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Coming Events – *there's still time to get involved*

“Precarious Peace” On Tuesday, November 11, 7:00 PM at the Unitarian Universalist Society in downtown Albany come and view a documentary about Guatemalan politics and strife from two local documentary film-makers who have experienced first hand the turmoil of that nation's recent history. This video showing and discussion with the producers and writers is being sponsored by RPCV-NENY and the Social Responsibilities Council of the Unitarian Universalist Society.

Rudy and Shirley Nelson, with roots in Albany, have created a superb documentary entitled “Precarious Peace,” and have come home to show and talk about it before various groups. Rudy Nelson, prior to his academic career in English and Religious Studies (University at Albany), worked in radio and as writer-researcher for an independent film company, Valley Forge Productions. Shirley Nelson also worked in media as a writer, and has published two books. “Precarious Peace” grew out of repeated trips to Guatemala both Nelsons undertook in the interest of developing church and community partnerships with groups in the U.S. Join us before the film for the monthly meeting (see below), same location, 405 Washington Ave on the corner of Washington and Robin.

Thanksgiving Dinner for Foreign Students RPCV-NENY is sponsoring our second Thanksgiving Dinner for Foreign Students on Saturday, November 29 at 4 pm at RPI. This year's event is being coordinated by Augusta Field and Joan and Harry Thornhill. We have had several people sign up to bring things at the September monthly meeting but will need more items as we get closer to the event. We will need people to help set up and clean up. RPI does not have any stoves so if you can bring a microwave that might be helpful to warm things up again. Last year the turkeys were brought warm and it worked out fine. The Thornhill's can be reached at: Harry@thornhills.com they can also be reached at 399-7758 and Augusta Field can be reached at: afield3@earthlink.net

We hope that several people will be able to make the event again this year. Last year it was a big success!

November Meeting Date Change Because the first Tuesday of November is election day, we will have our November meeting on Tuesday, November 11th, just prior to the documentary film showing. So join us at the Unitarian Universalist Society at 6:00 pm (Sharp!). If you'd like to have dinner at the meeting, please RSVP to Steve Hoyt (steveh@albany.net or at 518-732-1213), we will order food from a local restaurant for the meeting.

Message from the President

Hi Everyone! I hope all of you had a great summer. For those of you who couldn't come, we had our favorite summer event again this year, now the Third annual RPCV Picnic in the Adirondacks at John and Lynn Kucij's camp. It was a lot of fun for all those that came and picnicked, played and hiked. Thanks John and Lynn! Speaking of hikes, we had another beautiful day hike just outside of Rensselaerville. The hike was organized by Laura Van Duesen. Thanks Laura!

Besides these outdoor events we continue our regular monthly meetings the first Tuesday of almost every month, 6pm at the Latham Biryani - except the November meeting (see Guatemala Night item above). In August, we had another temporary change of location for the monthly meeting, this time we met at the Hegeman's in Chatham. They have a beautiful house in the woods that Don largely built, and we had an excellent potluck dinner. For September we were back at the Latham Biryani for a presentation by Dana MacDonald, who returned this summer from Benin. Dana brought back beautiful clothing and interesting stories about trying to teach a class of 70 unruly kids! October unfortunately didn't quite work out as planned however. The President and invited

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members of the Ghana Association of the Capital District got lost on the way to the meeting. But look for them again at the Thanksgiving dinner and other events, and they have also invited us for some of their events and fun parties (we will let you know when they happen).

Several of our members also met with Bob Klien, who is the Project Organizer for the Archival Project in September. This is an effort to have RPCV's document their experience for the RPCV Collection at the Kennedy Library. Items include personal papers such as letters and diaries, representative sets of photographs and other items of unique archival value. For all RPCV's, from those that served in the 60's until today, if you are interested in the project please contact Joe Doherty at doherty1@nycap.rr.com or 518-438-2409.

Bill Batt has also begun an initiative to place a coin drop box for unwanted foreign money that people bring with them back to Albany Airport. The box will be sponsored by RPCV's of NENY and the local UN group. Good job Bill!

Finally, I am happy to announce that our own Terry Amrhein was appointed to the board of the NPCA. Terry is also the Advocacy Chair for the NPCA and has personally done a great deal to help lobby Congress to expand the Peace Corps and enlarge the PC budget. Good job Terry!

Steve Hoyt, President, RPCV-NENY (Niger '94-'96)

Letter from China Part II *Tammy Kelly (China '00-'02), who joined us for a couple meetings earlier this year, is in China teaching English. In the June newsletter, we printed part of a letter she wrote us about her experiences. Here's the final section. In the first part, Tammy had stopped to eat at the end of a work day.*

An Hour for Cao Bing, part two

by Tammy Kelly

When I sat down, his daughter curiously and shyly served me some salted tea. I said hello to her and she bursted into a fountain of giggles muffled behind her small hands. She quickly ran inside to be with her mother. Periodically, she would return with a big aluminum pot of tea and refilled my thin, clear plastic cup.

The proprietor was very busy preparing cabobs. On the table next to him there was a side of lamb, loosely covered with a faded white cloth. People, on their way home from work, would poke and prod the fresh meat, haggle over a prices and decide on the best sections. The proprietor, in turn, would chop off the chunk lamb and cut it into little pieces. He would, then stick the pieces onto long thin metal sticks. He would spice the cababos with salt, red chili pepper and an entire palette of various colored spices that I can't name. Just when he began to prepare my bingzi for toasting, another person would come along and place an order for a few jin (pounds) of lamb. I sat and watched...and waited. I was tired, so it felt good to sit and rest my feet. The sky was now black and the street was dotted with naked light bulbs hanging from strings of wire, casually criss-crossing the street, from vendor to vendor. When the wind blew, the bulb haphazardly jiggled back and forth. By this time, 30 minutes had passed. I stopped drinking my salted tea; I didn't want to be awake all night contemplating the wonders. The young daughter, now, climbed up and down on the bench, next to me, oblivious to my strange foreign features. During this wait, we were fast becoming "hao pengyou" or good friends.

Finally, the wife came out of the kitchen. She had finished making the evening's countless bowls of noodles and hui mian. While the husband was cutting meat off its rib cage, she sat down next to the open coal fire. She started to begin the process for tasting cao bing, the toasted round bread.

First, she stuck two long metal cabob sticks into the bread. Then, with a knife, she cut indentations along the surfaces. She painted each side with a mixture of oil and chili pepper. At this point, someone yelled for more beef noodles, and off into the kitchen she darted.

The proprietor, having finished discussing and demonstrating the ins and outs of mutton, took over the cao bing-roasting process. He grabbed various pinches from his spice collection and generously sprinkled them on the oil slicked bingzi. Then, holding the cabob sticks, placed the bread over the flames.

He began to turn the bingzi over and over. Having been quite used to this task, he could look up from his work and talk with me. "I am embarrassed, this has taken so long, sorry...everyone wanted lamb tonight, very busy..." he politely explained.

"Mei guan xi...it doesn't matter, that's ok," I shrugged. I learned a long time ago, never be in a hurry in

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China...you'll end up a crazy, frustrated, screaming laowai (foreigner)...I know, I've seen a few of them scattered throughout this country. As he twirled the bread, his fingers and hands expertly crossed over the flames without getting singed. He asked me, "Where are you from?"

"Me Guo, America," I reluctantly answered, knowing a few weeks ago, there was a Muslim protest in the city center over U.S. involvement in Iraq.

"Oh...Ah..." he smiled, "Mei Guo," and flashed a thumbs up at me. "Are you a teacher?" he asked.

"Yep," I responded, "I teach Tibetan students at Qinghai Education College." He nodded and then asked, "How much money do you make?" I knew this question was coming. It is a typical question in China, like asking, "How are you?" The other customers perked up with curiosity...ah, this was going to be a conversation worth listening to. Having much practice, I answered, "I am a volunteer." More or less that's what I am.

"Volunteer," the crowd echoed...Today, in China, the notion of volunteering borders the holy or the bizarre. Since their beloved Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution campaign to send urban youth to the countryside, few Chinese find the notion of volunteering as glorious as once declared. Thirty years later, some of these urban youth are still trying to get home.

As the idea of volunteering was still being murmured with the spectators, my cao bing was ready for its last step, a final coating of chili paste and a swift sprinkle of sesame seeds. With a smile, the proprietor asked me, "For here or to go?"

"To go," I said. He nodded, handed me my now bagged cao bing and apologized again for taking such a long time. "Mei guan xi," I repeated and waved good-bye.

After all, it only took an hour to roast a circular bread, the size of a dessert plate. In general, the customers buying lamb have priority, because it is more expensive than a ten cent cao bing. All in all, in China, there are many things that can keep a curious "laowai" entertained, especially sitting on a bench in the dusty, windy evening on a side street in Xining City.

Book Review

by Bill Batt

Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the fate of Industrial Societies*, New Society Publishers, April, 2003. 288 pages, paperback, \$17.95

"Authoritative data indicate that from about 2009 on, there will be a permanent 3% per year decline of output from the world's now-emptying global oil fields." We will face a crisis of historic magnitude, yet one which many influential parties today have an interest in not wanting to disclose or address. This dilemma cannot be surmounted by any policies of economics; rather they result from the laws of physics. Moreover, there are no realistic substitutes to adequately provide the full range of power requirements that petroleum has heretofore given us. Even the often touted "renewable" power sources like solar and wind will take enormous investments, and there is simply too little time before the crisis arrives.

How are we — every individual and nation on earth — going to cope with this crisis? Each alternative, argues Professor Richard Heinberg, has so many downsides that we face a future of profoundly lowered sights. He both presents the data and explains why so many in industry and government have refused to face the looming crisis squarely. Many will dismiss this book as just one more Cassandra speaking, but it is incumbent then for such critics to know the arguments and answer them if they can. They will have a difficult time. The thesis goes even further: that the fossil-fuel based economy has allowed world population to soar to over six billion, but as the basis of such food provision becomes exhausted, the number will shrink once again to what it was capable of supporting in the absence of petroleum based fertilizers and cultivation, at best about two billion people, and perhaps by 2050. How that scenario will unfold is beyond the scope of his book except in a limited way, but demonstration of our dependency upon carbon-based power is graphically shown, and outlines of what might happen are referenced for the reader to explore.

The basis of Heinberg's book is three years of a very active listserve begun in February 2000 and moderated by retired Cornell Professor Jay Hansen. It grew out of Hansen's extensive website, www.dieoff.org, and two listserves (energyresources@yahoo.com and RunningOnEmpty@yahoo.com) to continue the discussion. There have been nearly 40,000 posts on energyresources alone, contributed by an open membership of over 600 very knowledgeable subscribers. The richness of these exchanges are remarkable testimony to the power of the internet. Professor Heinberg, in his fourth book, reflects the ideas expressed accurately and concisely for so difficult a subject. Agree or disagree, it is the responsibility of every citizen to read and understand the implications of Heinberg's message.