

unity



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Author of
praiseworthy prose

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Launching a legacy with Legos



Shubham Banerjee's prototype for a Braille printer was the inspiration for the 2014 Lego Mindstorms EV3 Build 4 Good robotics challenge. Photos courtesy of Braigo Labs

The next time you step on a Lego toy, you might want to refrain from scolding your child. That misplaced doodad could be a steppingstone on a path toward technologic greatness. Such was the case for Shubham Banerjee, an inquisitive California teen who created a printer to help the blind.

It all started when Shubham came across a flier soliciting donations to help the blind. That prompted him to ask his parents, "How do blind people read?" Their answer: "Go Google it." While conducting his research, Shubham learned that Braille printers could easily cost \$2,000.

"I thought that was pretty high," he told *Unity Magazine*. "I wanted to reduce the cost." He envisioned a printer that cost \$350. A Lego fanatic since the age of 2, Shubham built his prototype of the Braille printer from a Lego Mindstorms EV3 robotics kit.

"Anybody can build one or enhance on it," he says. "All instructions are here: <http://makezine.com/projects/braigo-a-diy-braille-printer-with-lego>."

He presented the printer at a science fair in 2014; afterward, it attracted worldwide media attention that took Shubham by surprise. Soon, his printer was the inspiration for the 2014 Lego Mindstorms EV3 Build 4 Good robotics challenge that was held in Seattle.

"I was just trying to help people," says the middle school student, who's the recipient of multiple awards. "I never thought it would come this far."

According to a January 2015 article in *The Guardian* newspaper, Neil Banerjee, Shubham's father, "an engineer and serial entrepreneur who works at Intel, invested \$35,000 to launch a company called Braigo Labs last summer. Intel then invested an undisclosed sum for a share in the company. ... Shubham built a more sophisticated 2.0 version using an off-the-shelf desktop printer and Intel computer chip (that) can translate electronic text into Braille before printing."

By the way: With Intel's investment, Shubham became one of the youngest recipients of venture capital.

On Braigo Labs' website (www.braigolabs.com), Shubham is credited with founding the company that's "committed to creating, researching, designing and developing new technology innovations and services. The mission of the company is to bring 'Humanely Optimized' technologies that are innovative, affordable and cater to solving life's problems."

If all goes well, Shubham told *Unity*, "We are targeting end of this year (2015)" for Braigo's first "Humanely Optimized" product, the Braille printer, to go on sale. "Before that, in summer, we will give units to blind institutes and organizations for feedback and testing." Now the goal is for the printer to be priced at less than \$500.

Meanwhile, Shubham says he has many products that "will be revealed soon."

As for his next science project – remember, the 13-year-old is still in school – Shubham hasn't given it much thought. "I am about to enter high school after summer (2015)."

Besides, says the young Silicon Valley visionary, "Braigo is keeping me preoccupied."



Shubham Banerjee built the prototype for the Braille printer from Lego's Mindstorms EV3 robotics kit.

Author of praiseworthy prose



Celeste Ng's novel, "Everything I Never Told You," is available in paperback this month. Photo by Kevin Day Photography

Surreal and unnerving. For Celeste Ng, that's the best way to describe the attention that her 2014 debut novel, "Everything I Never Told You," has generated.

Set in 1977, the book is about a missing Ohio girl, a lake and a local bad boy who was the last person to see her and refuses to discuss what happened.

The media have raved about Ng's deft handling of the prose:

- Entertainment Weekly: "Ng skillfully gathers each thread of the tragedy, uncovering secrets and revealing poignant answers."
- The Los Angeles Times: Ng has written "a moving tale of a dysfunctional family."
- The New York Times: "This is familiar territory, but Ng returns to it to spin an unfamiliar tale. ... If we know this story, we haven't seen it yet in American fiction, not until now."

"I'm really grateful for all of the responses the book has gotten," Ng (pronounced "ing") told *Unity Magazine* in early 2015. "Just this weekend I found out that 'Everything I Never Told You' won an Alex Award (from the Young Adult Library Services Association). That really meant something to me." So did the book's status as a New York Times best-seller and Amazon's No. 1 Best Book of 2014.

Six years after the Harvard alum started writing "Everything I Never Told You," New York literary agent Julie Barer began contacting publishers about Ng's completed manuscript.

"I first met Julie when I was in graduate school (at the University of Michigan)," Ng recalls. "Julie came in ... just to explain what an agent is supposed to do. She was lovely and I was terrified of her because it (book publishing) seemed such a scary thing. ..."

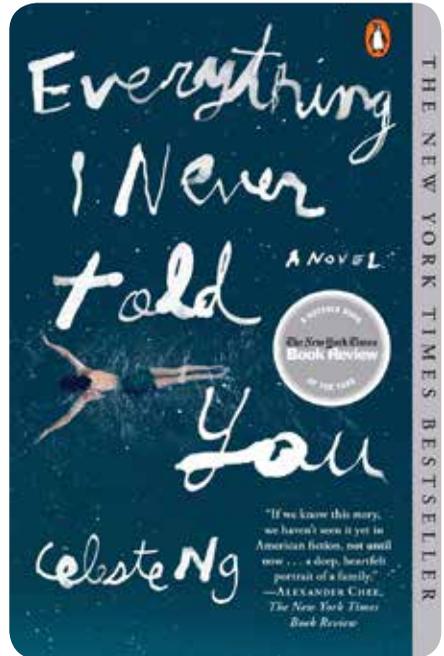
"Julie was the agent who I thought got my work. I'm very, very lucky. ... Without her, the book might not have even landed with those editors."

Though she's now a bona-fide author, Ng describes herself as a "science nerd" on her Twitter page.

"I actually come from a family of scientists (Dad is a physicist, mom's a chemist and her sister is an engineer). "Even though I'm not a scientist, I am interested in science. ..."

In spite of her literary pursuits, Ng, a first-generation Asian-American, never felt like an outsider at home. "My family is really a bookish family. We had tons of books everywhere. They really encouraged me even though it was not their field."

The paperback version of "Everything I Never Told You" goes on sale May 12. Ng (www.celesteng.com), who lives in Cambridge, Mass., is working on her next novel that's set in her childhood community of Shaker Heights in Ohio. What's the premise of the 1990s-era book?



"I'm superstitious about talking about work while I'm working on it," Ng says hesitantly. "(But) I want to try and write a story about a place ... trying to make itself a great place to live – and I think there's gonna be a couple of outsiders who come in to the community and create a ripple."

Conflict and concordance

The three artists in this edition of *Unity* use varied mediums to explore aspects of life that often generate disharmony – such as faith and politics – and one in particular – nature – that bring us a sense of peace.

MANSOORA HASSAN

Mansoor Hassan was born in Peshawar, Pakistan. She graduated from the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan and received a Master of Fine Arts from Pratt Institute in New York City. Hassan says her combination of photography and mixed media promotes a sense of shared humanity through visual explorations of social and political issues.

Hassan's tapestry of multi-layered images does more than indicate a culture with architectural elements, symbols and gestures. It becomes an inspired story to prompt cross-cultural dialogue amongst her viewers. Classical as well as contemporary writers and poets have inspired some of her work.



"The Whirlers"
by Mansoor Hassan



"Metamorphosis"
by Mansoor Hassan

transcendence, the elements of movement in both pieces can seemingly assist one in surpassing his or her physical and metaphysical self.

Hassan's work explores the intersection of cultural and historical perception. "Art dialogue becomes a crucial platform for intercultural exchange in order to overcome polarization," she explains.

Hassan has exhibited in major galleries worldwide, including Bolivia, Bangladesh and Norway. She is also an arts curator/administrator and considers herself an "arts activist."



"Spiritual Journey 010" by Mansoor Hassan

Hassan's "Spiritual Journey 010" is an abstract painting created on handmade paper and canvas using acrylic and iridescent pigments with graphite and oil. The imagery is etched on copper plates then printed on the painting. This piece is part of a "work in progress" series, The Spiritual Journey, inspired by a poem about spiritual discovery and growth.

"The Whirlers," twirling photo images from a Sema (dancing) ceremony, represent a mystical journey of one's spiritual ascent to a greater connection of peace with the universe. Another aspect of the Sema ceremony, "Metamorphosis," allows imprints of iconic cultural images to show prominently against gold and white silky backgrounds. With the theme of spiritual

SU-LI HUNG

Su-Li Hung was born in the fishing harbor of Kaohsiung (gow-shoong) in Southern Taiwan. She says her family was always interested in art and literature and she had aspired to be an artist and writer since age 8. Hung graduated from National Taiwan University with a Bachelor of Arts in Chinese literature and moved to New York City to study printmaking and oil painting at The Art Students League of New York.

Looking through dark branches with a background of glowing sky, "Red Maple Tree" contrasts black and red to "create a magic beauty of mosaic design," Hung says. "Nature has been an inspiration to me in America and Taiwan and painting is an excellent medium to express relationships of sky and tree. It is the classic idea of figures against negative space."



"Red Maple Tree"
by Su-Li Hung



"Mulberry Leaves"
by Su-Li Hung

In "Mulberry Leaves," Hung examines the detailed nature and shape of the mulberry leaf. She likens this work to the Sung Dynasty brush painting of a pear flower branch. Hung says when the wind comes, bamboo curves in a very elegant way and her painting, "Bamboo," shows the vibration of that wind curving the reeds.

Hung's work has been exhibited extensively in the United States, Europe, Taiwan and Japan. She has also published numerous books of essays and poetry.



"Bamboo" by Su-Li Hung

ELA SHAH

Ela Shah was born in Bombay (now known as Mumbai) and learned Indian miniature painting techniques at an early age. She was educated in Indian art traditions at SNDT Women's University in Mumbai. As an adult, she traveled the world, moved to the United States and earned her master's degree in sculpture at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

According to Shah, her inner journey as an immigrant is depicted through a multitude of symbols including flowers, Indian goddesses and sometimes icons of American pop culture. She says most of her work deals with issues of faith, search and survival.

Looking out the window one morning, Shah was delighted to see that winter was finally gone. Thoughts of warmer days, green grass and flowers encouraged bright and buoyant paintings from her flower Rainbow series. In "Power of Faith," those thoughts are exhibited through a flower of exuberant bold colors with little figures inside "offering faith in the cycle of life" and the appearance of multicolored confetti depicting celebration.



"Power of Faith" by Ela Shah

"This image of flowers and temples," says Shah, "also instills a sense of faith in oneself and humankind."

Shah's women often represent both a Western and Indian way of life. "Katar" is a colorful showing of a woman figuratively bursting from India to the Western world in a fluid motion with a whimsical look of traditional Indian harem wear. She holds a katar (dagger) to fight. The ladder suggests an American professional woman's challenges of trying to juggle family and career.

Shah has had numerous one-person shows in India and America. Her work has been exhibited in countless group shows in galleries and museums nationally and abroad. Shah's work is in the collection of the New Jersey State Museum, the Indian Embassy, and other public places and private collections.



"Puja" by Ela Shah



"Katar" by Ela Shah

In Hinduism, puja is a prayer ritual to worship one or more deities, and flowers constitute an important offering to those deities. Shah's "Puja," a silkscreen print, integrates the boldness of a beautiful pink flower with sculptured figures of an Indian temple.

Comfort food, Hawaiian-style

First things first: "Poke" is pronounced POH-kay.

That said, let's delve into the particulars of Hawaii's most beloved side dish that's attained hot-food-trend status in the States.

In Hawaiian, poke is synonymous with "cut piece," "small piece" and "to slice or cut." The basic dish (see the Tuna Poke recipe) consists of cubed ahi tuna, raw seaweed and crunchy, sweet onions. As for condiments and flavorings, wasabi and kimchi (staples of Japanese and Korean cuisine) are prominent.

According to Hawaii Magazine, the poke first eaten by natives consisted of raw fish, Hawaiian salt, seaweed and chopped kukui nuts. For hundreds of years, fishermen cut their catch of raw fish into cubes and enhanced them with whatever seasonings they could find.

"Post-colonial contact," says Hawaii Magazine, "that basic recipe got a bit more interesting with the introduction of onions and, sometimes, tomatoes to the mix."

These days, poke devotees incorporate a slew of ingredients, from all kinds of seafood (swordfish, snapper, octopus and lobster, among others), to nuts, sauces, fruits, veggies and tofu.

Poke is no different from any other traditional dish in that it has evolved. Adventurous cooks

now make it the centerpiece of other entrees, like pizzas and tostadas.

You can thank popular master chef Sam Choy for elevating the profile of poke. Twenty-three years ago, he launched the Sam Choy Poke Festival on, where else, the island of Hawaii. Back then, the main event was a poke recipe contest. In latter years, the festival expanded by offering cooking classes, tastings and a golf tournament. Choy's event no doubt served as the inspiration for other poke gatherings, such as San Diego's I Love Poke Festival.

In 2014, the best restaurant in the country, according to restaurant-review site yelp.com, was the diminutive Da Poke Shack in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. It was the leader among 99 restaurants that made Yelp's first top-100 list.

If you're unable to dine on poke at a West Coast eatery like the Bear Flag Fish Co. in Newport Beach, Calif. (<http://newport.bearflagfishco.com>), a Southern establishment like South Carolina's Charleston Harbor Fish House (www.charlestonharborfishhouse.com) or other Hawaii favorites such as Poke Stop in Waipahu (<http://poke-stop.com>) or Fresh Catch Restaurant in Honolulu (www.freshcatch808.com) anytime soon, there's always the option of ordering fixings for the dish. Noh Foods Hawaii sells poke mix on its website (www.nohfoods.com).

Tuna Poke

Recipe courtesy of www.disney.com

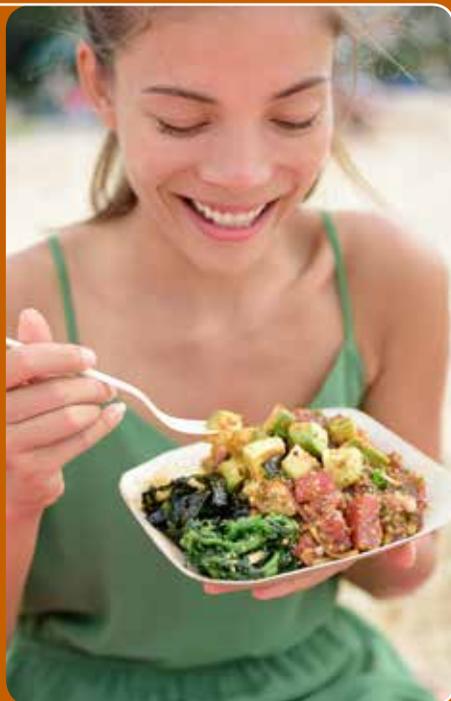
- 1 cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger
- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons yuzu juice
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 tablespoon finely minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds, plus additional for garnish
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon wasabi powder
- 1/8 teaspoon sugar
- 2 pounds fresh sushi-grade tuna, cubed
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Favorite prepared seaweed salad, for serving

Whisk together soy sauce, ginger, sesame oil, yuzu juice, lime juice, garlic, sesame seeds, vinegar, wasabi powder and sugar in a large bowl.

Add tuna to mixture and toss to coat. Season with pepper, to taste. Refrigerate 5 to 10 minutes.

Place a bit of seaweed salad in the bottom of a small dish. Top with tuna and garnish with toasted sesame seeds.

Yield: 6 servings as an appetizer



For breakfast inspiration, look to the East

Breakfast, as many home cooks know, is not without its challenges.

How do you make an appetizing morning spread that's customarily high in sugar and fat, and low in originality and variety? And how do you entice certain family members – who avoid breakfast at all cost – to eat a healthy meal before the clock strikes noon?

Consider delving into what the National Restaurant Association calls one of the hottest trends of 2015: ethnic-inspired breakfast foods. In particular, explore the many Asian foods and ingredients that are gaining visibility at retail (brick-and-mortar stores and websites) and restaurants these days. The restaurant association also revealed that among ethnic cuisines, Korean food came in at No. 2, followed by Southeast Asian at No. 3.

According to the American Egg Board, "There are scores of recognized Asian cuisines 30 within China alone so items beginning to appear on conventional American breakfast menus tend to be Asian-inspired, vs. strictly authentic. Hoisin and soy sauces, mango, cilantro, ginger, garlic, basil and lime are some of the Asian flavors increasing in frequency in breakfast dishes ..."

So what does this mean for the home cook? Well, there are plenty of recipes to get you started. Try this one for toasted quinoa, courtesy of www.avocadopesto.com.



Toasted Quinoa With Mushrooms And Asian Flavors

- 1 cup uncooked quinoa, rinsed
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 3 1/2 ounces sliced shiitake mushrooms
- 4 ounces sliced oyster mushrooms
- 8 ounces baby bella mushrooms, sliced
- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 6 green onions, sliced
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds

For the dressing

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon gluten-free tamari

Heat a pot over medium heat and add 1/2 tablespoon of sesame oil. Add 3 cloves minced garlic and quinoa and stir to combine, then cook for 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until quinoa is lightly toasted.

Add in broth, increase heat to high, bringing to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, covered for 15 minute or until water is absorbed and quinoa is fluffy.

In a separate pan heat 1/2 tablespoon olive oil over medium heat and add shiitakes. Cook for a few minutes, stirring occasionally, then remove.

To the pan add another 1/2 tablespoon olive oil and add oyster mushrooms; cook for a few minutes. Remove.

To the pan add another 1/2 tablespoon olive oil and add baby bella mushrooms and cook for a few minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 1 clove minced garlic and continue to cook with the mushrooms 1 minute. Add all the other mushrooms to the pan to combine.

Whisk dressing in separate bowl.

Combine mushrooms, quinoa, dressing and green onions. Serve sprinkled with sesame seeds.

Who is Arthur Chu? Soon all will be revealed

Documentaries about musicians are plentiful, as are such film features about athletes. By 2016, a game-show contestant will get his shot at “docu fame.”

Produced and directed by Scott Drucker and Yu Gu, the documentary “Who Is Arthur Chu?” (www.arthurchufilm.com) showcases a one-time insurance analyst whose 11-game winning streak on “Jeopardy!” yielded dollars (298,200 of them), devotees and detractors. Chu garnered attention in 2014 for employing the “Forrest Bounce” technique of choosing questions (jumping around the board) instead of running through a category in order. His just-shy-of-a-dozen victories put Chu – the son of Taiwanese parents – in fourth place on the game show’s all-time consecutive wins list.

In early 2015, *Unity* Magazine spoke with Scott Drucker and Yu Gu about their Arthur Chu film project. Following are excerpts from our interview.

Q. What inspired you to make this documentary?

A. Arthur’s “Jeopardy!” year and everything it encapsulates still feels like an underdocumented cultural moment. ... Arthur’s story also has many themes to delve into: the impact of television celebrity, the new American dream and the significance of going viral, to name a few. We want to show people who Arthur really is – the hyperfocused, ambitious Arthur – someone who we can relate to. We’re inspired ... by what Arthur is trying to do post-“Jeopardy!” And the question remains: Will he succeed in becoming a social/cultural commentator, will people listen to what he has to say and will he actually make a difference?

Q. What have you learned about Chu that you’ve found most surprising/intriguing?

A. We learn something from Arthur every day. He has this wealth of knowledge (not just trivia) that permeates the way he leads his life. His writing possesses a streak of stubborn idealism that doesn’t always mesh well with modern society. It is a whole side of him we didn’t even know existed until after we started shooting. ...



A documentary on Arthur Chu is currently in production.

Q. Does Chu have any input into, or control of, the documentary?

A. Arthur will have no creative input in the documentary. We are the filmmakers; he is the subject of the film. Of course, what parts of his life he lets us into is in his control, but he will not have any say in our vision for the story or how we edit everything together. Hopefully, Arthur’s journey will unfold on screen exactly the way we’ve been seeing it. He’s trusted us with the vision of this film, and he’s been very honest and true to who he is in front of the camera, and for that we are grateful.

Q. When do you expect to complete filming?

A. We hope to complete production this summer (2015). Post-production will begin around the same time and continue throughout the fall so we can be ready for the 2016 festival season.

Q. Are you getting the access you need from “Jeopardy!” to produce the documentary?

A. “Jeopardy!” has been incredibly gracious with the access they have given us. They have been supportive of the project and we’re glad they see as much merit in the film as we do.