

December 15, 1989 (Vol. 5, no. 8)

Dear Colleague:

"Guy Willoughby shed the natty suit that he has frequently worn in Kabul, dropped to his hands and knees off a highway north of here, and worked his way through a Soviet mine field" (NY Times, Dec. 3, '89). Willoughby, a 29-year old Englishman, is clearing mines left by the Russians--a job so dangerous that the Afghans themselves (sensibly enough) don't want to do. Work done, young Willoughby flies home to indulge in his passion for horse breeding and polo. This story makes me feel inspired, envious, and sad. Inspired because here is a youngster who almost jauntily puts his life at great risk for a humanitarian cause. Envious because Willoughby has added stature to being English. To be English is to love horses; fine, but so what? To be English is to help others a couple of thousand miles away from home. I can't dismiss that as easily. Finally, I feel sad. There is nothing in my tradition (Chinese) that fosters the grand Willoughbian gesture. Confucians may well condemn it as foolishness and unfilial--for it is unfilial to risk one's life for total strangers.

One of the great multicultural centers in Wisconsin is our own Memorial Union. Any day, you will find there infants in high chairs throwing peas on the floor, blue-haired ladies in soft kid gloves, students of all ages, bearded Marxian intellectuals, punks in spiked hair, middle-aged professors, spastics in wheelchairs, swaggering athletes, ectomorphs sipping their cups of Columbian coffee, mesomorphs slurbing over their beer mugs, vendors and politicians, chess masters and poets, and of course humans of all color. About the only room that bucks the trend and is becoming increasingly monocultural is our Multicultural Center!

I wonder how many of our top administrators go to the Union, not for the lordly visit or committee meetings, but to have a cup of coffee, to eat with students and colleagues? I like the Union for it is as close to demonstrating cultural diversity at work as you can get. I also like it because, notwithstanding its palatial exterior, it is kind of tatty inside: one is free, therefore, to go there in coat-and-tie for a concert or with one's shoelaces untied for a sloppy joe.

Best wishes and Merry Christmas,

