in the 1950s. Most adults, including my parents, had suffered the deprivations of the Great Depression which started in 1929 and didn't end til after WWII. With Europe and most of the rest of the world in ruins due to the WWII, the U.S. emerged for the first time as by far the most powerful economy and country in the world.

This great wealth led corporate America to replace Depression thriftiness with middle class consumerism including mass home buying, refrigerators, televisions, and cars.

I was a child of this boom and I loved cars. Each year when the new car models came out, Dad would take me from one dealer to the next—all spectacularly illuminated with spotlights to draw crowds—to see all the new cars and to pick up some free scale models to boot.

To 3-8 year old Bobby Wing, this was happiness.

5. Sports, Mom & Dad



Mom might have been America's winningest female coach of the 1950s. This was our Midget League team, ca. 1957. I am in top row, second from right. Butch is first row, second from left.

By age six, my passions began migrating from cars to sports, especially baseball. Sports remained my main preoccupation until radical politics replaced it in my college years.

My Dad was an excellent natural athlete. He was skilled at baseball, basketball, football, bowling, tennis, badminton, and ping pong. He was talented at body mechanics and strategy.

He loved teaching us how to play and, later, competing with us. Most every night after dinner, he'd organize my brother and me, and often my sister Moy, into drills or games on our street or our driveway. The whole neighborhood knew they were welcomed.

By the time I was six and my brother four, my parents had discovered that the North Sacramento recreation department organized softball and basketball leagues for youngsters our age. North Sacramento was adjacent to Del Paso Heights, one of Sacramento's two Black communities at the time, but I can't remember there being a single Black player in the many years that we played out there.

My Mom often served as our coach, especially since Dad often had to work at practice time. Mom was a non-athlete, but she was a quick study, had a unique touch with kids (and their parents), and was highly organized. I like to say that Mom was America's winningest woman coach of the 1950s.

I competed at basketball, baseball, ping-pong, pool, bowling, swimming, football, and golf. My siblings and I filled the family trophy case.

6. Baseball, the Giants & Black Heroes



East Sacramento Babe Ruth League All-Star, 1966.

In the 1950s and 1960s, baseball was truly “America’s national pastime.” It was the overwhelming favorite sport of a country

where after WWII, many people suddenly found themselves with leisure and recreation time and were trying to overcome the trauma of two world wars. Love of baseball, it was said, was the mark of a true American—as long as you weren't Black.

For many years college football, college basketball, and professional boxing were far more popular than professional football or basketball. Bowling was the biggest participation sport.

In 1958, the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers moved westward to become the San Francisco Giants and the Los Angeles Dodgers. The popularity of baseball in California soared as they became the first Major League teams west of St. Louis.



The great Hall of Famers, Willie Mays and Orlando Cepeda.

I played and dreamt sports full time. My Mom created special bedspreads embroidered with the San Francisco Giants logo for my brother and me. Butch had #30 for the great Black Puerto

Rican Hall of Famer, Orlando Cepeda. Mine had #24 as the great Willie Mays was my idol.

I became a pitcher/shortstop, copying Mays's batting stance and future Hall of Famer Juan Marichal's famous high leg kick.



The Beavers, my first Little League team. I was nine years old, first row, third from right. ca.1960

Our family became such regulars at Giants games that many of the players recognized us. In the early days when the Giants played at Seals Stadium, the players would often toss the ball around with us in the parking lot. On the few occasions that Mom didn't join us, Cepeda would always ask us, "Where's your Momma?" One year he gave Butch his bat for his birthday.

I was lucky to grow up in the golden age of Sacramento baseball. For years, Sacramento was home to the Sacramento Solons, a high level minor league baseball team. Over time that meant that

dozens of former professional players, coaches, and managers settled in town and taught us youngsters.

My era produced the great player/manager Dusty Baker, two twenty game-winners (Bob and Ken Forsch), \$100,000 bonus baby Leron Lee, my former teammate Fernando Arroyo, and many others. I played basketball and baseball against Bob Forsch. Turns out Leron grew up as a best friend of Grantland Johnson who later became one of my best friends.

When I met him later in life, Leron told me Major League Baseball blackballed him out of league for being a players' union representative when they went out on strike in 1972.

Five Sacramento big leaguers later became Major League managers: Larry Bowa, Buck Martinez, Dusty Baker, Jerry Manuel, and Jerry Royster. The latter three are African American. I played with and against many of these guys.

I was selected to the All-Star team each year of Little League and Babe Ruth League. I pitched a no-hitter when I was 11, and was so lucky that I lost only one game in six years of pitching. It didn't hurt that I played on the championship team each of those six years, so I had plenty of help.



I played basketball with Dusty Baker at the San Francisco Warriors basketball camp in Squaw Valley. He was All-City in four sports and became a baseball great as player and manager.

My biggest problem as a hitter was that I didn't believe in the laws of physics: I never thought a curveball would actually curve and inevitably bailed out. But I could hit anyone's fastball.

I never played for or against a Black kid in any sport and never had a Black neighbor or classmate until junior high school. Yet, my heroes were Black athletes like Mays, Cepeda, Henry Aaron, Bill Russell, Wilma Rudolph, Althea Gibson, and Sugar Ray Robinson.

Baby boomers were perhaps the first generation in U.S. history in which millions of non-Blacks idolized Blacks. The integration of sports, although incomplete, preceded the Civil Rights Acts and undoubtedly helped bring them about.



The great Althea Gibson broke the color line and was a champion in professional tennis and golf!



7. What's in a Name?



My Chinese name, Fung Sil Ling.

Mom and Dad named all their children with first names starting with L, middle names beginning with C, and the last name, of course, Wing.

In order of age, we are Linda Carolyn Wing, Laraine Catherine Wing, Loren Clifton Wing (me), and Lyle Courtney Wing. Due to the influence of British-controlled Hong Kong, many Cantonese like my folks gave their U.S.-born children very Anglo names. Mom was Lily Chung Wing and Dad Leland Wing (no middle name).

But, within the family, none of us are called by our birth names.

Linda is Day, which in Cantonese means older sister. Laraine is Moy, Cantonese for younger sister. I am Bob. And Lyle is Butch.

My older sister Day did not like my name Loren, which she had probably never heard before. So she plucked the name Bob from Buffalo Bob of the popular Howdy Doody show, and somehow it stuck.

In those McCarthyite days of strict cultural and racial conformity (the 1950s) almost all boys were Michael, Jack, Tom, Jim, etc. and almost all girls were Jane, Pam, Mary, Kathy, etc. Loren was a virtually unheard of name, especially for a male, so Day probably saved me a lot of razzing and embarrassment. Even today most people think that Loren is a female name.

My sisters are called Moy and Day within the family but are known as Linda and Laraine by everyone else. All but legal entities who have never met me know me as Bob and only my

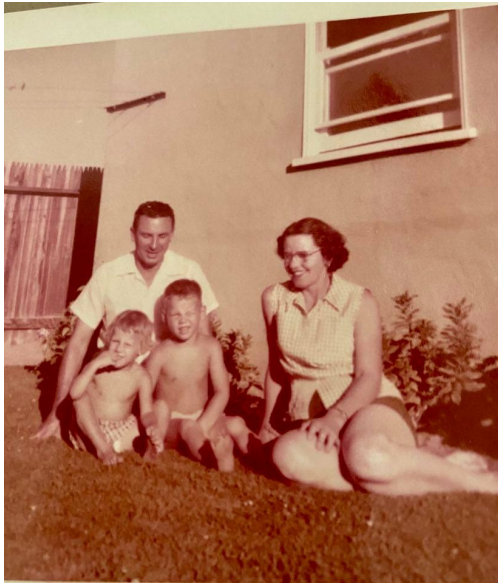
closest friends even know my legal name is Loren. Butch has alternated with Butch and Lyle.

Interestingly, Mom's female siblings were: Lily Wing (Mom), Lillian Wing, Lilac Wing, and Lelia Wing. The boys were Wayman and William. Chinese traditionally have patterned names which probably carried over in the U.S.

Both my parents were born with the surname Wing. Yet, for Chinese, Wing is not a family name. It is a male given name like Michael or Robert. Like most people globally, Chinese say their family name first, not last, so the U.S. Immigration officials converted both of my grandparents into surname Wing. My Mom's Dad was Wong Gin Wing (family name Wong), and my Dad's Dad was Fung Gum Wing (family name Fung).

My siblings and I—and our children and grandchildren—also have Chinese names with family name Fung. So does my daughter and my grandchildren. I hope they continue the tradition.

8. My Buddy Greg and I: From Baseball to Vietnam



Our loving neighbors, the Morcombs.

In my early youth, Greg Morcomb was my best friend. He lived across the street with his sister, Marilyn, and wonderful parents, Fritz and Roy. Fritz was our ever-present and all-loving second

mother. Our families even took vacations together.

Our families loved sports. Just about every day for ten years, we played every kind of ball together, most often in the street in front of our houses or in our driveway, but also in ballparks and gyms hither and yon. We played on numerous organized teams with and against each other and were dyed in the wool San Francisco Giant and 49er fans. (There were no west coast NBA teams at the time.)

Whether consciously or not, Greg and the Morcombs buffered whatever racial resentments against our family that simmered in the neighborhood or school.

Greg was big and strong for his age and fearless. I don't know how many kids Greg stared down on our behalf, but I do know he punched out a few kids who were bothering my brother. I believe word got around that you would answer to Greg if you messed with the Wing kids. Our neighbors also knew the Morcombs, along with the Hoovers and the Mahoneys, were our loyal friends.

I doubt Greg or his family saw this in racial terms, just fierce friendship and loyalty. While racial resentments rarely reared their head, Greg and the Morcombs contributed immensely to the security and happiness of our lives.

As we reached our mid-teens, Greg and I took different paths. Greg lost interest in school and became known as a brawler. He volunteered for the Marines to fight in Vietnam about the same time I became ardently opposed to that war.

When Greg completed his active duty, he invited me over. He was eager to show off the war photos that festooned the walls of his bedroom. In silent shock, I discovered that most of them depicted Greg and his buddies proudly displaying mangled and dead Vietnamese.

One unforgettable photo showed Greg with a brutalized Vietnamese boy who was the spitting image of my brother, the brother who Greg had so often protected.

I was overcome with sadness, at a loss for words. But I will love Greg and his family forever.

9. My Gong-Gong and his Big Question



When I think of Gong-Gong, my Dad's Dad, I always imagine him with a satisfied look on his face, like the cat that just swallowed the canary, puffing happily on a big cigar and with a

cherished glass of Lancers or Black and White in hand.

After retirement, he always seemed immensely content with himself, his family, and his life.

I will never forget a ritual that all of my siblings went through with Gong-Gong. At each visit to his house in Vallejo, he would summon one of us for a chat, usually when he was happily perched in his favorite chair after a satisfying dinner. The other three of us would always give this visit's chosen "victim" a knowing look of sympathy, as he or she dutifully shuffled over for "the question."

Once in his lap, Gong-Gong would flash a massive wad of \$20 bills and casually ask: "Bobby, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

We all knew that if we responded, "I want to be a doctor," we would be instantly rich. Much to Gong-Gong's chagrin, and our financial disadvantage, none of us ever uttered the desired words. But Gong-Gong never pressed us. He would simply state how he hoped we would become doctors, replace the money in his pocket, and gently release us to more childish concerns.

It wouldn't be long before he broke out the maraschino cherries and macadamia nuts!

10. The Consequences of 'Acceleration'



In fourth grade, my school placed me in what they called an “accelerated” class. Our class was to complete all the schoolwork for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade in two years, effectively skipping a year ahead of schedule.

Years later, I found out that Dad was opposed to his kids “skipping” grades, mainly for emotional development reasons. But somehow, the use of the term “accelerated” gave Mom and Dad the impression that this was a class that would get enriched learning but not gain a grade.

By the time they found out otherwise, they must have decided it would be too abrupt to take me out of it.

In elementary school, it was all a bliss. Great classmates, good teachers, and the accelerated pace was easy and interesting.

But the consequences of skipping hit me in junior high school and high school, from just about every angle, and primarily negative as Dad had feared. Physical and emotional immaturity enhanced new racial and teenage insecurities.

I was already small, so being put up a year exaggerated this disadvantage, at precisely the early teen years when differences in size and strength start to suffuse almost all relationships between boys. I was not timid, but I sometimes felt intimidated by bigger kids.

The year difference in age also likely reduced my athletic success. I was still good enough to make the junior high basketball and baseball teams for two years and to win five varsity letters in high school. Still, I must have fared better with an extra year of physical and emotional maturity and self-confidence.

More than likely, age, size, maturity, and racial issues also exaggerated by “Napoleon” tendencies: the over striving of shorter men. I would probably have this characteristic regardless of skipping a grade. It still sometimes gets the better of me.

It was probably one factor that propelled me to distance myself from my childhood friends in search of more popular friends. Big mistake, as it only multiplied my insecurities. The positive side is I became more focused and determined.

And finally, these issues combined to make me extremely shy of girls. I didn't date in junior high and extremely minimally in high school (just proms) and even college.

I worked hard to do my best, whether in school, leadership groups, or athletics. To others, I probably seemed well adjusted, motivated, popular, and successful.

For all of the negatives, I thank the heavens for being put up a grade. Why? Because it put me at the University of California at Berkeley in the historic year 1968-1969.

This placed me at the center of the fierce fights for Ethnic Studies, the origins of the Asian American and people of color movements, the antiwar movement, and more. It was these events that made me who I became, and I am forever grateful.

11. Love Letters Straight from My Father's Anger



My Dad was generally a very calm, even-keeled, fun, and loving man. He was a good husband who did an unusual amount of housework, especially ironing, and spent enormous amounts of time with us kids.

I believe he and Mom were among the many in the depression generation who had pretty much fulfilled their childhood dreams of economic security, homeownership, professional fulfillment, and a close-knit family.

But Dad also had his healthy share of anger. I'm not sure of its origins, but it was there.

When Dad yelled at us to quiet down from across the house, we froze. He had a loud voice that could be explosive, much like myself, though his was always short-lived. His outbursts were never without provocation, they were rare, and never lasted for

more than a few seconds. I don't remember him yelling at us from up close, and as we got older, these incidents disappeared. It never erupted into violence.

My strongest recollections of my Dad's anger were when he would get upset about how some other adult was treating one or more of us kids. Usually, the target of his ire would be one of our sports coaches.

Dad had deep knowledge and passion for sports, but he was a chill sports Dad. He never made a spectacle of himself but rather sat quietly in the stands to avoid embarrassing or pressuring us.

Still, sometimes his blood would boil over how a coach treated one of us or the whole team. He wouldn't show it in public but his ire would marinate at home. Once in a while, Dad would decide to write a nasty letter to the offending adult.

He would spend several days crafting the letter, dictionary and thesaurus at hand. We would all giggle at him and he would laugh too. To my knowledge, he never mailed one. And he never let us know what he was saying.

It seemed the writing process rid him of his anger and stress, and everything would quickly return to normal.

12. A Water Rescue



My Dad was an excellent all-around athlete, but he didn't know how to swim. Dad enjoyed the water and could go under and kick from one side of a small pool to the other.

Mom refused to go into the water at all, except to wet her toes. Day and I were good swimmers at an early age, Moy and Butch less so.

One summer, we took a vacation to Los Angeles from Sacramento and stayed at a small motel near our Aunt and Uncle's house in Silverlake. One of the reasons we chose that motel is because it had a pool.

After swimming underwater across the pool's width several times, Dad announced that he would jump off the low diving board. We had never seen him do that before.

He plunged in and almost immediately starting yelling, "help!" We all thought he was kidding because it was no more than 8 feet

from where he was in the middle of the pool to the side. We were sure he could make it.

But Dad couldn't transfer from the vertical position of his jump into the water to a horizontal position in the water to kick to the side. His pleas for help escalated.

I jumped in after him, but in his panic, he nearly drowned me. I was lucky to escape his grasp.

In horror, we watched helplessly as Dad floundered in the pool.

To our shock and gratitude, Mom came to the rescue. Ever resourceful and cool under pressure, this absolute non-swimmer grabbed the pole with a net that every pool keeps on hand to clean the pool, extended it to Dad, and pulled him to safety.

This whole episode lasted only seconds, but it seemed an eternity.

Within months Dad learned how to swim, and I trained to be a lifeguard as soon as I reached the qualifying age.

Probably eighty percent of the lifeguard training was learning how to fight off a panicked drowning swimmer and latch on securely enough to tow that person to safety. It was like water martial arts training.

But above all, they taught us to only try a water rescue in deep water as a last resort, to avoid being drowned by a terrified swimmer. They instructed us to do what Mom did: find a pole or extend a towel to the swimmer and then pull them in. So the first thing I do when I arrive at a pool is to locate that pole and make sure it is not locked down.

13. Mom Strikes a Bargain



Tijuana 1965

When I was about twelve years old, our family decided to take a day trip to Tijuana from our vacation base in Los Angeles.

It was the early sixties so Tijuana was still a small town, much of which I later learned was unpaved. But this was my first time out of the country, and I was excited. My brother had just learned to play the guitar, so the only specific objective of the trip was to buy one for him.

We strolled the downtown area filled with shops where English was spoken. About my only recollection of the place was that it

seemed slow and friendly.

We wandered in and out of dozens of stores in without finding a guitar suitable enough to even inquire about the price. Every guitar we saw was either way out of a beginner's league, or just a toy.



Market in Tijuana, 1965

Finally, we found what seemed to be the perfect instrument. Mom asked the proprietor for the price, and he said \$80. After a brief pause my Mom coolly countered, \$2.

I was shocked!

But the storeowner smiled complacently and smoothly responded, "I'll give it to you for \$70." My Mom politely repeated: \$2.

Now I couldn't hold back. "Mom," I pleaded, "What are you doing? Butch really wants this guitar. It's perfect!"

The storeowner surely took my outburst as a good sign for him, and confidently lowered his asking price to \$65. Mom stood her ground at \$2. I was beside myself but realized I was out of my league and kept my mouth shut.

After several more back and forths, the owner, to my amazement, came all the way down to \$20!

Now Mom finally upped her offer to...\$4. Soon it was hers/Butch's for the grand price of \$9.

Lessons learned, never to be forgotten and often imitated. When bargaining, don't fall in love with the item. Make a realistic, but very low-end offer, based on what the value of the item is to you and you only. Consider what you might be able to purchase it for in the U.S. or another store.

Never worry that your offer will be taken as an insult by the merchant: he/she can take care of him/herself and will only sell for a price they find sufficient. And don't start increasing your price until they come into your price range. Always be polite. Have fun.

I learned to add something I'm sure Mom knew: don't think you got a really good price unless a few merchants have declined your offer and let you walk out the door or to the next stall.

Over the years I have become almost as good at bargaining as Mom. While overseas with a group, I am frequently asked to negotiate for others and/or teach a class on how to do it.

In the last few decades, U.S. businesses have invaded just about every nook and cranny of the world so that it is rare to find an item that you can't buy in the U.S. But I still consider market shopping one of the most interesting and fun parts of foreign travel.

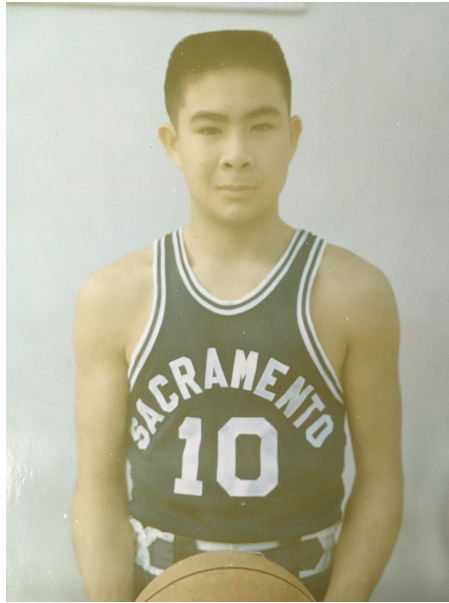
14. Why I Hate Jeremy Lin



Jeremy Lin was the first American-born Asian NBA star.

Because I was supposed to be the first Asian American star in the NBA, not him!

By high school, my passion turned from baseball to basketball, even though I was much better at the former. This change was hastened when I refused to play for the erratic, alcoholic coach who took over the baseball team in my junior year. This paved the way for me to continue to play basketball and prompted me



I played two years for the Sacramento High School Dragons.

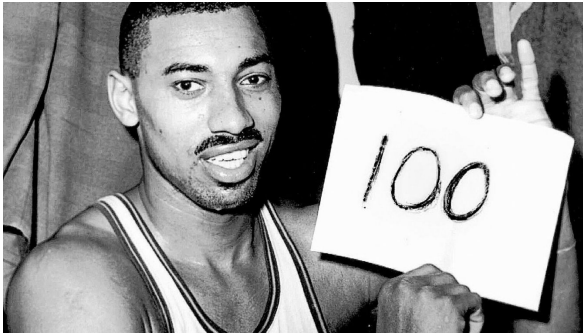
to join the golf team in the Spring.

I didn't give up my NBA dreams until the reality of my 5'6", can't-jump and can't-shoot self finally set in. I still like to quip that the only reason I didn't dunk was that I hated getting my head caught in the net. Before I got politicized, basketball coach or sportswriter were among my possible future occupations.

I grew up a big Boston Celtics fan in the days when the team was led by Bill Russell, Bob Cousy, Sam Jones, and K.C. Jones. (Somehow, by the eighties, the Celts had changed from the team with the most and best Black players to the one with the fewest.)

Like Jeremy Lin, I was always a point guard, even though that term had not yet been invented. Some of my fondest memories were playing with my Midget League team at halftime of professional exhibition games that would come to town.

Our team played at halftime of a game featuring the incomparable Wilt Chamberlain. My brother literally came up to the 7 foot plus Wilt's knee cap.



Wilt Chamberlain was the greatest scorer in NBA history, once tallying 100 points in a single game!

Another time we played at halftime of a San Francisco 49ers game. Yes, the 49ers are a football team, but back in those days, they made so little money that almost all but the big stars had to have off-season jobs. Some of them barnstormed as a basketball team to stay in shape and make a few bucks.

I also remember a junior varsity game that came down to the wire. Trailing by a point, I was fouled and went to the free-throw

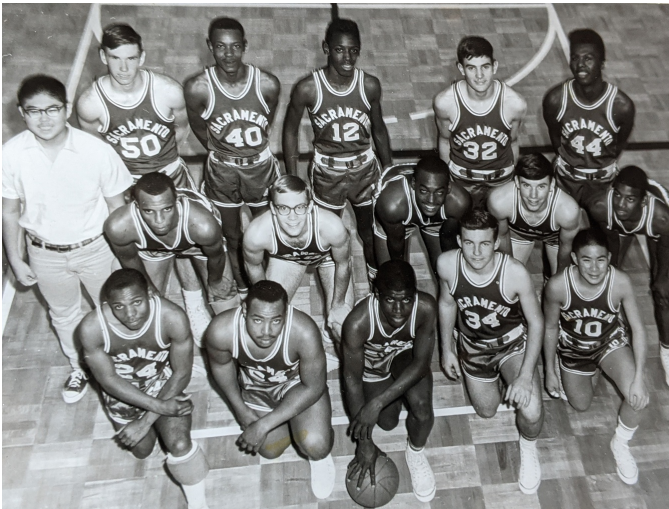
line for two shots. I choked like a champ and missed both. But my teammate Gary Maryland bailed me out by scoring the game-winning basket a few moments later.

Another great memory is Sac Hi versus Luther Burbank High game in my senior year. Early in the game, I set a pick on their 6'5" Adonis of a center, and he gave me a hip that sent me skidding across the floor. At just that moment, someone opened the door and came out of the locker room located right behind the baseline, and I slid into the locker room. I don't think the guy even knew that he had bumped me.

In the same game, I lost a contact lens on the floor, and play was paused for ten minutes while the players, coaches, and referees went to all fours to try to find it. Incredibly someone did find it, and I continued in the game.

Yes, those were my career highlights. But that didn't keep me from my NBA dreams.

15. A Sporting Life



I earned two letters in basketball, one in baseball, and two more in golf at Sacramento High School. I am front row, right. 1967

Sports were the center of my life until I was a senior in high school and realized I just wasn't good enough to play in college, let alone beyond.

I competed in eight organized sports through my freshman year in college: baseball (lettered), basketball (lettered twice), golf (lettered twice and was #1 on the team), ping-pong (junior city champion), bowling (many championships, bowled 279 in league), swimming, pool, and flag football.

Committing myself to the discipline, practice, teamwork, skills development, and sheer will power demanded by sports was probably my first adult decision. It was totally voluntary: I chose to participate and to participate seriously.

My talented and patient Dad taught me how to play every one of those sports except swimming. Although he didn't play, he even taught me golf because he was so knowledgeable about body mechanics.

As a youngster, I was a baseball fanatic. In general, I was best at ball and stick games (baseball, ping-pong, golf). My main athletic talents were hand/eye coordination, quick hands, and body/hand coordination.

I was a pitcher and shortstop. My teams won the championship each of the seven years I played organized ball: four years of Little League and three in Babe Ruth League. I made the All-Star team each year.

I played in the golden years of Sacramento baseball, the years when former players for the minor league Sacramento Solons were teaching hundreds of kids how to play the game correctly.

In those years, dozens of Sacramento kids were signed to pro contracts and many made the Bigs. The most famous was Dusty Baker, who I met at a San Francisco Warriors' basketball camp. He was the MVP of the camp and a high school All-City player in football, basketball, track, and baseball.

Not only did many kids make the Majors, but three Black players became major league managers when their careers ended: Dusty, Jerry Royster (who went to my high school), and Jerry Manuel.

I'll never forget being in the stands when the famous Yankee Yogi Berra was scouting Leron Lee. Leron crushed a ball into orbit. He was the first Sacramentan to sign for a \$100,000 bonus.



After a successful eight-year career, Major League Baseball blackballed Leron for being a strong player representative during the rocky 1970s, including the players' strike of 1972. He was forced to resume his career in Japan, where he became an all-time great. We became friends in our fifties via our mutual brother/friend Grantland Johnson.

Anyway, I hit against many kids who went on to pitch in pro ball. The best was probably Bob Forsch, who won twenty games in 1977 and retired as the third-winningest pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals.

Nobody ever blew a fastball by me because I had quick hands and good preparation. I could hit anyone's fastball.

My main problem was that I didn't believe in physics and valued my body too much. That is to say, I didn't think a curveball would curve when it started at my body, so I would bail out.

I will never forget the time that by far the best player in Babe Ruth, my teammate Gary Lim (a Blasian), got beamed in the head. I cannot get the image of him crumbling to the ground, unconscious, out of my head. Gary was never the same player or person afterward, and that trauma cemented my tendency to bail out on curveballs.

The highlight of my baseball career was pitching a no-hitter on Opening Day of the River Park Little League when I was eleven. Opening Day was a big deal in our neighborhood, celebrated each year with a parade through the community. I once pitched a Babe Ruth All-Star game in Folsom, Calif. when it was 111 degrees.

I was a better hitter than a pitcher, but I was one of the luckiest pitchers ever. I pitched once a week for seven seasons (ten weeks plus playoffs) and lost only one game! Every time I would get blasted, my team would bail me out by outscoring the other team or I would escape with a no-decision. It sure helped to be on the best team each year! But, whew, what luck.

My baseball career came to an abrupt end in my junior year of high school. I was jacked to play, having had perhaps my best hitting year ever as a sophomore. But the Administration saw fit to switch our flamboyant, alcoholic basketball coach to baseball.

No one came to watch baseball games, and he would be hidden from public display. I went to one practice and quit. I joined the golf team for two years.

My ardor for baseball had declined anyway, and was replaced by a crazy passion for basketball. I was one of the few chosen to play varsity for two years (high school was only three years back then), but was never good enough to start.

Nonetheless, after two to three hours of basketball practice every school day, I would lift another 100 shots at the hoop in our driveway. I was a good shot, but not so much when there was a hand in my face. I like to joke that I didn't dunk because I hated getting my head caught in the net.

16. Mom's Barracuda



When Mom traded in her station wagon for a sporty Plymouth Barracuda in 1967, she signaled that her life was blossoming as her kids left home.

Mom graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a degree in social work. Soon after marriage in 1946, she got pregnant and spent the rest of her life as a super Mom.

Mom was the main organizer and enabler for four hyperactive children. She performed this Herculean task with grace, skill,

and love.

Since I had a child myself I have marveled at all parents who raised four, let alone those who did it so well like my Mom.

She was super-Mom: tutor, softball and basketball coach, active school assistant, scout leader, friend to Orlando Cepeda and other Giants, cook, chauffeur, immaculate house cleaner, and traveler. Mom frequently won my Dad's company gin rummy tournament, beating all the rocket scientists, engineers, and mathematicians.

Once all the kids were in school, Mom was the family pioneer at taking up golf.

OK, Mom wasn't a great cook, though she adeptly prepared food for all of us. Her Dad, my Gong-Gong, was a genius cook who owned restaurants, but he wouldn't let anyone else do the cooking. My Dad had to teach her after they were married.

As we left the house for college, Mom blossomed into a new life. The first sign was when she traded in her Mom mobile (huge station wagon) for a sporty 1967 Barracuda. It was a gorgeous metallic rust color. I was stunned—and thrilled since I got to drive it so often.

Then, year after year, she unveiled her many, probably mostly new, talents: landscape architect, clothes designer, potter par

excellence, and expert investor.

And year after year, Mom and Dad allowed me to use their home as my #1 rest and rehab center for myself, my daughter, and my friends.

No, she never did become a great cook (though I did love her pork roast.)

17. From Banana to Asian American



An intergenerational meeting of Asian American activists organized by the Chinese Progressive Association. I'm in the first row, fifth from left.

I am an unusually Americanized Chinese American: my great-great grandfather Lee Bo Wen immigrated in 1854. This is

very rare. I have only met one person of Chinese ancestry that is not part of my extended family who has a continuous history in the U.S. starting in the nineteenth century. (See my *The Bowen/Wing Family: Six Generations in the United States.*)

In my youth this led me to be a “banana,” a Chinese American who strived to meet the standards of white people: yellow on the outside, white on the inside. In college, it led me to be among the first “Asian Americans,” people of Asian descent who found solidarity and identity in connection with Black and other people of color, in the fight against racial and economic injustice.

By World War II, my parents and many of their siblings and in-laws were among the first Asian Americans who graduated college, mostly at U.C. Berkeley, one of the few schools that admitted Asians. My parents, like a number of their siblings and college friends, proceeded to be the first non-white families to racially integrate suburban and other white middle class neighborhoods and corporations.

My siblings and I thus became among the first to grow up largely among white middle class people. Until junior high school the only Chinese people I knew were family members and friends of my parents. The only time I heard Chinese spoken was when we visited my Mom’s parents in Wyoming—or in Chinese restaurants.

I grew up on cowboys, baseball, hamburgers, and Mickey Mouse—the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) middle-class culture of the United States of the post-World War II years. I thought of myself as an All-American Boy. The Korean and Vietnam wars, the Civil Rights movement, etc. barely grazed my consciousness until I entered college in 1968.



Although I loved my extended family, I definitely held a negative stereotype of Chinese as FOB (Fresh off the Boat). I was a banana.

The first Chinese American I got to know was Gary Lim, my Babe Ruth Baseball League teammate from age 13–15. Gary was by far the best player in the entire league and, amazing to me at the time, he was Blasian. His Dad was Chinese and his mother was Black. Unfortunately I never met his family.

Kenny Inouye and Andy Kawasaki were also my teammates. Together, the three of them were the first Asians that I regularly connected with. But all three grew up in Asian/Black neighborhoods and attended different schools than I did until high school. We were great teammates who led our team to the

championship three years in a row, but didn't socialize away from baseball.

Sacramento High School had a significant percentage of Chinese students, maybe 10-15%, so I got to know some Chinese kids. Most of them were second generation (children of immigrants), some 1.5 (came to the U.S. as children), so much more Chinese than me.

Although I never became close friends with any of the Chinese kids, I definitely for the first time became attracted to some of the girls. That was accelerated when as a sophomore (which back then was the first year of high school), Nancy Dong was selected Homecoming Queen. She was positively gorgeous and only a half grade ahead of me, but I never had a class with her and was too shy to approach her.

(By the way, I learned just at the end of last year that there was a thriving Black/Asian dance party scene in Oak Park/Southside Sacramento during my high school years. Wow, did I miss out!)

During my senior year, my cousin Steve invited my brother and me to attend a party in Palo Alto organized by his Chinese American club. The party was held at the lavish home of the owner of a small supermarket chain and it seemed like all the kids were Americanized third generation.

It was my first time socializing with Chinese and it was exciting to find so many other kids who were so much like me. To make matters even better, one of the beautiful daughters of the host family latched onto me within minutes of my arrival. She gave me my first French kiss and we necked the evening through. (Yes, I was a late starter as my natural shyness toward girls was compounded by race.)

Later that year a Chinese-American classmate accepted my invitation to be my date at the Senior Prom. She was a year behind me in school and I hardly knew her, but she was a stunner and we had been eyeing each other from a distance for a while.

I had long felt racial barriers to dating, and dating became one of my first exits from the white world, well before I became a radical.

18. 'A 1968er': A Jarring Brazilian Welcome to the World



I visited my Brazilian father Samuel Mandelbaum and sisters Esther (left) and Rachel in 2008.

One of the many wonderful things my Mom did for me was to imbue me with a desire to travel the world.

But she didn't just talk about it.

Mom became the parent sponsor of the American Field Service (AFS) club at my school. AFS is a national exchange student organization that places U.S. high schoolers in homes and schools throughout the world, especially Europe, and settles foreign high school students in U.S. homes.

Mom and Dad volunteered the AFS Club to run the snack bar at numerous high school sporting events to raise money for an exchange student to be hosted at Sacramento High in the next year. Student members, including myself, helped out, but Mom and Dad did most of the work. This enabled Elsofie, a Dutch student, to attend Sacramento High in 1967-68.

I applied to be an AFS student for the Summer of 1967. The AFS national office ran a competition to determine who would be selected.

AFS chose me for their exchange student program to Brazil following completion of my junior year in high school. Since I studied German I had hoped to visit Germany, so I was surprised and a bit daunted to be invited to Brazil.

At the time, few—usually wealthy—Americans traveled abroad, and they mainly visited Paris, Rome, or London. Trips to developing countries were rare and often considered “exotic”

and dangerous. Looking back, it's impressive that Mom and Dad allowed me to go.

In 1967 I was the only AFS student from Sacramento whose destination wasn't Europe. The impending language barrier presented by Brazil intimidated me. Of the 99 American kids who AFS placed in Brazil that year, I was the only one who hadn't studied French or Spanish which are Latin-based languages akin to Portuguese. They placed me with a family headed by a Polish Jewish refugee from WWII whose fourth language was German!



My brother Samuel and I became even closer over the decades of our friendship. We visited Machu Picchu together in 2014.

But what luck! The ten-week experience transformed my worldview and my place in it for the rest of my life, and gifted me with a loving second family. It's hard to understate how utterly uninformed and naïve I was before the trip or the transformation it worked on me.

I will never forget the first night I spent in Brazil.

Our entire delegation landed in Rio de Janeiro from Miami. Brazilian host families who lived anywhere near Rio welcomed their exchange student in that magnificent city. My host family lived in a small town called Assis, 400 miles inland in the southern state of Sao Paulo. So I was to stay overnight with a volunteer family in Rio and travel to Sao Paulo to meet my new family the next day.

Susana Guedes, a former AFS student to the U.S. and one of the lead AFS-Brazil staffers, drove me and two others through breathtaking Rio at night to our overnight hosts.

The short ride turned into a revelation and a shock!

Revolutionary graffiti and slogans like "Down with the U.S. Imperialism!" festooned the city center buildings. Protestors had painted the iconic symbol of communism, the hammer and sickle, everywhere. I had never dreamt of such things.



I peppered Susana with the myriad questions that raced through my mind as I viewed the graffiti. Her answers blew my mind, even though she didn't express particular sympathy for the Brazilian movement. This was the first time in my life that I had witnessed revolutionary graffiti or encountered the concept of "U.S. imperialism" or "military dictatorship."

As far as I know, none of the 99 exchange students knew before we arrived that Brazil was in the throes of a U.S.-installed military dictatorship since 1964. The academic and State Department briefings we received never mentioned it and no one seemed to have found out on their own.

Although the Vietnam War was in full slaughter, large-scale antiwar actions were just beginning (Stop the Draft Week), and a McCarthyite reactionary worldview still dominated Sacramento and most of the country. The Civil Rights movement barely pierced my consciousness. I still naively believed that the U.S. was an unsullied force for good in the world.



The Brazilian people rid themselves of the U.S. sponsored military dictatorship in 1985.

And, having grown up drilling monthly for a Soviet nuclear attack by ducking under my desk at school, I thought communists were Soviet agents out to kill all Americans.



Favelas in Brazil were my first glimpse of stark poverty.

Brazil also first exposed me to the grinding poverty that oppressed most of the world and was rampant in the U.S. Not only was poverty on full display in the big Brazilian cities, but in my little town of Assis, population 60,000, I could swear that

less than half of the people lived in the paved and electrified part of town.

I was never the same. My mind became dominated with:

a. What was the role of the U.S. in the world? Previously I believed that the U.S. role in the world was purveyor of peace, democracy, and prosperity. But in Brazil, I discovered that the U.S. had overthrown its democratically-elected president and installed a military dictator. Which, in turn, raised the obvious question: what was the U.S. doing in Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere?

b. Why were some countries (and people) rich and other countries (and people) poor? I had never before understood even the slightest thing about the extent and depth of economic inequality in the world. Now it stared me in the face: Brazil v. the U.S. and the rich v. the poor.

c. These questions, in turn, begged another: What can I help do about it?

I spent my senior year agitated by these dangerous questions and only found my bearings when I read the Autobiography of Malcolm X and joined the movement in 1968.

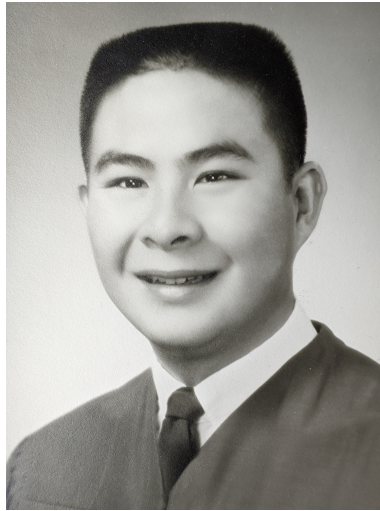
My Brazilian brother Samuel was also radicalized in college, when the dictatorship disappeared many of his teachers and

classmates. When he visited me in 1977, he and his friend spent an entire week cloistered in my library reading books about Latin America that were banned in Brazil.

And, 54 years later, I stay in close touch with my Brazilian family, the Mandelbaums, and am lucky to see them often.

Welcome to the real world, Bob Wing!

19. 'A 1968er': Sacramento High School



My Sacramento High School graduation photo in 1968.

Sacramento High School is the second oldest high school west of the Mississippi River. By the time I attended, it was an amalgam of the old monied white people, white middle and working class communities, but was located in the heart of the Black

community, Oak Park. It also included most of the town's poor Chinese and Mexican immigrants.

Whites dominated the school administration, faculty, and student body leadership. The school was constantly threatened with losing its academic accreditation. Only a handful of us left the Sacramento area to attend college.

Here are the events I experienced at Sacramento High School in the tumultuous days of 1967-1968.



Armed Black Panthers staged an electrifying demonstration on the steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento on May 2, 1967.

a. I was in Brazil during the explosive urban riots of the summer of 1966, but I had a front seat to the political aftermath. On May 2, 1967, the Black Panther Party staged their famous armed “invasion” of the state Capitol in my hometown of Sacramento. And in October 1967, after a shoot-out that left one policeman dead, the Party launched the “Free Huey” campaign to get their

leader released from prison. It was these two events that launched the Party to national and international fame.

I will never forget the day my friend Gloria Abernethy appeared at school rocking a “Free Huey” button. In all innocence, I asked her, “What’s a Huey?” She patiently explained who Huey was and why he should be freed from prison. I responded, “Hmm, sounds like he should be in jail.”



The Vietnamese Tet Offensive in 1968 proved that the U.S. could not win the war.

b. There was a mini race riot in the cafeteria at Sacramento High School toward the beginning of 1968. This brought the country’s racial antagonisms and dynamics directly to me. I took my first anti-racist action, joining Inter-Group Relations which the school set up in response to the skirmish. I was disappointed by the feeble response of the high school administration, the backwardness of most white students, and the racism of many of their parents. This deepened my commitment to figuring out

what was at the root of racism and what I might be able to do about it.



Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

c. On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., where he was supporting a sanitation worker strike as part of the Poor Peoples Campaign. Massive race riots immediately broke out across the country. The next day, many Black students at Sacramento High came to school wearing black armbands. I was still so ignorant that I had to ask someone why they were wearing the armbands.

d. In January 1968, the Vietnamese launched the Tet offensive against the U.S. occupying troops in their country. Before this, the U.S. told the world they had beaten the Vietnamese down to their last breath. But the powerful nationwide Vietnamese offensive made clear to the world, even the U.S. president and military command, that the U.S. could not defeat them.

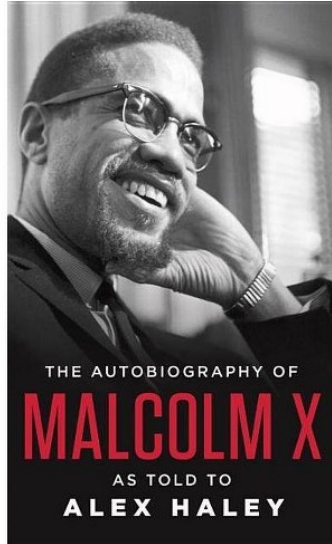
The U.S. killings of people who looked just like me were carried on the TV news every night. My older sister, Day, participated in Stop the Draft Week in 1967. Together these events convinced me that we were a murderous aggressor in Vietnam.

By 1969 I came to view the Vietnamese as a heroic example of Asians standing up to and defeating racist aggression. The Asian American contingents to antiwar marches swelled in numbers and with pride. Horribly, the U.S. carried on the murderous war for six more calamitous years and killed more than a million Vietnamese.

e. On June 6, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles on the night of his victory in the California presidential primary. He was the only serious antiwar candidate for the presidency at the height of the Vietnam War.

Together with the shooting of Dr. King, Bobby's assassination marked a turning point that strengthened the hand of racist, pro-war, law-and-order forces that culminated in Richard Nixon's election as president that November. The murders were momentous events in the U.S. and indeed world history: a potentially antiwar, civil rights era was transformed into its opposite. It marked the beginning of the defeat of the 1960s radical movements.

f. That summer, I got my first job (at a public swimming pool) and read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The book clarified for me the noxious connection of race and class and the enormous leadership potential of Black poor people.



Reading “*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*” changed my life by clarifying the relationship of race and class, and exemplifying the leadership potential of the Black working class.

Before that, I had read “*Black Like Me*,” written by John Howard Griffin, a white guy who took shots to turn his skin dark and then wrote about how that caused him to suffer racial abuse. In my mind, that showed that racism was not a response to a person’s character but a form of generalized hatred.

20. 'A 1968er': Berkeley and Asian Americans



The Asian American Political Alliance was formed in the Summer of 1968. It was the first ever pan-Asian political organization.

I first became a radical activist in 1968. By the end of my freshman year, I was seriously beginning to think of myself as a revolutionary.

My entry into radical politics was extraordinary rapid: 1968-69 was one of those years that compressed decades of change, social

and personal, into one. And, unlike recent years, that introduction immediately involved confronting the Iron Fist of the State.

In the Fall of 1968, I entered the University of California at Berkeley. Although I had already gone through much change in my understanding of the world, I was not yet active or explicitly radical and did not choose Cal for political reasons.

I entered Berkeley as a 17-year-old “nice Chinese boy” but ended up on strike for more than twenty of the thirty weeks of my freshman year in fights for Ethnic Studies and Peoples Park. I spent eighteen of those weeks in pitched battles with thousands of national guard and police backed by tanks and helicopters.



I commenced the school year still primarily seeing and inhabiting a white world and ended it in a people of color world. I was swept into the Asian American movement, the “Third World” (people of color) movement, the antiwar movement, and

the student power movement.

By year's end, I deeply detested the U.S. government, thought it was beyond reform and probably needed to be overthrown. I was mad as hell at racism and white people. I felt utterly betrayed when it became clear that the government, the leaders, and the schools had lied to me my whole life, and when challenged, sent their armed minions by the tens of thousands to attack us.

EXPLOSION OF LEARNING: NOT IN THE CLASSROOM

I was like a sponge. The breadth and depth of what Berkeley had to offer, intellectually and practically, was awe-inspiring for a sheltered boy from Sacramento.

In the fall, I attended Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) meetings, let little old Japanese ladies on the street trundle me to Nichiren Buddhist meetings (Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō), spent hours in the Shambala bookstore where I dabbled in the books of the Indian spiritual master Meher Baba. I read some Gandhi and some Red Book and books that attempted to reconcile Gandhi and Marxism.

SUPPORTING ELDRIDGE CLEAVER

My first actions were to get involved in the newly minted Asian American movement and the strike/barricade fighting over the right of Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver to teach an

experimental course on campus.



Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther leader and author of *Soul on Ice*.

One of the victories of the early 1960s Free Speech Movement at U.C. Berkeley was the right of students to initiate experimental courses that the school would accredit. In 1968 students proposed a class led by Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver. Cleaver was then a national celebrity due to his book “*Soul on Ice*” and his leadership role in the spectacular growth of the Black Panther Party’s influence.

Nonetheless, the university administration refused to certify the course. The white radical organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), demanded the course be offered. They organized a sit-in at Moses Hall and, when the police erected barriers to prevent more students from joining in, fought the police at the barricades. They also called for a strike, but it was short-lived. I struck for a few days but neither sat-in nor participated in the fighting.

I had never before done anything like this. It was a start.

BECOMING “ASIAN AMERICAN”

The first “Asian American” organization ever, a small group called the Asian American Political Alliance, was founded at Berkeley in the Summer of 1968. Impelled to learn more about Chinatown, I tutored students at the Cameron House on Clay Street in San Francisco, the same place where my maternal grandfather had been taught English decades earlier and around the corner from my paternal grandparents’ apartment.



In retirement, my father’s parents moved to an apartment at Sacramento and Stockton in SF Chinatown. I visited monthly for many years and picked my wonderful grandma’s brain about the community. My favorite aunt, Dolores Wong, is on the right.

I learned much from my grandparents. I spent hours wandering the streets, the shops, and chatting with people. I started reading what little there was about Chinese American and Asian American history and San Francisco Chinatown. I discovered that Chinatown had many of the same socio-economic problems as Black communities.



Asian Americans took their first dramatic political action in the Third World Strike at San Francisco State College in the Fall of 1968 and the Third World Strike at Berkeley in the Winter of 1969. Students fought tens of thousands of police and national guard, warding off tear gas, helicopters, and tanks.

They ignited a nationwide Asian American movement against racism in solidarity with other “Third World” people (today called people of color). A transformative “Yellow Identity” movement led me and tens of thousands of others to change our understanding of ourselves, our histories, and our futures. The movement created electrifying new organizations, campaigns, conferences, music, and culture.

Across the country, thousands of Asian Americans were throwing off the yoke of the passive, accepting “Oriental” and taking our destinies, and that of our communities, into our own hands. We were liberating ourselves from 120 years of racist humiliation in which resistance seemed futile and our ancestors were left to “eat a bowl of tea (meaning bitterness)” or to try to prove our loyalty by fighting for the very country that put us in prison camps.

We were cutting through the lies that had been told to us, reclaiming our history, and training to be activists, artists, and revolutionaries connected to Asian American waiters, cooks, farm workers, garment workers, and railway workers and in solidarity with people of color around the world.

Chris Iijima and Nobuko Miyamoto captured the new Asian American in what became the anthem of the Asian American movement, “We Are the Children” and the first ever Asian American album, Grain of Sand.



[Verse 1]

We are the children of the migrant worker
We are the offspring of the concentration camp
Sons and daughters of the railroad builder
Who leave their stamp on America

[Verse 2]

We are the children of the Chinese waiter
Born and raised in the laundry room
We are the offspring of the Japanese gardener
Who leave their stamp on America

[Chorus]

Sing a song for ourselves
What have we got to lose?
Sing a song for ourselves
We got the right to choose
We got the right to choose
We got the right to choose

[Verse 3]

Foster children of the Pepsi Generation
Cowboys and Indians, ride, red man, ride!
Watching war movies with the next door neighbor
Secretly rooting for the other side

[Chorus]

Sing a song for ourselves
What have we got to lose?
Sing a song for ourselves
We got the right to choose
We got the right to choose
We got the right to choose

[Verse 4]

We are the cousins of the freedom fighter
Brothers and sisters all around the world
We are a part of the third world people
Who will leave their stamp on America
Who will leave their stamp on America
Who will leave our stamp on America
Who will leave our stamp on America
America!

For the first time in my life, I was proud to be Chinese and Asian.
I was fighting mad at the racist injustices that we and other

people of color had suffered. It was exhilarating, infuriating, and liberating. We were part of a worldwide revolutionary movement!

21. 'A 1968er': The Third World Strike at U.C. Berkeley



The Third World Strike was a prolonged pitched battle in which we students faced thousands of armed men backed by tanks and helicopters every day for almost nine weeks.

As I went through changes in the Fall of 1968, I came to the point where I was ready to join the San Francisco State Third World Strike that began that quarter.

But just as I was about to go check it out, I caught wind that students of color were starting to organize to win a Third World College at U.C. Berkeley, and I decided to stay on more familiar turf.

The Black Student Union, the Mexican American Student Confederation, the Native American Student Alliance, and the Asian American Political Alliance coalesced into the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) with the primary goal of establishing an independent Third World College. The College would consist of African American, La Raza, Native American, and Asian American studies departments under the control of Third World students and communities.

Their demands also included the recruitment of Third World people at every level of university administration, instruction, and staff; open admissions for Third World applicants; and institutional autonomy (“Third World control over Third World programs”).

Along with the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State, this was the first-ever political action taken in the U.S. by consciously united people of color.



The TWLF threatened to call a Winter Quarter strike if the university administration did not meet its demands. Negotiations got underway.

But to no avail. When I returned to school in January for the Winter Quarter of 1969, the TWLF organized an “informational picket line” at Sather Gate, the iconic entrance to the campus, as well as a massive leafleting and organizing campaign around the campus and the adjoining student housing to inform the university community of its demands and urge students to strike.

Huge noon rallies were held each day in Sproul Plaza, with speakers orating from the administration building’s steps.

I avidly joined in and was thrilled that my sister, Moy, did as well, especially since I hardly knew any of the Strike organizers.

I had never done anything like this before in my life. It was fascinating and exciting, and scary as hell to be attacked by police and National Guard all day.

But I firmly believed that people of color's history and realities were virtually absent from the campus, as were students of color, and that this must change. I had caught the fever started by the San Francisco State students that it was time to try to take control over our own destinies.



I was mesmerized by the fierce Asian students who completely shattered the image of passive Orientals. I'll never forget Stan Abe, Vicki Wong, Belvin Louie, and dozens of others fearlessly marching in their fatigues and headbands, fists in the air, and their voices at full throat.

And my world was rocked to be in unity with other Third World students. I had never seen or heard of such a thing until the strike at SF State, and here I was actually participating!

Within a day or two, someone asked me to join the Asian American Political Alliance meetings that took place each night in a studio on Blake Street. The meetings discussed what happened that day and planned for the future, and I decided to check it out. It was tiring but exhilarating.



By the end of the first week of informational picketing, our numbers had dwindled into the small hundreds. But, for no apparent reason, the police suddenly and viciously attacked the picket line. They started beating students with their billy clubs and blasting us with tear gas and pepper spray.

In my naivete, I was utterly shocked that the authorities would attack a few hundred peaceful students. They instantly transformed a peaceful picket on behalf of a reasoned demand into brutal physical combat.

In a heartbeat, the hundreds of picketers were joined by thousands of outraged students. A full-scale riot confrontation between police and students filled the afternoon and spilled into the surrounding streets.

From that day on, for nine continuous weeks, confrontations between students and 10,000 or more armed security forces exploded every single day, during or just after the noon rallies, and lasted the entire day. The administration, often at Governor

Ronald Reagan's orders, deployed the campus police, the Berkeley police, the Oakland police, the Alameda County sheriffs, and the National Guard to suppress us.



They were armed with assault rifles, pistols, bayonets, tear gas, pepper gas, helicopters, and tanks. Some days there were enough of them to link arms and surround the entire campus and form armed chains blocking different buildings or sections of the university while still trying to control the surrounding streets.

They would march shoulder to shoulder through Sproul Plaza with bayonets fixed to clear the area. They hurled and launched enormous amounts of tear gas but even more from tear gas machines that they carried in backpacks and sprayed from helicopters.

They beat the daylight out of untold numbers of people and arrested hundreds if not thousands.

Their most notorious tactic, inaugurated in the second or third week of the strike and carried out almost every day after that, was to send a special squad to isolate a specific leader for a horrendous beating and arrest.



The first person they attacked in this way was a Black student named Cornell Abercrombie, who lived at Bowles Hall, the same dorm that I bunked at. By chance, I happened to see Cornell return to Bowles late that night. He was beaten practically beyond recognition, busted up, bloodied, and bruised. He could barely walk or speak. I never saw him again.

My most searing memory of the strike was when the police went after Ysidro Macias, one of the Mexican American Student Confederation leaders who later become a very close friend of mine. Somehow, through the crowd of thousands in Sproul Plaza, I witnessed the horrific scene, which to this day plays back in my mind's eye in slow motion.

First, an elite police squad ripped Ysidro from the picket line. They dragged him to the grassy area next to Sproul steps, where six or seven of them brutalized him with their batons, kicks, and

punches well after he lost consciousness. (He still has no specific recollection of what happened to him that day other than being isolated and arrested.)

They then dragged Ysidro by his feet up into Sproul Hall for booking, his head crashing on each unforgiving stone step as they ascended.

(Twenty years later, I recounted this story to my dear friend Gloria House/Aneb Kgositsele, a fabulous revolutionary poet and activist who drafted SNCC's first-ever antiwar statement. She wrote a powerful poem about it, entitled "Ysidro Healing.")



Organizers were sent into the dorms and classrooms to build support for the Third World strike.

Through all this, the TWLF adapted, endured, and fought. Many Black and Latino students were Vietnam Vets attending Berkeley on the GI Bill and were trained in military tactics. We posted people atop buildings with binoculars to do reconnaissance and report on the police/national guard numbers and movements so

that we could best adapt, evade and/or counter. We met each night to plan the next day and the future.

But we were exhausted, bloodied, imprisoned, and battered. We were mad beyond reason. It was a miracle no one was killed.

Somehow I made it through the nine weeks of conflict virtually unscathed. I was only 17 years old and still wore my hair in a crewcut. Although I participated in a thoroughly organized manner each and every day, all day, I was no kind of leader to be targeted.

The strike leadership urged me and Lalent Lacon, the only other 17-year-old in the organized core of the TWLF, to avoid arrest and disappear when the rioting broke out because we were minors who had almost no rights if arrested. But their instructions fell on deaf ears.

Somehow I was never in the wrong place at the wrong time. Dozens of times each day amid the rioting, I would step into doorways, decide to veer this way or that, take this route or that, enter this building but not that one, be assigned to this task or that, and somehow was never forced to taste my own blood or get carried away in an ambulance or paddy wagon.

Dozens of people I didn't know and can't remember pulled me out of harm's way, and I did the same for dozens of others. I

imbibed tremendous amounts of tear gas, was regularly within inches of fixed bayonets and swinging billy clubs, and had untold numbers of close calls. But somehow, I escaped injury and arrest.

Beside myself with rage, I strangely remained a pacifist and oddly unbowed through the whole fight, a fight that was literally beyond my imagination just weeks before. After I decided to stay with the strike when the first violence broke out, I never reconsidered.

I never attended a class or opened a book. I participated in the actions all day every day, and the smoke-filled AAPA meetings until late every night. I never threw a rock at the police or national guard. I never threw a stone through a window or otherwise destroyed property, even though I was often sent out with groups specifically for that purpose. I don't think any of my comrades noticed amidst the chaos.

Odd, but that was me.

Insofar as we had a strategy, it was to endure until the absence of students from class and disruption of the education process, the massive property damage on and off the campus, and the enormous cost of police and national guard deployment, combined with concerted public education and organizing campus and community groups to our side, would swing public opinion on the campus and the community against the

university. Or, more likely, until the powers-that-be decided that the costs were just too high.

It seemed like I compressed a lifetime into the nine weeks of the strike. Suddenly, on March 4, 1969, just a day before finals began, the university academic senate voted to form an independent Ethnic Studies Program. The chancellor would appoint the leaders of each of its components—Afro American Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian American Studies—and classes were scheduled to begin in the Fall of 1969.

Victorious, we canceled the strike. This allowed me and others to cram for a few finals, but I was too far behind and mostly took incompletes.

On March 20, 1969, San Francisco State announced that it too would form a College of Ethnic Studies in the Fall of 1969. The first united Ethnic Studies Programs in the country were to become a reality.

Similar struggles broke out across the country and Ethnic Studies programs, especially Black Studies, were implemented in hundreds of universities. Soon Women's Studies and Peace Studies programs were also won. Our generation had the unique experience not only of mass struggle (and mass repression), but of creating an enormous amount of new knowledge that

transformed the understanding of U.S. history and society.

Asian American Studies is uniquely important, because the vast majority of Asians who live in the U.S. immigrated after 1965 and have no family connections to the history of Asians before that time. Asian American Studies provides that link.

I also ended up on strike for nine weeks in the Spring Quarter. This time the issue was People's Park. Together with some homeless people, students (almost all white) had turned the park on Haste Street just above Telegraph into a park that served free food, supplied health care, clothes, and food as well as music. The university said they were going to close the park and build a dormitory upon the land. The students called a strike to demand that they be allowed to maintain People's Park.



This strike was violent from the very beginning. Again thousands of national guard and police were deployed against the students, along with helicopters. I was not involved in the Park, but I agreed with their demands, so I went on strike. Although on strike, I was not very active in the fight, but I did manage to get repeatedly bombarded with tear gas by a helicopter one day in

Lower Sproul Plaza.

I lost sight and stumbled into Strawberry Creek with hundreds of others. Fellow students rescued me and guided me into a nearby building to get relief.



So that was my freshman year. I entered as a nice Chinese boy with some questions and concerns. I ended up on strike for twenty of the thirty-week school year, fighting thousands of armed men for eighteen of them. By year's end, my primary identity was as a Third World person and Asian American, an antiracist who identified with revolutionary forces around the world.

(For a more general analysis of Ethnic Studies, see my essay "Educate to Liberate: Multiculturalism and the Struggle for Ethnic Studies," 1999.)

22. A Revolutionary Prude



I had a memorable freshman year at Berkeley in 1968-69. Nineteen weeks on strike fighting the police and national guard. Becoming “Asian American.” Being away from parents for the first time.

1968 was the quintessential year of 1960s radicalism and also of the Flowered Children counterculture: long hair, drugs, sex, and rock and roll.

But I am betting that I was the only one at U.C. Berkeley in that year who:

1. Was on strike for 18 weeks.
2. Never smoked so much as a single hit of weed or tried any other illegal drug.
3. Had a crew cut.
4. Never had sex.

OK, I guess I was a revolutionary prude.

23. A Hair Raising Trip, A Random Act of Kindness



The startling sand dunes on the central coast of Oregon.

I have received many random acts of kindness, but here will recount one particularly memorable occasion.

After my tumultuous freshman year at Cal, I took a summer job working for the Department of Recreation of Sacramento County. The job ended just before Labor Day, but classes at Cal didn't commence until October.

So I took the first solo trip of my life, a three-week camping trip through Northern California, Oregon, and Washington—in Mom's Barracuda.

I saw some magnificent sights for the first time:

*Bodega Bay where I camped on the same beach where the scary film, *The Birds*, was filmed; Mendocino and the rest of the stunning northern California coast to Crescent City.



When I visited in 1969, the water in Crater Lake was so crystal clear that I could see the bottom of the lake from a boat out in the middle.

*Crater Lake was so crystal clear that I could see the bottom of the lake from a boat out in the middle.

*The astonishing miles of sand dunes right on the ocean on the coast of central Oregon, all pocked with freshwater ponds.

*The Redwood forest, Lake Shasta, the Oregon Caves, Mount Rainier, the volcanic rock fields of Oregon, and on and on.

Oh, and no small thing, I grew my hair out for the first time since I was a toddler. Gee, I must have been the only guy at Berkeley in 1968-69 who had a crew cut, never smoked marijuana and didn't get laid. I digress...

Anyway, after a brief visit to Seattle—I was avoiding cities—I started heading back home to Sacramento, making the turn South along the Washington coast.

At the time, there was only one lane each way on the Washington coast, and the area was sparsely populated. As dusk began to settle, I searched for a place to camp for the night. I pulled into a rustic rest stop to pee and search my map for a campsite.

I returned to the Barracuda to find that the ground under my left front tire had given way, leaving about a fourth of my car sitting directly on the earth and the tire hanging over a shallow precipice that led to a river.

It was getting dark, and there was no one around and no traffic along the highway. I was up shit creek, far from the nearest town.

As I pondered my dilemma, a small truck pulled into the rest stop. A young white couple who appeared in their twenties and of

modest means debarked the truck. I anxiously approached them and showed them my predicament.

Without hesitation, the young man threw a rope around my bumper and attached it to his hitch. I was dubious this would work and feared it would also tear my bumper off. But it did work, like a charm.

I thanked them profusely and was about to return to my travels when they asked me if I would like to stay at their house for the night. I eagerly agreed and followed them for five miles or so to their modest home.

It turned out they were Jehovah's Witnesses, the first that I had ever met, and each held two minimum wage jobs to make ends meet.

Very sweet. A life-affirming experience that helped me get past stereotypes.

24. The Fighting Manongs



Filipino farm workers started the famous Grape Boycott. Here some are gathered in front of Agbayani Village, the United Farm Workers' retirement home constructed on union land for the Filipinos.

One of the first things I got involved in as a freshman at Berkeley was supporting the United Farm Workers grape boycott by collecting food to take down to the retired Filipino farmworkers in Delano, Calif., the Manongs (elders).

On Sept. 8, 1965, these Manongs, organized as the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, initiated the famous grape strike and boycott that was soon joined and greatly amplified by the Cesar Chavez-led National Farm Workers Association. The two then merged and became the famous United Farm Workers union in 1966.



We mobilized dozens of people to help build Agbayani Village in Delano, a retirement home for Filipino farmworkers on the United Farm Workers Union's forty acres.

Upon collecting the food, we would caravan down to Filipino Hall in Delano. There I met and befriended about forty of the

Manongs who became my movement grandfathers. I spent countless hours hearing their stories and eating Tony's delicious food.

It was a life lesson to me that these humble immigrant working men who had spent their lives toiling in the fields in oppressive plantation conditions could take action that would change history. They became, for me, the personification of the struggle and political potential of the working class, not to speak of human kindness and grace.

The grape boycott was far from their first political action. In the 1930s, they spearheaded the formation of a radical farmworkers' union. Two of them, members of the Communist Party, were assassinated in the effort. Their lives were filled with hard stoop labor and struggle with utterly reactionary, white supremacist bosses, isolated from their families in the Philippines and mostly single. Yet, they carried on through their entire lives.

By the time I met them in 1968, they were all retired and mostly in their seventies. I was particularly close to Tony, the cook, Leo, who I worked with constructing Agbayani Village, Pete Velasco, and Phillip Vera Cruz, the Vice President of the UFW, a radical and a poet. I have forgotten so many others' names in the fog of my memory. They have all long since passed.

I visited Filipino Hall at least a few times a year and then in 1974 volunteered to help them build a retirement complex on the Forty Acres, the United Farm Workers union's headquarters in Delano. My friends organized dozens of people to participate, renting buses to take us from the Bay Area to Delano on many weekends.

Amidst a white reactionary small town, this was dangerous work. We took turns standing armed guard each night. The retirement home was named Agbayani Village in honor of Paulo Agbayani, a Filipino farmworker who died of a heart attack while picketing a grower during the Delano grape strike in 1967.

My relationship with Manongs was amplified for me in the years that followed by my work at the International Hotel on Kearny Street in San Francisco. This Hotel was the site of pitched conflict with the owners who wished to expel the largely Manong tenants to build a shiny—and hugely profitable—new downtown high rise.



My relationships with the Manongs were also part of a broader and deeper relationship with the Filipino left and anti-Marcos martial movement, against racism and for socialism in the U.S. These movements were embodied in the organization known as the KDP, the Union of Democratic Filipinos. The Philippines and Filipinos became a central part of my political and social life.



25. Que Linda es Cuba



In Cuba, 1970.

I was on strike and in pitched battles with the police and National Guard for most of my first two years of college: the Eldridge Cleaver controversy, the Third World Strike, People's Park, and the strike following the U.S. Bombing of Cambodia.

I was mad as hell at U.S. imperialism and racism, and fighting it out the best I could. But by the end of the unsuccessful struggle to stop the U.S. bombing of Cambodia in the Spring of 1970, I was battle weary. I came to the realization that I had a very clear sense of what I opposed but very little sense of what I advocated. I was in fight-and-tear-it-down mode with only the vaguest notions of what I wanted to help build in its place.

During that time, I also formed many new friendships. For the first time in my life, the majority of my friends were Asian and highly political. The rest were Black, Native American, or Latino. I had made an identity and social turnaround, in addition to a political one. But these new friendships still seemed unstable.

My visit to Cuba in 1970 and working with the Venceremos Brigade for a few years after that helped me find my groove, both politically and personally.

Four of my friends from the Third World Strike and the Asian American Political Alliance went to Cuba on the first contingent of the Venceremos Brigade in 1969 and returned with glowing reports. They spent eight weeks in Cuba, cutting cane, and learning about the construction of socialism in Cuba and worldwide liberation struggles.

By the time they returned, it was too late to join the second brigade, so I signed up for the third. Despite my friends' reports,

I was skeptical that Cuban socialism could or would do much of significance in undermining racism, but I was excited to go and see for myself.



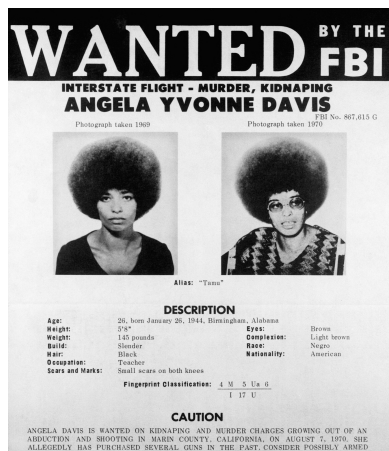
I worked in construction during my second visit to Cuba in 1971 while I attended seminars on the Latin American movements.

This meant I would miss the Fall quarter of college in 1970. In fact, I ended up dropping out altogether. I was 19 years old.

By the third brigade, the Bay Area regional committee of the organization had been transformed into a predominantly people of color-led group and the rest of the national organization was trying to do the same. In fact, things went overboard in trying to correct racial imbalances. Any person of color who volunteered was accepted to go on the third brigade, including a couple of dozen unreconstructed gang members and many people who were only vaguely political.

Simultaneously, the explicit policy was that experienced white activists were only begrudgingly accepted, opting instead for inexperienced ones. The result was what I called the “lumpen-hippie brigade.”

I almost didn’t go, not because of the brigade’s composition, but because Black Panther leader Huey Newton was freed from prison barely a month before we were to leave the country. Many of us hoped Huey’s leadership might rapidly raise the movement level and were concerned we might miss the critical early phase of that. But I decided to go on to Cuba anyway.



It also turned out that, just before we departed for Cuba, Angela Davis went underground when the authorities trumped-up charges against her. On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson, the younger brother of the famous political prisoner, George Jackson, initiated a shootout in a failed attempt to free his

brother and other political prisoners.

Angela was charged with smuggling weapons into Jonathan while in prison by hiding them in her hair!

This came down on the Brigade and me indirectly because Angela's sister, Fania, and Fania's husband, Sam, were going on the third brigade as well. Consequently, the FBI was all over us, using the excuse of hunting for Angela.

At the time, it was illegal to use a U.S. passport to visit Cuba, so the Brigades' route to Cuba was busing to Nova Scotia (east coast of Canada) and boarding a Cuban ship to Havana. The FBI harassed the Bay Area delegation at every stop along the way, a three-day journey.

They photographed each of us as we deboarded for meals and bathroom breaks, interrogated us, and repeatedly boarded our bus supposedly looking for clues to find Angela. We feared they would plant drugs on the bus and arrest all of us.

Luckily we had some great leaders who helped keep us cool and in solidarity despite the ongoing FBI provocations. We made it to Nova Scotia, where we boarded an ancient Cuban shipping vessel and a week later arrived in Havana!

We spent four weeks working in the citrus tree fields of the Isla de Juventud (Island of Youth) and then two weeks touring Cuba. I

was stunned to learn that the island, formerly known as the Isla de Pinos (Island of Pines), had been the site of the relocation of Japanese-origin Cubans during WWII. The twenty or so Asians on the Brigade were allowed to meet with a small Japanese rural community on the island.



Fidel Castro orates to millions in Havana.

We were housed in dormitories packed with bunk beds and ate in a cafeteria located in a fabulous grapefruit grove.

The four hundred or so of us were divided into work brigades of about twenty each. Our job was to plant new citrus trees and fertilize the existing ones. We were trucked to and from our work assignments each day, where we also took snacks and lunch. My work brigade was blessed with excellent leaders who set an example of hard work and solidarity.

We also had some beautiful singers who led us in song and kept our morale high. I will especially never forget the beautiful singing each day on the truck as we returned from a hard day's

work. We were a high-performing group.

We worked in pairs. Egregiously I cannot remember the name of my partner. She was a terrific white woman from Buffalo who was active in the socialist feminist movement, probably in her mid to late twenties. We were excited to contribute to the Cuban Revolution, were hard workers, and had great rapport.



I was on the Third Brigade to Cuba in 1970. We planted and fertilized citrus trees on the Isle of Youth.

At some point, she came out of the closet as a lesbian for the first time in her life. I had the great luck to be able to talk to her about this and learned a lot. She was the first openly gay person I ever really knew. It was helpful to have her to talk with when some of the other gay people on the Brigade starting protesting Cuba's anti-gay policies, some insultingly wearing only the Cuban flag.



Each night after dinner, there would be speakers, films, or cultural events from around Cuba and around the world. We met revolutionaries from Chile, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, South Africa, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and many other countries. We learned about colonialism, neo-colonialism, and revolutionary movements in their countries.



African revolutionaries made political and cultural presentations to the Brigadistas.

And we learned how the Cubans were transforming every aspect of their lives—from health and education to the economy and criminal justice—along socialist lines.

On Saturday nights, and often Friday nights as well, a party would follow the program. We had a great Cuban band assigned to us and others would also come in to play. And wow, would the guachipupa—rum punch—flow. We were young, dumb and full of ..., and after a hard week's work, would really cut loose.

More than thirty fights broke out amongst us, often guachipupa fueled and often over women. Gang members figured large in these fights, as we had numerous members from Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

After our four-week work stint on the Isla de Juventud, we commenced a two-week tour of Cuba, visiting many of the principal cities, factories, schools, health clinics, museums, cultural events, and fields.



We were greeted as heroes by thousands of Cubans who drew a stark distinction between the U.S. government which had invaded them and tried to kill Fidel dozens of times, and the U.S. people, who they saw as friends or potential friends.

Support for the Revolution throughout Cuba was still very high, and the revolutionary fervor of younger people was intoxicating.

I was only 19 years old but could not have been more impressed. The visit convinced me that people could create a very different way of life than that dominated by capitalism and organize their lives based on humanistic values and morality rather than profit.

I believed that Cuba, though far from perfect, was making determined inroads into vanquishing racism that were not happening in the U.S. despite the Civil Rights movement. I had previously visited Brazil, so I felt that I could distinguish between cultural differences and the differences created by socialism.

I returned home determined to delve deeply into socialism as a real alternative to capitalism, as the positive thing that I would fight to build.

WORKING FOR THE VENCEREMOS BRIGADE

Having quit college, once home, I was free to immerse myself in the new beehive of revolutionary activity buzzing in San

Francisco Chinatown, centered on the International Hotel on Kearny Street. I participated in Asian Community Center, the Garment Workers Cooperative, Everybody's Bookstore, and the International Hotel. I learned a lot and honed my ping-pong and three-cushion billiards chops to boot.



Fellow Brigade organizers and lifelong friends: front row, l-r: Esperanza Tervalon Daumont (child), Miriam Ching Louie, Linda Burnham. back row: Bob Wing, Melanie Tervalon, Cheryl Perry, Rebecca Carrillo, Belvin Louie.

At the same time, the Venceremos Brigade Bay Area regional committee asked for at least one Asian who had visited Cuba to join and help organize the Fourth Brigade to go to the island. Somehow I was the one “elected” by the other Asian brigadistas.

I wasn't all that enthused about lightening my work in Chinatown, but that changed rapidly. In my first meeting, I met

Harry Chang, who became the most important intellectual mentor of my life. (See my essay, “Harry Chang: A Seminal Theorist of Racial Justice.”) And the committee as a whole was filled with powerful, thoughtful, and simpatico people—mostly of color—with a dynamic leadership team of Betty Broussard, George Singh, and Giuliana Milanese.

Before long, I decided to make the Brigade my main political work.

From 1968 till at least 1975, the Brigade and Cuba played an enormous role in transforming and consolidating revolutionary-minded young people, especially of color, like myself, into lifelong antiracists, socialists, and internationalists. There was much overlap of personnel between the Venceremos Brigade regional committee, the Third World Women’s Alliance, and the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP) in the Bay Area.

It was in this milieu I met the vast majority of people who have become my lifelong comrades and dearest friends. Between doing political work, studying, learning about life, living together, and partying we developed an almost magical unity and love that has been tested and solidified through the years.

I had found a groove that would last a lifetime.

26. SF Chinatown Organizing in the early 1970s



I fought the August 4, 1977 eviction at the International Hotel. It was a harsh conflict pitting Filipino tenants, the Asian American left, and our allies against the city's biggest corporate landlord, Walter Shorenstein, and the police who did his bidding.

When I returned from my first trip to Cuba in the Winter of 1970, I had already decided to drop out of school to become a professional revolutionary. I planned to try my hand at

organizing in San Francisco Chinatown.

There was a rush by dozens of others from Berkeley, San Francisco State, and by Chinatown progressives to do the same. And Asian American Studies at Berkeley was supplying significant funding for radical organizing in several Asian American communities in the Bay Area.



The International Hotel in the 1970s was the epicenter of radical organizing in San Francisco Chinatown and Manilatown.

At the time, San Francisco and most other U.S. Chinatowns were under the political and economic control of U.S.-based partisans of the Kuomintang, the pro-U.S. rightwing political party defeated by the Chinese Communists but which still controlled Taiwan. Their main Chinatown instrument was the Six Companies, also known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.

Their dominance of Chinatown had never been challenged and their alliance with U.S. authorities was longstanding. They were a powerful and dangerous foe of the new activists.

The epicenter of radical organizing in San Francisco Chinatown was the International Hotel, a three-story, red-brick structure located on Kearny Street between Washington and Jackson Streets. The Hotel was a single-room occupancy building filled by elderly single Filipino men (Manongs) for decades. It was all that remained of the once thriving ten-block Manilatown that financial district encroachment had decimated.

The Hotel owner was billionaire Walter Shorenstein who owned 25% of the commercial office space in San Francisco. He planned to evict all of the Manongs and erect a massive new financial building that would decimate Manilatown and constitute a major step in the gentrification of Chinatown as well.

In the meantime, Shorenstein refused even basic maintenance to the Hotel, hoping the horrible conditions would drive the tenants out.

Led by Filipino activists, dozens of young radicals volunteered to maintain the building and help the elderly tenants thrive and continue defying the owner's eviction attempts.

At the same time, we set up numerous social justice organizations in the massive basements of the I-Hotel. These included the Asian Community Center, Leeways, the Kearny Street Workshop, and Chinatown-Manilatown Draft Counseling. The Kearny street organizations were the home base for numerous other radical organizing projects such as a cooperative garment factory, Everybody's Bookstore, and tenant and worker organizing.



I volunteered at Everybody's Bookstore when it opened in 1970. It carried books from the People's Republic of China as well as radical U.S. literature.

I journeyed to Chinatown every day for months, often on the almost hourly shuttle organized by Berkeley Asian American Studies. My main work was with the Asian Community Center which held community meetings around various issues and showed movies about revolutionary China every week. They also started Everybody's Bookstore, where I volunteered.

The Center's leadership included several former roommates of mine from Berkeley. Many members were the sons and daughters of Chinatown families that formed a pro-China cultural group called the Munching in the 1950s. A fun sideline for me was that the Center became the site of constant, high-level ping-pong.

My other main work was at the International Hotel itself. I mainly helped out with maintenance. Former Berkeley Filipino students I met in the Third World Strike were the principal leaders of this project.



Kalayaan was a voice and organizing tool for radical Filipinos.

Many of these folks helped form Kalayaan, a Filipino Marxist collective that later transformed itself into the KDP, the Union of Democratic Filipinos. The KDP became a major national force in opposing martial law in the Philippines and antiracist organizing of Filipinos. By the late 1970s, KDP leaders were instrumental in forming the Marxist group that I joined, the Line of March.

I also participated in the garment workers' coop. The coop meant to provide an alternative to exploitative labor in Chinatown garment factories. It was initiated by a U.C. Asian American studies community class spearheaded by members of the Asian Community Center.

I spent considerable time in Leeways, a center for Chinatown youth initially led by the Red Guard Party, a Chinatown group modeled after the Black Panther Party. The Red Guard eventually merged with I Wor Kuen. A plus for me at Leeways was that almost everyone was young and spoke English. At Leeways, I learned how to play three-cushion billiards.



The SF Chinatown-based Red Guard Party modeled itself after the Black Panther Party.

27. Harry Chang, My Intellectual Mentor



Harry Chang, late 1960s.

I first met Harry Chang at a Venceremos Brigade meeting in Oakland at the very end of 1970. In that meeting, he took on the project of writing a pamphlet on U.S. racism to be used in preparing people to live and work together in Cuba.

I was a youthfully arrogant nineteen-year-old who felt he knew a lot about the subject without ever having studied it. So I volunteered to work with Harry, largely, I thought, to make sure this unknown Korean immigrant who had just moved to the Bay Area from Seattle didn't screw it up.



Harry and me, August 1974.

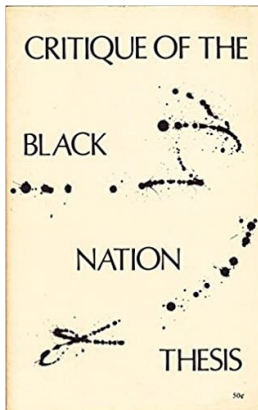
It turns out that Harry was in the process of making a series of theoretical breakthroughs in understanding race and racism. His new findings transformed the intellectual lives of myself, hundreds of other young revolutionaries, and numerous political organizations.

He laid the foundations for what later became two of the most important theoretical approaches to racism: racial formation theory and critical race theory. (See my essay, "Harry Chang: A

Seminal Theorist of Racial Justice,” published in Monthly Review, January 2007.)

It is surprising that a Korean immigrant would make such a creative contribution to understanding U.S. race relations.

Born Chang Heh-Ik in 1937 to Protestant seminarian educators in South Korea, Harry immigrated to the United States to attend UCLA in 1955, the year of the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott. Somehow over the next decade, this fledgling



The Critique of the Black Nation Thesis (1975) was the only piece that Harry published during his lifetime.

international student, like many others in the United States during that fateful period, got radicalized.

Although he trained as a mathematician, Harry became a brilliant Marxist educator and a genuinely original applied

philosopher. His focus and forte was dialectics: he dedicated himself to learning, teaching, and most of all employing the Marxist analytical method, especially to U.S. racism.

He led a three year study project on racism and numerous study groups on Marx's Capital in the 1970s. His voluminous Study Notes on Marx's Capital are absolutely incredible.



Harry with Ric Ricard, August 1974

Harry wrote every day, mostly for self-clarification, and always in pencil, triple-spaced on lined paper. Only two of his numerous essays have been published: the Critique of the Black Nation Thesis (Racism Research Project, 1975) and Toward a Marxist Theory of Racism in Review of Radical Political Economics (published posthumously on Sept. 1, 1985).

From 1971 to 1975, I spent at least a couple of days a week with Harry, except for the time he spent at Antioch College. We

discussed everything under the sun. I rummaged through his handwritten notes strewn about the living room, read drafts of ongoing projects, and typed some of them up for circulation. And I organized the numerous study groups he led in the Bay Area in those years, centering on Marx's Capital or race and racism.

We also worked closely in the Northern California regional committee of the Venceremos Brigade and what became known as the Racism Research Project.

This work transformed me from a non-reader, non-learner, and small thinker into an avid student and voracious reader of Marx and Marxism, history, sociology, political economy, philosophy and literature, as well as politics. Harry even taught me to love Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, and Bach!

His study groups on Marx's Capital and U.S. racism became centerpieces of building unity among people from numerous Bay Area movement organizations and aligning their politics and strategies, especially about the struggle against racism, socialism, and Marxism. He emphasized learning the theoretical and research methodology of Marxism, not just its conclusions, enabling us to analyze the concrete conditions we faced here and now independently.

He never sought to be a political leader himself, but he had a tremendous impact, especially in the Bay Area.

Harry died prematurely from a brain tumor in 1979.

By the late seventies, I had an unfortunate rift with Harry, primarily personal. But Harry had thoroughly transformed me, internally and externally, and most of whatever theoretical acuity I developed was due to the foundation he laid.

28. Back to College and Asian American Studies



Fiftieth anniversary of the Asian American Political Alliance, the first Asian American organization in the U.S., founded in 1968.

From 1971 to 1974, one of my projects was working with Harry Chang and eight other people to develop a theory of racism. We called ourselves the Racism Research Project when we published a “Critique of the Black Nation Thesis” in 1973, and we

researched the origins of racism in the United States.

In the Fall of 1973, I decided to return to U.C. Berkeley to deepen that historical research. My senior thesis, completed in 1975, brought two years of work together and was titled “On the Origins of Racism: The Plantation System, the Development of Slavery and the Production of Racial Categories in Seventeenth-Century Virginia.”

I did one year of graduate work in history at Berkeley before it became clear that I was not suited for an academic life.

From 1975-77, I taught in Asian American and Ethnic Studies, organized Asian American students, and participated in Asian community organizing projects. My favorite class was Asian American Studies 145, devoted to teaching Marxism. We formed a left caucus of like-minded folks to improve the teaching, community organizing, and student organizing centered in Asian American Studies.

Asian American Studies was incredibly radical. It produced groundbreaking studies, broadly Marxist, politicized thousands of students, was a virtual revolutionary cadre factory both on campus and in the Bay Area Asian communities, and was democratically run by students and faculty together. Many classes were team-taught, and we placed student organizers in every class.

Rather than being run by the university administration or the tenured faculty alone, each class, community project, and departmental committee (e.g., budget) elected a representative to the steering committee, which, in turn, elected the chairperson. In 1976, the steering committee chose me as chair.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to us, the new Chancellor of U.C. Berkeley secretly met with the four tenure-track faculty of Asian American Studies and threatened to close down the department unless the faculty took it over and remodeled it as a traditional academic department.

In return, he offered tenure to all faculty members in Ethnic Studies, which at the time had only had one tenured faculty person.

The Asian American studies faculty, with one dissenter, took the deal. Two days after school ended for the summer of 1977, they posted a notice shockingly firing about forty people effective immediately, including all the student and community organizers, and seizing all power for themselves.

True to his promise, the Chancellor helped every Ethnic Studies tenure track faculty member (about 15 in all) to get tenure in 1978.

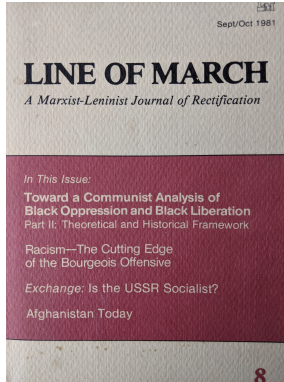
29. What was Line of March?



The last Line of March “exec,” left to right: Arnolito Garcia, Cathi Tactacquin, Max Elbaum, Linda Burnham, Bob Wing, Miriam Louie. Irwin Silber was also a member.

My longest and deepest organizational commitment was to the Line of March (LOM), a nationwide Marxist organization that I

helped to lead. LOM began as a life dream project in 1977, but ended with its fatal shortcomings exposed by 1989.



Line of March published a theoretical journal, a newspaper, an internal bulletin as well as newsletters aimed at different sectors of the movement.

I learned most of what I know about politics and organization in Line of March and cemented my commitment to fight for peace and racial justice for life while in the organization. I formed or deepened my most important lifelong comradeships and friendships there as well.

WHY DID I JOIN?

I helped form and lead Line of March because I deeply admired the communists at the forefront of the successful world revolutionary movement as well as the Line of March leaders. The Vietnamese, led by their Communist Party, defeated the

supposedly invincible U.S., and revolutionaries, mostly Marxist-led, seized power in Cambodia, Tanzania, Ghana, India, Egypt, Laos, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau, Syria, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Iraq, Chile, and Portugal. Powerful liberation movements were underway in South Africa, Uruguay, El Salvador, Indonesia, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

The socialist countries, especially the USSR and China, had grown immensely powerful and gave crucial aid to these movements. By 1979, about two-thirds of the world's people lived under governments that described themselves as socialist.

Revolutionary movements were also reaching a pitch in the Western Europe and the U.S. In our country, the powerful civil rights movement won historic victories and morphed into the Black Power movement led by the Black Panther Party. These inspired the Chicano, Native American, Puerto Rican, Asian, women's, student, and gay liberation movements. And after 1968, many in these movements came to believe that a revolution, not just reforms, were necessary to win peace and social justice in the U.S.

We had all faced the iron fist of the state trying to crush us and many turned to Marxism to help guide our efforts as it had in so many other countries.

I was one of them, and so were the people who had become my most trusted comrades and friends. We formed and led many organizations: the Union of Democratic Filipinos, the Third World Women's Alliance, the National Committee to Overturn the Bakke Decision, the Northern California Alliance, several chapters of the Venceremos Brigade, and we were closely allied with CASA (Centro de Accion Social Autonomo), COMEXAS, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, some of the Women's Unions and others.

Most of the leaders of these groups studied together and thereby deepened our understanding and our unity.

For years, we hoped that others would form a Marxist party that we felt we could join, but one after the other they fell into deep sectarianism and bad politics. Finally, in 1977, we decided to try to build our own. That became the Line of March.

MAIN STRENGTHS

For all of Line of March's shortcomings, here are some of the things that I was proudest of:

1. We conducted a deep and acute theoretical/political analysis of the main problems of U.S. society and the international situation. We organized nationwide study projects of leading people, including many outside of Line of March, on the history and

state of socialism, racism and nationality oppression, the divisions in the U.S. working class, women's oppression, gay liberation, and the international situation. These study projects lasted for years and concluded with the publication of findings in our journal, *Line of March*.



2. We centered the struggle against racism, U.S. imperialism, and racist neo-fascism, not just in rhetoric but in our operative political strategy. We called that strategy the United Front Against War and Racism, much of which is still valid today.
3. We were one of the only Leninist groups that openly and unabashedly supported gay rights and welcomed gay and lesbians into the organization. At one point, the majority of our chapter chairpersons were lesbians, and two of our three original national chairpersons were gay/lesbian.
4. The majority of our leaders were people of color and women.

5. We played particularly useful roles in the mass struggles against racism and war, especially in 1980s fights to defend affirmative action, the Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns, opposition to martial law in the Philippines, and opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America.

6. Our theoretical journal and newspaper, Frontline, were terrific.

MAIN WEAKNESSES

Although most of the U.S. Marxist groups of the seventies and eighties made important contributions to the struggle, just about every sector of U.S. Marxists developed a small-minded habit of denouncing each other and competing for recruits rather than learning how to navigate the complicated struggle against the world's most powerful ruling class and a profoundly racist white population.

We failed to see that most of us, with the possible exception of the most dogmatic, had much more in common than differences. We should have found ways to build much larger organizations and movements opposed to U.S. imperialism, racism, sexism, and class exploitation rather than splitting into irreconcilable mini-camps.

Internally, we centralized too much power in the national leadership and built a bloated national staff to carry out the leadership's plans. We were inattentive to the particularity of each chapter's political situation. Within the national leadership, we practiced collective leadership for many years but the chairperson ultimately gained far too much power, just when he was suffering from drug addiction.

We demanded far too much of our members and often obnoxiously intervened in their personal lives. On the other hand, we had the insight to institutionalize a child care system for our members' children.

In historical terms, we were part of the breakdown of the international communist movement and socialism of the 1960s-80s. The split between China and the USSR, lack of democracy, economic stagnation, and eventual degeneration or demise of most the socialist countries in the late 1980s and 1990s tore us apart as well.

WHAT DID I DO AND LEARN IN LINE OF MARCH?

I learned the foundations of what I know about politics, strategy, campaigning, and organization in the Line of March. I was in the national executive leadership team from 1978-1984 and again from 1987 until we terminated the organization in 1989. I was a member of the National Committee for the entire time. In the

“exec,” as we called it, I learned how to:

*launch and build organizations: e.g., the Line of March, the National Committee to Overturn the Bakke Decision, the National Coalition to Overturn the Weber Decision, the National Anti-Racist Organizing Committee, the National Anti-Klan Network, and many others.

*create, implement and summarize strategic plans, political lines, and national campaigns

*lead chapters and national teams

*create national research projects and conferences

*create a national political education school, systematic forums, an internal bulletin to summarize experience and other training institutions.

*build relationships with other organizations inside and outside of the U.S.

*create and lead small arms training and security

*conceptualize, launch, and implement a theoretical journal

*build collectives and personal relationships with diverse individuals

*deal with criticism and be self-critical in order to learn from my mistakes and accomplishments

*write

*terminate organizations when they no longer served a purpose.

Here were some of the positions I held, in addition to member of the national executive committee and national committee.

- *Chair of the Anti-Racist Commission in charge of leading all of the organization's anti-racist work

- *Chair of the Marxist Leninist Education Project, our national political education school that also published some of our curricula. I wrote the main parts on racism, the state and revolution, political economy, leftwing communism, the united front against war and racism.

- *Chair of the National Anti-Racist Organizing Committee, a national mass organization led by Line of March

- *Chair of the Theoretical Commission that led our national theoretical work

- *Member of the editorial board of the Line of March journal. I also wrote or co-wrote major journal essays on Black liberation, critique of Althusserian Marxism, the labor aristocracy, peace and nuclear disarmament, Palestine, critique of China's foreign policy (the Three Worlds Theory), Mexican/Chicano liberation.

- *Co-chair of the National Study Group on Racism and National Oppression

- *Head of all east coast, southern, and midwest Line of March chapters, based in New York City

*Responsible for relationships with Mexican left organizations

CONCLUSION

I am proud that, at the end, the Line of March conducted a collective and thorough two-year summation of its work, the only Marxist group to do so. That process lasted two years and was called Reexamination, Redirection, and Democratization. We delved into our politics, organization, mass work, and leadership, enabling everyone who participated to come to their own conclusions. Although there was serious criticism of the top leadership, no one questioned the leaders' integrity. This was what allowed for the process to go deep yet not lead to ugly recrimination or big splits.

For all of its shortcomings, Line of March was also a tremendous learning experience that led to deep, lifelong knowledge, skills, and friendships.

30. The FBI, the Murders of Gene and Silme, and Me



Josina had this shirt made for me on my 60th birthday.

I had a brutal relationship with the police and the National Guard for many years, as I have described elsewhere, starting in 1968.

The FBI was probably present during Third World Strike and other student struggles that I participated in. In 1970 it became an unmistakable, ongoing part of my life for years. This was in the midst of the illegal and intense years of COINTELPRO, the U.S. government's attempt to disrupt the Black and other radical movements of the sixties, including murder.

VENCEREMOS BRIGADE AND CUBA: A "HUMAN MISSILE"

The FBI first trounced into my personal life in 1970 as I traveled with other members of the Venceremos Brigade from Oakland by bus to catch a freighter to Cuba from St. John, New Brunswick in Canada. Angela Davis had just gone underground to evade trumped up charges of conspiracy to commit murder, and her sister Fania and then brother-in-law Sam were going to Cuba with me and the other brigadistas.

The FBI thus saw fit to photograph and harass us on every stop along this transcontinental journey, literally until we boarded the Cuban freighter in St. John to Havana.

Angela was captured about six weeks later while we were aboard a Cuban ship returning to St. John. Fania immediately joined a packed international press conference to announce the founding of the Committee to Free Angela and All Political Prisoners.

The U.S. border patrol and FBI put us through the wringer when we tried to reenter the U.S. from Canada. Everyone's suitcases and backpacks were tossed, literally, and searched. They sliced up our sleeping bags and clothing, searching for hidden political materials or drugs, and as straight up intimidation.

They confiscated thousands of documents, books, pamphlets, photographs, and other items. But I believe everyone eventually made it through.

An upside to this official attention was that I was never drafted into the armed forces and was not asked to serve in Vietnam. The government labeled those of us who visited Cuba as "human missiles" (referring to the Cuban missile crisis) and barred us from the army, which by then was suffering tremendous internal conflict as opposition to the War in their ranks became massive.

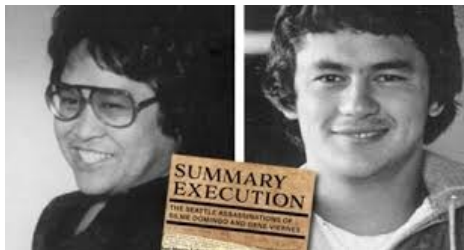
When I joined the Bay Area regional committee of the Venceremos Brigade, the FBI redoubled its interest in me.

By 1971, the FBI assigned agent Fred Fiedler to keep tabs on me. Every three to six months, "someone" would break into my house—without so much as cracking a window or busting a lock—take my documents and photographs but leave my stereo, television, and everything else alone. Once we even caught Fred on our roof.

For several years Fiedler interviewed my parents, neighbors, roommates, postal carriers, employers, and co-workers. He routinely visited the places I lived, but by pure coincidence, I was never home. He always left his card in a vain hope that I would contact him. I remember my Mom once told me that Dad had temporarily had his military contractor security clearance pulled because of me.

I can't remember when Fiedler disappeared from my life, but somewhere in the 1990s, the FBI's interest in me waned.

THE ASSASSINATION OF SILME DOMINGO AND GENE VIERNES



In 1981, my dear friends Silme Domingo (left) and Gene Viernes were assassinated at the order of U.S.-backed dictator Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines.

My most traumatizing experience was the murders of my dear friends Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, and the subsequent grueling but ultimately successful attempt to convict their murderers, including Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos.

Silme and Gene Viernes were long-time friends and comrades of mine from the Asian American movement, the Union of Democratic Filipinos, and Line of March. Both had fathers who toiled in the highly exploitative Alaskan fish canneries for decades, and they joined their fathers in this seasonal work once they became teenagers.

The cannery workers were represented by a corrupt union, Local 37 of the ILWU, that required pay offs to get dispatched to work and collaborated with Tulisan gangsters in running gambling operations that fleeced the workers in their Alaska dormitories.

Once Gene and Silme became political activists, one of their first projects was to launch a reform movement in the union. After years of law suits and organizing, their reform slate swept to victory in a union election in 1981.

On June 1, 1981, they were assassinated in the union office by two members of the Tulisan gang who were subsequently convicted of murder. However, the Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes, a mass community/union organization, was instrumental in convicting the Tulisan gang leader and the former head of the union of organizing the assassinations and paying off the trigger men.

The Committee also discovered that the U.S.-backed dictator President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines was the ultimate

ringleader of the assassinations. In 1989 a federal jury agreed and found Marcos guilty of both murders and ordered him to pay restitution to the families. Convicting a U.S.-backed dictator in a U.S. court is unprecedented.

The Committee suspected but was unable to prove in court that the U.S. government gave Marcos the green light for the murders. (For a powerful account of the murders and trials, see Michael Withey's excellent book, "Summary Execution.")

"MILITARY INTELLIGENCE"



Military intelligence is a contradiction in terms.

On a much lighter note, in about 1985, I received a phone call from military intelligence. I thought, OK, here we go, as usual. But instead of questioning me about my political activities, the caller said that my backyard neighbor had listed me as a reference for a job that required a minor security clearance!

I barely knew this neighbor and had no idea of his politics, and he never told me that he had listed me as a reference for a military job.

Still, I thought I'd give it a go. I told the caller to go ahead with his questions. Among other things, he asked me if my neighbor had "questionable associations." I asked what that meant, and he said "foreigners" or other "suspicious people."

The incident showed that the different intelligence agencies did not share information. I have also thought that my having a nickname "Bob" and never using my legal name "Loren" may have crossed up the authorities.

IRAQ WAR AND THE NO FLY LIST



I returned to the attention of the FBI in the wake of Sept. 11 attacks and during the anti-war in Iraq movement in the early 2000s. I had helped start the bilingual antiwar newspaper "War Times/Tiempo de Guerras" and was elected national co-chair of United for Peace and Justice, the country's largest antiwar in Iraq coalition.

I was one of the four people arrested in the first antiwar civil disobedience action at the national capitol. The FBI placed several of my War Times co-workers and myself on the “No Fly” list. We were not banned from flying, but anytime we showed up at an airport, we were subjected to heightened security.

FBI and police attacks, surveillance, harassment, and even assassination were an integral part of every activists’ life in the 1960s and 1970s. The Iron Fist of the ruling class was in our faces or lurking at all times. Although methods are more sophisticated and technical now and therefore harder to detect, I assume surveillance is still widespread.

Interestingly even Trump did not deploy the Iron Fist against the movement or its leaders to any significant degree. But the more successful we are, the more likely force will be brought to bear against us.

My primary approach is to be as public as possible, as that is our best defense. If we unnecessarily or prematurely go underground, constantly spread rumors about who is an agent, or curtail our activities to avoid attention, they have already achieved their goal of dividing us and disrupting our work. Put people you suspect of being agents and informers to work for the movement to test their commitment and make them contribute to the work, whatever their motives.

31. Just One Look is All it Took



Josina Machel Wing Morita, born Oct. 16, 1980

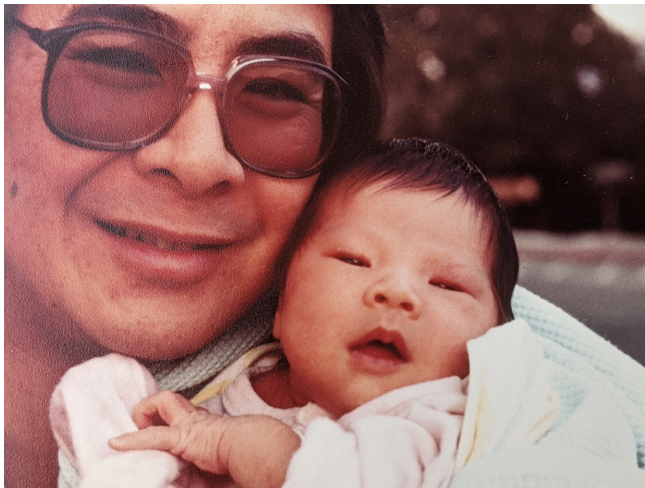
At first sight, Josina locked her eyes on mine, and that was it: a magical feeling of unimaginable love and absolute commitment.

This feeling was unexpected.

The pregnancy was unplanned, and I was on an exhilarating political mission working 16 hours a day and in no way wanting to be a parent at that time. Barbara Morita and I confirmed the pregnancy on the very day I was to leave for New York on a one-year assignment that I was really excited about.

I was and am a strong supporter of a woman's right to choose whether to try to give birth, and Barbara wanted the baby. So that was settled.

But it is one thing to theoretically support a woman's right to choose, quite another to have another human being unilaterally make a decision that will profoundly affect you every moment of the rest of your life. I was deeply conflicted, fearful, and, though I tried to deny and conceal it, angry about Barbara's decision.



It didn't help that I was already doubtful about the future of my relationship with Barbara. We decided I should go ahead and move to New York. Our relationship deteriorated despite considerable commuting across the country. Though I did my best and we didn't have any blow-ups, those months were not among my proudest.

I had bought a ticket to return to the Bay Area three weeks before the due date. But Josina decided to come four weeks early. I was in a meeting in my living room in Fort Greene (Brooklyn) when I got the call from Barbara at about 10:30 AM Eastern on Oct. 16, 1980, and she told me her bag of water had broken.

I hopped the first plane to the Bay, but I missed the birth.

Turns out I was not the only one. Although Barbara was a physician assistant, she disbelieved the signs of labor, thinking it was much too soon. She nearly gave birth on the Bay Bridge as she rushed to San Francisco General Hospital and delivered shortly after arrival. A swift 5-1/2 hour labor.

My Mom was still on the freeway from Loomis to the hospital when Josina was born. Dad was at work. Gloria, Barbara's mother, was at the airport awaiting Barbara's sister's arrival, June, from Seattle.

The only family member to attend the birth was Nancy, Barbara's younger sister. Happily, both the delivering doctor, Vicki Alexander, and nurse Susan were close friends of ours.



Dad with my punk hair baby.

I finally arrived about 3-1/2 hours after Josina was born.

Josina locked eyes on me, and magically all my ambivalence vanished. Love at first sight. It is amazing and humbling that the best decision I ever made was not made by me.

Thank you, Barbara. Thank you, Josina.



Josina's first birthday: She was part of a big cohort of babies!

32. The First Day of the Rest of My Life as a Single Dad



Josina's Mom, Barbara Morita, and I broke up when Josina was just nine months old.

It turns out I hadn't thought through what it would mean to be a single father, even if half-time. I mean, really, to be on my own with a baby.

Luckily, I found a roommate, Tom Angotti, an experienced and loving parent who was happy to help me out. Tom was indispensable to me for the first three years of my single fatherhood.



At my folks' house in Loomis, Calif.

Barbara dropped Josina off at my new place for my first solo sometime in the afternoon when Tom was out.

As soon as Barbara left, I finally realized that I was on my own, and it hit me like a ton of bricks.

I set Josina's stuff down and lay down on my bed with her on my chest. And I cried like a baby. What had I got myself into? I finally settled down and vowed to Josina and to myself: "It's you and me for life—no ifs ands or buts, no excuses. Period."

This was the first day of the rest of my life as a single Dad.

To seal this decision, I decided never to ask Barbara to take Josina during the Sundays to Wednesdays each week that she was to be under my care. If I started doing so, I feared there would be no end to the requests. One day, likely soon, I would look up and find myself not holding up my end.

Don't get me wrong. This was one of the busiest periods of my hectic life, and I got a lot of help from many people. And even when I sought help, I took full responsibility for Josina and did not slough it off on Barbara.

I always felt this was one of the most important and best decisions of my life.

33. Raising My Sweetheart Baby



Before you were born, I thought hard about how I should try to parent. I admired my parents' approach: raise your kids to be independent and then support them. They managed to do that despite all the curve balls the four of us children threw at them, especially political curveballs.



We had a super fun bathing ritual.

The problem for me was that I had way more strongly held opinions about the world than my parents did, so taking their approach didn't seem possible.

I worried that if I had a massive list of things I wanted for you, it would be stifling for you and nerve-wracking for me. So I reduced my goals down to two:

1. That you would be as personally happy as possible.



Age 8 or so, ca. 2008.

2. That the world would be somewhat better for you having been here than if you had not.

And it pretty much worked for me. I didn't obsess over the many other things that I thought were important. I hope I didn't micro-manage you. And you have way overachieved both goals. I'm a happy camper.



Josina first learned to love water during her first visit to Disneyland in 2004.

34. 'There's No Place that I Would Rather Be' -- Camp Tuolumne



Josina and I went to the City of Berkeley's Tuolumne Camp every year. We marveled at the stars many nights lying on this flat boulder.

The City of Berkeley's Tuolumne Camp is located off Highway 120 on the Tuolumne River near Groveland, Calif., spectacular country about forty minutes from Yosemite Valley. The Camp was the highlight of our summers for more than ten years.



The Camp was well supervised and had endless things for kids of all ages to do without parental oversight: swim in the river, arts and crafts, hiking, volleyball, ping-pong, storytelling, campfire singing and skits, etc. Literally within an hour or two of our first visit, Josina and her cousin Teri (who always accompanied us) had the run of the camp on their own.

If they needed me, they knew I would be at my “office”: a beach chair at the river. Oh, and the staff cooked all food! Parental

nirvana.

Many families attended the Camp on the same week every year, and so did we. The kids made friends that lasted for a decade and together the families formed a safe village for the children. There was also staff continuity and many of them became



My niece, Teri (left) came to camp with us every year.

like big sisters to the kids. We made it a habit to stay in the same tent next to the river every year. It was uncanny how much growing up Josina and Teri would do during our one-week to ten-day stays each summer.



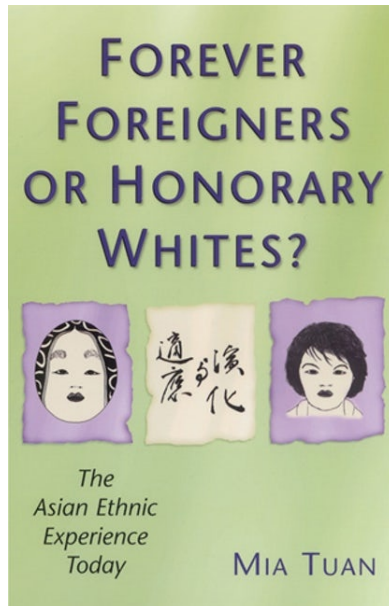
That's me swan diving into Rainbow Pool.

Each year we would make a day visit to Yosemite but the highlight of the week for me was our regular visits to Rainbow Falls, a 100-foot swimming hole carved into solid rock by a twenty-foot waterfall just a couple of miles from Camp.

We always brought an inflatable raft to float in and spent hours jumping and diving from the rocks above, some as high as fifty feet.

No stress, all fun. As the Camp song says, "There's no place that I would rather be...than at Tuolumne." Unforgettable.

35. An Honorary White Person



The racial reality of being Asian in America is odd: white people swing, often rapidly and for no apparent reason, from treating us as honorary white people to attacking us as dangerous permanent aliens.

For Asians, being an honorary white means being passively or actively accepted as belonging, often with exceptions like being barred from high positions or marriage. And it usually comes with being exoticized and stereotyped.

An honorary white person is not considered actually white and not exempt from some hostility but is allowed temporary or partial entry to the club, especially if one stays silent.

One of the weird things about being an honorary white person is that some white people will say things that ordinarily they would only share with other whites, like racist jokes.

Here are two personal examples.

I went out to play golf one day and got partnered with a white guy that I had played with once before. This guy apparently felt quite comfortable with me as he proceeded to tell me the worst racist joke I've ever heard. Here is the "joke":

"One day, Martin Luther King looked in the mirror and noticed that the upper half of his face had turned white.

"Alarmed, he went to the doctor to find out what was wrong. After many tests, the white doctor gave Dr. King a nasty smelling, brown concoction and said, 'Here, drink this. It will solve your problem.' Dr. King drank it, and the normal brown color was promptly restored to his face.

“He asked the doctor, ‘What was that stuff? It smelled like shit.’ The doctor said, ‘It was shit. You were a quart low.’”

I promptly told the guy: “I didn’t know you were a racist.” He was quiet for the rest of the day.

Here is the other incident.

I was rafting the South Fork of the American River with Josina, her friend Elsa, and my dear friend Linda Burnham. A young white couple joined us in the raft, along with a middle-aged white river guide.

The young man took the seat next to me in the front of the raft. After an hour on the river, we hit some turbulent water that briefly sent our raft into a spin. As we returned to calm water, the white guy whispered to me: “That was almost as confusing as Father’s Day in Harlem.” No one else heard the comment.

I was shocked and did not retort.

About 15 minutes later, a powerful rapid threw everyone overboard except me. It was a potentially dangerous situation: my baby and close friend were imperiled. But, by lucky chance, I was able to help the guide get back in the raft first, and he and I quickly proceeded to fish the others back aboard.

The last one in the water was the young white guy. He was floundering on my side of the boat, so it was my job to pull him out of rushing whitewater. I hesitated for a few moments, thinking that maybe this guy needed some punishment for his inexcusable joke. But, realizing he actually might be seriously injured, I dutifully boarded him.

Laughing at racist jokes or approving anti-Black put downs and policies is one of the costs of being an honorary white person. Asians are the “model minority”: not quite white but held up by whites as “proof” that people of color can be successful so long as they hew to the white standards, including racism.

36. A Permanent Alien



Massacre of Chinese in Rock Springs, Wyo., a mining and railroad center, 1885. My mother was born and raised in nearby Evanston, Wyo. whose Chinatown was destroyed before her parents migrated there.

The U.S. has a long history of excluding Asians from immigrating into the U.S., barring us from naturalization as citizens,

hyperexploiting Asian workers, and discriminating against Asians in all facets of U.S. life. My U.S. born grandmother was even stripped of her citizenship for marrying my grandfather who was foreign born and therefore, legally barred from citizenship.



Protesting in 2021.

As part of these anti-Asian campaigns, the racists argued that our very appearance branded us as permanent aliens, forever excluded from being “American.” The courts agreed and devised a unique legal category, “aliens ineligible to citizenship” to deprive Asians of immigration and citizenship rights. (See my essay “Crossing Race and Nationality: the Racial Formation of Asian Americans” published in Monthly Review and available at my website, www.bobwingracialjustice.org.)

Before Asian exclusion, Chinese were about one-fourth of the California population. But as late as 1965, there were only 1.2 million Asians in the U.S. Today we are more than 20 million.

Here are two personal experiences:

1.

In the fall of 1970 I returned from Cuba by ship, landing in Nova Scotia. I then took a bus to New York City and spent about a month getting to know a little about the City and traveling up the east coast to visit Asian American radical groups in New England.

A massive anti-Vietnam war march and rally was planned for New York and, of course, I joined in. I took a subway from the lower east side where I was staying with a friend to Central Park where the march and rally were to be held.

As I emerged from the subway I came across a Russian immigrant who spoke English with a thick accent. He noticed that I was carrying an antiwar sign and angrily shouted: "If you don't love this country, go back to where you came from!"

Well, my family has been in the United States since 1854 and he was clearly a recent immigrant, yet because he was white he could tell me to go back where I came from. I was a permanent alien. He, a patriotic all-American.

2.

It was the late 1990s and I was riding a shuttle bus from downtown Seattle to the Seattle-Tacoma airport, accompanied

by two colleagues. The three of us are pretty talky and we were carrying on for about twenty minutes when we were interrupted by this white guy sitting across from us.

First, the guy tried addressing me in Japanese. I didn't answer so he switched to his version of Korean. And then Chinese.



By now I was pretty annoyed so I told him, “Look dude, you’ve been listening to me speak perfect English for the last twenty minutes yet you insist that I must be spoken to in some Asian language, that I just cannot be an American or speak English. You must consider me some kind of permanent alien. If you actually have something to say to me, try English and quit making a fool out of yourself.”

He emitted a few uncomfortable laughs and fell silent for the rest of the ride.

* * * * *

Due the civil rights movement-inspired immigration reform of 1965, there are now 20 million Asian Americans. We are the fastest growing group in the U.S. Yet once again we find ourselves amidst growing anti-Asian hate crimes inspired by Donald Trump's constant refrain of the "Chinese virus" but more broadly by U.S. fears that China now challenges U.S. global economic supremacy.

So far the fightback by Asian Americans has been heartening. We are already a key part of the broad electoral alliance against the racist authoritarian Republicans.

37. Thirteen Years a Legal Secretary



In 1984 I was taken off the Line of March payroll and had to make a living in the real world.

I had been a paid revolutionary since 1978. This is not a work history that attracts employers. Since I had become an activist at age 17, I had never contemplated let alone trained for any occupation and I didn't have any training that might qualify me for any profession.

My one marketable skill was that I could type 120 words per minute. After an initial low-paying job, I spent 13 years as a legal secretary. Other than gathering a few dollars for my daughter's college education, a saving grace was that I mainly worked union jobs in firms that represented injured workers in the worker's compensation system.

I was half-paralegal, half-legal secretary, dispensing much advice and listening to thousands of workers' stories. I learned about what it was like to work in numerous occupations and the tragedies that befell people injured on the job.

I also spent several great years as the shop steward for Teamsters Local 856 in one of the law offices. I got to help dethrone the last of the corrupt Jimmy Hoffa Teamster leaders. Ben Leal was the local president, but he also held six other full-time Teamster jobs (and pensions), including International Vice President.

We pitched him out but ended up electing someone who said he was part of the Ron Carey-led Teamster reform movement but was just an incompetent opportunist. Still, big fun.

I also won numerous grievances against our arrogant employer, Stuart Boxer, the husband of former U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, including thousands in back pay for Latina undocumented workers that he hid from the union for years. The workers, primarily women of color, became very close in the process.

I left my other political work to evenings and weekends. I did, however, manage to write a family history book while on the job: "The Bowen/Wing Family: Six Generations in the United States."

38. Midlife Crisis



Rafting the South Fork of the American River with Linda Burnham and Josina, ca. 1995.

I understand midlife crisis to be a common malaise that may set in after a person has found what seemed like their life's work (career, family, etc.) in their twenties or thirties, but then start

seriously questioning it as they approach forty, causing greater or lesser degrees of disorientation. Mine was something like that, and turned out to be quite long.

Mine centered on being a revolutionary and communist, a path I took in my late teens and had given all my energy to for 23 years by the time I hit forty.

The year I turned forty (1991) was particularly crazy for me:

1. The socialist camp—the USSR, Eastern Europe, etc.— came completely unglued and their serious shortcomings, especially lack of democracy, became painfully apparent, causing me and mine to question the viability and desirability of socialism and the usefulness of Marxism. The Marxist group that I had spent so many years building came apart in 1989 as did almost all of the others in the U.S.
2. Many of the progressive or revolutionary governments in the developing world also collapsed and their grave weaknesses were exposed. Again this caused me and mine to re-assess the revolutionary processes in the developing world.
3. A decade of Reaganism made me feel the full impact of the defeat of the radical movements of the 1960s that had shaped my life. I also suffered from PTSD from those many years of intense struggle, and needed a break to recover.

4. I ended a six-year romantic relationship.

5. I began to feel more urgent about saving money for Josina's college education.

The main change I made during my midlife crisis years was to turn away from "big picture" politics and toward "immediate result" organizing. From 1989 I had become a leader in a national process of trying to understand where the U.S. left had gone wrong and to create a new type of Marxist or socialist organization.

I had also helped hold the first big public event using the term "New Majority" to indicate the demographic trends that were leading people of color toward becoming a majority of the population in California and elsewhere. I had helped to start a new magazine to further these efforts, CrossRoads.

But in late 1991 I dropped all of that work. I remained supportive but not active. I never questioned my critique of racism, capitalism and imperialism, but I no longer had a strong idea of what to replace capitalism with.

I turned away from "big picture" politics and focused my attention on work that people could benefit from directly, like being the union shop steward at work. I delivered meals to people with AIDS every Friday for five years. I helped build

Josina's sports leagues and teams.



Josina is on the far right, second row from top. I am second from the right in the top row. ca. 1989.

I also engaged some big fun activities like skydiving and whitewater rafting.

I tried to open myself to other ways of looking at the world, but nothing really took. I didn't notably change my dating habits. My friends remained the same.

I started back toward big picture politics in about 1995 when I noticed a new generation of young revolutionaries of color developing in the Bay Area and saw an opportunity to help them out by starting a study group process that lasted three years.

39. Skydiving



Skydiving was an exhilarating experience. It also led me to some important personal realizations. Lodi, ca. 1994.

One day my friend Joan Kerr called to tell me her niece was hot to go skydiving and that she and her brother had agreed to join her. She asked if I would like to go, too. I had daydreamed about

skydiving since college so I immediately said “yes.” A week later, we were off to Lodi, just north of Stockton, to do the thing.

The night before we left, I started to have second thoughts. I realized that I had done absolutely no research on skydiving, the technique, training, or mortality rate, or where it might be safest to do. There was no Internet back in those days, so I was flying blind with no time to look into the matters, not exactly my style.

By the time we approached Lodi, I still had qualms but was ready to go. However, just as we approached the skydiving company’s parking lot, an ambulance came roaring past us, sirens screaming. It turns out that a skydiver had suffered a severe injury, and the ambulance had come to take them to the hospital.

I thought to myself: “OK, this is the end of this adventure. After the accident, no way my friends would still go through with this.”

Wrong. It didn’t faze them one bit.

So we parked and entered the office. Joan’s niece prepped us to tell the manager that she was 16 because she had discovered that was the minimum age to skydive. So when the manager asked her age, she confidently announced “16.” But she broke into hysterical tears when the manager informed her that the minimum age was 18.

Since the teenager was the main driver of this adventure, I again thought to myself: “OK, that’s it. We’re not going.”

But again, I was wrong. Joan and her brother were still good to go.

So we were led into a room to watch a short instructional video. It turns out the video was almost entirely devoted to telling us over and over that the skydiving company could not be held liable under any circumstances, even if the engine fell out of the airplane in flight. Again and again, it repeated that we assumed all liability on ourselves, no matter what happened.

Well, Joan is a lawyer, so I thought, “no way Joan will accept this. We’re not going.” Wrong yet again.

So now the die was cast, and I put my game face on to prepare for this crazy experience.

The whole thing went off better than I ever dreamed.

First, I never really got scared. It turns out that my brain somehow sensed that one cannot jump out of an airplane for the first time while you are in your rational mind. So by the time I entered the aircraft, my rational mind had gone on hold, along with the fear that it would have caused. I was almost in a trance.

Second, upon jumping from 9,000 feet, my body played a series of tricks on me that made me feel like I was flying rather than

falling and falling fast—at 120 miles per hour during the free fall. The air pressure produced by dropping rapidly pressed on my body and tricked me into feeling like I was flying upwards rather than falling downwards.

And somehow, my eyes did not register that the earth was rapidly coming closer. The result was that I literally blissed out when I could just as easily freaked out from fear.



I had a blissful free fall and a perfect landing.

When my instructor popped the parachute to end the free fall, I was momentarily disappointed because the feeling of flying vanished. But in a hot second, my body realized that it was a lot safer, so I settled down and floated to the earth.

The landing was perfect, like sitting on a pillow. It was executed by coming in like an airplane, not just going straight down. And I

was instructed to lift my legs, so I landed on my butt, much safer than feet or knees.

Then another unexpected thing happened. It took more than an hour before my rational mind completely kicked back in. By that time I was back home. I watched the video of my jump over and over again for almost an hour before my rational mind was convinced I had actually jumped from a plane at 9,000 feet.

And, once convinced, it hammered me with the question: why in the heck had I done such a reckless act?

It was then, for the first time in my unconventional life, that I realized that I was, in fact, an adventurous risk-taker. Somehow, through all the years of fighting the police, being tracked by the FBI, organizing, and trying to do the impossible of making a revolution, I had never thought of myself as particularly adventurous.

In fact, I thought of myself as pretty calculated. It took the skydiving experience for my self-conception to align with the reality of my life. It has been liberating as it balances the fun part of me with the stressful and analytical parts.

40. A Second Political Life: Community Organizing and Civic Engagement



As I emerged from my midlife crisis, the world of revolutionary politics had gone through a historic transformation, and not to the good. The period of successful national liberation struggles and socialism that had shaped the first half of my life was over

and the U.S. was the only superpower.

On the positive side, the 1990s had produced a new generation of social justice forces. But racism, capitalism, and imperialism were as horrific as ever.

Out of nowhere, I received a call in 1997 from Gary Delgado, the founder of the Center for Third World Organizing that spearheaded the training of people of color as community organizers, asking me if I wanted to work for his new organization, the Applied Research Center (ARC). ARC was trying to expand the horizons of community organizers to include research, popular education, policy, and media in their efforts.



ColorLines cover photo for the special issue on the prison industrial complex featuring Angela Davis.

This job thrust me into the middle of the racial justice community organizing world that had been newly re-energized

by large-scale funding from non-profit foundations in the 1990s. When I founded ColorLines, a magazine devoted to race and organizing, I also had the opportunity to re-connect with racial justice academics who wrote for ColorLines and were the other significant set of subscribers.

In short, I was lucky to find myself back on the cutting edge of racial justice organizing and scholarship.

From 2001-2004 I focused my work on the anti-Iraq war movement, but otherwise I spent the rest of my political life anchored in racial justice community organizing and civic engagement work.

In my first political life, I was strongly motivated by the successful revolutionary movements around the world. In my second political life, that motivation was not very strong due the degeneration and defeat of many of those earlier movements.

So this time, much of my motivation stems from understanding that fighting for peace and social justice was central to who I am as a person. It's what makes me feel human and worthy of my time on the earth. And working with regular folk to improve their lives is what makes me happy. I also understand that, even if the outcomes are not always we might want, the situation for regular working people throughout the world would be much worse if we did not wage those fights.

Moreover, the massive increase in people of color living and voting in the U.S., and the growth of progressive white people, mean that the progressive movement has new prospects to build the power to make lasting change.

Spending one's life fighting for one's deepest values and aspirations for humankind is one of the best possible ways to live.

It's been a pleasure and a privilege.

41. My Big 50th Birthday Bash



Reveling in Calistoga on my 50th. Left to right: Miriam Early, Karen Lenoir, James Early, Linda Burnham, me, Belvin Louie, Gerald Lenoir, Miriam Louie.

I have only held one grand birthday party for myself. It was for my 50th birthday. Not sure why, but I just felt like celebrating.

Here's what I did:

I took three months off work (without pay, of course).

I gathered (and financed) my very closest friends from near and far to hang out together in the wine country for three nights. This was one of the best experiences of my life. The constant singing still rings in my ears.



Calistoga partying. l-r: Valerie Perry, me, Karen Lenoir, Linda Burnham, Belvin Louie, Fred 'Smokey' Perry, Miriam Louie

Upon our return from the wine country, I held a big dance party at Gerald and Karen Lenoir's fabulous house in Berkeley.

And then I jetted off on a two-month foreign wanderlust through Southern Europe and Southern Africa. I did the European leg alone and the African leg with my daughter, Josina,

who I met up with in Botswana just as she completed her semester abroad there.

Josina and I have traveled a lot together, and having her with me for the second month was one of the great things about this trip.



The magnificent Trevi Fountain in Rome.

Another thing that made this journey so fantastic was that it was so open-ended. When my plane took off from SFO to Barcelona, I had only reserved two nights hotel in Barcelona, a plane ticket from Frankfurt to Johannesburg one month later, and a plane ticket from Cape Town back home a month after that.

Other than that, I was utterly free each day to decide what I wanted to do and where I wanted to do it. It was the freest I have ever felt.

As it turned out, I spent two weeks in southern Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Toledo, Sevilla, Cadiz, Grenada), followed by two weeks in northern Italy (Rome, Florence, Tuscany, Pisa, the Cinque

Terre, Venice).

Then I trained to Frankfurt and caught my flight to Johannesburg. I immediately grabbed a train to Gaborone, Botswana, where I met up with Josina, who was just completing her studies there. After a few days in Botswana (Gaborone, Mahalapye), we spent a week in Zimbabwe (Victoria Falls, Harare, Great Zimbabwe) and a little more than two weeks in South Africa (Johannesburg, Cape Town and their surroundings).



Josina's family in Gabane, Botswana, 2001.

In the course of this trip, I experienced magnificent natural and human-made beauty, learned vital history lessons, met incredible people, bathed myself in the history of the struggle against apartheid—and immersed myself in some of the world's culinary delights.

42. My Trip to Spain: Of Muslims, Jews, and 1492



The magnificent Arab royal palace in the Alhambra in Granada. Arabs ruled Spain for more than 700 years, until 1492.

Spain was the first stop on my memorable two-month 50th birthday trip in 2001.

I was enchanted by the stunning architecture of Gaudi that dominates Barcelona and the art museums of Madrid, and my understanding of history was transformed by what I learned in Toledo and southern Spain.

The Muslim royal cities of southern Spain are absolutely astonishing. Like other royal cities in Europe and Asia, they are walled fortresses built to protect the rich and powerful who live and rule within from the peasantry and other competing elites.

But unlike others, the main buildings are built of plaster and are devoid of gaudy gold or silver displays. Instead, there is exquisite plasterwork, ironwork, woodwork, divine tile work—and an emphasis on having water flowing in every area, from fabulous fountains to tiny streams in the cracks between tiles. Together, they present a wondrous concept of beauty.



The Muslims built walled cities in all of the principal towns of southern Spain. They have various names: in Sevilla and some other cities, the “Alcazar,” in Grenada, the “Alhambra.” They

are all breathtaking. To my eyes, the Alhambra is one of the most beautiful human creations I have ever seen, worth a trip to Europe all by itself.

The Arabs and Berbers (often called Moors in Europe) who ruled Spain from 711-1492 built these royal cities. By the way, the numerous Spanish and Latin American towns named Matamoros mean “Kill Moors.”

For hundreds of years, Western Europe was mired in the Dark Ages and was one of the most backward parts of Eurasia. Meanwhile, the Arab world was one of the world centers of power and learning, the principal inheritor of Roman and Greek philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy, which they advanced further.

They ruled not only Spain but also Portugal and much of Italy for centuries. The Arab world was, in fact, the vital source of knowledge for the Renaissance in Western Europe.

The Spanish Catholic King Phillip succeeded in “reconquering” Spain from the Arabs in....1492!

Most European churches contain very old paintings that depict Jesus and the Holy Family as dark-skinned and multi-ethnic. The white Jesus wasn’t invented until the Renaissance.

Since 1492, the Spanish adamantly deny Muslim and Arab influence on Spanish culture. They portray the conflict as one between Spanish Christians (the good guys) and North African Muslims (the wretched, murderous heathen bad guys). But the truth is far more complicated. During the 700 years of Muslim



The old churches of Europe often have more accurate multiracial depictions of the people of Jesus' time.

rule, many Spanish became Muslims, and probably some Arabs became Christians.

A telling and little-known fact illustrates this: the “ez” at the end of numerous Spanish surnames such as Martinez, Ramirez, Sanchez, Rodriguez, Gonzalez, etc. actually means “son of”—in Arabic! So Martinez means son of Martin, Ramirez means son of Ramiro, etc.

Using “son of” in surnames is extremely common in many parts of the world: e.g., Robertson, Johnson, Jackson, Thompson, Jameson, etc.) But in Spain, “son of” is written in Arabic, not Spanish, indicating that Spanish people are an intermixture of Spanish ethnicities with Arab and Berber ethnicities and the lasting Arab influence in Spain.

Interestingly, the Spanish Jews overwhelmingly sided with the Arabs to throw off harsh Catholic anti-Semitism. They too enormously benefited from Arab learning, adopted the Arabic language, and before long became what Wikipedia calls the “unquestioned leader of world Jewry.”

In Toledo, I (finally) learned about the sheer brutality of anti-Semitism (other than the Holocaust).



The jaw-dropping architecture of Gaudi dominates Barcelona.

In that historic capital city, I visited my first ever “Jewish quarter” in Europe. There were literally no Jews living there, and I was told that has been true since....1492. In that infamous year, the reactionary Spanish Catholic King issued the Alhambra decree intensifying the Spanish Inquisition, which targeted Jews and Muslims. The King ordered Jews to convert to Catholicism or leave the country, and massacred those that didn’t.

I gazed down a beautiful hillside in the Jewish Quarter and was informed that Christians butchered thousands of Jews there in 1492.

The former intellectual and cultural leaders of world Jewry were decimated. Those who managed to flee Spain became known as the original Sephardim—Sephardic Jews.

This learning was all the more meaningful for me because I had become a close friend of an octogenarian Jewish woman from Greece at my gym in Oakland. As a child, she had successfully hidden from the Nazis during WWII, but her ancestors had fled Spain centuries earlier to settle in Greece. She weighed on my mind in Toledo, and I was able to gift her with a beautiful memorial of the Spanish Jews.

It turns out that there were three momentous historical events in Spain in the infamous year of 1492: the Christians’ final defeat of the Arabs who had ruled Spain since the year 711, the

intensification of the Spanish Inquisition which made Spain the reactionary capital of Europe, and Columbus' genocidal foray into the New World.



This fun group adopted me at a bullfight in Seville and amply plied me with liquor.

43. The Struggle to Stop the Iraq War



Giant “World Says No to War demonstration,” NYC, Feb. 15, 2003. That’s me in the green coat on the far right.

Working in the antiwar in Iraq movement from 2001 to 2005 was one of my most exhilarating experiences. The movement failed to stop the war in Iraq, but it helped ignite an unprecedented

worldwide movement that limited casualties in Iraq and the other countries that the U.S. attacked. It also gave a significant boost to the progressive movement in the U.S., which has continued to grow to this day.

Just days after the terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York City, I published an open letter to ColorLines readers predicting a U.S. attack on Iraq and a general offensive to tilt the balance of world power stronger in U.S. favor. I offered some ideas about how to build a movement against the president's declared "war on terrorism at home and abroad."

Soon, with my lifelong comrade Max Elbaum and others, I wrote and published more in-depth working papers on the same subjects. We saw the need and the opportunity to build a movement that linked antiwar work with antiracist work.

But the horror of the terrorist attacks enabled the president to rally Congress and the media to his murderous political agenda, before the left could rally masses to the streets. As a result, we worried that it might take a year or even two before a big antiwar movement emerged to challenge the Bush administration.

WAR TIMES

I helped gather a crew of people to publish an antiwar newspaper that we hoped would be an information and organizing tool. We

called it War Times/Tiempo de Guerras as the paper was bilingual English and Spanish.

The paper was free. We hoped it would be financed by a new network of antiwar people and organizations who would also distribute the paper and organize antiwar groups and actions.



We had only enough seed money to print a pilot edition targeted to the Bay Area, even though our ambition was national. However, cash and orders for the paper came pouring in as soon as we published the prospectus for the publication on the Internet, even before the pilot edition came off the press.

Consequently, we boosted the initial plan to print 10,000 pilot copies and distribute them only in the Bay Area to a print run of 75,000 for national use in more than 100 cities. Our team was the

first to know that, contrary to our fears, the scaffolding of a mass antiwar movement was already in existence.

For more than three years, the paper's distributors and supporters sent us enough money on a monthly basis to finance the paper, issue by issue. Together, we rapidly built a national network of antiwar groups that was entirely unexpected.

The War Times crew was one of the most skilled, politically united, and easy groups to work with in my political career. Almost half the group had started and edited publications before and had worked together in different political organizations and campaigns before launching War Times. But everyone was willing to take on a specific role. Some key people were Max Elbaum, Jan Adams, Rebecca Gordon, Gerald Lenoir, Arnoldo Garcia, Jung Hee Choi, and Samuel Orozco.

UNITED FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Soon after we began publishing War Times, east coast movement veterans Leslie Cagan and Bill Fletcher initiated a new group called United for Peace and Justice to spearhead the movement, and War Times joined. Soon, I played a central role in building UFPJ's first mass demonstration scheduled for Feb. 15, 2002, in New York City.

Support for the action poured in from throughout the country, and peace forces in numerous countries organized simultaneous



demonstrations on Feb. 15. As the date neared, dozens of celebrities also joined, and politicians scrambled to get themselves on stage.



Boops with Rosie Perez.

Reflecting worldwide participation, the event was called “The World Says No to War.” It was reported that: “In almost 800 cities across the globe, protesters filled the streets of capital cities and tiny villages, following the sun from Australia and New Zealand and the small Pacific islands, through the snowy steppes of North Asia and down across the South Asian peninsula, across Europe and down to the southern edge of Africa, then jumping the pond first to Latin America and then finally, last of all, to the United States.”

The New York Times called the global movement “a new superpower” even though it supported the war.

I flew into New York a few weeks early to help with the organizing. My main role was to build and unite the coalition’s diverse core and be a press spokesperson. I also helped to work out the program, choosing speakers and performers amongst the hundreds angling to get on stage once it became clear that the event would be huge.

Naturally, many differences emerged in the process, especially over Palestine, the role of politicians and celebrities, local representation, and issues of race. But we eventually hammered out a program that was widely accepted.

I also helped clarify our press messaging in the face of New York’s refusal to give us a march permit.

Rather than focusing on the fact that the City denied us a march permit, I focused on ensuring that the public knew we had a permit for the rally. We thereby used the enormous media that the fight over the march permit generated to proactively publicize our legal event rather than making people feel like they would be in danger if they came to an unpermitted march. The City never gave us a permit to march, but they gave us tremendous free publicity for the rally in the fight over the permit.

Feb. 15 was electric. Very early in the morning, I received a phone call from Leslie Cagan, who was the overall coordinator for the day. She told me she was very sick and asked me to take her place as coordinator in addition to stage manager.

I met the press in mid-city at 6 AM and there were already dozens of buses full of demonstrators from as far away as Texas and Michigan, with more arriving by the minute!

Josina came into town, so we soaked in the whole day together, with her serving as my assistant.

It was frigid: the temperature never rose above 20 degrees, but at least 500,000 people showed up. The crowd stretched as far as the eye could see up Second Avenue. It stayed that way for the entire four hours of the rally despite the deep freeze and despite

being penned in by police roadblocks.



With Leslie Cagan, one of the great mass peace demonstration organizers in the U.S.

With Second Avenue already beyond capacity, tens of thousands of people also thronged First Avenue. As the rally commenced, the police attacked the people on that street. The police riot, including mounted police, raged for more than an hour.

As overall coordinator, I urged that we not inform people from the stage of the police attacks in fear that it would provoke a stampede in which thousands might be trampled, and the entire event would become a violent fiasco, undermining our political purpose. I am proud that we kept our heads amidst the police provocation and, happily, there were few injuries.

There were three other highlights for me.

A couple of days before the rally, I was privileged to spend half a day with one of my heroes, the great actor and activist Ossie Davis. Ossie had supported the formation of Line of March back in 1980. Long before that, he had become famous for his powerful eulogy of Malcolm X. I had previously attended one of his lectures where he wowed me with his political acuity and broadmindedness. Our half-day together confirmed my feeling about Ossie, up close and personal.



One of my heroes, Ossie Davis, and I doing press work publicizing the giant Feb. 15, 2002 rally.

The great Richie Havens performed his incredible anthem, “Freedom” to kick off the rally on Feb. 15. It was a lifelong dream of mine to organize an action where he would perform that song. It was everything I hoped it would be, setting the stage for the rest of the rally.

Finally, as stage manager, I had the job of trying to manage a lot of egos. A highlight was when Rev. Al Sharpton started screaming in my face from six inches away, demanding that he be moved up in the program to speak to the massive crowd before it started peeling off. Dennis Kucinich agreed to trade spots with Rev. Al, even though Dennis was the first politician to endorse the rally. Turned out Rev. Al and the other speakers had nothing to fear because the enormous crowd stayed to the very end.

Following the Feb. 15 actions, I was elected national co-chair of United for Peace and Justice and held that post until 2004.

I was part of the first group arrested at the U.S. Capitol for protesting the war, along with Kelly Campbell of Sept. 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, Nancy Lessin of Military Families Speak Out, and a representative of the U.S. Student Association.

I learned a lot in this movement and met numerous courageous and powerful organizers from throughout the country and the world. I did antiwar speaking tours in diverse places such as eastern Kentucky, the Mexico/Texas border, Jakarta, and Milan.

The only real disappointment was the relative lack of participation by domestic social justice organizations. UFPJ reserved half the seats on its steering committee for social

justice organizations, especially racial justice groups.

This was done not only in the spirit of antiracism and democracy but an attempt to fulfill the potential of social justice and peace organizations uniting against the “war on terrorism at home and abroad.”

Even the most radical non-profit social justice organizations were unwilling to buck the constraints of their big foundation funders to participate, even though virtually all the staff and members of these organizations opposed the war. They marched as individuals, but they committed no organizational resources to the effort and did not formally endorse antiwar actions.

Antiwar work was too radical for the foundations, and the organizations meekly followed their lead: a major disappointment and a crucial lesson.

We failed to stop or end the war, but we built a gigantic movement that constrained U.S. actions and was a signal moment in building the U.S. progressive movement that has continued growing and become the most powerful U.S. left since the 1960s.

44. Two Palestinian Children's Stories



Gaza, 2003.

In October 2002, I met a remarkable young woman named Maysoon Zayid at Deheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem. Maysoon was born in the U.S. but is of Palestinian origin and speaks Arabic fluently. She has cerebral palsy, is in her early 20s, and is a regular on the famous soap opera, “As the World

Turns.” She is also a professional standup comedian.

(The Camp is one of many in the West Bank that houses Palestinians who were turned into refugees when the Israelis stole their historic lands to create Israel.)



Young leaders in Daheisha Camp with Palestinian-American actress/comic Maysoon Zaid, right. I asked Jihad, middle, what he thought he might be in the future, he responded: “No choice, a martyr.”

Who would have known there was such a person, let alone that she would put her career on hold to volunteer to work with Palestinian refugee children to produce their own plays? She spent three months each in three different refugee camps,

creating a show in each.

Maysoon told me this story about her experience at Deheisheh Camp:

There was a rambunctious boy of about eleven who is part of her theater group. I met him—a very sweet kid who can't sit still or stay quiet for long. Finally, one day, after many fruitless pleas to calm him down, Maysoon felt she had to ask him to leave the room for the day.

As he started to depart, the other children boisterously demanded that Maysoon readmit him. Maysoon firmly refused and explained that the child was disrupting the whole group and could return the next day.

The children persisted in protesting. And Maysoon steadfastly refused. Finally, a young boy of about ten stood up and dramatically pleaded: "In the name of my martyred father who the Israelis killed in cold blood, I beseech you to let my friend rejoin us. In the name of my martyred father, I beg you to let him come back."

Well, what can one say to that?

Maysoon relented and let the boy return.

But she calmly regrouped the children and delivered a dramatic speech of her own. She told them it was unfair to ask her to do

anything in the name of their martyred fathers, that it put her in an impossible situation and was not why their fathers died.

The children listened respectfully to Maysoon, who they truly loved.

When she finished this speech, a little girl raised her hand and asked: “What about our martyred brothers? Can we ask in the name of our martyred brothers?”

P.S. On February 28, 2019, Time magazine ran a story entitled “23 People Who Are Changing What’s Funny Right Now” that featured Maysoon Zayid. <https://time.com/5540280/funny-people/>

* * * * *

On a different note, regarding Palestinian children: When I was in Tulkarm fighting the Israeli erection of the Great Wall around Palestine (see story by that name), I spent every night playing with and holding children at the Muslim orphanage located just below the apartment where I bunked. A sad yet wonderful experience that I will never forget.



I visited this Muslim orphanage in Tulkarm every evening after tense days of confronting the Israeli army alongside Palestinian farmers trying to prevent construction of the awful Israeli Wall.

45. Letter from Palestine



A hospital in Gaza, 2002

October 5, 2002

All,

I'm just checking in from Deheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem on the West Bank, under Israeli military occupation. In my short travels to Jerusalem, Gaza, Bethlehem, and Ramallah, the

Palestinians I have met in homes, offices, cars, and the streets have been wonderfully gracious, welcoming, and open-hearted.

Everything is good, for me, that is. Today is one of those precious few days that in Palestine are called “very quiet.”

That means that, as of noon today, “only” two Palestinian teenagers were killed, one in Gaza and the other in Jenin.

For me, it meant that it took Barbara Lubin (of the Middle East Children’s Alliance) and me three hours to make the car trip from Ramallah to Bethlehem. Under reasonable circumstances, that journey should take no more than half an hour.

For Palestinians, it is much worse. Unless a Palestinian has some pressing, immediate reason to travel from Ramallah to Bethlehem (or vice versa), the Israelis will absolutely not allow them to do so. Not even to visit a mother or a spouse. Many of Barbara’s friends have been isolated from their families for months due to this viciousness.

To travel from Ramallah to Bethlehem, we had to pass through three Israeli military “checkpoints” and detour around numerous places where the Israelis have purposefully destroyed the roads. Sometimes the Israelis say this destruction is for “military reasons”; many times, it is simply to cause havoc in Palestinians’ lives and businesses.

Yesterday, as we drove from Bethlehem to Ramallah, we found ourselves at the city's main entrance. However, the Israelis had destroyed it. So, to enter, we had to drive for 45 minutes on one of those exclusive Jewish-only "bypass highways." Finally, the



Che was the first image I saw inside the Old City in Jerusalem.

detour led us to a spot that was a stone's throw from where we started the detour, but this time inside Ramallah.

One of the reasons today's trip took us "only" three hours is that, by chance, we ended up in a taxi driven by a Palestinian who holds Israeli citizenship. Otherwise, we would have had to change taxis at each checkpoint once we got through. Even our Israeli citizen driver was not allowed to drive into Ramallah, so we did have to change there.

It's hard to suppress the thought that the Israeli government is monstrous. They are not just militarily controlling Palestine. They think of every possible inconvenience and humiliation to inflict. Israeli teenaged soldiers are set loose to harass, ignore/make wait, and humiliate anyone they please. The idea that the Palestinian Authority is in charge of anything is pretty farfetched.

The Israelis treat Palestinians like cattle, made to walk several hundred-meter-long gauntlets, often literally in cages, to pass Israeli checkpoints—that is, those few that are allowed to pass. They plow under homes and businesses by the hundreds. They mercilessly kill children; disease goes unchecked. The infrastructure is destroyed.

The Gaza Strip is appalling. It is one of the most impoverished areas in Palestine, even though it has miles of beautiful beaches on the Mediterranean. In Gaza city, it is tough to find buildings that don't have bullet holes or have not been reduced to rubble by bombing or shelling.



The prison-like entry to Gaza.

The poverty in the Gaza refugee camps (where those who formerly lived in what is now Israel are shunted) makes Gaza city look positively like paradise. The central market area is gruesomely poor, more than half the houses are bombed out, water is non-existent or poisoned.

The children's playground is the steel plated tread of an Israeli tank. Shelling is daily; incursion and curfew frequent. Few have work. No one knows what new pains tomorrow will bring. Men leave their families in the morning to avoid being asked for a shekel (20 cents) for food by their children. It's a disaster.

Anyone who, like myself, might be imagining the Israeli "settlements" in the West Bank or Gaza as some kind of rustic pioneer thing need to be disabused of the notion. The settlements are like gigantic (up to 50,000 people) Darth

Vaderesque housing developments, with all the “conveniences.” They are state-subsidized. A hard-core of zealots organizes to lead the settlers. Many of the rest are just going for the cheap housing prices.



Far from being rustic, Israeli settlements in the West Bank are usually armed fortresses on the hilltops.

They are usually strategically placed high on hills for military purposes, just as every lord put his castle on a hill with a moat and/or wall around it in the medieval days. They rise out of the hills like grotesque citadels—we're not talking about single-family homes with lawns, but of gigantic condo complexes that are deliberately awe-inspiring, especially massed by the dozens on top of hills.

Not infrequently, Israeli rockets are fired from these settlements' commanding heights, raining down upon the surrounding Palestinian towns.

They are fortresses, grotesquely ugly but awesome. But they are quite beautiful inside. Ah, "nation-building."

While Israel occasionally makes deals like Oslo, they never stop building the settlements. There are now 250,000 people living in new settlements ringing, literally choking, Jerusalem and cutting it off from the rest of the West Bank, especially Ramallah, just to the North.

According to the Oslo agreements, Israeli settlers now control 40 percent of Gaza, supposedly under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Half a million Jews now live in settlements on the West Bank.

Yesterday we visited what the press likes to call “Arafat’s compound” in Ramallah. It’s the governmental center of the Palestinian Authority. You probably know that the Israelis just recently pulled back from the third occupation of the compound since September 11.

Well, now there is only one building left standing—Arafat’s residence; the other seven or eight or whatever they were are rubble. There are still two Israeli tanks dominating the street on either side of the compound, and Arafat is still under “house arrest” inside.

Something that is little talked about in the U.S., even progressive circles, is the starkness of the class divide among Palestinians. While most Palestinians are jobless and numerous small businesses have been destroyed by gunfire, by the curfews, or the inability to move goods, there is a thriving small capitalist and professional elite.

Except for the occupation, nightly shelling, roadblocks, etc., their lives are remarkably like a middle-class American. Beautiful houses and apartments with all the latest appliances, computers, cell phones, satellite T.V. It’s pretty crazifying to live that way amid an occupation.

To give you an idea, one couple I met is buying a condominium in Ramallah that will cost \$160,000 (U.S.). Yes, there is a market

that will bear that price for a condo, a price that is higher than many U.S. cities, despite the almost daily chaos. This elite sometimes has old roots, but much of it was created post-Oslo by the government, new business opportunities, the NGOs, and the United Nations.

Some of the former secular left is tied into the Palestinian Authority, the NGOs, or the U.N. and live an ironically cushy life amidst the occupation. Many activists went into business post-Oslo. Hundreds joined the government. Others were just spent and gave up politics.

Many Palestinians returned from abroad after Oslo, hoping to build a life or a business. Some thrived, many were destroyed. And, of course, many others built up their military underground. So vibrant in the first Intifada, the mass movements lost many of their leaders to these efforts.

But the fight goes on. However pessimistic I found many of the Palestinians I talked to, almost to the person they are convinced that ultimately they will survive and prevail. As far as they are concerned, Israel will never “remove” them; they aren’t going anywhere.

Best,

Bob

46. Fighting the Great Wall Around Palestine



Palestinian farmers demand an end to Israeli construction of the Wall that is preventing them from accessing their own land.

In October of 2002, I spent a little more than two weeks in the Tulkarm/Qalquilya region of the West Bank of Palestine. I was

there to help the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) organize Palestinian farmers devastated by the Wall that Israel is constructing around Palestine.

The ISM put me up in an apartment a floor above an orphanage. I organized and fought all day; cradled and played with children half the night.

It was a harrowing experience, and I was lucky to come out alive. Although well-intentioned and brave, the ISM (a Palestinian group) leaders I worked under were terribly inexperienced. They did not even think to send reconnaissance ahead of our daily forays to see what we were getting ourselves into. But I could not abandon them in the middle of this dangerous campaign.

I filed the report below from one of the many confrontations I joined.

Israel Erecting 'Great Wall' around Palestine

By Bob Wing

Tulkarm/Qalqilya region, West Bank

October 12, 2002

"The Israelis are stealing our land and bulldozing our olive trees to build their new fence. They fire at us, refuse to let us enter our land, and humiliate us. The courts will not stop them. We will try to discuss the issue with them and get them to stop bulldozing

our land.”

So spoke Mohamed Abal Al-Tif on October 9 as he and 60 other unarmed Palestinian farmers prepared for what turned into a five-hour, gunpoint confrontation with Israeli soldiers and private security protecting bulldozers. At one point, three machine-gun toting private security men charged up the hill with a chain saw and cut down an olive tree right amid the farmers.

The Al-Tif family and the other farmers have been cultivating olives in Kafr Jamal, a village in the West Bank’s northwest corner, since what they call “Roman times” over a thousand years ago. Now their entire way of life is threatened.

The bulldozers and chainsaws in Kafr Jamal and throughout the Tulkarm/Qalqilya area are implementing Israel’s unprecedented plan to surround the entire West Bank with what they call a “security fence.” However, this “fence” will dwarf the Berlin Wall, enclosing the whole 340-kilometer length of the West Bank.

Binyamin Ben Eliezer, Israeli Minister of Defense, explained the “fence” as necessary for security: “The terrorist attacks that have been haunting Israel have obliged us to build a continuous obstacle to stop the infiltration of terrorists into Israel.” The Israeli government also emphasizes that it is not intended to

represent a political border or even a permanent situation.

However, Palestinians and some Israelis dispute the Israeli security explanation. They say the wall is meant to cement the occupation and turn the West Bank into a giant prison.



“The whole idea of walling in the whole West Bank is unprecedented and illegal. It’s truly insane,” said Osama Qashoo, a Palestinian International Solidarity Movement activist from Qalqilya who participated in the Kafr Jamal farmer’s protest.

Yehezkel Lein of the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem, says “Israel’s intention is not to seize the land for a temporary period, but to expropriate it permanently.” On October 12, more than a thousand Israelis and Palestinians defied an Army curfew to stage a non-violent protest of the Wall in Abu Dis, just outside

of Jerusalem.

Much of the new “security fence” is being constructed well east of the Green Line, the boundary between Israel and the West Bank established in 1948. To build it, Israel is confiscating tens of thousands of acres of the West Bank’s best agricultural land, taking over the main water supply of the West Bank, and destroying hundreds of thousands of olive trees, which form the backbone of the already devastated Palestinian economy.

The fence will also place at least ten Israeli settlements and eight Palestinian villages in the No Man’s Land west of the security wall but east of the Green Line, under Israeli control. The purpose of the wall in Abu Dis and around Jerusalem is to bring all of the now divided Holy City under complete Israeli control.

What exactly is this wall?

In some highly populated places, the “security fence” will be a 30-foot high concrete wall, with gun towers every 100 meters. I witnessed such a wall in Qalqilya, a town of 40,000 near the Green Line in the northwest of the West Bank.

In most places, it will be a barrier stretching between 30 and 100 meters in width. From east to west, the barrier will consist of a 15-foot deep x 20-foot wide trench; a dirt path that will be a “killing zone” onto which Palestinian access is forbidden; an

electrified fence; a trace path to disclose the footprints of infiltrators; and a two-lane Israeli patrol road. I witnessed these barriers in different stages of construction throughout the Tulkarm/Qalqilya area.



The first phase, approved this June, will span about 110 kilometers in the Tulkarm/Qalqilya area near the northwest border of the West Bank, the Jerusalem area, and the Anon area. It will cost 942 million Israeli Shekels [about \$382 million today].

Conflict is incredibly intense in the rich agricultural area of Tulkarm/Qalqilya. It is olive harvest season, and security wall construction threatens this critical economic lifeline. Since Israel

barred most Palestinians from working inside Israel, unemployment in the West Bank has soared to over 50 percent.

Agriculture, especially olive growing and olive oil production, is, therefore, more important than ever. The northwest area is intensively cultivated with olive, fruit, tomato, and spinach. It is the principal agricultural center of the West Bank.

Mohi Atear, the mayor of Farun, a village of 3,500, explains: “We are all shocked at what is going on. The Israelis imposed a curfew on us on March 28. We were not allowed to leave our homes the whole time. When we were finally allowed out on April 20, we were shocked to see bulldozers mowing down our olive trees and clearing our land. Only then did the Israeli military produce flyers saying they were confiscating our lands ‘for military reasons.’”

Atear says the Israeli military has confiscated more than half of the villagers’ agricultural land. But he says the situation keeps changing because Israel keeps producing new maps that place more and more of their land to the west of the barrier, under Israeli control.

Omet Abed, 64, a landowner and grandmother of 30, unleashes a veritable torrent of words when she finds someone who will listen.



Omet Abed, a landowner and grandmother, is furious at the Israeli's for building the wall.

"It's harvest time, and the soldiers often won't allow access to our trees. We have to walk two kilometers around the trench they have dug and ask permission. It depends on their mood. Sometimes they let us in. Sometimes they fire their guns at us or beat us. One person has been killed. Others have been told to undress or to buy treats for the soldiers. Are we not human beings? Why do they treat us this way?"

As Ms. Abed speaks, a loud explosion detonates behind us, clearing more area for the bulldozers to smooth.

Mayor Atear reports that it is becoming common for settlers to fire at farmers from the Israeli-only road below us. "The last incident was three days ago."



Mohi Atear, the mayor of Farun, a Palestinian village of 3,500 that is losing land due to the Israeli wall.

Even though it is harvest time, the village now allows only the very old and the very young to attempt to enter the fields: it is too dangerous for the rest.

Palestine Report says: “Not only do the Israeli plans place the wall on highly desirable agricultural land, but they also gobble up the Western Aquifer, a renewable groundwater source that supplies over 50 percent of the West Bank’s needs.”

Mayors and farmers tell me the same story throughout the area. In Kafr Suar, the new fence places 50 percent of the villagers’ agricultural land on the Israeli side. It is 65 percent in Kafr Zibad, 70 percent in Kafr Jamal, and 80 percent in Qafin. Hundreds of homes, many of them newly constructed like the ones I saw in Farun, will be destroyed. In most places, the

bulldozers, protected by private security and the Israeli army, work round the clock.

I witnessed numerous torn up water lines and water tanks in each of the areas I visited, even whole water-pumping stations destroyed. New security walls, roads, and trenches cut a wide swath through miles of olive groves in Tulkharm/Qalqilya.

The mayors of Farun, Kafr Suar, Kafr Jamal, and Qafin also report that some of the private companies hired to build the wall are profiteering from a vast illegal trade in olive trees. They transport them by the truckload to Israel, where they sell them for up to 1,500 NIS [about \$600 today] each.

This has impelled them to aggressively chop down olive trees that in no way obstruct construction. In many places, I saw 10 or 15 yards of land cleared on either side of the “fence.”

A stone’s throw from the West Bank village of Qafin, but a world away since it is across the Green Line, Doron Liber of Israel’s Metzer Kibbutz, joins Taisir Harasheh, Qafin’s mayor, in attesting to the illegal olive tree trade and denouncing the new security wall.

“The fence is turning our heaven into hell. We know that Palestinians once owned our land, and we want to be good neighbors. If my land were being taken away the way Israel’s

‘fence’ is taking away the Palestinian’s land, I would turn the world upside down.”

Metzer Kibbutz has even offered part of its land to the fence builders. “We’re willing to contribute some of our land, because it is wrong that all the land should be taken from the Palestinians.”

Some Israeli settlers, such as the mayor of Salait who has long cultivated friendly ties with its Palestinian neighbors, also oppose the fence.

According to B’Tselem’s report, “The Separation Barrier,” the Israelis have declared that eight Palestinian towns and villages with at least 10,000 residents are now in the “no man’s land” west of the wall but east of the Green Line. They will be cut off from the West Bank and put under Israeli control, unable to access Palestinian services, market their goods in the West Bank or Israel, and cut off from their friends and relatives. Many others will be surrounded on three sides by the wall, cut off from their farmland.

B’Tselem reports that the wall will also bring under direct Israeli control a number of the huge Israeli settlements built to cut East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank.

The wall will also maroon West Bank towns like Abu Dis, which formerly used Palestinian East Jerusalem's schools, hospitals, and fire services. Taayush, an Israeli organization composed of Jews and Palestinians, teamed with partners in the Palestinian villages of Abu Dis and Al Aziriya to stage a protest against the wall on October 12. Karen Akokoka of Taayush called the action "a rare joint Israeli/Palestinian non-violent demonstration against the occupation."

The Israeli army imposed a curfew—making it illegal for anyone to leave their house and for anyone to enter the town—in an attempt to block the protest. However, Akokoka says, "more than 1,000 protesters courageously broke the curfew" to stage their rally and march. The Army eventually fired tear gas to break up the demonstration.

Despite the protests, the Israeli government is unlikely to heed any human rights advice about their wall. The farmers' protest in Kafr Jamal silenced the bulldozers, but only for a few hours. Square foot by square foot, olive tree by olive tree, settlement by settlement, Israel is taking over Jerusalem and the West Bank, and cutting off its economic lifelines.

The great wall around the West Bank is a major escalation of this ongoing project and is already causing tremendous misery and conflict.

47. My Struggle to Leave Palestine



As I rode an airport shuttle van from east Jerusalem through various Israeli settlements to the Tel Aviv airport for my return home, my mind involuntarily fixated on killing Israelis.

I would often slap myself to try to return to reality, but each time my mind would return to murderous vengeance. I had been traumatized by Israeli oppression and terror to the point of temporary insanity. (You can imagine how Palestinians must feel, including Palestinian exiles.)

As we approached the Tel Aviv airport, I was jerked out of this mindset when, at a checkpoint, Israeli soldiers abruptly ordered me out of the van and into a military vehicle that brought me to a military headquarters inside the airport for interrogation.

I had no trouble entering Israel but had been forewarned by Palestinian friends that I might be detained on my way out

because my passport showed that I had visited Gaza. Upon entry, I had told the authorities I was a tourist.

But tourists do not go to Gaza, which has little historical or religious significance but is one of the Palestinian resistance centers. The Israeli authorities considered anyone who went there to be automatically suspect.

But since I had been warned, I had a story ready to tell them when they demanded to know why I had visited Gaza.

It wasn't the first time I lied to authorities. I had learned that the best lies incorporate a lot of the truth. I had traveled to Gaza with a Canadian woman who worked for the United Nations in Ramallah and had married the brother of a top revolutionary political leader. She was going to Gaza to celebrate a holiday with the extended family.

So I made a revision to the story and told the authorities that I had an affair with this Canadian who took me to Gaza on business. I refused to give them her name or mention her relationship to the revolutionary family, but I guess the story was so far-fetched that they decided it might actually be true.

Anyway, after a few hours, I was released and caught my plane home.

48. Los Angeles Transition



Community Coalition staff and members celebrate a win.

By 2005 I had tired of the Bay Area left. Much of it lived in a bubble with little concept or concern for what the rest of the country was like and preferred to compete within itself for who could be the most “pure.”

At that time, the Community Coalition in Los Angeles contacted me to lead a political education program for their leadership

team. After discussion, we agreed I would move to Los Angeles in 2006 to help with the leadership transition from the founder, my old friend Karen Bass, to the younger generation.



Coalition members Marquesha and Ms. Ali.

Los Angeles racial justice forces were at that time a center of innovation, especially in delving into electoral politics. And the Los Angeles labor movement was the most dynamic in the country, growing rapidly, moving to the left, and becoming a major force in local and state politics.

I was stimulated by the change of venue. I learned a lot about traditional community organizing at Community Coalition. I also got the chance to work with other groups such as InnerCity Struggle, CHIRLA, and East Los Angeles Community Corporation. My best experience was getting to know and work with the

east to Community Coalition at 81st and Vermont. In four years, I faced traffic only once, due to a collision on the 105.



The ocean view at sunset from my balcony in Playa del Rey.

I also dated more than I ever had in my life. I had a lot of fun and met a great person that I saw off and on for ten years.

From the outset, I considered LA a temporary move. My real goal was to move to the South, the heart of racism and home to most Black people. So, from LA I organized several Black history and politics trips through the South to become more familiar with the region and in hopes of finding an organization I might join.

Happily, I had a great opportunity to move to Durham, N.C. in 2010.

49. Campaigning for Obama in North Carolina, 2008



Barack Obama won the Democratic nomination for the presidency in 2008, setting up an epic general election. Obama was one of a small number of politicians who had opposed the war in Iraq, and he represented hope after the dark years of

George W. Bush.

North Carolina hadn't gone for a Democratic presidential candidate in decades but it was considered the critical battleground state of the 2008 campaign. I decided to spend a month working for Obama there. My old friend Leah Wise lived in Durham and agreed to put me up. Gerald Lenoir joined me for a week.



I mostly walked precincts in Roxboro, a predominantly white, conservative town north of liberal Durham. I got a strong taste of Southern politics. Some of my most memorable experiences were:

1. Walking precincts in trailer parks. I learned there are at least three different economic/racial types of trailer parks. Some are

owner occupied prefabricated homes. Others are decently well kept trailers, a mix of owners and renters, sometimes on fairly tidy streets where most people have jobs. The worst are dominated by impoverished tenants, non-existent services, ragged trailers, dirt roads, and awful conditions.

2. The middle-class parts of town were like battle zones. Whoever posted a sign for Obama was risking attack and Bush signs were a warning. Bush voters militantly chased pro-Obama canvassers like me from their property, threatening to call the police. Yet there was a lot of openness to Obama among white middle-class voters, or at least curiosity. Black voters stood firm and determined. They were elated at the prospect of a Black president, but few would risk an Obama poster or lawn sign, even in Black working-class neighborhoods.

3. There was more openness to Obama among white women than white men. I would often strike up a conversation with a white woman, but when the husband overheard, he would storm to the door, tell me his wife was voting for Bush and chase me off. Not a few were drunk.

4. One of my memorable experiences took place in the parking lot of a small convenience store in Roxboro. A young white couple was sitting in their car with their windows down, so I walked up and gave my rap. The young man at the wheel



said he was voting for Bush. His girlfriend said the same. I asked why but they politely declined to state. Suddenly a voice piped up from the backseat—I hadn't even noticed anyone was back there. A middle aged guy said: "I'm voting for the nigger." I asked him why, and he responded, "It's time for somebody else to have a chance." I believe he was sincere to his words, a fascinating but positive contradiction.

5. I got attacked by a German shepherd in a predominantly middle-class Black neighborhood. The house was set back from the street by about 30 yards and had no fence. So I did my usual thing: I clapped several times to see if there was a dog. Satisfied that there wasn't, I started up the driveway. About ten steps in, a German shepherd charged around the side of the house and leaped at my throat. I got lucky. He knocked me over but barely

nicked my throat and didn't return for a second attack. The owners heard the noise and came running out to take control of the dog and apologize.

The long and short was that I had a ball and learned a lot. Gerald and I took personal credit for Obama's wafer-thin victory in North Carolina. (I campaigned for Obama in Virginia and 2012 and also claim personal credit for his narrow win there which put him over the top in the Electoral College.)

I also discovered that Durham was a beautiful town with a long history of struggle and many social justice organizers. And it turned out that I knew several people in Durham, not just Leah. They were soon to lure me to live in town.

50. Nothing Could Be Finer Than to be in Carolina



With my friends Karen Hayes and Leah Wise who shared their wisdom, humor, homes, food, and families while I lived in Durham, 2010-2015. Somehow most of my best friends in Durham were beautiful, statuesque Black women.

While campaigning for Obama in North Carolina, I soon realized that several old friends lived in Durham. One was Al McSurely, an old Line of Marcher who was famous for being charged with sedition for organizing West Virginia coal miners in the 1960s in concert with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

Al won his countersuit and used the money to attend law school at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, adjacent to Durham. In the 2000s, he had become the chief advisor to the most influential activist in North Carolina, the Rev. William Barber, II.



Rev. William Barber II, the brilliant leader of Moral Mondays, the North Carolina NAACP, and the Poor People's Campaign.

Rev. Barber is a mesmerizing speaker with a deep command of history and politics. He became President of the North Carolina

NAACP and its 100 chapters and then organized Historic Thousands on J Street (HKonJ). This massive statewide coalition united most progressive organizations on a proactive and wide-ranging social justice political/legislative agenda.

Al wanted me to move to North Carolina to take his place, as he was already 72 years old and his wife was fighting cancer. I had several strategic meetings with Rev. Barber to see if that arrangement might work. We both came away thinking it might, and I decided to make the move, even without any definite agreement. I knew that if a situation with Rev. Barber didn't work out, there were plenty of great people and organizations to work with.

I timed my move to Durham with a tremendous conference commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in April 2010 in Raleigh, the state capital of North Carolina adjacent to Durham.

It turned out to be one of the highest quality political conferences I ever attended, and I helped Rev. Barber put on his workshop. The workshop was so powerful that it inspired the fabulous Berniece Reagon, co-founder of the Freedom Singers and Sweet Honey in the Rock, to spontaneously lead us in song.

I never did become central to Rev. Barber's operation. Still, I joined in whenever asked and later became one of the nearly

1,000 people arrested at the legislature in the Barber-led Moral Monday civil disobedience actions in protest of ultra-reactionary Republican shenanigans. (See my essay, “Rightwing Neo-Secession or a Third Reconstruction.”)



The Umbrella Coalition crew in 2010, including Bryan Proffitt (now co-founder of the Organize 2020 Caucus and Vice President of the North Carolina Association of Educators), far upper right, Sendolo Diaminah (now cofounder of the Carolina Federation), top row center, my buddy Ray Eurquhart (fifty year movement veteran and the “mayor of the Southside”), top far left, and Kaji Reyes (now executive director of Durham for All), top row, second from left.

Bryan Proffitt is another old friend from United for Peace and Justice days that lives in Durham. When I arrived in town, he and

his team had just embarked on a student/teacher organizing project called the Umbrella Coalition centered at historically Black Hillside High.

I met and worked with Bryan’s comrades—especially Brigid Flaherty and Sendolo Diaminah—on many political projects, and his mentor Ray Eurquhart became my best friend in Durham.



My great friend, Ray Eurquhart, and I at a Moral Monday rally in Raleigh, North Carolina.

I worked to build an Activist Academy aimed at aligning the Durham left around anti-gentrification and electoral work, with the immediate aim of training and electing Black leftists to local office. This led me to work with the main progressive electoral force in town, the Durham People’s Alliance. The election of

Sendolo to the school board was our first success in a long string that continues today.

Bryan and his teacher crew reoriented to building statewide and launched Organize 2020, an anti-racist, social justice caucus in the North Carolina Association of Educators, the teacher's union. They have become a significant force and recently won the statewide presidency and vice-presidency. I got to help out with the launch of Organize 2020 just before I left Durham.

At the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, I got involved with redistricting training throughout the South. We also trained my daughter, Josina, and her redistricting work in Illinois launched her political career. I also learned about heirs' property issues and worked on Second Chance issues for the previously incarcerated.

I worked a year with the Pushback Network, a national network of social justice non-profits aimed at improving their civic engagement (electoral) work. This launched me into the middle of community based electoral work, especially in the South.

These relationships enabled me to make a month-long foray to help with Chokwe Lumumba's successful campaign for Mayor of Jackson in 2013.



The great Chokwe Lumumba, a founder and leader of the Republic of New Afrika, New Afrikan People's Organization, and Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, was elected Mayor of Jackson on June 4, 2013.

And of course, I continued my Black History self-tours through North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and northern Georgia.

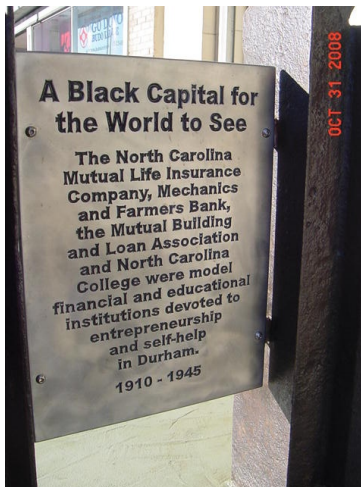
Except for the summer heat and humidity, Durham is a nearly ideal place to live. Northern Durham county was formerly the site of the largest slave plantation in North Carolina, so Durham has a large black population.

For decades, Black scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and E. Franklin Frazier considered Durham the "national capital of the Black middle class." Nowadays, 20% of the population is Latino, so people of color constitute about 60%. It is also the site of Duke University, University of North Carolina, and North Carolina Central University. This gives it a significant cultural



Historic Stagville Plantation in northern Durham County was the largest slave plantation in North Carolina.

and political footprint, especially in the South, and is the basis for the launch of the Research Triangle, a major high tech business center.



Durham sits atop beautiful rolling land covered with pine trees. One hundred miles of hiking trails lay within 15 miles of my

house. It boasts fabulous golf courses, cheap and empty. Ray and I bonded over politics, reading, and golf.

My other close friend Karen Hayes regularly hosted parties, so I had a vibrant social life. I was diagnosed with cancer in my Durham years but was lucky that Duke has a world-renowned cancer center that took good care of me.



I surrounded myself with joyous children, especially Devin DeJesus (r) with her sister Ciara.

In 2015, I returned to Los Angeles to help take care of my beautiful goddaughter, Tamierra, and said goodbye to wonderful Durham. But I kept my house and phone number.

51. Southern Black History Travels



The Crossroads in Mississippi is an important cultural center.

I have visited forty countries, but my favorite trips have been Black history, music, and family history tours of the South, often with my great friend Gerald Lenoir.

I have done self-made tours through Alabama, Mississippi (plus Memphis and New Orleans), Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina,

South Carolina, Virginia, and D.C. (and Harper's Ferry). I have also seen a bit in Tennessee, Florida, Missouri, and Texas.

These visits are compelling to me due to the horrific and inspiring history of Black people in this region. I have been lucky to meet fascinating people on these trips. Here are a few of the many highlights.

1. I learned that the Montgomery bus stop where Rosa Parks boarded each day for decades, including the historic day, is located on Court Square. Court Square was the main slave-trading center of Alabama.



With Gerald Lenoir and the now famous voting rights activist LaTosha Brown. We worked together on Count Every Vote, a Southern voter protection program in 2004.

2. Dexter Avenue is the broadest avenue in Montgomery. It leads from Court Square to the state capitol. The Dexter Avenue Baptist

Church, Dr. King's church during the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, is just one block from the State Capitol and fifty yards from the nearest Confederate monument. Arch segregationist governors and Dr. King looked at each other all day through their windows. The Confederacy established its first office across the street from the Capitol, and Jefferson Davis ordered the attack on Fort Sumter from there.



Dr. King was the minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The church is located one block from the state capitol: Dr. King and arch segregationist governors looked at each other through their windows all day.

3. We accidentally met Chris McNair, the father of one of the four girls killed in the Birmingham church bombing and a professional photographer. He invited us to dinner with his family and showed us his extensive gallery of Civil Rights movement photos. We also visited the former site of Angela Davis's father's gas station.



The great and fearless Fred Shuttlesworth, leader of the Birmingham civil rights movement in the 1960s.

4. In Mound Bayou, Mississippi, we met the scion of a town founder, often billed as the first-ever African American town. He told us his forebear and other founders had been slaves owned by Jefferson Davis and his brother!



5. In Meridian, Miss., we found the grave of James Cheney, one of the three civil rights workers murdered by the Klan during Freedom Summer, had been constantly defaced. Finally, they reconstructed it of iron and anchored it in cement.



The Meridian, Miss. grave of James Cheney, one of the three civil rights workers murdered during Freedom Summer in 1964. It is reinforced with iron because racists constantly destroy it.

6. We stayed in the Clarksdale, Mississippi hotel above the nightclub Ground Zero, both owned by actor Morgan Freeman. We also went to his fancy restaurant for dinner and danced alongside him and his wife at the club.



7. Gerald and I found records of his ancestors at Alcorn State College in Mississippi. We visited Gerald's previously unknown Mississippi relatives in Jayess, Mississippi, a place with no stores or schools but many forty-acre parcels, and a church where half the people buried in the cemetery bore the name Lenoir.

We attended a revival in the church where a parade of people approached Gerald to claim they were related. We visited

Gerald's oldest great aunt in the hospital: her mother was a slave. She told us stories her mother had told her about slavery.

8. We visited Perry County, the site of the birth of my friend Frederick Douglass (Smokey) Perry's Dad, the Communist leader Pettis Perry. We also visited Marion where the murder of Jimmy Lee Jackson sparked the march that ended in Bloody Sunday. Smokey accompanied Gerald and I on that visit to Alabama.

9. I met a Black woman who told us she directed a white couple to Robert Williams the night the police came after him in Monroe, N.C. The white couple claimed the Williams family helped raised them. The police eventually charged Robert Williams with kidnapping this couple on that night and launched an international hunt for him.

The woman's son toured us through Monroe, pointing out the places where Williams had campaigned against segregation. He led us to Williams' grave. It was in a segregated cemetery with graves marked as far back as the 1840s.

10. In a Savannah, Ga., soul food restaurant, a patron saw me reading a civil rights book and hooked me up with a friend's civil rights tour of Savannah— by boat! The highlight was Runaway Negro Cove.

11. In Charleston and the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, I found out that the Gullah-Geechee language is almost identical to the creole spoken in the West Indies.
12. I tracked down Nathaniel Bacon's old plantation in Virginia. He had loomed large in my research into the origins of racism in the U.S. as the leader of Bacon's Rebellion.
13. I went on a tour of Nat Turner's revolt led by the scion of the principal slaveowner at that time, killed by Turner. Many of my fellow tourists were also relatives of former slaveowners of that period and place. I found out that an ancestor of Turner now owns the land where Turner's wife was enslaved and that more than one hundred of his descendants live in the area. I also learned that Dred Scott was born and raised on the path of the Turner revolt but was removed out of state just before the rebellion.



14. At Harper's Ferry, site of John Brown's famous armed anti-slavery raid, the official museum video depicted Brown as a clinically insane maniac. The museum shop was filled with Confederate memorabilia, and one could not purchase a single remembrance or image of John Brown. Reactionary West Virginia has subverted John Brown's memory

15. Stone Mountain is the "Mount Rushmore of the Confederacy": massive sculptures of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis are carved into the huge stone mountain. But the current website depicts the site as "Atlanta's Favorite Destination for Family Fun. Nestled in 3200 acres of natural beauty, Stone Mountain Park features family-friendly attractions, outdoor recreational activities and a variety of on-site lodging options so you can stay where you play!"

The website contains no images of the sculptures or references to the Confederacy and the souvenir shop had scant memorabilia or references to either. Liberal Atlanta has subverted the Confederacy.

16. I met Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and many other legendary civil rights fighters at the fortieth commemoration of the Selma to Montgomery March. I learned that the children of Viola Liuzzo, a white volunteer from Detroit murdered by white vigilantes immediately after the original march, were told by their father

that she died in an ordinary auto accident. They didn't discover the truth of her martyrdom for decades.



In Selma with one of my heroes, Rev. C.T. Vivian, former executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and lifelong organizer. We worked together to build the National Anti-Klan Network.

17. I lunched at a café that billed itself as the local home of the Rush Limbaugh club while on an anti-war in Iraq speaking tour of eastern Tennessee and Asheville, N.C. While I ate, the thirtyish white male waiter slipped me a handwritten note that I feared might be a threat. It read: "I know who you are. I read about you. I wish you could send a few thousand progressive people from California. They could change the politics of North Carolina for the better." Rightwing "revolution radio" in the area denounced the corporations as "fascist" and advertised "the best gas masks" and other survivalist paraphernalia.

52. Grantland and Me in Life and Death



Grantland and Lee's wedding.

I met Grantland Johnson when he went to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade in 1971. I was one of the Bay Area regional organizers, and Grantland lived in Sacramento, my hometown.

Like many others who went on that Brigade, Grantland became one of my most treasured and lasting friends. We both loved politics, books, sports, fighting racism—plus talking and laughing. He was one of the most knowledgeable, engaging, and fun people in my life. He had the most extensive library of anyone I know, was a brilliant political strategist and coalition builder, and a consummate policymaker.



Grantland was from Del Paso Heights on the northern edge of the city of Sacramento. It was one of the two main Black communities in our home town. Both of us loved baseball, and one of his teammates and lifelong buddies was the great Leron Lee. Although Leron was nearly twice Grantland's size, Grantland was also the blocking fullback for Leron on Grant

High's football team.

Grantland lived an accomplished and meaningful life. After working with local trade unions and serving on the Sacramento Regional Transit Board, he won election to the Sacramento City Council. A few years later, he became the first African American elected to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors.

In 1993, Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Bill Clinton, named Grantland Western Regional Director of Health and Human Services. In 1999, Gray Davis selected Grantland to be California's Secretary of Health and Human Services, the largest state agency in the United States.



Grantland suffered from congestive heart failure and diabetes for many years. In 2011, he told his friends that he needed a kidney

transplant, and I volunteered to be the donor. I figured I had two and only needed one, so it was an easy decision that might save Grantland.

I was living in Durham, N.C., at the time, so I traveled to the University of California at San Francisco Medical Center to go through the work-ups to see if I met the stringent criteria of a kidney donor and to discover if I was a biological match for Grantland.

In these work-ups, the doctors discovered that I had prostate cancer. I was disqualified from being a kidney donor for Grantland but was successfully treated for cancer. I was trying to save Grantland but instead he rescued me.

No one else offered a kidney transplant and soon Grantland became too weak to undergo surgery. He passed in 2014.

53. My Honey Bunny Tamierra



2020

My relationship with Tamierra has been one of the most rewarding and complex of my life. We are doing well now, but our history is still being written.

I met Tamierra's great-grandmother, Debra Lee, at Community Coalition, a South Los Angeles community organizing group. Debra was a longtime grassroots leader in the Relative Caregivers program there, and when I joined in 2006, she was staffing that program. She had been raising two grandchildren, cousins Briana and Josh, pretty much since birth.



2009

The single most important thing I learned at Community Coalition was the magnitude, impact, and issues of children living with neither parent and the daily heroism of relatives who take them in. For decades I was puzzled about the depth of

problems piled up in Black and Brown communities. Academics and the press focused on the ubiquity and difficulties faced by single female-headed households.

But unbeknownst to most observers and me, the crack cocaine crisis of the 1980s and 1990s was the first drug epidemic that dragnetted women in similar numbers as men. This caused a tragic leap of millions of children bereft of both parents due to addiction, mass incarceration, and death.



Somewhere near 50% of kids in South Los Angeles high schools don't live with either parent. All face the trauma of being parentless. Many are further traumatized by the dysfunction of the child welfare system and foster parenting. And millions live with grandparents, older siblings, aunts or uncles who lovingly take them in during a crisis moment, with little preparation and

often few resources.

From schools to health to churches to sports to businesses to street dynamics to cultural events to politics, every institution in the community is massively impacted by this situation.

To worsen matters, these relative caregivers suffer discrimination by the welfare system. Most are not recognized by the system and receive no support or benefits. Those in the system receive much less support than foster parents, let alone group homes, despite being generally much poorer. Studies also show that children living with relatives fare much better than those who are fostered.



The Coalition's relative caregivers' program was inaugurated to correct many of these inequities and has been quite successful. Debra was one of the most important leaders in this fight. I deeply admired her and the other relative caregivers and came to

understand their role in keeping the community together.

EARLY YEARS

Debra's granddaughter, Briana, was besieged by health issues in 2007, at age 13. The stress caused Debra to suffer a series of strokes on top of her already severe diabetes.



I started hanging out with Josh every Saturday to give some respite to Debra. Before long, Tamierra was born on July 12, 2008, and custody was immediately awarded to Debra. I fell in love with Tamierra at first sight a few weeks after she came into the world and started spending every Saturday with both her and Josh.

Tamierra was the calmest and easiest baby I ever knew, and beautiful. I reveled in being connected to these two sweet kids. At some point, I told Debra that if her health deteriorated, I would

be willing to take custody of Tamierra, and she agreed to this proposal.

Since Debra's health seemed pretty stable, I moved to Durham, N.C., in April of 2010. I visited Tamierra six times per year and had Debra and her stay with me in Durham for 3-4 weeks every summer. These were beautiful times. As a supplement, I became a Guardian ad Litem in Chatham County.



Tamierra and her buddy, Devin DeJesus with my neighbor Wendy's heavenly apple cheesecake in Durham.

BACK TO LOS ANGELES

During their summer visit in 2014, I noticed Debra's energy had diminished. Months later, the doctors determined that she had suffered a heart attack. She began to faint and require EMT help almost monthly due to low blood sugar. She was hospitalized in

the summer of 2015 with kidney problems.

The prognosis was a significant hospital stay and an uncertain recovery. I decided to move back to Los Angeles ASAP to take care of Tamierra and made it on time for the new school year. I officially became a legal co-guardian of Tamierra. We agreed that we would make decisions together but that Debra would always have the last say in decision-making.

I was deliriously happy with Tamierra. I will never forget her flying down the stairs and jumping into my arms every day when I picked her up from school or the first time she said it was OK



I was “Bob, the SuperHero Hair Dresser.”

for me to call her “my daughter.” Debra’s health markedly improved once she began getting dialysis in a clinic rather than doing it herself.



Tamierra with Daijha, her buddy in our condominium complex.

I had Tamierra more than half the time and saw her every day for four years. She was thriving, active at soccer, learning the trumpet, curious, and an excellent student with a fine memory. In third grade, she tested at 10th-grade reading level. Whenever there was a dull moment, she would read, even at dinner.

I mobilized my family and friends to be Tamierra’s village. Everyone became her active auntie and uncle. I reorganized my life, location, and finances around her.

However, as Debra's health improved, she wanted more control over Tamierra, especially to instill her with Christianity. Suffice to say, things went from bad to worse and, as Tamierra entered middle school, she decided she would take custody of Tamierra full-time.

I was devastated. I spent months managing my anger, successfully I think. I took Tamierra on weekends every three to four weeks, giving myself time to recuperate and them the chance to settle into the new pattern.



Tamierra was flower girl at Josina's wedding, 2015.



Coach Anthony of Mid City Soccer Academy presented Tamierra with the championship Game Ball in 2018.

Then the pandemic hit. I spent eight months with my grandchildren but spent the day with Tamierra every two or three weeks while I was home. Our relationship has been great again.

She has grown taller than me and the paper thin girl has been replaced by a full bodied young woman.

This leaves me feeling that my relationship with her may be almost as important as when I first returned to LA. It definitely means I won't move out of town, which I had thought to do.



2021



Chef Tamiera cooked me one of her Japanese specialties, salmon.

54. My Joy in Children



Gerald Lenoir and his nieces at his 60th birthday.

Children have been a lifelong source of joy in my life.

Love for children is a family trait inherited from my Mom and Dad. Like my Dad, it is rare for me to pass a child on the streets, especially babies and toddlers, without stopping to enjoy them and encourage their parents. Love of children is one of my bonds

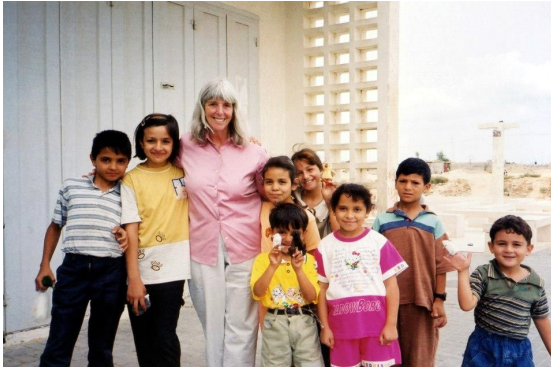
with my best friends.

When I lived in Durham, N.C., I volunteered as a Guardian ad Litem (GAL). A GAL is appointed by the court to advocate for the best interests of children who are wards of the state welfare systems. I positively loved this work.



“Toot-Toot” was my first Guardian ad Litem kid.

At the height of danger that I faced in Palestine, I found peace and love each night in the orphanage below my apartment. I have taken photos of children in many of the countries I visited, deposited in an album on my Facebook page.



With Barbara Lubin of the Middle East Childrens Alliance in Palestine, 2003

The great loves of my life have been my daughter and grandbabies and my goddaughter, Tamierra. As I age, they have become even more important to me.

Children stand apart from our world of cynicism, racism, and violence and embody unconditional love. And returning that love has been the biggest joy of my life.



With my brother Samuel at his amazing DermaCamp for kids with serious dermatological problems in Brazil. He's in front, photo center, and I'm in back, also center.



With my sweet neighbor kids in Berkeley. l-r: Buddha, Elena, Kiyoko. ca. 1999.



In Alexandria, Egypt, reporting on the Egyptian Revolution, 2011.



While campaigning for Walden Bello in Manila in 2010.



Zanzibar 2007

55. Mom's Ring



I have many possessions which I enjoy, but only one that is special. That's my Mom's jade ring.

I have acquired beautiful ceramic plates, coffee cups, dolls, and ethnic shirts from throughout the world. I have also collected some beautiful art, especially original pieces by friends. But each

time I move, I give away virtually everything I have to friends.

I am not attached to stuff, just my Mom's ring.

56. My Second Home in Paradise



These and other retirees on Ala Moana Beach became my uncles, aunties, and close friends for decades.

I visited Hawaii every winter for more than 25 years. It was my place of respite, calm, and rejuvenation.

Many of my stays were for one week; others up to three weeks. I believe that one can usually get immediate stress relief in one week, but more than that is deep rest each day. After three weeks, you can hardly remember what you were doing before you left.



Masa was the unofficial Mayor of Ala Moana Beach. He embraced me into his tribe.

My first breath of Honolulu air immediately transports me to a beautiful reality. The majestic mountains emit spiritual calm. The water is deeply healing. The music and food are blissful. And, most of all, the people are gentle and kind. It always took

me the better part of a week to get accustomed to kindness.

I visited most of the islands, but my favorite was always Oahu, especially Honolulu and Waimanalo.

These frequent vacations were affordable because my close friend from college, Danny Li, lived about a mile from my favorite beach, Ala Moana, and graciously put up with me year after year. My friend Leonard Hoshijo guided me through Hawaiian life.



Leonard Hoshijo

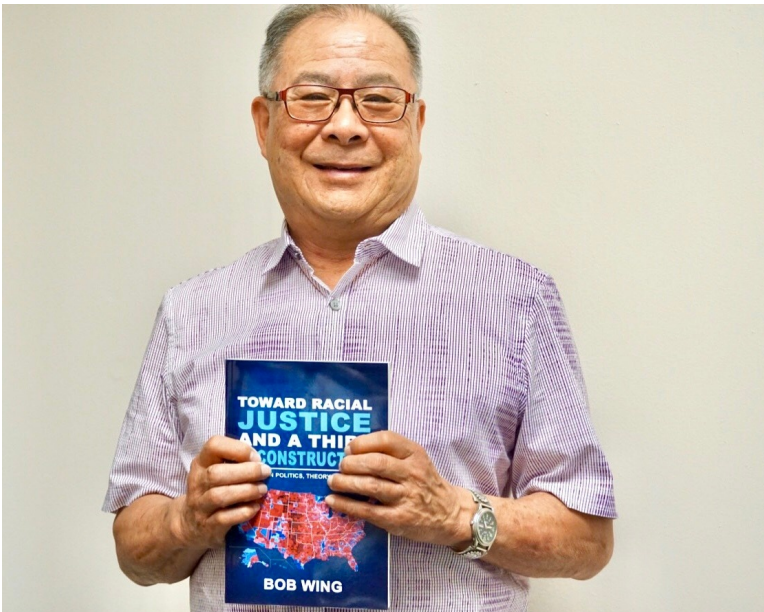
On my second visit to the Islands, I met a bunch of young retirees, mostly union guys, at Ala Moana Beach in Honolulu. Masa was the “Mayor of Ala Moana,” and his whole group adopted me. We spent the morning swimming, walking,

bicycling, running, and talking story and often lunched together. Each year they greeted me as if I had never left.

By 2005, all of them had passed away. The same year Danny moved to the Big Island, far from a swimmable beach. And my favorite Honolulu restaurant, Canton House, closed.

I didn't return until 2019, but Hawaii will always be my second home. The magical Bruddah Iz (Israel Ka'ano'i Kamakawiwo'ole) transports me back to Paradise with every note.

57. A Life in Writing (with Bibliography)



Growing up, I never dreamt I would be a writer. Honestly, I barely read let alone wrote. And what did I read? The Willie Mays Story, the Henry Aaron Story, the Bob Cousy Story—you get the

idea, lightweight sports biographies.

Somehow I even managed to avoid the classics taught in junior high school and high school. No Dickens for me.

I got good grades in school, mainly due to my excellent memory. I had no concept of math, literature, science, music, or history. I just memorized what I needed to get good grades. I was a classic American philistine.

All this changed when I dropped out of college in 1970 to become a full-time movement person, what we used to call a professional revolutionary. Specifically, meeting and studying Marxism with Harry Chang (see the story about him) changed my entire intellectual make-up and that of numerous others who worked with him.

I learned to read scientifically and appreciate knowledge by participating in a dozen or more study groups on Marx's Capital and other books. Meanwhile, I learned to write by penning dozens of political memoranda, strategy papers, political education guides, and leaflets for the organizations I worked with.

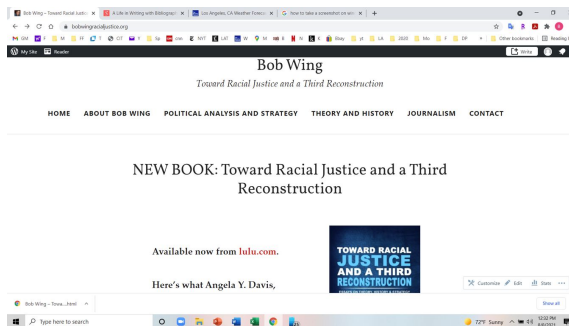
But it wasn't until 1980 that I had the knowledge and confidence to write serious political essays. And when I did, my writing was ostentatiously theoretical. Although I wrote numerous lengthy

political and theoretical papers in the 1980s, I didn't learn to write in plain English until the late 1990s when I started ColorLines magazine.

My main intention has always been to try to clarify the historical and theoretical basis for successful political strategy to combat and eliminate racism.

I always wrote quickly and fairly clearly, but I never became a master at the craft. I became much more competent in the early 2000s when I began writing journalism. But even today, with probably more than a hundred thousand published words to my name, I see myself as an organizer and strategist who occasionally writes instead of a writer. For me, writing is part of organizing.

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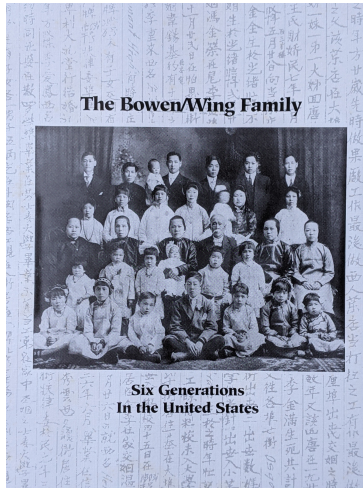
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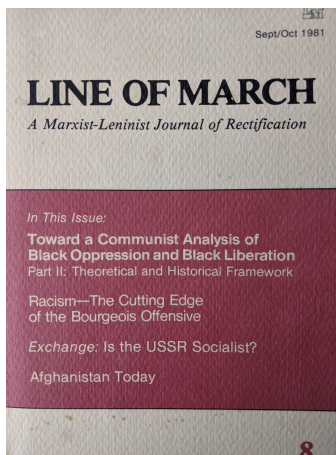
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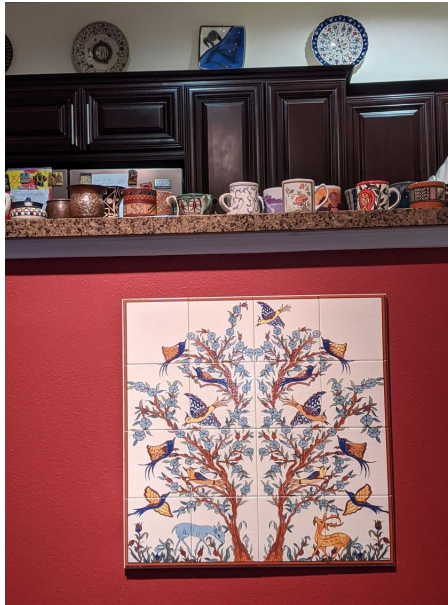
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58. My Love for Ceramics and Ethnic Shirts



View into my kitchen. In the forefront is a Palestinian “Tree of Life” tile mosaic. On the counter are handmade cups from all over the world. On the back wall are large ceramic plates from, l-r, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey.

Two of the forms of beauty I have come to treasure are ceramics and shirts. I have collected both throughout the world, wearing the shirts and using the ceramic plates and cups almost daily for forty years.

I first got enraptured by ceramics on a visit to Mexico City in the early 1980s. I wandered into a small store that displayed stunning ceramic plates in its window. The shopkeeper told me the story of Mexican ceramics called talavera. I fell in love with the art and ended up purchasing three plates, all of which I still own.

I soon also realized how easy it is to transport ceramic plates wrapped in clothing in my suitcase. Shopping for ceramics became one of my most enjoyable traveling experiences and perhaps the most beautiful things I own. But I rarely get attached to them, as I give most of them to friends every time I change residences. This is also a convenient excuse for purchasing more on future travels.

My love of ethnic shirts started even earlier and became my trademark style. I began with Hawaiian shirts purchased in Hawaii, not the cheesy ones available on the mainland. Since then, I have branched out into ethnic shirts from all over the world, with the majority from Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines.



I wore my guayabera embroidered with the United Farm Workers logo to my dear friend Dorothy Burnham's 100th birthday party.

My most extensive collection is of guayaberas. These shirts are usually cotton and have four pockets plus embroidery running vertically on each side of the shirt, front and back. They originate in Spain, but many Latin American countries have created their own versions. The Philippines also has a dazzling version, called Barong.

I wore these shirts to work every day until I retired, as well as to parties and both formal and informal events. I even wore a Barong at my daughter's wedding.

59. Love and Romance



I have been fortunate at love. I have been with incredibly courageous, politically committed, intelligent, powerful, and beautiful women.

My only bad luck was that only two enjoyed cooking. A strange fact is that all of my serious girlfriends had one name that started with M.

Dating frightened me as a high schooler, and I avoided it. Until I was forty, my pattern was to get to know just about everything to know about a woman (except what they were like in bed) through many years of doing political work and socializing together before starting a romance.

I knew Josina's mother ten years before we became lovers. My record is 37 years of friendship before romance. I never did typical dating. It always took me at least a year after a break-up to begin seeing someone new.

This is a great way to choose partners. I was fortunate to know so many fantastic movement women that this method was possible. But after age forty, the movement ebbed, organizations came apart, and most of my friends married, so this deliberate process was no longer an option. I reverted to the norm: dating near strangers.

A MAN'S LIFELONG LESSON

I didn't have a steady girlfriend until I was 21 years old! The experience was profound and ended with a lifelong lesson.

I was surprised when a close friend of mine approached me after a meeting one night and told me she was in love with me. She was way out of my league in every respect, so I hadn't even dreamed about her.

But we were a fabulous match in many ways. Many of our friends thought us an ideal couple, despite being that rarest of combinations, an Asian male with a Black female.

But in fact, we may have been too much alike: high-toned, high energy, young, and stubborn. We could be flammable, both to the good and bad. But she was far more mature than I.

For me, this was a memorable time, as most first loves are. We moved in together, but we only lasted a year or so.

One of the signs of our revolutionary times was the gifts we gave each other for our birthdays. I gave her a shotgun: she gave me a copy of Stalin's Collected Works!

The big lesson came as we broke up, an event which my inexperience led me to believe impossible.

One night we got into an argument. I can't even remember what it was about. But suddenly, my lover broke into tears and rushed out the door to safe harbor with a friend.

The next day I was informed—I don't remember by who—that I had made my partner physically scared of me during our argument.

The idea, or the possibility of attacking a woman, had never occurred to me. And I thought my partner was so powerful as to be impervious.

It took me some hours, but I finally realized that my body language was indeed threatening and scary. It had to be so to have felt threatening to such a strong person who knew me so well.

My realization was too late to save the relationship. But it was a lifelong lesson that I have never forgotten. And, I dare say, I have made good on it, being conscious never to put myself in a similar mode with a woman.

Still, it has taken me a lifetime to temper my temper. And I am still working on it.

ABORTION AND VASECTOMY

I got a vasectomy at age 33. After Josina was born and her Mom and I broke up, I wanted to avoid having children by more than one woman, worrying that it would be too much for me and difficult for everyone else involved.

I told my then girlfriend about this plan and she asked me to wait a bit before having the vasectomy. She then got pregnant and decided on an abortion, so I went ahead with my plan.

I hoped that getting the vasectomy would free me from birth control issues, but then we entered the age of AIDS, so that never came to pass.

Surprisingly, my most adventurous dating life happened in my late fifties. It probably had something to do with living in Los Angeles, though it continued in Durham.

I had affairs with twice as many women as the rest of my life, some in their twenties. I always preferred Black women, but in this period, I exclusively dated African Americans, though not on purpose.

Still, I never broke a monogamy agreement. I take credit for part of this; another part was sheer happenstance.

MARRIAGE

I only came within shouting distance of considering marriage once and very briefly. I believe marriage is a patriarchal institution and that most marriages are built on an unequal sexual division of labor.

But I do not outright oppose it on principle and have plenty of first-hand experience with great marriages, including my parent's.

If I had met the right person at the right time, I might well have married. However, by age 31, I had little interest in living with anyone, and as the years passed, I became outright opposed to it. I suppose part of that is individualism, but I also detest the sexual division of labor, and I have little confidence that I could avoid it.

Almost all of my close friends are happily married, but there isn't one that I wish I could copy. And, I can't imagine having to negotiate all the details of parenting with a live-in partner.

Remaining single has worked for me, and possibly spared womankind a lot of frustration and pain as well.

Still, being single is difficult for many reasons, especially for women, and I always hoped my daughter would find a great marriage partner. She did.

60. I Wonder as I Wander



The elderly lady is the wife of my paternal grandfather's brother. This is her family in front of my grandfather's former home in Lung Doo, Chungshan, Guangdong, China, 2007. They are my last known living relatives in China.

My Mom got me traveling as a teenager, and I never stopped. I have visited about forty U.S. states and more than forty

countries. I rarely return to a place but have been to Mexico about seven times and Brazil four.

What do I love about traveling?



I traveled to China in 1995 with my favorite aunt, Lilac, one of my Mom's sisters. She took care of her parents and her love and support kept the extended family together.

I love discovering new forms of geographic, architectural, artistic, handicraft, linguistic, and musical beauty and learning how people in different geopolitical and cultural locations see and understand the world. I avidly study each country's unique history, social and political issues, interact with the people, and enjoy their food. I love the sky, the water, the mountains, the flora and fauna in all their wild diversity. I love the people fighting to improve their lives.

When I travel, I study up. I read histories, novels, watch films, study the geography, learn at least a few words of the language, and read travel guides before and during each trip, and almost always hire tour guides at historic or cultural sites. Travel is one of my favorite ways to learn.

I never met a country, a people, a language, or cuisine I didn't enjoy.

61. Of God and Religion



The Fremont Presbyterian Church was the first church in my neighborhood in 1963.

I grew up in a household devoid of religion.

My Mom's Dad considered himself a Christian, but only because he was forever grateful that a Christian mission in San Francisco Chinatown taught him English.

My Mom may have vaguely considered herself a Christian but probably only out of sociability because she also never showed any interest in God, the Bible, or church. Later she said she was “agnostic,” but I think she didn’t want to use such an exclamatory term as “atheist.”

When I was an adult, my aunts once told me that Dad had been a “militant atheist” when he was young, but Dad denied it. He certainly was an atheist, but religion was a total non-subject—both explicitly and implicitly—in our household and our extended families. Rationalism was more up our line.

When I was about ten, I noticed two things that got me curious about Christianity. The first was that some of my baseball friends regularly disrupted our games by announcing that they “had to go to catechism.” I despised these interruptions, but I was slow to realize that catechism was connected to Catholicism.

The second was that an impressive new Presbyterian church was built in our insular community, the first to enter, and many of my friends and neighbors attended.

So finally, I asked my Mom about God and religion. She wasn’t willing to take on the topic, but she quickly found someone to lead a youth Bible study for me and some of my friends who were also curious. The class held my attention, but nothing stuck.

My second bout with religion occurred when I was 15. That summer, I attended a basketball training camp near Lake Tahoe sponsored by the San Francisco (now Golden State) Warriors. My dorm room contained a bible, and I started reading it. I was drawn to some of the stories, so I took—actually, stole—the bible home to continue reading. I read a bit more than half of it before I decided that, although some of the stories were interesting, I couldn't figure out what any of it meant in real life, or at least my real life.



In China, many people participate in rituals with Taoist, Buddhist, or Confucian roots. Still, few think of themselves as religious, just as many in the West celebrate Christmas even if they are not Christians. Moreover, Buddhism and Confucianism are not religions since they centrally involve no Gods.

Religious belief is rare in China. Although various Buddhist, Taoist, and other ideas or rituals are widely practiced, few Chinese consider themselves religious, just as many in the West celebrate Christmas and Easter but are non-Christian. Confucianism was for centuries the dominant ideology, but Confucianism is a philosophy that involves no Gods and is not a religion. Neither is Buddhism.

I am an atheist, but not one made strident by a big struggle to reject religion nor as a result of Marxist influence: I was never religious to begin with.

However, I am deeply aware of the crucial positive role religion has played in Black history and many liberation struggles, such as Rev. Martin Luther King and Latin American liberation theology. I consider Jesus a profoundly revolutionary figure.

Even though the influence of religion has declined, if one is militantly opposed to religion, one is not likely to be a successful organizer in Black or Latino(a) communities where Christianity still runs deep.



I have worked directly with dozens of ministers, primarily Black but of all races and numerous ethnicities, in the course of my social justice work, all of whom I made aware of my atheism as our relationships deepened.

However, my utter lack of Christian background makes me an outlier in U.S. culture.

62. No Fuss, No Muss



My lovely paternal grandmother, Mary Wing, with Josina and I. ca. 1983.

I have never believed in having a motto. But as my paternal grandmother aged, I decided she had a great one: “No fuss, no muss.” I think it meant something like, “don’t cause unnecessary drama, be humble.”

This seemed to capture my humble, hard-working Po-Po, and I have held it in the back of my mind for about thirty years now.

In my youth, I had high aspirations and most likely caused more than my share of unnecessary fuss. But as I aged, I tried to cut down on that. While it's not really a motto, I have sought to "be useful, especially to your loved ones but also to strangers and the struggle for social justice."

63. Water Baby for Life



In Zanzibar with Gerald Lenoir and Nunu Kidane, 2007

Another great source of joy in my life has been water. I am a water baby for life.

I find most bodies of water to be beautiful and calming, and have a hard time keeping my body out of them. I am known for suddenly stripping to my underwear and diving in when I come

across a remotely inviting body of water, even if it is freezing cold.

The feel of cool water on my body is soothing, healing, and sensual. The sound of waves, rivers, and waterfalls transport me to a better place. Small lakes are nirvana, especially ponds filled with snow melt. Swimming is the closest thing to flying, a nearly effortless motion. Diving from high places gives me the same thrilling feeling.

I learned to swim while visiting my cousins in Los Angeles and then took swimming lessons back home. I grew up a couple of blocks from a public swimming pool in Sacramento and just over the levee from the American River. As a youth, I spent virtually every day of the summer in the water. I trained as a



I am a down Sacramento water fighter, one of the thrills of the American River float.

lifeguard at 17.

I lived in the Bay Area for 38 years and visited Hawaii almost every winter. I was lucky to have a close friend, Danny Li, to stay with who lived a short walk to my favorite beach, Ala Moana, where I could swim and talk story with retirees every day.

I brought Josina and her cousin, Teri, to the City of Berkeley's Camp Tuolumne every summer. These visits were among the highlights of my entire life: pure relaxation while watching my kids have so much fun and grow up in the process. I spent most of my time there in the small river and at nearby Rainbow Falls, where I could dive from a 30-foot cliff. I'll never forget the time Josina surprised me by jumping from the same place.

I again spent wonderful time on the American River in my forties and fifties. I rafted Class 3 and 4 whitewater with Josina and my great friend Linda Burnham on the upper and middle forks. And each summer for more than a decade, I organized daylong "floating picnics" on the lower river with up to 120 friends at a time. Pure fun!

On one of those trips, I helped rescue a young man who was not part of our group. I was alerted by a member of our group and when I reached him, he was inert and semi-conscious. As I towed him to shore with the help of another person, I worried that I might have to perform CPR since I had just completed a

course. Luckily there was a nurse ashore who took over. The young man had to be helicoptered to a nearby hospital.

I have visited some of the world's most beautiful beaches during my foreign and domestic travels. My favorite of all was in Zanzibar. It was gorgeous but not as spectacular as some



Ala Moana Beach, Honolulu, my favorite swimming beach.

others I have visited. What made it special was that it was entirely secluded, with no signs of human activity to be heard or seen. And wonderfully safe to frolic in. My favorite beach for swimming is Ala Moana Beach in Honolulu.

I almost drowned twice, on two of the world's most famous beaches. The first was when I was a 16-year-old exchange student to Brazil. The day after we landed in Rio de Janeiro, I hightailed it to world famous Copacabana Beach with some of my fellow exchange students.

At some point during the day, I caught a cramp in each of my legs while body surfing, just at the point where the waves broke.

I was tossed around in the water, unable to stand, and had to be carried out by two Brazilians.



Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro

The second time was at Waimea Bay in Oahu. I was with my old friend, Danny Li, who doesn't swim. Unbeknownst to him, I got caught in a current that took me out to sea, but luckily it also brought me back. I came huffing and puffing back towards Danny, and he looked at me like I was crazy.

Lesson: Respect the ocean! (And rivers, too.)

Since age 55, I have had the privilege of living near water again and constantly swimming, both in Los Angeles and Durham. These days I swim about 3 miles a week in a pool, plus beach time. I am a lucky guy.

If it were not against the law, I would love to have some of my ashes placed in the American River and possibly Ala Moana Beach and Playa del Rey.

64. Happy and Low Times



I have been fortunate to have a very happy life. I found and followed my passion, social justice, with all the energy and intelligence I could summon.

I have grown a great family and have a group of brilliant, committed, fascinating, honest, and loyal lifelong friends. They are the core of my existence, the ones who help me keep perspective, who I can love unconditionally, and who give meaning to my life.

My first happy years were from birth through 6th grade. I had the great good sense to pick fabulous parents, and they ensured an exceptionally secure, happy childhood for me. My neighborhood was filled with children, and I had unreserved friendships.

Junior high and high school were not so great, but I had sublime years from 1968–1985.

These were my years of political awakening and of becoming clear about my identity and goals in life. I found and bonded with my best friends who shared these and, like me, gave their life's energy and love to their fulfillment and each other. We risked our lives and livelihoods to become revolutionaries, internationalists, and people of color. Victorious peoples' struggles all over the globe nourished us and we grew from our experiences.

We passionately sought to understand the world, change it, become conscientious citizens of humanity, and be loving friends and parents. My friends helped me become aware of my strengths and shortcomings and improve myself as part of our lifelong journey.

I was challenged to take on meaningful and large-scale intellectual, political, and organizational tasks, the likes of which I had not previously imagined. I met committed revolutionaries and intellectuals from all over the world.

I traveled to numerous countries where I did my best to immerse myself in their histories, cultures, movements, and beauty. My curiosity and commitment deepened and broadened.

In 1980, my daughter Josina was born and transformed my life. I had to try to put myself in her position to understand what she was going through to be the best father I could be, especially

since I was a single Dad.

Fathering a girl has been a profound learning experience and the most joyful of my life. I have also had the great good luck to help raise several other children.

My most challenging years were 1991-1995, the years of mid-life crisis and political burnout. In and around 1991, the socialist countries and the world revolutionary movements, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, suffered historic reverses, many of them self-inflicted due to their economic stagnation and lack of democracy.

These caused a political and intellectual crisis in me. The first Iraq war was wildly popular in the U.S., even in Berkeley, causing me further political disorientation. And in that year, I also ended my longest romantic relationship.

But those were also great parenting years, including girls' sports. These were also among the many beautiful summers Josina and I spent at wonderful Camp Tuolumne. They were also a time of adventure in skydiving, whitewater rafting, travel, socially responsible investing, and productive union organizing. For several years I dropped off meals to be people with AIDS through Project Open Hand.

In 1995, I connected with a new generation of radicals of color, and I returned to the big political battles. In 1998, Gary Delgado of the Applied Research Center hired me, and later that year I founded ColorLines magazine. I had found a new political home in the people of color community organizing and electoral sector. That has been my main home base since then.

2001 was a beautiful year despite and even partially because of the September 11 attacks. My 50th birthday, described elsewhere, was one of the most fantastic times of my life.

The attacks led me to spend the next four years in the antiwar movement. I helped start the antiwar newspaper War Times/Tiempo de Guerras and was elected co-chair of the massive national antiwar coalition United for Peace and Justice. The War Times crew was the most productive and effortless set of folks I ever worked with, and the newspaper took off.

The February 15, 2002, worldwide demonstrations of tens of millions against war in Iraq were a life highlight. I was the overall coordinator of that day's half-million-person march in New York City and had my daughter by my side as an assistant.

My Durham years—2010–2015—were full of learning about the South and meeting many great people and creating new, deep friendships. I always felt that a lifelong racial justice organizer had to work and be familiar with the South, and I finally fulfilled

that self-imposed charge.

I worked and got arrested with the Moral Monday movement (now the Poor People's Campaign), the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Durham People's Alliance, the Pushback Network, the Activist Academy, and Organize 2020. And I got to spread my wings throughout the South, most memorably helping with the successful Chokwe Lumumba mayoral campaign in Jackson, Miss.

I had a wonderful second parenting life from 2008-2019, especially 2015-2019, when I got the opportunity to co-parent my beautiful goddaughter, Tamierra Brooks.

And since 2018, I dove into the joyous world of grandparenting Kai-Kai and Mei-Mei. I spent most of the first year of the pandemic with them—so beautiful and so much fun.

Hopefully, I will have much more great happiness to come. Meanwhile, I am forever grateful to my family members Josina, Cornell, Kai-Kai, Mei-Mei, Moy, Mom & Dad, and Tamierra. And to my lifelong friends, especially Linda, Gerald, Karen, Smokey, Denise, Max, Ray, Bruce R. and many more.

65. Success?



I've spent my life trying to make revolutionary social change that would vastly improve peoples' lives.

Result: Insofar as there has been a revolution, it has come from the white supremacists, not the social justice forces. But we are now on the move.

Funny, but two of the things I've been most successful at were things that were not even on my radar until the end of my twenties, or even later: parenting and accumulating enough money to retire comfortably and help pay for my grandchildren's college education.

66. Friends That Make Life Worth Living



My 60th birthday in Durham, with my great friends (l-r) Gerald and Karen Lenoir, Bruce Richard, me, Josina and Cornell, Minerva Solla, James Early, Linda Burnham, and Miriam Early.

I have been incredibly fortunate with friends.

At age 17, I entered U.C. Berkeley and engaged what became a lifetime focus on the fight for social justice. I was lucky to be part of the first wave of Asian American activism and of Third World (people of color) unity, and formed heady new dreams and relationships. But somehow I never became really personally close with any of my new friends despite spending enormous amounts of time with them.

Then, starting at age 19, I had the great good fortune to meet most of the people who would be lifelong dear friends and comrades. We were all revolutionaries of color shaped in the late sixties, making the transition from being college radicals and revolutionary nationalists to being lifelong revolutionary internationalists and Marxists whose central focus was the struggle against racism at home and abroad.

Almost all of us met via traveling to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade from 1969-73 and many of us became Brigade organizers.

But also crucial to our unique setting was the Third World Women's Alliance which taught us, in theory and practice, about the importance of the struggle against sexism and the leadership of women; Filipino revolutionaries who brought a deadly seriousness and skill to the enterprise; Harry Chang who shaped



Reunion of the Third World Women's Alliance. Front row, l-r: ?, Milagros, Toni Vincent, Fran Beal, Pat Romney, Michelle Mouton. Back row: Linda Burnham, Renata Tervalon, ?, Miriam Louie, Beatriz Pesquera, Ellice Parker, Rebecca Carrillo, Grace Shimizu, ?, Attieno Davis, Letisha Wadsworth, Cheryl Perry League, Jettie Harrison, ?, Zelma Toro, Concha Delgado, Lou Braud.

us intellectually; and many Black organizers who helped all of us to center the Black Liberation struggle in our worldview and political understanding.

The best of times became the rest of my life politically and personally. Dozens, maybe hundreds, of us became comrades for decades and friends for life. And a handful became absolutely

essential to my life, who have shaped and sustained me



Linda Burnham and Max Elbaum, my lifelong dear comrades, buddies, co-authors, and troublemakers. Through fifty years of turbulent change and struggle, we have hung tight.

politically and personally, who have gone through tumult and ecstasy, chaos and contentment together, who literally give meaning to my life and make it worth living.



Frederick Douglass (Smokey) Perry, my buddy for 50 years.

They are my dear comrades, confidantes, soul mates, and teachers of fifty and more years. They are the ones who tell me the truth, especially when I make mistakes.

They have each shared with me their astonishing combination of political and social understanding, commitment to justice, talent, personal integrity, life wisdom, courage, kindness and love. They water my roots.



December 2019, left to right: Miriam Louie, Cheryl Perry, Ellen Kaiser, Michelle Mouton, Linda Burnham, Arnoldo Garcia, Cathi Tactacquin, Gerald Lenoir, Juan Fuentes, Max Elbaum, Belvin Louie.



Denise Crawford in Alaska, 2021.

I am one of the truly lucky ones to be befriended, beloved, and befamilied by such beautiful, committed people. Together with my daughter and her beautiful family, my parents, and my

sister, Moy, they make up the soul and substance of my life.



Josina's wedding in 2016. l-r, Karen Lenoir, Linda Burnham, Gerald Lenoir, Tamierra and me, Dorian Warren, Minerva Solla and Bruce Richard.



Brother Ray Eurquhart, my Durham comrade/buddy.



Dorothy Burnham (now 106) at her 100th birthday party. She has been a revolutionary since the early 1930s! Her abiding curiosity, deep knowledge, inherent grace, beautiful art, political steadfastness, and wonderful companionship have helped sustain me for fifty years.

67. Mom and Dad in Me



At their Loomis, Calif. home, ca. early 1990s.

For much of my life, I thought I was more like my Dad than my Mom.

But that was more true in the days when sports were a central part of my life and especially when I had a crew cut like my Dad's.

The ways I am most like my Dad are: I am athletic and love sports, I pride myself on being a rationalist, and I have a temper.

The ways that I am most like my Mom are: I am a fighter and a risk-taker, I love foreign travel, and I am “Chinese cheap” (with myself, not my friends or others).



With Josina, 1981.

Both of my parents were fabulous parents and kid lovers, and so am I. And both were brilliant pragmatists and planners. I try to emulate this, but am not as good as they were. I hope to make timely decisions and show a lot of grace in my old age as they both did.



At Cal, ca. 1946.

I have spent my entire adult life promoting peace and social justice. In many ways, my goal is to allow all people to have the kind of peace, security, and love that Mom and Dad gave to me.

Dad used to wisely say, “You choose your friends, not your family.” But I had the best of both worlds, because if I could choose, I would choose Mom and Dad to be my Mom and Dad.

Mom used to say that she had a guardian angel watching over her. Maybe that helped her to be adventurous. I told her I didn’t think I had a guardian angel. But then I realized that Mom and Dad were my guardian angels, and will be to the end.

Thanks Mom and Dad. You are the best. I love you forever.



Mom's 60th birthday, 1984.

68. My Sweetheart Grandbabies



2020

When Josina was a baby, I called her my Sweetheart Baby. Well, now I have Sweetheart Grandbabies!



Kai Wing Morita Collins/Fung Kai Wing (Kai-Kai) born 9/25/18

Before I had grandchildren, people used to tell me that being a grandparent was far better than being a parent. I never understood this because I felt that being a parent was beautiful and that it couldn't get any better than that. WRONG!

The obvious advantage to grandparenting over parenting is that grands are not the main disciplinarians or the main responsables. We get to do the fun stuff, to revel in the love and joy. I have spent so much time with Kai and Mei that I am almost a third parent. But almost a parent is light-years from actually being the parent.

But there is more on top of the sheer joy of babies.



Meiko Wing Morita Collins/Fung Meu Leilei (Mei-Mei), born 3/21/2020

If you are lucky, and I am, there is also the satisfaction of watching your child and her partner be wonderful and loving parents themselves. Josina and Cornell are totally committed and intelligent parents. It’s fantastic to see the love in the whole family and to have the confidence that your grandbabies are in the best hands possible.

Finally, the joy is greatly enhanced because I have fewer sources of joy and less stress at this stage of life than in the past, and therefore more time and emotional availability to enjoy the babies.

One special responsibility I had was to give Kai and Mei their Chinese names.



For Kai, I chose 馮 啟 榮 Fung Kai Wing. This means initiating (or spearheading) glory for the Fung family. It also honors my grandfathers who shared the given name Wing. Wing is also our American family name due to U.S. immigration mistaking the last name for the family name when Chinese say the family name first. Kai means ocean in Japanese.

For Mei, I chose 馮 妙 莉 莉 Fung Meu Leilei. This means beautiful lily, a tribute to my Mom whose name is Lily. Meu

honors Josina, as that is her Chinese middle name.



Kai and Mei are by far the main sources of unconditional love and joy in my life. They make my heart sing. I am so lucky to have them. It doesn't hurt that they are the cutest babies ever to inhabit the earth.





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69. Race, Racism & My Family



With my daughter's family: Josina, Mei-Mei, Cornell, and Kai-Kai, 2020.

Issues of race, racism, and the struggle for racial justice have been the centerpiece of my life since I was 19. I have friends of a dizzying variety of ethnicities, but the core of my friends and

colleagues are African American.

And now I have a Black goddaughter and son-in-law, and two mixed Black/Asian (Blasian) grandchildren. So race is more personal than ever for me.



My goddaughter, Tamierra, and I in 2020.

“Race” is a nonsensical concept: there is only one race, the human race. But “race” was invented by racists to serve their interests, and they wielded their power to make it shape our lives in this country.

The U.S. is the only country that considers anyone with a single perceptible drop of African ancestry to be “Black,” and only those who appear “purely white” are considered “White.” The

slaveholders invented and imposed these concepts to maximize who could be enslaved.

By this hateful definition, their own mixed-race children, grandchildren, etc., and those of other white sexual predators were legally “Black” and therefore enslavable. As a result, the 19th century U.S. was the only slaveholding country that met its massive demand for additional slaves through slave reproduction rather than African importation.

Simultaneously, they created a privileged social status (freedom v. slavery, citizenship and political rights, and virtually exclusive access to the best jobs, land, schools, houses) to be enjoyed only by “Whites.” This new concept united all people of European descent who, in their ancestral homelands, made murderous war on each other for centuries—and divided them from Blacks.

There is nothing natural, logical, or scientific about “White” and “Black” in the U.S.

Instead, “White” and “Black” are purely socially constructed concepts. They are two sides of the social relationship of white privilege and racial oppression. These concepts enlarged the enslaved labor force and created a cross-class white political bloc to support it. And after the bloody Civil War finally abolished slavery, the U.S. (and South Africa) was the only place that drew a white supremacist color line (“Jim Crow

segregation”) in every aspect of life.

Racism remains potent in the U.S. even after the Civil Rights Acts made it illegal.

For centuries, the U.S. outlawed inter-racial marriage in an attempt to keep the color line clear. Then, after the Civil Rights Acts loosened racism, the idea of being “mixed-race” or “biracial” started to become acceptable and is now growing rapidly. However, these concepts still generally embrace only those whose parents are of different racial groups.

Actually, most African Americans have been mixed race for centuries due to the sexist atrocities of white slaveholders and interactions with Native peoples. But the one-drop rule meant they were legally and socially recognized only as “Black.”

To avoid slavery and systematic racial discrimination, many mixed-race folks “passed” as white. By 1968, anthropologists estimated that 30% of “White” people actually had some African ancestry. And, to take it all the way back, Africa is the one and only cradle of modern humans, who then migrated to people the rest of the world. We are all African.

This atrocious history personally impacts my family. Racism means that many people question why I, an Asian man, is with his own goddaughter, a Black female teenager. My goddaughter

tells me she feels that some people think I might have kidnapped her. But the majority, who are Black, seem positive. I am widely known in the community as “the man with the child.”

My grandparents went into shock when I showed up at their house with an African American partner. Many extended family members boycotted the wedding of my cousin to a Black man and another cousin who married an African American was excluded from extended family gatherings for decades.

Racial intolerance is most frequent and most volatile among whites, but exists in all groups, including Blacks.

Much more volatile scenarios come into play for my African American son-in-law, Cornell, due to the racist stereotype that Black men are violent and dangerous. Many people cannot “see” that his children are mixed-race, so they worry or even assume that he might have kidnapped his own children! This is a harsh, painful, maddening, and potentially dangerous way to be forced to live. But, again, others are delighted to see a mixed-race family.

Josina will also have to deal with the variety of reactions that people will have to her multiracial children and her African American husband. This is further complicated by the rise in white supremacy, anti-Asian hate, and Josina’s public profile as an elected official and community leader. And she and Cornell

will have to work together to guide the children and each other through the racial thickets in society and their personal lives, identities, and personalities.

Racially mixed people, couples, and families are becoming more widespread and acceptable. But my son-in-law, daughter, and grandchildren will face complicated and sometimes cruel racial identity issues—from some people of all racial groups—their entire lives, even as they gladden those who are supportive of multiracial families.

Racism deforms the beauty of love that sees no color lines into racial intolerance and danger.

70. Whence my Black Affinity?



I am a fifth-generation Chinese American whose family broke the color line in a white suburban Sacramento community. As a result, almost all of my friends and neighbors were white through high school.

My grandparents ex-communicated me and other family members who dated Blacks.

I have the full spectrum of the Rainbow as friends and even speak Spanish. But most of my friends, neighbors, colleagues, organizations, literature, research and writing topics, bridge and golf partners, and lovers have been African American.



Ms. Luella Calvin, my cherished friend and restaurateur, taught me to cook soul food. ca. 1976.

One of the greatest gifts my parents gave me is that they both loved my Black friends from day one.

My daughter Josina, who is hapa Chinese/Japanese, had all Black friends until she was 10. I remember my sister asking me why Josina spoke “like a Black girl from Georgia.” Josina married an African American and has two gorgeous Blasian (Black/Asian) children. I am the co-legal guardian of my African American

goddaughter, whom I have been with since birth and had custody for years.

But I am proudly Asian and not a Black wanna-be. It is not my desire (or right) to appropriate Black history or experience—or to deny my own. I have written the history of both sides of my family and stayed connected to the Asian American movement from the beginning. I could not be more proud of how Asians are moving strongly against racist authoritarianism and anti-Asian hate and voting en masse against the white supremacist Republicans.

But I am an Asian (Chinese-American) who speaks Spanish and not Chinese and whose friends and family are primarily Black.

What's up with that?

There are many rational contributing factors, including personal preference.

But let's start with the rational factors.

1. I grew up admiring Black heroes and leaders. To name a small number: In sports, Willie Mays, Althea Gibson, and Muhammad Ali. In music, Harry Belafonte, Diana Ross, and Aretha Franklin. In acting, Ruby Dee, Cicely Tyson, and Denzell Washington. In politics, Dr. Martin Luther King, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer. In scholarship: W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, and

Angela Davis. In literature, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor.



The great Civil Rights fighter, Fannie Lou Hamer.

In the 1960s and 1970s, African American culture's sheer beauty and deep expressiveness, music, athleticism, literature, language, and even gestures catapulted it into becoming the most influential popular culture in the world, let alone the country.

Today there are even more incredible Black role models, as another renaissance of Black cultural expression and activism has taken hold. These new leaders embrace an even more universal concept of human rights, including LGBTQ, mental health, and immigrant rights, and have more influence than ever.

2. I became a racial justice organizer, activist, and writer by age 17. Understanding and fighting racism has been my life's work. Racism oppresses Latinos(as), Asians, Native peoples, Arabs, and

even many whites, but the centerpiece in this country is anti-Black racism. And African Americans have been the core and leaders of antiracist resistance and struggle.

The Black movements of the 1960s instigated the liberatory movements of many other groups, including Asians. The original concept of Asian American was based on solidarity with Black and other people of color against racism.



As an Asian who didn't speak any Asian language, I did not think I could be a very effective organizer in Asian communities, except on school campuses. So early on, I chose to center my work on racial justice issues common to all people of color.

I learned Spanish in Cuba and Mexico and have spent time organizing in Latino(a) communities. But most of my work has focused on African Americans and I became familiar and comfortable in Black communities and institutions over the years. I have spent a good part of my life being the only non-Black person in the room.

Learning about the Black experience has opened me up to the pain, foibles, survival strategies, talents, triumphs, and struggles of poor and oppressed people everywhere. It has deepened my internationalism and taught me about working class life.

3. Still, I think the bottom line is that, for elusive personal reasons, I have always felt accepted, respected, and loved by many African Americans and have happily reciprocated. Because most other groups are significantly infected by anti-Black racism, it is among African Americans that I am most comfortable being my whole self.

I have done the best I can to learn from Black people. Each day there is more to try to understand. That experience pervades my values, how I see the world, how I react, my nerve endings, my taste and sense of beauty, my brain, and my heart. I am a far better person for it.

71. A Father's Pride and Joy



First haircut of the pandemic.

I have loved Josina absolutely from the first moment I saw her and I have tried to be the best father I could to her. I know I have

made many mistakes but I am tremendously proud of the powerful and loving adult my Boops has become. And of how close we have been throughout her life.



I mentioned earlier that my two main goals for Josina were: that she would be reasonably happy and that the world would be better off for her having lived. She has far exceeded both of those goals.

Here are some of the things about Josina that make me proud and happy.

Both of us LOVE to eat and believe eating is a major source of happiness. When she was a baby she would sing and dance during every meal, and yell if she had to wait for food. As a teenager, we went on eating vacations and visited three restaurants for each of her birthday dinners!

Now she knows great restaurants in every part of Chicago and Skokie, and we have enjoyed terrific food in many countries.





Both of us love, identify with and appreciate Black people, though are also firmly anchored in being Asian and people of color. She is especially deeply rooted to her Japanese-American heritage by her special relationship with her Grandma Gloria.

All of her friends until she was ten were Black (excluding family members). My sister once asked me why Josina spoke “like a Black girl from Georgia.” She’s married to a terrific African-American and has gorgeous Blasian kids.





I am proud that Josina married a Cornell Collins, a fantastic, working-class African American.



Josina has artistic talents, especially with color. This is an oil on canvas she did with a friend in high school.



She also had mad nail and makeup skills.

Josina respects and loves her “aunties” and “uncles”: she has actively sought the companionship, wisdom, and advice of my best friends and is attempting to attach her children to them as well. She even throws parties in the Bay Area just for them when I am not even in town.



Kai-Kai's Red Egg and Ginger at Gerald and Karen Lenoir's house in Berkeley, filled with her "aunties" and "uncles." 2018.



My 60th birthday party in Durham with my besties, 2011. Josina has close relationships with them from day one. l-r: Gerald Lenoir, Karen Lenoir, Bruce Richard, me, Josina, Cornell, Minerva Solla, James Early, Linda Burnham, Miriam Early.



Visiting the great Yuri Kochiyama, our dear friend.



Josina played varsity softball, soccer, volleyball, and field hockey for Berkeley High School, and pitched for Pitzer College. I'm sure

I caught at least 10,000 of her pitches—and I never got winged! This helped her learn about hard work, competition, discipline, teamwork, and grit.

When she was a freshman at Pitzer College, I asked Josina what she might major in. She said, “I don’t know, Dad, but it will be something you don’t know anything about.” By the end of that year she had decided on a double major in International Race Relations and Sociology—basically what I have studied my entire life.

She got very active on racial justice and class issues in college, helping to lead a justice campaign for the family of a Black teenager killed by the police in a neighboring community and going on hunger strike in support of campus workers.

When she graduated, she told me she “wanted to move to a big city outside of California.” I think that was a polite way of saying she was going to do racial justice work like me, and didn’t want me looking over shoulder or casting a shadow over her.

She ended up carving out a great role for herself in the racial justice communities of Chicago, and is now a politician.



We had a ball working together at the giant “World Says No to War” Rally in New York City, February 15, 2003.

Josina has traveled the world, often in unique ways. As a freshman in high school she self-organized to attend the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing!

After her junior year, she spent six weeks in Progreso, a Costa Rican “town” that had no running water or electricity and where horses were the main form of transportation. She was there to help build a home so a teacher could live locally.



Josina (far left) at the family home in Progreso, Costa Rica, 1997.

In college she visited Zapatista communities in Chiapas, lived in Japan, and did a semester abroad in Botswana. One of her Botswanan aunts named a baby after her! She attended the United Nations’ World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The two of us have travelled together to many countries on several continents.



We rafted the Colorado River through the magnificent Grand Canyon! 2011.



In Santorini, Greece 2009



In China we visited the world historic sites and ancestral villages in Kwangtung. This photo was taken at the Temple of the Sun in Beijing, 2007.

Josina has had a special relationship with her Mom's Mom, Gloria Morita, from day one. Gloria has also been incredibly kind to me, and always supported me as a parent.



Mei-Mei, Josina, and her beloved grandma, Gloria Morita, 2021.

Josina has beautifully navigated complex issues in her Mom's family and built a strong relationship with her Mom and two sisters.



The three sisters are wonderfully close and supportive of each other. l-r: Paloma Wake, Amanda Wake, and Josina.



With Josina's Mom, Barbara Morita, in Josina's office as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Cook County. 2016

Josina and Cornell are absolutely fabulous parents. I knew they would be terrific, but wow, they are off the chart. There is nothing more gratifying than seeing your precious grandchildren being so beautifully parented.





There are many more photos of the family in the story, “My Sweetheart Grandbabies.” 2020.

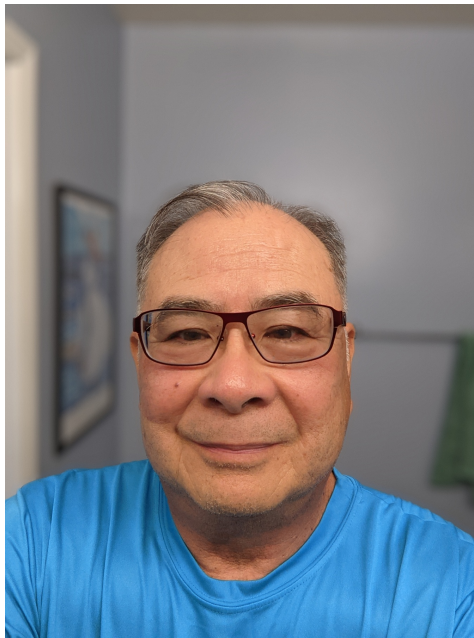






Josina and Cornell's wedding, August 20, 2016.

72. Aging: 'Live Proud Enough to Die'



70 years old, 2021.

The trick to aging is to simultaneously understand one's aging process and take appropriate steps, especially health and

financial steps, yet not to prematurely act old and squander opportunities to contribute to society and have fun.

I try to remember the truth that, however old you are, right now you are the youngest you will ever be. I also developed the habit of thinking of my age as not just a number but also how far into my adult life I was and how much I have left. I've done OK with this but erred to some degree by acting prematurely old.

I had an abnormal young adulthood. I became a professional revolutionary at age 17, so I never gave serious thought, let alone time, to developing a typical career. I had a lot of fun in those years, but I was far from carefree, footloose, or fancy-free, even in the so-called years of "drugs, sex, and rock and roll."

By age 19, I was thrust into political leadership, national leadership by the time I was 21.

I was forced to recognize early on that being a revolutionary brought on the wrath of the government, whether my actual activities were "legal" or not. Leadership in such a situation was seriously consequential for myself and those with whom I worked. Leadership also means being deeply and often publicly accountable to your comrades, colleagues, allies, and even opponents.

My first radical actions, especially as a participant in the Third World Strike at Berkeley in 1968, were met by thousands of armed men coming down on us for weeks on end. In my first two years of college (60 weeks total), thousands of armed men were dispatched against us for 27 weeks.

The FBI was on me from age 19, and they assigned a personal agent to me by the time I was 20.

I have zero regrets about any of this. But it has shaped my psychology, including PTSD, and certainly prematurely aged me.

On a lighter note...

The first time I ever thought of myself as “old” was in the late nineties when I was in my mid-forties.

A young man, probably in his late teens or early twenties, came bicycling down my block. He hit the speed bump right in front of my house, took a tumble, and suffered a few scrapes. I invited him in to clean up and dress his wounds with anything he chose from my medicine cabinet.

I noticed he inspected one bottle of medicine after another, but wasn't using any of it.

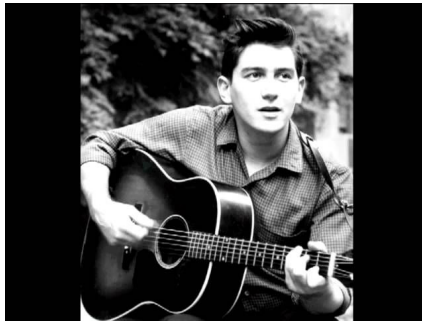
I asked him what he was looking for, and he said that all of my medicines had expired—before he was born!

I really began to suffer the health impacts of aging at about 56. Since then, I have learned to work through the insults, indignities, and limitations of aging. Not fun. Not for sissies. I am a sissy.

A good friend of mine says all of us older folks are managing our disabilities—and losing our friends one by one.

It is my fervent hope and intention not to hang on once I lose a decent quality of life. I don't want to make others sacrifice to take care of me when that point is reached. And I'd rather have the huge sums of money often spent at the end of life be enjoyed by my daughter and grandbabies.

But, until death do me part, I plan to keep on keepin' on:



Phil Ochs

The lyrics of the great radical folksinger, Phil Ochs, in “When I’m Gone” are helpful to me:

There’s no place in this world where I’ll belong when I’m gone

And I won't know the right from the wrong when I'm gone
And you won't find me singin' on this song when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

And I won't feel the flowing of the time when I'm gone
All the pleasures of love will not be mine when I'm gone
My pen won't pour a lyric line when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

And I won't breathe the bracing air when I'm gone
And I can't even worry 'bout my cares when I'm gone
Won't be asked to do my share when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

And I won't be running from the rain when I'm gone
And I can't even suffer from the pain when I'm gone
Can't say who's to praise and who's to blame when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

Won't see the golden of the sun when I'm gone
And the evenings and the mornings will be one when I'm gone
Can't be singing louder than the guns when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

All my days won't be dances of delight when I'm gone
And the sands will be shifting from my sight when I'm gone
Can't add my name into the fight when I'm gone

So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

And I won't be laughing at the lies when I'm gone

And I can't question how or when or why when I'm gone

Can't live proud enough to die when I'm gone

So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

