



Four Ladies From Burma

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON — When Burma's Zin Mar Aung was placed in solitary confinement for trying to organize students in 1999, Bill Clinton was president of the United States.

When she was released, Barack Obama was in the Oval Office.

Zin Mar Aung says she had never heard of George W. Bush or his wife, Laura, who used her own bully pulpit to push for liberation of Burma's most famous political prisoner, democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, then under house arrest.

Suu Kyi is well-known to many now because of the largely unacknowledged work of the Bushes, as well as Hillary Clinton and John McCain. Since her release, Suu Kyi has risen to public office, accepted her Nobel Peace Prize and been the subject of a movie ("The Lady").

Less well-known are four rising female leaders with whom I met, including Zin Mar Aung, who are visiting the U.S. this month for leadership training. Their delegation is sponsored by Goldman Sachs' "10,000 Women" program, in partnership with the George W. Bush Institute, the McCain Institute and the Meridian International Center.

What does all this mean? Start here: Imagine living under a military dictatorship where free speech is punishable by incarceration, torture or worse. Imagine sitting in an 8-by-8-foot cell alone for 11 years with nothing but a small water jug, a "sink" for waste, and a 15-minute daily break for a cold bath in a communal tub. Throw in a lack of any amenities (shoes) or even necessities, such as sanitary napkins.

This was Zin Mar Aung's life for 11 years. How did she hang on to her sanity, I asked? She says she accepted that her existence consisted of those 64 square feet and wishing otherwise would do her no good. Meditate on that for a few seconds, while keeping in mind that her crime was publicly reading and distributing a collection of revolutionary poems she and her fellow students had written. Zin Mar Aung says she focused on those poems to get her through more than 4,000 days.



PHOTO COURTESY KATHLEEN PARKER
 From left to right: Erin Walsh (Goldman Sachs), Zin Mar Aung, Shunn Lei Swe Yee, Kathleen Parker, Ma Nilar OO, Hla Hla Yee

Then one day, she was free. What does one do next? How does one navigate freedom in a nation relatively new to democratic reform and find the voice to speak when one has been silenced? Second and third thoughts further crowd the spirit in a country where, despite admiration for The Lady (as everyone refers to Suu Kyi), women are not universally embraced in the political process.

It takes courage to put one foot in front of the other, much less to become an activist, as Zin Mar Aung and her colleagues have done. For her part, Zin Mar Aung picked up where she left off, earning a degree in botany, and now pursuing an international law degree. In the meantime, she established the Yangon School of Political Science and co-founded Rainfall, an organization focused on women's empowerment.

The accomplishments of the four also include helping political prisoners, providing education and training to underserved girls and young women vulnerable to trafficking, and advocating for victims of domestic violence. The name of one of the organizations they help suggests the urgency and breadth of their challenges: "Stop Sexual Harassment on the Bus Now."

The three other women are: Hla Hla Yee, a mother, attorney and former political prisoner who counsels marginalized women and provides paralegal training in or-

phanages and elsewhere; Shunn Lei Swe Yee, who mobilizes young people to work for a more civil society; and Ma Nilar OO, who worked for the International Red Cross for 18 years, advocated for political prisoners and personally provided some of those aforementioned necessities to Zin Mar Aung and Hla Hla Yee when they were imprisoned. More recently, she has been training and finding jobs for at-risk girls and young women (ages 13 to 35). She recently lost two teens from her program when their parents sold them each for \$100. They were of high value, apparently, because they were virgins, the sundering of whom is crudely termed in Burma "to open a new envelope."

Some of these struggles sound familiar, even in our relatively advanced democracy. What is different for these women is the absence of democratic traditions in their country and a lack of familiarity with the instruments of freedom. Everything — from how to build a feminist movement to how to create a political party — has to be invented from scratch. What is message? What is public opinion? How does a person get elected?

Imagine that. And then meditate about — or pray for — the safety and success of these four brave women.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Modern Technology Unearths Old King

THE TELEGRAPH, London (Feb. 4): The forensic dramas that have become so popular on our TV screens in recent years have whetted the public's appetite for this particularly morbid line in detective work, but the discovery of the skeleton of Richard III beneath a Leicester car park trumps any work of fiction. It ranks as one of the most dramatic archaeological discoveries of modern times.

A story that began more than five centuries ago with Richard's death at the Battle of Bosworth Field has been concluded with the use of the most advanced techniques. The University of Leicester, whose coup this is, used archaeology, genealogical research, carbon dating and DNA-matching to conclude that the huddled skeleton with a twisted spine and severe head injuries is, beyond reasonable doubt, that of the last monarch of the House of York. One of the great mysteries of our history — the fate of Richard's corpse — has been resolved.

This extraordinary work of historical detection would not have been possible a decade ago, because DNA technology was not well enough advanced. Nor would it have been possible in the years ahead, because the direct bloodline traced by Leicester's researchers is going to die out. A monarch who has become a by-word for regal villainy — largely because of the effectiveness of the Tudor propaganda machine, aided and abetted by William Shakespeare — will now be re-interred. Leicester Cathedral has been chosen for his final resting place, though some may think that York Minster would be more appropriate. Wherever he is laid to rest, the last English monarch to die in battle, who was "killed fighting manfully in the thickest press of his enemies" in the words of one chronicler, deserves the fullest pomp and ceremony. We will never again have a chance to entomb a sovereign five centuries after his death.

Who The Cheats Really Cheat

THE ADVERTISER-TRIBUNE, Tiffin, Ohio (Jan. 31): The only person to win the Tour de France seven times in a row admits to taking performance-enhancing drugs.

Baseball Hall of Fame voters — facing a ballot including one player who has admitted taking steroids plus three others whose qualifications are clouded by allegations of using banned substances — opt not to have a Class of 2013.

Four athletes performing at the Winter X Games ... were hospitalized following mishaps during competition or practice. At least two remain in the hospital, one in critical condition.

There is a distinction between athletes who violate rules against use of banned substance and those who flirt with breaking the law of gravity. Yet all have one thing in common — they risk their health in order to compete.

But that distinction is important. Competitors in many sports face the possibility of injury. From motorsports to mountaineering, those risks are accepted by participants and minimized as much as possible.

Those who violate rules against performance-enhancing drugs and blood doping not only cheat their fellow competitors, they cheat their spectators, also.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
 Today is Thursday, Feb. 7, the 38th day of 2013. There are 327 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Feb. 7, 1943, during World War II, the government abruptly announced that rationing of shoes made with leather would go into effect in two days, limiting consumers to buying three pairs per person per year. (Rationing was lifted in October 1945.)

On this date: In 1795, the 11th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, dealing with states' sovereign immunity, was ratified.

In 1812, author Charles Dickens was born in Landport, Portsmouth, England.

In 1857, a French court acquitted author Gustave Flaubert of obscenity for his serialized novel "Madame Bovary."

In 1863, the British Royal Navy corvette HMS *Orpheus* struck a sandbar and sank off the coast of New Zealand, killing 189 out of the 259 men on board.

In 1904, a fire began in Baltimore that raged for about 30 hours and destroyed more than 1,500 buildings.

In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized a flag for the office of the vice president.

In 1948, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower resigned as Army chief of staff; he was succeeded by Gen. Omar Bradley.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy imposed a full trade embargo on Cuba.

In 1971, women in Switzerland gained the right to vote through a national referendum, 12 years after a previous attempt failed.

In 1983, Elizabeth H. Dole was sworn in as the first female secretary of transportation by the first woman to sit on the Supreme Court, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

In 1984, space shuttle Challenger astronauts Bruce McCandless II and Robert L. Stewart went on the first untethered space walk, which lasted nearly six hours.

In 1999, Jordan's King Hussein died of cancer at age 63; he was succeeded by his eldest son, Abdullah.

Ten years ago: The government raised its terror threat level from yellow to "high risk" orange, warning of a growing possibility that al-Qaida would launch an attack against the United States to coincide with Muslim holy days. President George W. Bush courted the leaders of France and

China in an uphill struggle to win U.N. backing for war with Iraq. Unidentified attackers bombed the exclusive El Nogal social club in Bogota, Colombia, killing 36 people and injuring 160 others. Tom Christerson, the longest-living recipient of a fully self-contained artificial heart, died at Jewish Hospital in Louisville, Ky., after 512 days on the AbioCor; he was 71.

Five years ago: John McCain effectively sealed the Republican presidential nomination as chief rival Mitt Romney suspended his campaign. Fourteen refinery workers were killed in a sugar dust explosion in Port Wentworth, Ga. A gunman opened fire at a Kirkwood, Mo., council meeting, killing three city officials and two police officers before being fatally shot by law enforcement. In Los Angeles, a man who claimed responsibility for the deaths of three relatives opened fire on a SWAT unit, killing one officer; the gunman was killed by a police sniper. After two months of delay, shuttle Atlantis blasted into orbit with Europe's gift to the international space station, a \$2 billion science lab named Columbus.

One year ago: In a setback for Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum swept GOP caucuses in Minnesota and Colorado and a non-binding primary in Missouri. A federal appeals court ruled California's ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, but gave gay marriage opponents time to appeal the decision before ordering the state to allow such weddings to resume.

Today's Birthdays: Author Gay Talese is 81. Former Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., is 78. Actor Miguel Ferrer is 58. Reggae musician Brian Travers (UB40) is 54. Comedy writer Robert Smigel is 53. Actor James Spader is 53. Country singer Garth Brooks is 51. Rock musician David Bryan (Bon Jovi) is 51. Actor-comedian Eddie Izzard is 51. Actor-comedian Chris Rock is 48. Actor Jason Gedrick is 46. Actress Essence Atkins is 41. Rock singer-musician Wes Borland is 38. Rock musician Tom Blenkinship (My Morning Jacket) is 35. Actor Ashton Kutcher is 35. Actress Tina Majorino is 28.

Thought for Today: "A cruel story runs on wheels, and every hand oils the wheels as they run." — Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramee), English writer (1839-1908).

FROM THE BIBLE

Lord, if You will, You can make me clean." And Jesus ... touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." Matthew 8:2-3. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Defending Kids

Lois Keck, Crofton, Neb.

There has been so much hype lately about guns. In the Jan. 31 edition of the *Press & Dakotan*, there were two very interesting articles on this subject. One was a column by William Kerr on how safe he felt in countries where there were no guns. Then, on page 10, there was the news about the teen performer at the inauguration who was fatally shot at a park in Chicago. That news article mentioned this was Chicago's 42nd slaying in January, then goes on to tell how many homicides there have been in Chicago. They did not mention that Chicago has some of the toughest gun control laws in the nation.

We who believe in self-defense, be-

lieve that's why there have been so many homicides there. The saying that has been repeated bears repeating again: "When good guys are disarmed, only bad guys will have guns."

Another thing to think about in this discussion. People are so afraid to have armed guards in schools. Yet, at the Super Bowl on Sunday, there are hundreds of security guards among that crowd. Who is more important, the attendees at the Super Bowl or our kids in school? Don't the kids deserve the same security?

And, please, people, realize we are not saying, just grab someone and arm them. I'm sure those guards at the Super Bowl were trained. That's what we need in our schools, too, to protect our kids. You who agree, let your elected officials know.

Writer's Block

Let's Have A Heart-To-Heart Talk

BY ANDREW ATWAL

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Congenital heart defects are the No. 1 cause of birth defect related deaths.

One out of every 100 children is born with a congenital heart defect.

In the United States, twice as many children die from congenital heart defects each year than from all forms of childhood cancer combined — yet funding for pediatric cancer research is five times higher than it is for heart defects.

I am one of those born with a heart defect, but just by looking at me on the outside, you'd think I was a healthy adult.

I had open-heart surgery at about two months of age to repair a condition Tetralogy of Fallot back home at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. My second open-heart surgery came at 23 years old, on Dec. 6, 2012 at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. By the time many children with heart defects reach their teenage years, they've needed several surgeries to stay alive.

Tetralogy of Fallot is a condition where blood that does not have oxygen spills out to other areas of the body, causing obvious problems if not treated.

I underwent pulmonary valve replacement surgery on Dec. 6, a recovery that lasted six weeks at home — including four weeks without driving. However, I was able to return to work in the middle of January.

February is American Heart Month, and Feb. 7-14 is Congenital Heart Awareness Week. Thanks to new technology, many children are able to survive their defects, but others are not so lucky. Each child with a defect, however, now has someone to look up to in Shaun White, who has won multiple Olympics and X-Games medals who was born with Tetralogy of Fallot.



Andrew ATWAL

I live a fairly normal life, aside from needing surgery as well as going to a cardiologist to get checked on every year. I graduated from high school, got my bachelor's degree and then moved to Yankton to work for the *Press & Dakotan*. Without the surgery I had,

particularly as an infant, none of this would have been possible. Without the surgery I had in December, things would have continued to deteriorate.

My surgeon said because the deterioration has occurred over an extended period of time, I never felt how bad it actually was — that is, until after this surgery when I saw how big of a difference it made and how much better I feel because of it.

As technology continues to improve, more babies will have these problems detected sooner, making survival and living a normal life more possible than it ever has been. State Sen. Jean Hunhoff (R-Yankton) has seen the need, as she introduced SB 168, which requires newborns to be screened for congenital heart defects. The bill was passed on Feb. 4.

Although survivorship into adulthood is a strong possibility for those with a heart condition, more research must be done to find out why so many born with a heart condition do not have it detected until they reach adulthood — or until after it's too late.

I live a fairly normal life, and from outside appearances you'd never know I was born with a heart defect or that I've had two surgeries to correct it.

Congenital heart defects are a real problem — a problem that must be solved in order to have more and more children survive their defects and live a normal life.

You can follow Andrew Atwal Twitter at twitter.com/andrewatwal