



Culture of Peace: Still a ways to go to realize 'The Right To Peace'

BY **DAVID WICK AND IRENE KAI / ASHLAND CULTURE OF PEACE COMMISSION**

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"The Right to Peace — The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70" is the theme for the International Day of Peace, Sept. 21, 2018. The Universal Declaration, the most translated document in the world (printed in over 500 languages), is as relevant today as it was in 1948 when it was adopted at the United Nation. A fundamental understanding is there is no peace without justice. The declaration is a powerful tool in the fight against oppression in all its forms — be it racial, sexual orientation, gender etc.

Often these acts of bias or microaggressions are subtle and unconscious. I have recently experienced within the Ashland community, Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC), and in my own household with Irene Kai, that it is one thing to talk about and espouse the ACPC values of inclusivity, compassion, accountability, and respect, and another to really live them and practice them daily. I have had another wake-up call from my white, male privileged unconsciousness I can be in due to the culture I learned growing up. It is uncomfortable, embarrassing, and a "not again" moment of learning! And, waking up for us all is an essential part of confronting all forms of oppression in order to create a healthy, safe community for everyone.

The following is Irene's experience as an Asian American living in this country:

My great-grandfather immigrated with my grandfather to San Francisco in 1900. As a successful businessman, my grandfather traveled back and forth from the U.S. to Hong Kong. Both of my parents were American born, married in Hong Kong and stayed there to take care of the family business. My siblings and I were born in Hong Kong as Americans born overseas and came back to New York City when the family decided to consolidate all the family businesses and stay in New York City permanently. When I arrived in New York City at 15, I did not speak English.

The most devastating culture shock was being called derogatory names and told to go back where I came from as soon as I set foot in this country. I was determined to work hard to learn English and I

thought maybe through education, I could earn my credentials and have a respectable career to enter the American mainstream. Maybe then, with my education and degree, I could be protected from the insults of racism.

I taught at Penn State University as a full-time professor after I received my MFA from the Royal College of Art in London. One evening, at the end of the Vietnam War, I went into a bar with my colleagues and was thrown out of the establishment because the employees thought I was Vietnamese. Regardless of my social or economic standing, I was still worthless as an individual to many Caucasian Americans because of how I look. That was a shocking realization.

I have lived in Ashland for 20 years. I have developed and cultivated meaningful relationships with my peers, but outside that circle, the biases from some Caucasian Americans towards me have not changed much in 50 years. I have been dismissed as a laundry worker, told what to do from people with no knowledge despite my personal expertise, and I was even once told to use the back entrance at a party because I did not match the idea of who “should” be attending it.

I have traveled around the world and lived in this country for 50 years. From observation, I know the difference between a biased put-down and a disagreement. Unless you are on the receiving end, you would never know the sting of discrimination.

An essential part of peacebuilding is identifying oppression and its subtler forms of implicit bias that impacts so many people on a daily basis. ACPC stands behind our commitment to challenge all forms of oppression as they are barriers to peace. Once these practices are seen for what they are, they can be worked with toward change, and ultimately transformed. This is where the peacebuilding rubber really meets the road, this is our deep work, and it is not easy or comfortable. But this challenging, collective work is essential as we take steps to reduce and transform all barriers to co-creating a Culture of Peace.

Ashland Culture of Peace co-founders Irene Kai and David Wick are, respectively, the commission's director of development and executive director. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.