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WELCOME

Season's greetings!

Even though Christmas is primarily a Christian celebration, I do not hesitate to bestow the greetings of the festive season onto all of you, of any faith and any cultural background. For I believe that Christmas, the birth of the holy prophet, should be an important event in our lives as any other major festivity from different religions and cultures. If we are in constant search of finding a truly multicultural community of harmonious life and shared experiences, then we must celebrate and value as many diverse cultural and religious festivities that we have knowledge of. True that Christmas is the biggest celebrated holiday world-wide (partially due to consumerism marketing agendas) while Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist holy days, go unnoticed by the larger communities. However, it is up to each and everyone to find out the holy days of different religions and cultures so that we might join in their celebrations. What I found fascinating when researching to write this piece was that there are twelve major religions in the world, which are

Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sikhism, Shinto and Zoroastrianism.

Knowing the dates and religions is an important responsibility. As part of the diverse community that we live in today, there must be an understanding that a lot of people who migrate from different countries and don't share the same festivities or celebrations might feel isolated and disconnected with the community at large during this season. When festivities for their religion arrives they, too, would like to share the good times with people around them. If the community at large, however, is unaware of those days and festive seasons, isolation and alienation can take place.

Once again, Season's Greetings and let the good times roll!

Sanaz Fotouhi
Editor

MESSAGE FROM MWA PRESIDENT

I would like to firstly express my warmest welcome to all the newly elected members of our Management Committee, which includes Sanaz Fotouhi (Vice-President), Kate Sykes (Treasurer), Sue Ross (Secretary), Gill Savage (Membership), Marion Le (Legal Adviser), Bruna Romano (Legal Adviser) and Elena Sione (Public Officer).

With the support of such talented women on the committee, I am confident that MWA can overcome the challenges and obstacles it has faced over the past 20 years to soar onto higher grounds and raise the standards for multicultural women in the ACT.

Our commitment to raise the standards for multicultural women was recognized from the successful outcome at our Special General Meeting on Thursday, 28 September. At the meeting, we put forward a set of amendments to our members to change our Constitution to reflect MWA's core role and activities more consistently. The most noteworthy change is for MWA to open its arms to include women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) as eligible members, when previously only migrant

women who speak English as a Second Language held that eligibility.

I feel that this is a significant change to MWA, as it allows us the opportunity to become a peak body representing a united voice for multicultural women and their families in the ACT region. The change to include all CALD women, will lead MWA to have a stronger voice and capacity to work with other organizations and agencies to address the issues of access and equity for multicultural women.

Since July this year, the Committee of Management has been preparing a three-year strategic plan to ensure MWA's dream, objectives and aspirations can be realised. Our key objectives for 2006/07 are: to increase our membership base, communicating key services and to conduct research of our members and clients to understand their needs, and identify gaps in the service provisions. That way, MWA can continue to advocate, exchange information, and cooperate with other organizations and

Contributors:

Sue Chen, Sally D'Souza, Sanaz Fotouhi, Patricia Moroney, Zoya Patel, Sue Ross, & Paramita Roy

agencies to address access and equity in order to improve the status of Multicultural Women in the ACT and to enable them to *reach their full potential*.

I believe that in the next twelve months, MWA will undergo significant changes and as her President, I would like to ensure that we have the appropriate infrastructure and capacity to undertake upcoming endeavors.

In supporting MWA reaching its full potential, we appreciate members contributing their skills, knowledge, time and effort as a volunteer, sub-committee member, or participate in our activities to network and socialize. New members are absolutely welcome.

Sally D'Souza
President

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

By Sue Ross

The MWA Special General Meeting and Annual General Meeting on Thursday 28 September became quite an occasion both for the business conducted and the opportunity to catch up with friends and to make new acquaintances. The meetings were well attended with about 17 people present. Change to the MWA Constitution was the business for the Special General Meeting. A lot of changes were proposed, discussed, amended and finally passed. The discussion was excellent and as a result the Constitution is now in much better shape. The main changes were to emphasize 'women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds' rather than 'migrants with English as a second language,' to remove the requirement for at least 8 general meetings each year (although there may still be 8 'events') and a number of more administrative changes.

The main business at the AGM was the

Treasurer's report that noted the positive financial position, the key objectives for 2006/07 being increasing membership, communicating key services and researching our member base to understand their needs and advocate on behalf of them in a more effective way. This attracted quite a bit of interested discussion. It was followed by the election of office bearers:

President	Sally D'Souza
Vice President	Sanaz Fotouhi
Secretary	Sue Ross
Treasurer	Kate Sykes
Executive Member	Gill Savage
Executive Member	Marion Le
Executive Member	Bruna Romano

A number of people said how pleased they were with the direction MWA is taking and appreciated the social aspect of the evening.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH—Creating a better world

*Dr. Patricia Moroney
Jungian Analyst and Psychotherapist
Canberra A.C.T. and Bowral N.S.W.*

Parvia awoke to the sudden blast of sunlight streaming through the very small window of the aircraft, which suddenly became a hive of activity. It was 5.30 in the morning and the air stewards were opening the windows of the aircraft preparing to serve breakfast. Soon the aircraft would be landing and Parvia would find herself in a new strange land, one she had never seen before and one in which she would stay for a long time.

As she strained to see out the small window of the aircraft she looked down on the landscape below. How different it was from the one to which she had been accustomed. She felt a rush of excitement at the prospects of a whole new adventure but felt again the pang of grief she had experienced when she said good-bye to her native land. The pain of loss overwhelmed her and tears filled her eyes.

The blast of sunlight and the pang of grief—these two things sum up the experience of those who depart their homelands to begin a new life in a foreign land. The person becomes

overwhelmed by all that is so new – the different landscape, food, language, culture and customs. A disorientation of one kind or another can occur for those who lose their homelands and are thrust into a totally new environment. Where we are born and brought up becomes part of us and we become part of it. Our environment shapes us and we shape it. Our identity is very much bound up in landscape and language. When we move away from this place our very identity is threatened and it suffers. Something of our self gets lost in the translation from one culture to another. When a burst of sunlight hits the eyes suddenly the eye muscles cannot adjust and they are blinded for a time by the suddenness of the shock to the eyes. So it is with a change of culture. The psychic muscles cannot cope with the sudden shock caused by the loss of the familiar and the bursting in of the foreign over the personality. One gropes around in the dark blinded by the loss to the identity of the personality, a loss that occurs in the translation from one culture to another.

Grief can cause anything from depression to a temporary loss of equilibrium. Sometimes one's soul is left behind in the old place and it takes considerable time for it to catch up with the actual physical relocation. Grief and pain are a daily companion to some who experience a longing and a yearning that they often do not understand. Some can even experience a loss of identity. One cannot put one's life on hold, remain in a cocoon or insulate oneself in a little piece of the 'old native land' set up to protect oneself from the impact of the new. One must move forward and take up the challenge of the adventure of the new but to be able to do this one needs to preserve one's own identity at the same time. It is fairly important to surround oneself with objects from the old culture as far as possible, to have some contact with people who speak the old language while at the same time learning the new language and developing new contacts with the new culture.

If it is possible to revisit the native homeland after a couple of years, that is also helpful. It can help the adjustment to revisit the native homeland every two or three years or as often as is feasible to allow for the adjustment to be smooth. But there are some, who cannot revisit their homeland. Today we have the advantage of seeing the homeland on television or speaking to family and friends on the phone. Children should learn to speak the native language of their parents and learn about the old native culture because they also have a soul that belongs to the old culture. Their identity depends on that part of their soul being preserved for the sake of their health and

full personal growth. Otherwise they may have problems later on in their adult lives. Even the grandchildren need to maintain the connection. It takes several generations sometimes before the need to keep a connection disappears.

Being actively in arts and crafts, dance and music of the old homeland is one of the best ways of feeding the psyche and maintaining its well-being. We are good at meeting the needs of our physical bodies but often we neglect to nourish the soul or psyche as we often call it. The body will suffer if we neglect the soul's needs.

In this modern world not only are we adapting to one new culture but often the country to which one moves has many cultures and we meet people from many parts of the world so the challenge is great. To meet this challenge it is vital that we keep a healthy connection with our own native culture to preserve sufficient identity to be able to make the multi-cultural connections with others we meet. We are citizens of the world but usually it takes many years, with lots of exposure to different thought and education and an evolutionary development within, before we are able to move from being a citizen of a country to being a citizen of the world. Maintaining our own native roots is vital. The tree cannot grow unless it is firmly rooted in the ground. If its roots are shallow it will soon snap at its base and fall over. Our roots are our native culture, language and landscape so we need to find some ways to maintain a connection with this as best we can under very challenging circumstances. Eventually we will internalize the new landscape and it will become part of our identity and we will take on a new breadth of identity from it. We will come to love the new land as our own.

With each new step we take towards growth there is a letting go of something old. 'Letting go' is very liberating but it is a form of death, nonetheless. We cannot die too often or we lose ourselves completely. As long as we have a strong sense of self we can engage in this 'letting go' process with relative ease. If we never 'let go' we do not grow. So we need to put very positive connections into our lives – connections with friends, family, art, music, religion and all manner of cultural things. Then what is lost in translation at the outset will be restored abundantly and beyond our wildest dreams. The psyche is capable of huge expansion beyond our imagination. It has a depth and a height that is fathomless. As this expansion occurs our experience of our self and our life becomes enriched. This in turn further enriches society, it reverberates throughout the whole universe having an influence on all of creation and this alone is what creates a better world.

Multicultural Women's Book Review

Shih-Wen Sue Chen reviews *Amish Adventure*
By Barbara Smucker

In *Amish Adventure*, Barbara Smucker, a Mennonite who has conducted in-depth research (including interviews) on the Amish people, provides not only an interesting and engaging story, but also an accurate portrayal of the many facets of Amish culture. Since childhood, the teenage protagonist, Ian McDonald, has been traveling across the world with his father, an engineer and troubleshooter for an oil company. With much anticipation, Ian looks forward to their next trip to the Northwest Territories, where his father will be stationed for two weeks. To Ian's dismay, his father suddenly tells him that the company will not let Ian come along this time. Since Aunt Clem is their only close relative, Ian must stay with her in Toronto for six months. One stormy day, he bids his father goodbye and heads for his aunt's dreadful place in Jack Turner's car. Turner, a colleague of Mr. McDonald's, turns out to be a very reckless driver. That night, Turner hits a horse and buggy, which belong to the Benders, an Amish family. Ian comes to live with the family temporarily, and discovers many aspects of Amish culture during his stay. Initially, Ian is shocked at the idea of living "the old way," and wonders if he should go live with Aunt Clem, but as he becomes more integrated into the Amish community he is not sure that he wants to leave. This cultural experience compels Ian to seriously reevaluate his previous lifestyle and former worldview.

The central theme of the story revolves around farming and Ian's attempts to save the Benders' farm. Striving to be self-sufficient, the Amish people conduct their daily lives without the help of modern technology such as electricity or plumbing. This does not mean that they are "backward" though, for as Ian later discovers, they can build a barn in one day!

The Amish way of life is based on their religious beliefs, which are reflected through cultural attitudes such as values and social conventions. For example, their silent prayer makes Ian uncomfortable at first, but he later respects the fact that even the little ones kneel beside their chairs

and benches after dinner to pray and listen to a reading from the German Bible. Religion serves as the strong foundation upon which the Amish community is built and members of the community feel a sense of responsibility towards the welfare of their people. This is one of the most valued attributes one can have. Even though Ian does not agree with all the church policies, he feels the sense of belonging in this Amish community. Used to leading a "nomadic" life, Ian finally finds a real home here, one that he has longed for all his life.

Barbara Smucker portrays Ian's confrontation with the unfamiliar Amish world honestly and realistically. The fact that Ian does not heartily embrace the Amish culture very readily at first enhances the credibility of the text. Throughout the book, he keeps on questioning their actions and struggling to understand the Amish mentality. His view of the world, as well as former values and priorities are challenged and changed after his experience on the Amish farm. Even his personality is affected. Famous for his red hair and flaring "Scottish temper," Ian learns to control his emotions and stay calm after he witnesses the Benders acquiescently accept all of life's unfairness without seeking punishment to the wrongdoers. Smucker does not merely focus on Ian's point of view throughout the book though; she effectively employs the stories of two young Amish people to illustrate the important issues concerning the Amish community. It might have been easy to follow the Amish lifestyle long ago, but as the outside world evolves at an alarmingly fast speed, it is hard for young members of the Amish community not be lured into the complex modern society. But letting readers know the difficulties and dilemmas of the young Amish, Smucker adds another dimension to her book. The Amish world in this text is not perfect or harmonious, nor crafted and inaccurate, but genuine.

AMONG AFGHAN WOMEN—PART II

By Sanaz Fotouhi

I cannot hold back my tears. I turn around and look out the window, tears run down my face. The nurse, Hamideh, hands me a piece of bandage wrap with which I wipe my nose and tears. On the other side of the window, behind the fly-screen another restless mother stands patiently looking into this room.

I gain back my control and focus on the task at hand which is to conduct an interview with the burn victims. The girl we are interviewing is a fourteen year old, Monireh. She has beautiful velvety eyes. The doctor pulls back the cover to reveal her small body wrapped in white bandage. Puss and blood have seeped through. She has a twenty percent burn, the doctor tells us.

Did you burn yourself?

No. I had just changed the gas bottle on the cooker and I think it was leaking. I stroke a match and then I don't remember anything.

The doctors and nurses assume otherwise because of the consistent burns all over her body, which is usually a sign that there had been a deliberate application of a flammable liquid all over.

We interview several other girls, some with thirty, forty and some a bit higher percentages of burns. The doctors here in Kabul, as with doctors anywhere else in the world, do not give high hopes of survival to patients with more than forty percent burns. The thought causes excruciating pain because more than half of the fourteen or so women lying in these beds have higher than forty percent burns. It is not difficult to see the low chances. From under the bandages stains have oozed through. A mother fans her daughter in the summer heat and buzzes flies off her face. Another girl cries for her mother, screaming in pain.

What bothers me most in this room are two empty beds which three days ago, when I had come to find the Esteghlal Hospital in Kabul, were filled. In one, next to the window, had laid a sixteen year old girl with jet black hair, a thin face and hollowed cheeks and very large dark eyes that filled her whole bony face. Her name was Seveeta. She had been married for seven months when she had been burnt. She did not reveal if she had committed the act or if it was an accident. I had wished her well and taken a picture

of her still beautiful face.

Across from her had been another girl, Maliha, a fourteen year old with dark skin and eyes that talked to me and asked me for help without speaking a word. She was fully wrapped in white bandage and only her face was exposed.

Their beds were empty today and I had not wanted to assume the worst. I asked Hamida only to be told what I had not wanted to believe. Malihah, in fact, Hamida said casually, had passed away only twenty minutes before we arrived. That is why we had had to wait to be allowed into the burn unit. They were transporting her body as we had arrived at the hospital. It gives me shivers to think that I had taken the last pictures of these girls ever.

We return Monireh. I ask her again, did you burn yourself?

This time she reveals the truth. Yes I did.

Why?

Because I was fed up. I had broken a glass bottle and was badly scolded for it. I could not stand it anymore.

How did you think to burn yourself?

My aunt talked about it all the time. That's how I learned.

Are you sorry that you have done this?

She looks at me. I don't think she has understood my question, or perhaps my accent. She does not respond. Hamida translates for me in the correct accent.

Yes. I am very sorry. I hope I had not done this.

As we were leaving the hospital, I spotted a lone woman sitting under a tree. There was a body wrapped in a green blanket in front of her on a bed. We watched as Maliha was transported in a taxi to her next destination with her mother who only started to weep when she was well inside the taxi and the door closed.

As Maliha's taxi left, another taxi entered the hospital, carrying a scourged twenty seven-year old who had fallen into the clay oven when baking bread twelve days ago....

THE DRIP

By Zoya Patel

Drip...drip...drip... it was an alien noise in the aftermath of destruction. Drops of water splashed from the roof onto the ground, shattering into a million pieces.

A pounding sound caught her attention, the crunch, crunch, crunch of footsteps in the alley that ran beside her now-destroyed house. A gruff foreign voice pierced through her thoughts, the sound loud, resounding in her mind. She caught her breath, fear taut in her chest. This could mean only one thing.

Drip...drip...drip...

Desperately, she tried to look as if she were dead, breathing shallowly and clenching her fists to keep from shaking. Through the slit beneath her eyelids, she watched as a pair of black, heavy-duty boots crunched into view, followed by long legs covered in the green and brown trousers that signified a member of the military.

They could not know that she was alive.

Drip...drip...drip...

The footsteps stopped in the centre of the room. With her eyes slightly open, she could see the solid pause at the dead body of her son. His face was smashed, and blood formed a pool around him. He was barely thirteen years old.

Even though the bomb had struck miles away from their home, the impact had shattered their house to pieces. Her husband, daughter, son, mother and father were all gone. Her life destroyed in one single hit.

The ticking noise from their clock suddenly caught

her attention. It had somehow survived destruction and its voice now joined the dripping of the roof.

Drip...drip...drip...

Tick...tick...tick...

"They're all dead," the soldier stated in a strange foreign accent. "Clear out lads."

She heard the footsteps thud away and breathed a sigh of relief. Pain was spreading through her body, numbness seeping through her veins, turning her body to stone. She knew she wouldn't last for much longer. Her back was broken and she could hardly breathe. She longed for sleep like never before.

Tilting her head slightly, she could see the fallen bodies of her relatives all around her. They were with her always, she thought to herself faintly, even in death. She felt as if she were alive in a coffin.

Drip...drip...drip...

Tick...tick...tick...

She could feel the life draining out of her with each second. Just as her eyes closed, she remembered with a flash the noise the bomb had made. A horrible squeal and a rush of air, followed by the shattering sound of destruction.

The tap dripped again.

Drip...drip...drip...

She breathed one last, shuddering breath. It was over.

Tick...tick...tick...tick...

A FILMMAKING EXPERIENCE IN KOLKATA, INDIA

By Paramita Roy

It was December 2005, a team of five from Australia were busy working on a film project in the city of Kolkata. The story was about an eleven year old Muslim boy Mohammad, disguised as Hindu Hori, traveled all alone to the city of Kolkata, to find a job in order to support his family back in his village.

India produces more than a thousand films a year, and this particular medium has immense influence on the masses, and especially the newer generations.

Growing up in this rich visual culture, even those who can't read or write can still read the visual subtext, and visual cues very competently and accurately. The people

in India are quite knowledgeable about this powerful medium of film. People with families and friends regularly go to the movies to be entertained. Like royal watchers in Britain and Australia, people follow film culture and lives of celebrities very closely and diligently.

They know what elements make a film saleable, what makes it a commercial success, and I wasn't spared by anyone who knew the purpose of my trip to Kolkata in December of 2005. Every chance people got they would stop and advise me on my project. Many of them dismissed my idea

straightaway saying, "Who would be interested in a film about a little kid?" and offered me their words of wisdom. "How about a romantic love story, a comedy, or, perhaps a remake of The Godfather in India? Can't you write a story about a romance between an Australian man and an Indian woman or vice versa?" and so on.

I knew that our film didn't have the required formula, the spice, a twist in the end. Swapan, my uncle's young chef, advised me quietly: "Didi, you still have time, make a few little changes, add some romance, a bit of violence, spice it up with some Bollywood dance and that's all you need to make your film a sure hit!" I thanked him and all the others for their genuine concerns, and tried to avoid any further debate or discussion on this subject.

We were working almost 18 hours a day, planning, auditioning hundreds of actors, mostly with acting experience in tele-films, rehearsing with the main cast, and our super efficient production manager was finalizing the dates with the crew, organizing the locations etc. To make the story more authentic, the Mike Leigh method of character improvisation was applied. I was introduced to this particular technique at the Australian Film, Television and Radio school (AFTRS) in Sydney by writer and director, Robert Merchand. This process allowed the actors to be more involved in the project.

The filming was to commence on the 1st of January 2006. But on the 26th of December 2005, the Indian subcontinent was hit by a devastating earthquake and subsequent tsunami, leaving us all in absolute shock. But to our surprise, the crew was determined to go ahead according to our schedule.

Therefore, in a chilli winter New Years day early morning, my cast member Salim Bhai alias Ramji not only had to shave his very dear moustache, but had to pour buckets of ice cold water straight from a street tubewell onto his bare body, all in the name of Film, and we continued this for take after take. Not a word of complaint was heard. The actors, I must mention here, were not only enthusiastic but extremely professional in their attitude and approach.

The 64 minute long film "Hori alone in Kolkata" was shot in 12 different locations, and principal

shooting was completed in four days time. The outdoor shoots were extremely difficult as hundreds of people often crowded to watch the shooting, and there were individuals who at times got carried away and even called out "ACTION", startling the entire cast and crew. The moving of heavy tracks, lights and camera equipment were limiting us in many ways. Had we a smaller crew we could have experimented more and used more camera angles in the film.

The first cut of the film was done in Kolkata, and the final cut of the film was made in Canberra. The purpose of this film was to capture the plight of this lonely little boy, and tell his story. This film was not intended to merely entertain the audience, therefore surely it will disappoint many. But from a filmmaker's perspective, this experience had been a wonderful learning experience for all of us involved. Through this project we met many people, made many new friends, learnt new skills, new strategies, but most importantly we were deeply inspired by the people of Kolkata who live in such difficult conditions, yet are still so enthusiastic and passionate about any creative work and art. The film "Hori alone in Kolkata" was shown in Canberra early this year, was shown in Cairns in October, and will be shown in India in December this year. You can read more about audience feedback and future screenings by visiting our website on

www.paramitaroy.com

CONTRIBUTOR: Paramita Roy, a local filmmaker. She has graduated with a bachelor and master degree from Queensland University of Technology and attended Master classes at the Australian film, Television and Radio school (AFTRS) in Sydney. Paramita has written and directed several short films, and presently working on her first feature film.

Upcoming Events

Multicultural Women's Connection is a weekly session run by MWA and the Multicultural Youth Service. It is held every Thursday between 1-4 at the Multicultural Youth Service Centre at the Theo Notaras Building. For more information about the activities offered during this session please contact Multicultural Youth Service at info@mys.org.au or call them at 6257 2144

MWA Book Club is a monthly lunchtime meeting for multicultural women to discuss writings and films made by multicultural women. The club meets on the last Thursday of each month (from July-December 2006) at CMAG between 12.30-1.130.

Women's only Swimming Summer Season

Starts Sunday 19 November 2006, at the Catholic University, corner of Phillip Avenue and Antill Street, WATSON.

A beautifully enclosed pool. All women welcome, particularly Muslim women.

Sessions 1.00pm – 2.30pm and 3.30pm – 5.00pm. Lessons available.

Tickets on sale now.

Phone 6126 4703 or 6247 7227.

About MWA

Multicultural Women's Advocacy, Inc. (MWA) is an advocacy, advisory, and lobby group that focuses on the needs of women from culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) backgrounds. MWA engages in providing information, referral, and support to CALD women seeking opportunities to further develop their capabilities and achieving their lives' goals. The group was founded in the late 1980s, with its beginnings as the ACT Association of Migrant Women Speaking English as a Second Language (AAMWESL), which later became the Association of Migrant Women with English as a Second Language (AMWESL), to finally MWA in 2002 to reflect the organisation's core principal function, advocacy for multicultural women.

MISSION STATEMENT: MWA is a group of culturally and linguistically diverse women who have settled in the ACT region. MWA advocates, exchanges information, and cooperates with other community groups and government agencies to address access and equity issues to enable all CALD women to achieve their full potential.

VISION: Culturally and linguistically diverse women achieving their potential.

MOTTO: *We serve to inspire*

OBJECTIVE: To empower multicultural women to actively participate in building a community in the ACT that enhance the lives of multicultural women through advocacy, community development, education, training and cultural services.

VALUES: MWA recognises that to maintain cultural harmony, peace and tolerance in the ACT community requires the practices of a fair, collective, and democratic process that reasonably represents the needs of multicultural women. MWA supports practices that uphold the following essential values:

Celebrating Diversity - valuing and respecting the diversity of cultural backgrounds of multicultural women and recognising their cultural rights in practicing their faith and cultural beliefs at home, at work and in the public.

Accessing Equity and Fairness - acknowledging and recognizing that multicultural women have a right to access opportunities and support that enhances their personal, familial, social, cultural, environmental, and economic wellbeing through fair and democratic means.

Empowering Qualities of Self-determination and Leadership - providing opportunities and support for multicultural women to gain self confidence to carry out choices that will enhance her potential in achieving her life goals and to lead by example for other multicultural women.

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