

## SONG WRITING AND SEEKING THE SHALOM OF THE CITY

*“Thus says the LORD of hosts the God of Israel, to all those who were in exile... Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruits. Take wives and become fathers; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they may have sons and daughters. Increase in number; do not decrease. And seek the shalom of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its shalom you will have shalom.*  
— Jeremiah 29: 4-7

Songwriting can be an instrument for spiritual warfare as it brings to remembrance the faithfulness of God. The first song of victory in Scripture, the Song of Moses, is remembered in the Psalms of David and is repeated again in the last days of Revelation:

*“The Lord is my strength and my song;  
He has become my salvation.”  
— Exodus 15:2, Psalm 118:4 Rev. 15:3*

The song “Seek the *Shalom* of the City” began to surface when the above passage from the prophet Jeremiah brooded in my mind during the turbulent week of December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004. This translation of the passage had first deeply affected me a dozen years earlier when I came across it in a ministry newsletter. When I uprooted my family from California to take a job in Stony Brook, New York, we felt that we were living in exile.

The creativity involved in song writing taps into our unconscious. Often a seemingly disconnected stream of memories may bubble to consciousness. What may have appeared to be a mere coincidence can, in retrospect, be turned out to stones in the stream—the twelve stones of remembrance (Joshua 4:9), stones to bear witness (Joshua 24:26-27) or an Ebenezer stone of God’s help (1 Samuel 7:12).

The memories that surface during songwriting are often pieces of a puzzle that fit together to reveal a picture of God’s work in our lives. The connecting together of these memories into a coherent life story gives us a powerful testimony that strengthens our resolve not to shrink from the tasks God has given us.

*“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb,  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives  
so much as to shrink from death.”  
— Revelation 12:11*

The week this song surfaced, as I said, was a turbulent one. On Monday of that week, I learned that my father, John Mar, had been diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. On the Saturday of that week

the song was the birthday of our first child, Lauren Alethia Mar, who was stillborn on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1984. Through writing this article, I realized that the song began on December 9<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the announcement of a project, which I had been involved with since 1996 and in which Dad had played an important role.



John W. Mar  
Dec. 15, 1921

When he was a 17-year-old youth in Modesto, California, Dad joined the Air Force to fight in World War II. As a lieutenant bombardier on a B-17, Dad flew 35 dangerous missions over Nazi Germany. Once Dad’s throat mic had protected him from being hit with a piece of shrapnel, and another time his plane the ‘Li’ Eight Ball’ crippled in

battle slowly made to the base with disabled engines. After World War II, Dad married my mom, Mary Eng, whom he had met at an Air Force base in San Antonio. They moved to Sacramento to start the first Chinese take-out restaurant in Sacramento, the Chinese Kitchen. Then just as his GI Bill was about to run out, Dad decided to go U. C. Berkeley to become an architect. Since he had been involved in the destruction of buildings, Dad wanted to be an architect who would be involved in their construction.

After Lauren Alethia was stillborn, Lana could not conceive. At that time we were attending the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Santa Monica. While we were involved in helping to plant a Vineyard Church in West Los Angeles, Lana received prayer from John Wimber, one of the founders of the Vineyard Movement. Our daughter Jessica Elizabeth Mar was born in Santa Monica in 1986. When Jessica was less than one year old, we moved to Long Island, beginning our life of exile.

Our son David was born two years later as we moved into a house in Mastic, New York. We began attending Lamb's Chapel in nearby Center Moriches. At the time I began working with worship leader Eugene Greco at Christ for the Nations, a local Bible College adjacent to Stony Brook University. Eugene said it felt as if we were breaking concrete and making progress at Stony Brook, which up to that time had been impenetrable to Christian ministries. I was serving as a deacon at Lamb's Chapel, when it was denied access to show a film after school hours in Center Moriches. Other groups including a New Age group had been allowed use of the facilities, so I urged the church to pursue legal action.

I finished teaching my first graduate seminar at Stony Brook, and I was looking forward to Christmas break. David, now eight months old, had just gotten a clean bill of health. The night after Christmas, David began to cry and so I took the time to hold me and kiss him and rock him to sleep. The next morning, David did not awake as usual. I can remember to this day Lana's cry as she went into David's room. Lana ran out with David's lifeless body, and I did CPR for the first time on my son. David had died during the night of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Lauren's death had been heart wrenching, but we were able to hold onto our faith. The death of a second child David started a slide into a spiritually trying time.



David John Mar  
April 11-Dec. 27, 1988



Dad with Jessica (b. 1986)  
and Krista (b. 1990)

In the midst of these tragic losses, we believed that Lord's promise for our children:

*"His children will be mighty in the land;  
the generation of the upright will be blessed."  
— Psalm 112:2*

I began to pray Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 over Lana. Lauren Alethia, our first daughter, was buried in Los Angeles and now, our first son, was buried in Center Moriches at the other end of the country. I had no time to grieve for I was facing renewal and tenure and I had Jessica, Krista, and Lana to care for.

Attending a conference sponsored by the Vineyard Christian Fellowship on Long Island, there was a "word" regarding a woman who had endured the death of a son and who had subsequently had a miscarriage. I encouraged Lana to the conference the next day for prayer since the "word" had accurately described her situation. Lana received some powerful prayer that day, and she became pregnant again. After her first visit to the pediatrician, Lana was given a date for the birth of our child that seemed familiar. When Lana checked on her calendar, it was exactly one year to the day of that healing prayer: Krista Michelle Mar was born in 1990.

At that time, it was difficult for us to attend Lamb's Chapel, a young congregation with many young pregnant mothers and a triumphalist style of faith. At this time, we started attending the First Baptist Church in Patchogue, New York, where Pastor Craig and Helen Adams welcomed us. Lana often spoke with Helen, and I was asked to teach an apologetics class. When the church became involved in fighting the influx of pornography into Suffolk County due to a crack down in neighboring Nassau County, I was asked to give a presentation on recent research into the addictive nature of pornography to Suffolk County officials.

Then I landed a job offer back in California, very close to Lana's family. We were ready to return from exile. We rented our house in Mastic, purchased our airline tickets and I gave notice to the Philosophy Department that I was taking a leave of absence. It was then that the Lord used the passage from Jeremiah, together with another one about two baskets of figs, to speak to us about remaining in Stony Brook to "seek the *shalom* of the city" where we had been carried away captive. These passages from the weeping prophet Jeremiah brought a flood of tears:

*"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says 'Like these good figs I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all of their heart (Jer. 24:47)."*

Lana, who had for years longed to return to California, felt the Lord was directing us to stay in Stony Brook. This was an unexpected change of heart. However, now we had no place to live; we had non-refundable airline tickets; and I had already resigned my job. In Sunday school, Jessica and Krista caught the chicken pox, which enabled us to refund our airline tickets. We then found a rental near the University, in the desirable Three Village school district, where Jessica would begin kindergarten at Setauket School. I was able to cancel the leave of absence and return to my job at the university.

The day Jessica stepped onto the school bus, Lana had tears in her eyes. We were concerned that Jessica would be teased for being a Christian at school. When she returned from her first day at school, we asked Jessica how her day went. Jessica said she told her teacher that she only knew how to spell two words—“Jessica” and “Jesus”. It turned out her kindergarten teacher, Ms Marengello, was a Christian who would play a crucial role in Jessica’s education.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity.” (Jer. 29:11-14).*

About this time, I was asked by two teachers at Christ for the Nations Bible College—Gary Zarlingo and Steven Holmsy—to help them with a debate. They had been challenged by two professors at C. W. Post to debate the existence of God. I agreed to help them prepare—using my training in logic and philosophy of religion and my new course notes from my apologetics course for the First Baptist Church.

When I arrived at Christ for the Nations, I asked exactly what proposition they would be debating. “Resolved: the existence of God can be proven,” they replied. I realized immediately that this proposition placed on them an undue burden of proof. I immediately suggested they get on the phone and propose an alternative. When they did, a new proposition was agreed upon: “Resolved: It is rational to believe in the God of Christianity.”

This proposition, I explained, would shift the battleground to where their strengths as Bible scholars could be utilized. Moreover, to win the debate they didn’t have to prove that God exists to everyone’s satisfaction—a nearly impossible task. To win now required what is admonished in scripture (2 Pet 3:15)

to be prepared “to give a reason for the hope within”—to rationally defend their faith “with gentleness and respect.”

It was cold and stormy the night I drove out to C. W. Post to see how team of David would fair against team Goliath. When I entered the auditorium, I was questioned about which “side” I was on. The audience was polarized and poised for the intellectual battle. Seated in front of me, I overheard the students of the philosophy professor talking and laughing. They were confident that their professor would mop the floor with the Bible college teachers.

Just as the debate was about to begin, the storm caused the lights in the auditorium to blow a circuit. When the lights couldn’t be turned on again, Pastor Zarlingo began speaking for the first affirmative reading his presentation in the light of hand-held flashlight. He told me later that this was comforting: as a preacher, he had no fear of standing in front of a congregation, but he felt out of place in the setting of a college debate. Just as Gary was finishing his speech, he noticed the lights flickering and it occurred to him to say, “And God said, let there be light” at which time all the house lights came on.

The students sitting in front of me who had been so confident before were taken by surprise as was the audience. In their over-confidence, the two professors from C. W. Post had neglected to test the consistency of their positions. The philosophy professor argued from the position of materialism that death was the end of our existence, but her partner argued from a New Age perspective in which death is viewed as a door to another stage of life. They cancelled each other’s views out, and when Zarlingo and Holmsy were able to answer, with scholarship and confident respect, objections to the Christian faith, the negative team began to lose their nerve.

Two weeks after that debate, Zarlingo and Holmsy invited me to a victory lunch. The meeting, however, was bitter-sweet. They had obviously won a debate they were expected to lose. This joy, however, was mixed with sadness. Christ for the Nations had just announced it was closing its doors. In retrospect, they were glad they had decided to accept the challenge to defend their faith for now they had a memorable victory to accompany them as they sought new jobs.

The next year in Stony Brook’s Philosophy Department would be the most difficult in its history. A disgruntled senior member of the Department was appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences by the Provost, and he used his new power to fire the duly elected chair, who had recruited me to come to

Stony Brook, to appoint an interim chair, and to plot the demise of the entire “analytic” wing of the Philosophy Department. Thus began an intellectual “witch hunt” to discredit all the three of the newly hired members of the Department— including myself.

When I had first led a Bible study for the Three Village Church at Stony Brook with Eugene Greco as a worship leader, there had been few Christian groups. Now a year later, a number of Christian fellowships had begun to take root at Stony Brook— including Campus Crusade and Intervarsity. I began to get invitations to speak about the issue of the existence of God and suffering in the world. These were still very difficult things for me to discuss since I was still grieving over the death of my son David. Besides stirring up unresolved grief, another reason for my reluctance to share was that, years before coming to Stony Brook, I had lost my teaching position at UCLA when I had become a Christian.

It turned out that my speaking to these Christian groups, although in the evening on my own time, would be used by my colleagues in Philosophy to try to block my renewal the year before tenure. Blatantly discriminatory remarks spoken “off the record” by colleagues were included in the appointed Chair’s letter summarizing the meeting. In their zeal to find any reason to discredit my teaching, these colleagues discredited themselves by opening the University to a charge of discrimination on the basis of religion in the official documented letters.

While I was going up for tenure, the dissension within the Department led to a split with one faction, including some of the more biased detractors leaving the Department to form their own academic unit. My tenure file—in their absence—passed through the Department with flying colors. During this time of persecution, I confronted the Dean on the issue that as a Jesuit his conduct did not reflect the character of Christ. When I showed him my actual student evaluations, moreover, he admitted that I could not have gotten such high evaluations if I had been—as falsely accused by some colleagues—using the classroom as a forum to promote unpopular views on abortion. I said to him, “Who knows whether you have been put in your position, for such a time as this?” Yet the Dean refused to take action and admitted he was “too sophisticated” to believe in the resurrection of Christ. By the end of the week, he resigned his position and left for another university in disgrace.

During this time, we began attending Church on the Sound in Setauket because of its vicinity to the University. For a men’s retreat, I had recommended

that our guest speaker be Gary Zarlingo, now an associate pastor at the church which had helped to obtain a lawyer to pursue the Lamb’s Chapel case. At this retreat, Pastor Zarlingo spoke on Romans 8:17-39:

*No, in all these things we were more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

When Zarlingo talked about how we were “more than conquerors” (*hyper nike*), he illustrated this passage with an image: the arrows of persecution shot at believers could be used by the Lord as a ladder to deliver us from our pit of persecution.

When news of the ideological purges taking place within Stony Brook’s Philosophy Department had reached the American Philosophical Association, distinguished scholars (including Alvin Plantinga and Bas van Fraassen) from across the country, took time to write letters to President John Marburger and to review my scholarship for tenure.

The week my file went to the tenure and promotion committee, I felt like we were indeed “more than conquerors” as I was lifted from my pit of persecution. I was awarded the President’s and Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of *Lamb’s Chapel vs the Center Moriches School District* (1993), and *Scientific American* (Feb. 1993) published an article discussing my innovative research in logic.



About this time, two of Korean American students approached me to be the faculty sponsor for the newly formed Asian American Fellowship. Before taking on this responsibility, I urged the students to seek the blessing of the Korean Christian



Fellowship, which they were leaving to start the new group. The Asian American Fellowship flourished under the leadership of Karina Kim, and Lana and I began driving students to Church on the Sound and the Three Village Church.

Having won the battle for tenure and now sponsoring the fellowship, we decided it was time to purchase a home in Stony Brook "to seek the *shalom* of the city." When we opened our home to the Asian American Fellowship Dad was there.



Church on the Sound was forced to relocate for financial reasons and several sites were being considered. As a faithful member, I believed that the church should be relocated to Nichols Road near the University. The area on Nichols road had been set aside for churches, but at the time, there were only two churches—a Unitarian Church and a Church of Christian Science. In studying the spiritual history of the area revealed that had been covenants placed on the land prohibiting it to be used by Jews and Blacks. The oldest church in the area was an AME Church that had been designated for slaves after the Civil War. In praying for the Church on the Sound's relocation, I believed that the purpose for the land on Nichols Road would be fulfilled by an evangelical church that would open its doors to Blacks and Jews and other marginalized peoples.

Church on the Sound successfully sought permission to meet in the local Middle School adjacent to their new property. I recall the day we gathered as a congregation and buried stones of remembrance on the property before the building process would begin.

With the help of Karina and the Asian American Fellowship, we helped to start an English speaking service for a Chinese speaking congregation which met down the street from Church on the Sound.

Pastor Nicholas Seeberger of Church on the Sound gave us his blessing.

The success of the English speaking service, however, provoked the jealousy of the Chinese Pastor. She used the conservatism within the Chinese Church with regard to spiritual gifts to polarize the leadership and to discredit the success of the English ministry. Then she began to stir up strife by accusing several pastors who had been helping with the church plant of trying to take over her ministry.

Pastor Ken Tom of Vision Quest, a servant of the Lord, had been recruited to help with the start-up and he was sacrificially commuting long hours from New Jersey. Pastor Nicholas Seeberger of Church on the Sound, who had supported and prayed for our efforts, was also accused of wanting to take over her church. When Lana began a successful meeting on parenting within a home fellowship for the women at the church, the Pastor said "no one was interested" in the topic even though the meetings were crowded. This was a confusing and disillusioning experience.

On December 2, 1993 the tragic suicide pact of two Asian American high school girls, Ellen Liu and Mili Subudhi, shocked the Asian American community. These tragic deaths were the youngest suicides in the history of the Long Island Railroad. Ellen and Mili came from highly successful families, and they had first met in third grade in the Gifted and Talented Program. This tragedy deeply affected us because Jessica with a recommendation Ms. Marengello, now her second grade teacher, and excellent test scores, was about to enter that program.

**The Three Village Herald**  
 Wednesday, December 8, 1993

**Two Melville students die on tracks**

By Susan Redden

It was 6 pm on December 2. At first, the engineer of the westbound train wasn't certain. But within seconds he became sure: those were two bodies lying on the railroad track.

The two young women reportedly were struck by an earlier train whose engineer had not even known he struck anything. The girls apparently were lying prone, between the rails as the train approached them in the early evening darkness.

And thus Mili Subudhi, 15, and Ellen Liu, 16, died. Both were eleventh grade students at Ward Melville High School. Residents of the Three Villages, they had been friends since they met in the Gifted and Talented program at Mount Elementary School. They were in the top 10 percent of their Melville class.

According to Melville principal Robert McKean, the girls were "very quiet, very sweet, in all honors classes, and very friendly."

Mili Subudhi was editor of the school's literary magazine, a strong soccer player, a violinist and a violinist concerned about world hunger.

Ellen Liu liked literature and poetry, favored vivid hair dyes, vintage clothes, and playing the guitar.

But friends of the two describe them somewhat differently than McKean did, saying how bright they were, how much fun they were — but also noting they had experimented with drugs and sometimes did bizarre things such as setting fire to their leaves. Their very close friendship grew closer this year, McKean said. "The puzzling thing everybody is why did it happen."

"Yes," he added. "They did leave some [leaves] communication for their families."

It turns out the girls left strange messages on their fanlike answering machines, a note to a boyfriend regarding the pain that would cause him, a quick "We have to catch a train. We love you," to their friends — and a journal, found near their bodies, which disclosed they had been planning suicide for about a month.

Although by Friday morning, rumors reported they had been close to Bryan Salva and Daniel Swain, the two boys killed in a tragic accident as they tried to keep out of the way of a Long Island

Mili Subudhi, the editor of what's theory magazine, was a vegetarian concerned with world hunger.

Railroad trails in August of 1992, McKean said. "We don't believe that to be true. They may have been casual acquaintances. But that's all."

At what doubled moment the girls decided they would die on the railroad tracks is not clear but Suffolk County homicide detective Thomas Hughes said McKean there was "plenty of information" to prove intent.

We know that, after school on Thursday, the girls boarded a 2:15 pm bus whose last stop was Adams Drive — where the girls apparently gained access to the railroad tracks despite a

Continued on page 10 below. Scene outside O.S. Davis Funeral Home. Joyno photo.

The tragedy was a wake-up call to the Asian American community. We thought it could be no accident that the two girls were Asian Americans. Yet, sometimes a community, instead of responding with compassion and concern, blames the victims – the children and the parents— trying to find reasons for distancing themselves from learning about the pressures that impact all our children. We felt that something had to be done to address the issues faced by Asian American youth in the public school system in order to protect our own daughters.

As I began to think about issues of cross-cultural evangelism, I was invited to be part of the American delegation of the Society of Christian Philosophers to attend a conference in Beijing, China in 1995. The Tiananmen Square crackdown had tarnished the reputation of China, and a few weeks before our conference, the controversy caused by International Women's Conference that met in Beijing was in the news. An American Harry Wu had been arrested for raising issues of human rights violations in China.

I wanted my presentation at the Second Symposium of Chinese-Western Philosophy and Religious Studies to clearly communicate the claim of Christianity in a way that would not be lost in translation. I planned to use Paul's address to the philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17 as a model to reveal the true meaning of Tiananmen or "The Gate of Heavenly Peace." In addition to translating this passage of scripture into Chinese for an appendix I found slides of Christian art work. While in a used bookstore, I had stumbled across this Asian Christian artwork in *The Bible Through Asian Eyes* (Auckland, New Zealand: Pace Publishing in association with Asian Christian Art Association, 1991) edited by Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady.

At the conference, I spoke about how fulfilling the Great Commission engages us in cross-cultural evangelism: it forces us to seek the heart of the gospel and to seek to express it in the heart language of a people group (see "The True Meaning of the Gate of Heavenly Peace," archived this journal at [www.globalmissiology.net](http://www.globalmissiology.net), Aug. 2004). Rather than arguing that all religions are paths up the same mountain, I inverted this image and suggested that tree of the world religions derived from a common root: an indigenous notion of the one True God.

The Athenians had an altar to the Unknown God. The Chinese called this one true God, the Lord of Heaven, *Shang Ti*, which some scholars speculate may even be related linguistically to the Hebrew term *Shaddai*, as in *El Shaddai*. In Korea, the one true God, the Great One, is known as *Hananim*—The Great One.

Belief in *Shang Ti/Hananim* predates Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps God in reconciling the world to Himself has placed eternity in the hearts of every nation so that people "would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17: 26-27)."

The exclusivistic claim of Christ in John 14:6 I argued, forces us to transcend an egalitarian approach to pluralism. There is only one true sovereign God "who made the world and everything in it" and in whom "we live and move and have our being". This one true and sovereign God created not only the unity of the human race, but also the diversity of cultures and nations ("people groups"), which, in spite of their differences, are all called to repentance by the cross of Christ. I suggested a modern day Paul might use Tiananmen in Beijing the same way used the Altar to the Unknown God in Athens.

Jonathan Spence captures the central significance to China of Tiananmen in an essay by that name.<sup>2</sup> "Tiananmen Square, where so many of the impassioned events of the spring of 1989 unfolded, is the most emotionally and historically charged urban space in China. Tiananmen, itself—'the Gate of Heavenly Peace'—is of great antiquity and great beauty. It is at once the entryway into the inner vastness of the Forbidden City, the exit from that imperial and bureaucratic world into the zones of public space and revolutionary memory. In the ninety-acre square in front of it stand the massive monument to China's revolution martyrs and the mausoleum honoring the embalmed remains of Mao Zedong. On either side of the square are the huge buildings that house the National People's Congress and the museums of revolutionary history. To the east and west run some of Beijing's busiest boulevards, with their government offices and big hotels, and off these arteries lie a maze of narrower streets and alleys filled with the hubbub of stores and small restaurants. To create a rough parallel in modern American life, one might imagine Times Square in New York expanded to a space of ten city blocks long and four wide, with the White House at the northern end and the Lincoln Memorial at the southern end."

How might Paul declare the true meaning of Tiananmen, the "Gate of Heavenly Peace"? In the Old Testament Jacob has a vision of a gateway or

<sup>1</sup> Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Regal Books: Ventura, California), 1981, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Spence, *Chinese Roundabout: Essays in History and Culture* (W. W. Norton: New York), 1992, p. 293.

ladder to heaven (Gen. 28:12), and Jesus himself draws a comparison between Jacob's ladder and himself (John 1:51, John 10:9). In the Old Testament, Gideon built an altar to *Jehovah Shalom* or The LORD is Peace, and in the New Testament, Jesus says that he is our peace (John 14:27). Just as Paul had revealed the true meaning of the altar to the Unknown God to the Athenians, in Beijing that the true meaning of Tiananmen (*Ti Hanan im*) is revealed in Christ. Using slides from the Tiananmen Square crack down, I ended with a call to repentance.

*"Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:29-30).*



While in China, I volunteered to exchange rooms with another scholar who wanted a private room, and I had the privilege of sharing a room with Dr. Enoch Wan, who, it turns out had started the first Bible study for both Cantonese and Mandarin speaking Chinese at Stony Brook University. I had to go all the way to China to learn the spiritual history of my own community!

Enoch was able to give us a spiritual perspective on why our current efforts to work through a Chinese church in Stony Brook had been met with such spiritual opposition. Professor Wan was able to warn us about the spiritual warfare he had encountered. I later learned that the Chinese church where we had been serving was birthed out of an unresolved church split. I realized that God wanted to do a work in Stony Brook, but the unforgiveness in that local Chinese church had, it seemed, temporarily disqualified them from sharing in this noble task.

At the end of the conference, some of the conference participants attended the government

sponsored Three Self Church. I remember we got there a half an hour before the service and not being able to find any seats. Some folding chairs were put up in the back of the sanctuary and as I looked into the courtyard I saw it was filled with Chinese people. It brought tears to my eyes as I recalled that when Jesus angrily chased the money-changers from the courtyard of the temple, it not only because of the commercialism but because "my Father's house shall be a house of prayer for the nations."

Later that week, members of the underground church who perhaps had been attending the conference contacted Professor Wan. Professor Thomas Oden of Drew University and I had the privilege of accompanying Enoch in secretly meeting and speaking with members of the underground church, who if caught could be arrested. I remember opening one of their songbooks to the "Spirit Song" by John Wimber. I showed them a picture of my daughter Jessica and shared with them the story of how John Wimber had prayed for the birth of our child.

When I asked these Chinese Christians what they desired most, they replied, "Pray for us." Humbled by their faith, I asked them to pray for the God's work in Stony Brook. I believe that many of the subsequent events that happened at Stony Brook University are the result of the powerful prayers of the saints in China—believers who "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."



A few days after returning from China, I received the "Outstanding Professor Award" from the Alumni Association at Stony Brook University. Dad had flown out to Stony Brook to be there on that occasion. I met the new President of Stony Brook University, Shirley Strum Kenny, and after thanking the Alumni Association and friends and family, I began talking about the need for an Asian American Center at Stony Brook University to meet the educational needs of 25% of its students who were Asian Americans.





After prayer walking around the campus with some intercessors we had come to believe that a unused hallway between the Physics and Philosophy could be reclaimed as a space for an Asian American Center. At the time, it had been walled off and led nowhere. Then a friend and former student showed me an article about how Charles B. Wang, the CEO of the largest business software company in the world, had also traveled to China in 1995 for the first time.



I began to wonder if Mr. Wang – if his heart had been changed as mine had by his visit to China – would be the donor for establishing an Asian American Center at Stony Brook. We learned that Charles B. Wang had been invited to speak at Stony Brook on April 20, 1996. I asked Dad to draw plans for a conversion of the hallway. The day before Mr. Wang arrived, I showed President Kenny the notebook of plans and the proposal I had put together concerning the educational needs of Asian American students.

When Charles Wang arrived to speak that day, I recognized him from his picture in the newspaper. I walked up to him with Dad's plans and my proposal for an Asian American Center at Stony Brook University. When Charles Wang's wife Nancy suggested that Charles to "just do it," the lecture

began with the announcement that Mr. Wang would make a personal donation of \$25,000 for the project. After his presentation, Mr. Wang asked, "Instead of a hallway, why don't we build a building?" I suggested that he talk with President Shirley Kenny, whom he had known for many years. Charles signed a copy of his book commemorating the occasion.

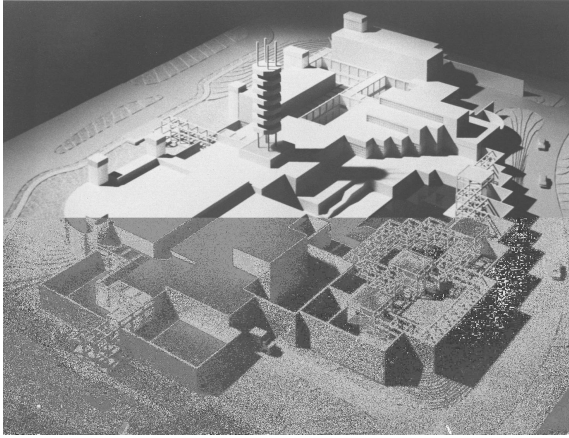


After that meeting, I knelt down and prayed in the hallway to dedicate it in service to the Lord and to purpose that part of the mission of the Asian American Center would be to fight stereotypes that led to the exploitation of Asian women. I opened my Bible up to a passage from the Proverbs.

*"By wisdom a house is built,  
And through understanding it is established;  
Through knowledge its rooms are filled  
With rare and beautiful treasures"*  
– Proverbs 24:3-4

That very weekend I preached at a Chinese church in New York City through Pastor Ken Tom's VisionQuest ministry. I shared about the extraordinary events that happened that week. A member of congregation told me that I would be meeting P. H. Tuan, an architect on many of Charles Wang's projects and a Christian who had generously helped their churches in the past. Eventually, in spite of the University's political maneuvering, P. H. Tuan would be chosen to be the architect for the Charles B. Wang Asian American Center. P. H. Tuan has put his heart and soul into the design and completion of the Wang Center. The building is centered on a central tower which symbolizes light (for Christians, the light of Christ) coming to Stony Brook's campus.





On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1996 Mr. Wang had donated \$25 million for the Charles B. Wang Asian American Center, the largest donation in the history of the public education system in New York State. In his donation speech, Charles Wang acknowledged the catalytic role of the request for the “Bridge” in these grand plans

*“I am pleased and humbled to speak to you this evening in support of the Asian American Cultural Center at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Let me say a few words about how the Asian American Cultural Center came about, and why I believe this initiative is so important.”*



*“This past summer I was invited to speak at Stony Brook by the Asian Forum. There I met Dr. Gary Mar, who asked me to help fund the conversion of a corridor into an Asian American Center.”*

*“I was delighted to help. And today, that corridor is the temporary home of the Asian American Cultural Center. But that was not the end. Gary persisted. And in our discussions planted the idea of a more ambitious cultural center...”*

This was the beginning of a whirlwind of educational and cultural initiatives. Through the President’s Diversity initiatives, I proposed and initiated a new course dealing with issues faced by Asian American students. While this initially regarded as outside of the field of Philosophy, through advocacy and scholarship there is a new American Philosophical Association Committee on the Status of Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies



Now, a decade after returning from China, the lives of over a 1,000 students have been impacted and transformed by this course. My students successfully advocated for April to be added to the University’s Diversity Calendar as Asian American heritage month, which enable us to strategically plan co-curricular events, school outreaches, film festivals, workshops, multi-media projects and conferences.

*“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know... Nevertheless I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel out from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it (Jer. 33:3, 69).”*



In the intervening years as the Charles B Wang Asian American Center was coming into existence, we began to form communities of shared values and memories.

In 2002, for example, the Chinese Consulate in New York City asked the Asian American Center Bridge to host the Tianjin Children's Art Troupe. The children were bussed to Stony Brook and performed on September 22, the actual day of the Moon Festival. My younger daughter Krista agreed to celebrate her birthday that day, and our local church, Church on the Sound, agreed to house to children overnight.

I slept overnight at the front door of the church as a watchman to ensure everything would run smoothly. A Christian who was the owner of a local MacDonald's donated a special meal for the Chinese children (MacDonald's is special in China), and a mime, who had heard about the event at a Christian bookstore, volunteered to perform "People Need the Lord" for the children in a way that would cross cultural and language barriers.

In the midst of this entire ministry, I remember one of the Chinese women in the troupe walking outside into the night and smiling at me (I didn't speak Chinese) as she pointed to the Full Moon in the night sky. It was the same moon over China and America on this night of the Moon Festival—a reminder of the majesty of God.

As the children left on the bus the next morning to continue their tour of America, they received "goodie bags" with special soaps, candies, and Bible verses translated into Chinese. In the foyer of the church, is a mural with 2 Chronicles 7:14, but it was the following verse that I believe was fulfilled that day for Church on the Sound:

*"Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there."*



In October 2002 I had committed to attending my third conference with the Society of Christian Philosophers in China even though there was talk about the Grand Opening of the Wang Center happening that year. Then, after nearly a decade of anticipation, I learned that it was scheduled at a time I would be in China. I kept my commitment. Then I learned that the Grand Opening had been moved to October 22<sup>nd</sup>, a few days after my return.

The front rows of the auditorium were reserved for many dignitaries, and my family, almost barred from entering, was able to sit in one of the back rows. We wondered if the Charles B Wang Asian American Center, now simply called the 'Wang Center', would fulfill its visionary mission. In this donation speech Charles Wang again acknowledged the humble beginnings of the Center in our desire for a converted hallway as a place where the task of rebuilding and restoring the Asian American community could begin. After his speech Charles noticed us in the Chapel and had his photographer take a picture with the family.



Later that year on December 15, 2002, award-winning documentary filmmaker Loni Ding received an honorary doctorate from Stony Brook University. My older daughter Jessica, now President of the Asian Culture Club and the Bible Club at the same high school that two Asian American girls were attending when they committed suicide, received, on behalf of her school, an educational resource—the first two episodes of the Loni Ding's award-winning documentary series *Ancestors in the Americas*.

Although we had been involved in meetings with the high school administrators and the community about the tragedy, this was the first time



something had actually been done to bridge the educational gaps that could have, in some way, have protected our Asian American youth at risk.

In his donation speeches, Charles Wang talked about one of his cherished hopes for his Asian American Center: "I want my children to have a full measure of the immigrant experience... So while that direct experience is denied them, my children—and your children—will be able to participate in the experience of their parents on both sides of the Pacific, though institutions like the Asian American Cultural Center at Stony Brook."

In the spring semester of 2000 in a chance conversation with Dini Zimmerman, a talented TV director and producer, we conceived the idea of doing a documentary about Angel Island. Although sometimes called the "West Coast version of Ellis Island," Angel Island in San Francisco Bay was a prison, a legacy of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. On the walls of Angel Island, Chinese detainees carved poems on the walls of the ir barracks in protest of the inhuman treatment.

This project was inspired by the work of Loni Ding, who was invited to speak at Stony Brook as the first speaker in the Provost Lecture Series for Asian American Heritage Month. In the midst of an interview, we surprised Loni with a screening of our project "I Saw Myself", dedicated to her. In our documentary, the students reclaimed the history of the Angel Island and read the poems that had been carved in silence. In addition to giving voice to a silenced generation of immigrants, the video recounts the activism of the Asian American community in their struggle to preserve the Angel Island Immigration Station as a historic site.

In their turn, Stony Brook students took up that struggle. Recreating their ancestors' experiences, the students found their own voices. As one student put it, "I could have been one these detainees in 'this place of lingering memories and tarnished dreams'."

This project began in March 2000 when the Angel Island Immigration Station was on the list of the eleven most endangered historical sites in America. My students were exhilarated when California voters voted to appropriate funds for the restoration of the immigration station. My entire class worked a "Ten Mile Day" (a reference to a record set by the Chinese workers on the Transcontinental Railroad) to complete the project and entered into an undergraduate research competition. However, the judges never viewed the ten minute documentary. I promised my class I would work to see the project duly acknowledged.

Three years later, on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003, "I Saw Myself" was distributed as a CD at the historic opening of the *Tin See Do: The Angel Island Experience* exhibition at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, and students returned for this joyous occasion. In March 2005, the completed project will be donated as an interactive kiosk to the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation.



On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2003, our Third Annual "With Liberty and Justice for All..." Symposium dealing with the contributions of Asian Americans to struggles for social justice was held for the first time in the Wang Center. Our speakers were Gary Okamoto, Director of Columbia's Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, author and activist Helen Zia, who had recently co-authored a book with Dr. Wen Ho Lee, the Chinese American scientist falsely accused of spying for China, and world famous linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky. I had the privilege and daunting task that semester of teaching a graduate seminar with Chomsky. The event was broadcast on the radio across the country.





On the morning of that event, I had returned from a conference while Lana flew to Washington D. C. to testify before the House Appropriations Committee on behalf of the First Candle /SIDS Foundation. Lana had been chosen for her powerful testimony to advocate for research to prevent stillborns and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.



All this is the “back story” which bubbled up to consciousness upon writing the song on December 9<sup>th</sup>, which I discovered upon writing this article was the anniversary of Charles Wang’s original donation speech in 1996. Finishing the song the next morning, I was scheduled that afternoon to meet with the administration about securing a place for the “Bridge” in the Wang Center. Although it had cost \$25,000 for converting the hallway which had been a place dedicated to meeting the needs of 25% of the student population who are Asian American, the Physics Department would not share the space and reclaimed it as their own.



That morning I drove to the Little Portion Friary in Mount Sinai, where I purchased five loaves of freshly baked bread. In the summer of 2002, I had walked the labyrinth at Little Portion and received an image of Jesus leading me down to the bottom level of the Wang Center. At the time, I interpreted this to

mean that the Lord was leading me to endure three years of unrewarding preparatory labor at the Wang Center before there would be fruit.

I distributed the five loaves. In the middle of the room, I placed a rare and beautiful treasure—a gift of a Go Board with Go stones of seashells and slate donated by Louise Haywood in memory of her husband Stewart. Louise Haywood was a daughter of a medical missionary to China who had treated Eric Liddell, who after winning a gold medal in the 1926 Olympic Games became a missionary to China. (His life was portrayed in the film “Chariots of Fire”).



I had invited a group of students and community leaders to voice their support. Among them was Karina Kim, who was now on staff with the University Counseling Center and a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Social Welfare. When the President’s Deputy agreed that the Asian American Center Bridge should have a home in the Wang Center “long ago”, this was an occasion for celebration.



Rather than offering the room where we met, the President’s Deputy led us to the bottom floor of the Wang Center—just as in the labyrinth vision—to show us two rooms that shared a common garden. A picture of a Chinese woodcarving “Five Loaves and Two Fish” that I had used in my presentation in China in 1995 came to mind. I believe that with the Five Loaves and these two rooms—the Two Fish—we can feed the over 5,000 Asian American students at Stony Brook and transform the Wang Center from an empty palace into a home imbued with the Asian American spirit.

Currently my family attends the Long Island Alliance Church in Dix Hills. On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005 the Long Island Alliance Church will be working with the Asian American Center Bridge to host an outreach with international tennis champion Michael Chang at the Wang Center. The theme of the event will be “bridging the gap”—the *generation* gap between parents and children, the *cultural* gap between Asia and America family values, and the *spiritual* gap between God and humanity bridged by Christ. The theme of the event from the book of *Nehemiah* is the removal of shame through restoring the walls with the stones that have been broken and burnt.

*Nehemiah 2:17 Then I said to them. “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”*

When we become believers, we invite Jesus into our hearts, but our lives can be in shambles. Satan still has influence in our lives because our gates are broken. Our lives are rubble, but now the Holy Spirit directs our restoration.

It is significant that all the rebuilding of the walls is done with the stones already there—the fallen stones that were broken and burnt. God builds his kingdom with people who are broken and burnt, renewing them and jointly fitting them into the walls of a restored New Jerusalem. In Isaiah 58:12, we read:

“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
And will raise up the age-old foundations;  
You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”

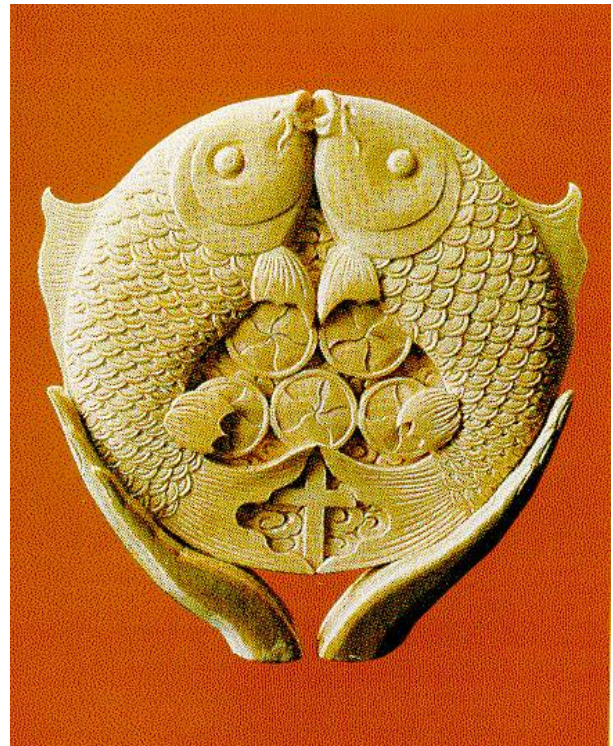
Dad and Mom will be flying out from Sacramento to attend this event and to see the Wang Center for the first time. I hope to arrange an architect’s tour of the Wang Center for Mom and Dad with architect P. H. Tuan. In honoring our parents and opening wide our hearts to our children, our prayer is that there will be intergenerational healing and restoration.

*“And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..”*  
— Malachi 4:5-6

*“We have spoken freely to you.. and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.”*

— 2 Corinthians 6:12

Jesus’ miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish (Matthew 14) demonstrates the importance of building a community of shared values in advancing the Kingdom of God. Huang Po Hu has written about how sharing communities reflect the revelation that God is love: “Sharing must be restored to the centre of human community; it must once again become the bond of human relationships and it must be the very heart of faith and piety. The reason is simple but profound. God, for Jesus, is the God who shares God’s own self with human beings. God is love because God shares. The disclosure of God as a sharing God is good news to the poor: the assurance that God is with them and for them must be the beginning of a change in their own self-esteem, and a change from passive fatalism to active participation in the movements towards a more share and a more just society.”



“Five Loaves and Two Fish,” a wood carving by Zhang Wanlong of the Nanjing Theological Seminary

As we enter the New Year 2005 the administration has gone back on their commitment to provide a permanent home to the Asian American Center Bridge in the Wang Center, so this story has not yet come to an end. Perhaps connecting with the “Back to Jerusalem” movement in China will be required. In our battles, the struggle to remember the faithfulness of God will be crucial.

The chorus of “Seek the *Shalom* of the City” begins with our prayers. The final admonition of Psalm 122 to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” contains the word *pray*—where the word in Hebrew is not the term used for formal prayer, but the everyday Hebrew word for ‘ask.’ As Eugene Peterson notes, not only does the name Jerusalem (*jerushalom*) contain the word ‘shalom’ but the first everyday word *pray* is therefore a “transition into the everyday world.”<sup>3</sup> The successive verses rehearse the faithfulness of God as recorded in Jeremiah. The song is performed by Chiwei Jjie Li (Keyboards/Vocals), Shandra Velez (Vocals) and recorded by Pete Chu (Sound Engineer).

Songwriting can, therefore, be an instrument for spiritual warfare. This is not to say that we enter into worship in order to do spiritual warfare. Worship itself—the voluntary, loving contemplation of God—is itself engaging in a spiritual battle. In Scripture, songs bring to remembrance the faithfulness of God. The flood of memories evoked by songwriting can often be “pieces of a puzzle” that give us a larger picture of God’s work in our salvation. The discovery of these interconnections is not nearly as accidental as they might seem.

These hidden connections are accessible to people who value memory and who place stones as memorials to the work of God in their lives. The introduction of memorials into our life story helps us to interpret our lives through the stories of Scripture. Perhaps this is part of what it means to be converted—to be continually working out our salvation with fear and trembling. This interweaving of memories makes our lives more coherent and strengthens our testimony and our resolve. In public worship, a song testifying to the faithfulness of God creates a community of believers with a larger memory, allowing them to remember, enter into, and to continue to persevere as peace-makers who usher into their places where they dwell the *shalom* of God.

Professor Gary Mar, Department of Philosophy  
Director, Asian American Center/Bridge  
Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY 11794-3750  
[gmar@notes.cc.sunysb.edu](mailto:gmar@notes.cc.sunysb.edu),  
[www.aac.sunysb.edu](http://www.aac.sunysb.edu)

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience to the Same Direction* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois), 1980 pp. 51–52.



## SEEK THE *SHALOM* OF THE CITY

### Chorus

C            am            F - G  
 We prayed to the LORD from a place of exile.  
 C            am            F - G  
 We prayed to the LORD for the birth of our child.  
 C            am            F - G  
 Pray to the LORD for the peace of the city  
 am F                      G am - C/Csus  
 In its *shalom*, we shall find — our own.

C            am    F - G  
 I'll watch over you, 'till you come home.  
 C            am            F - G  
 No longer a captive, no longer you'll roam.  
 C            am    F - G  
 I am your God, we'll never part,  
 am F G            am - C/Csus  
 Return to me — with all of your heart  
 (Chorus)

C            am    F - G  
 I'll build you up, not tear you down.  
 C            am            F - G  
 I'll give you roots, so abundance abounds.  
 C            am    F - G  
 Sins of rebellion, I will forgive  
 am            F            G am - C/Csus  
 In renown and joy and honor— you'll live.  
 (Chorus)

C            am            F - G  
 Call unto me, my answer I'll bring  
 C            am            F - G  
 Of great and mighty, unsearchable things  
 C            am            F - G  
 Health and healing now will appear  
 am            F            G am - C/Csus  
 Of my goodness, nations of earth— shall hear  
 (Chorus)

“Seek the *Shalom* of the City” by Gary Mar:  
 Chiwei Jolie Li, Producer, Keyboards, Vocals  
 Shandra Velez, Vocals  
 Pete Chu, Sound Engineer:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, **to all those who were in exile... Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruits. Take wives and become fathers; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they may have sons and daughters. Increase in number; do not decrease. And seek the *shalom* of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its *shalom* you will have *shalom*** (Jer. 29: 4-7).”

“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Like these good figs I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. **My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.** I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. **They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all of their heart** (Jer. 24:4-7).”

“**For I know the plans I have for you**” declares the LORD, “**plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.** Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **You will seek and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you**” declares the LORD, “**and will bring you back from captivity** (Jer. 29:11-14).”

“**Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know... Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.** I will bring Judah and Israel out from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will **forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it;** and they will be in awe and will tremble at the **abundant prosperity and peace I provide** for it (Jer. 33:3, 6-9).”

