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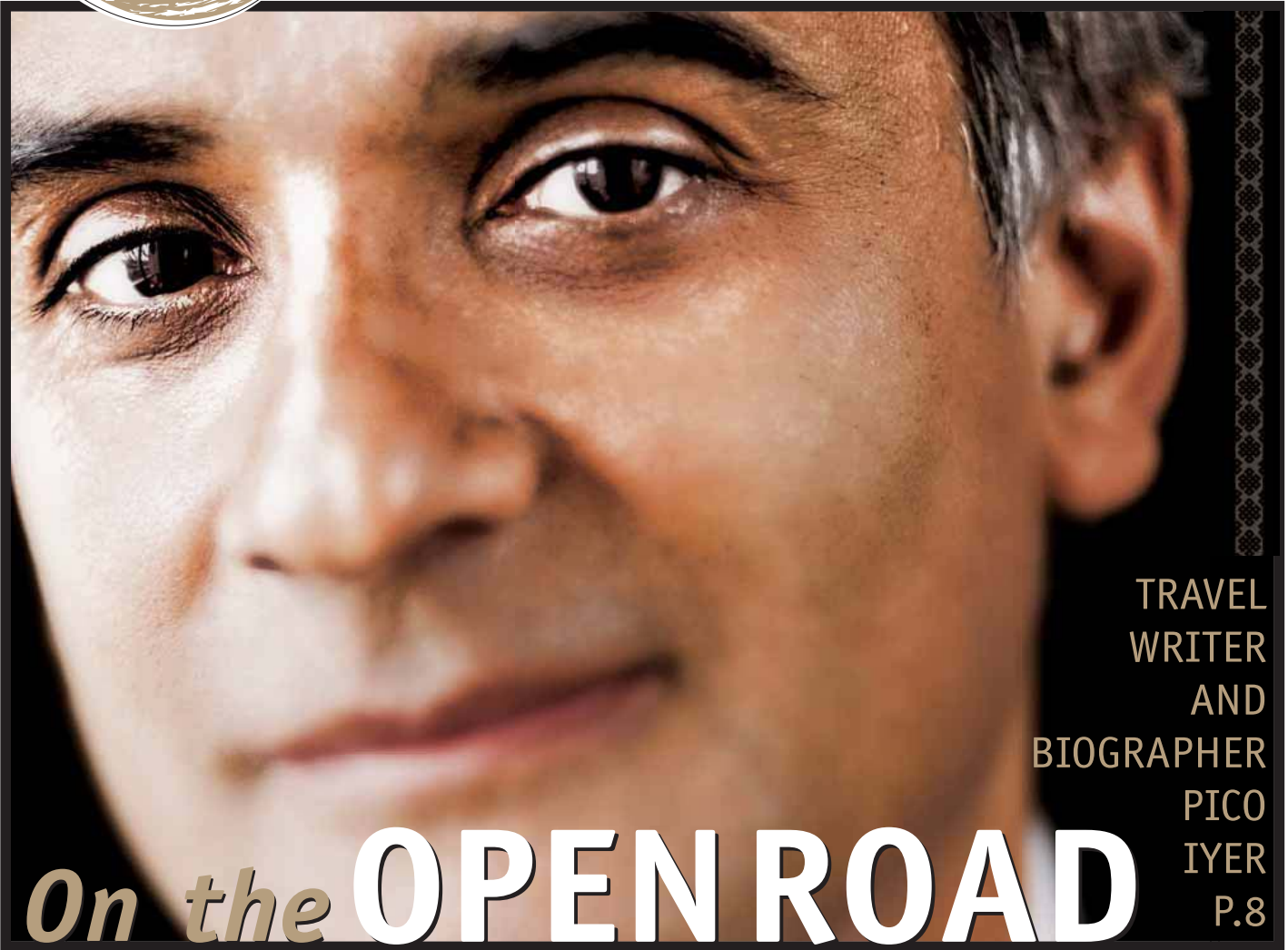
WEEKLY

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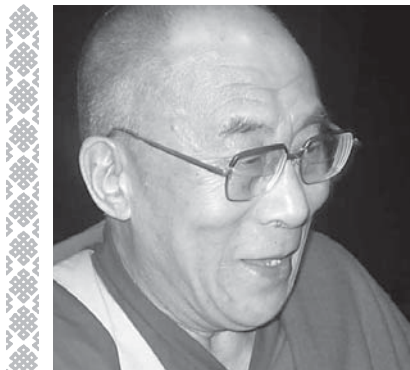
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HIS HOLINESS, PICO IYER & ME

FOUR YEARS ago, the 14th Dalai Lama visited the Pacific Northwest, giving teachings and participating in roundtable discussions at venues across Vancouver, B.C. One of the highlights of his trip was an elaborate ceremony at Christ Church Cathedral where the Dalai Lama, along with fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi, were awarded honorary doctorates by Simon Fraser University. With marching dignitaries, blaring bagpipes, a heavenly chorus of children and enormous leaded stained-glass windows dripping colored gems, it was a breathtaking blend of pomp, posturing, spirituality and substance, and I was shocked to find myself with front row seats for the show.

I had been following His Holiness around town for several days as part of the media contingent, taking photos and notes, watching the pros from the *Vancouver Sun* and *Time* magazine at work. We were herded

here and there, given background briefings, backstage access and an intimate press conference I'll never forget. I watched a lot of serious journalists lose all professional detachment when the Dalai Lama entered the room—it was near impossible not to be impacted, not to swoon, when in such close proximity to a “living Buddha.”

I was mingling with the media in the basement of the cathedral, pre-bagpipes, when I saw a reporter that looked familiar from dust jackets of several books on my shelves back at home. “That looks a lot like Pico Iyer,” I thought of the small, smiling Indian man with the beat-up rucksack slung over his shoulder, and a glance at his nametag confirmed my suspicion. I had read and relished *Video Nights in Katmandu: And Other Reports from the Not-So-Far* and *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World*, two of his finest books collecting some of the most observant, piquant and intelligent

travel essays I've ever come across.

Iyer was fresh on my mind because Whatcom Community College, where I was teaching composition at the time, had chosen another of his books—*The Global Soul*—as the Book of the Year, and it was being taught in a wide variety of courses. I was already looking forward to meeting him on campus in a few weeks, when he would visit with the classes studying his books, but here he was, in the flesh, in the basement of a cathedral in downtown Vancouver.

I introduced myself and quickly learned why he was such a successful world traveler: friendliness! With charm and genuine interest, he asked me for my story—who I was, where I came from, what I do and what brought me to such an auspicious gathering. Together we talked about the Dalai Lama phenomenon, the frenzied adulation that accompanied him every-

LAMA, CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

ON THE ROAD WITH THE DALAI LAMA



BY CHRISTIAN MARTIN



"I WAS NERVOUS AT THE PROSPECT OF MAKING A CERAMIC PRAYER WHEEL LARGE ENOUGH TO FIT 200,000 HANDWRITTEN PRAYERS"

CHRIS MOENCH, a longtime Bellingham sculptor, recently presented two ceramic prayer wheels to the Dalai Lama during his Seattle visit for the Seeds of Compassion conference April 11-15. Last August, Moench ran into conference organizer Pamela Eakes at an art fair and offered to make two prayer wheels for the event. The first was used onstage in a public "Inter-spiritual Dialog" attended by 10,000 participants. The second prayer wheel, created small enough to fit in a carry-on bag to Dharamsala, India, was a gift to the Dalai Lama from Moench and all the people involved in Seeds of Compassion.

Reached at his retreat near Lake Padden, Moench commented on his experience: "I was honored and nervous. Honored to be able to give something back to the Dalai Lama who has devoted his whole life to promoting peace in the world. Nervous at the prospect of making a ceramic prayer wheel large enough to fit 200,000 handwritten prayers. It took three months and 175 pounds of sweat, prayers and clay."

To see more of Moench's work, visit www.axisofhope.net



LAMA, FROM PAGE 8

where he spoke in Vancouver, indeed everywhere he popped up around the globe. We tried to be a little bit jaded about it, but couldn't quite pull it off since we too were extremely excited to be a part of his historic visit to Canada, especially the ceremony that was about to take place in the cathedral above our heads.

I mentioned to Iyer that I had read and appreciated an essay he wrote on the Dalai Lama from his then-new book *Sun After Dark: Flights into the Foreign* and he responded that if I liked that one, just wait until his next one came out.

"I'm actually writing my next book entirely on the Dalai Lama, based on over 30 years of conversations I've had with him and many travels to hear him speak all over the world," Iyer told me.

Flash-forward four years, and the Dalai Lama is back in the Pacific Northwest, Pico Iyer is once again visiting Bellingham and his long-awaited biography is finally in print. *The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama* is an erudite, insightful and expansive book that is based, as advertised, on Iyer's three-decade relationship with the exiled ruler of Tibet. It isn't a chrono-

logical retelling of the Dalai Lama's life, but instead a series of interlocking chapters that examine the world's most famous monk from three different angles (which also serve as section titles): In Public, In Private, In Practice.

Iyer begins his biography by examining the aspects of the Dalai Lama's public life, dividing public perceptions of him into chapters entitled "The Conundrum," "The Fairy Tale," and "The Icon." In the first, Iyer points out the rich ironies embodied in the Dalai Lama: "A religious teacher who is telling people not to get confused or distracted by religion; a Tibetan who is suggesting that Tibet does not have all the answers; a Buddhist who, more and more, is urging foreigners not to take up Buddhism but to study within their own traditions, where their roots are deepest."

And this, the most painful of the Dalai Lama's ironies: despite being celebrated the world over as a leading peacemaker, the political situation in his own country is disastrous. The recent demonstrations by Tibetans against their Chinese masters have resulted in riots, curfews, imprisonments and more than 100 Tibetans killed. The violence has unsettled

much of the world, and threatens to derail China's coming-out party at this summer's Olympic games.

"The country that he was born to rule is slipping ever closer to extinction," laments Iyer, "...on his watch, his own people have lost most of their contact with their leaders, their loved ones, and their culture, and one of the great centers of Buddhism...has been all but wiped off the map."

Iyer likewise brings his sharp insight to the Dalai Lama's cult of personality, examining how a man who describes himself as "a simple monk" came to acquire the same global recognition as Michael Jackson, Coca-Cola, or *Pirates of the Carribean*.

He believes the Western world's fascination begins with our cultural perception of Tibet as a "Shangri-La," a place of peace, unity and perfect wisdom hidden away from the imperfect, divisive, crass world we inhabit. The well-known narrative of the Dalai Lama's unusual life story—from the mystical origins of his being recognized as the 14th Dalai Lama as a 2-year-old to the dramatic flight from Tibet as the Red Army invaded to his tireless work as a leader-in-exile—also fuels the adoration that follows

LAMA, CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

2nd Annual MOTORCYCLE Show-n-Shine

for Whatcom County Foster Kids

Trophies! Live Music! Food! Raffle!

Sunday, May 18, 2008
8am - 3pm

Historic Downtown Bellingham
Market Depot
1100 Railroad Avenue

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COMMUNITY ◊ LECTURES ◊ BOOKS



Listen

Pico Iyer reads from *The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama* at Village Books on Wednesday, April 30 at 7pm. You can hear a podcast of the Dalai Lama's talk apodcastcafe.org/radiofreeindi and watch webcasts at seedsofcompassion.org/webcast.

LAMA, FROM PAGE 13

him wherever he travels. Tibet and the Dalai Lama both "wear the contours of fairy tale" and this turns out to have both benefits and drawbacks.

But fairy tales aside, Iyer also sees something genuine in the way people of many nations and cultures flock to the Dalai Lama.

"The world seemed to have moved from having too little information about itself to having too much," he observes, "and what the soul cried out for...was something that could put the clutter into a larger perspective." The Dalai Lama wins audiences over with "transparent sincerity and lack of shadow: just one man obviously speaking from the heart, with no apparent wish to sell any position or philosophy, let alone himself."

These natural talents were evident in the Dalai Lama's recent visit to Seattle. More than 50,000 people filled Qwest Stadium for the capstone event of the five-day Seeds of Compassion conference. The gala featured a colorful parade highlighting more than 200 different cultures that live in Washington state, a 1,500-member intergenerational choir, drumming and dancing ceremonies and a beaming Gov. Chris Gregoire. The Dalai Lama spoke to the capacity crowd about compassion, nonviolence and dialogue, with a special emphasis on the importance of passing these qualities on to children.

It was the Dalai Lama's first international trip since riots have broken out in both Tibet and along the global path of the Olympic torch as it winds toward China, though he chose

to make little reference to the controversies. Instead, he engaged with diverse groups of people on and offstage throughout the conference, including the governor, researchers from the University of Washington, musician Dave Matthews, local school children, author Ishmael Beah, Costco co-founder Jeffrey Brotman, and Archbishop Tutu.

He also made time to meet with a few people from the Whatcom area, including members of the Lummi Nation, who presented the Dalai Lama with traditional gifts including a cedar bark hat and a beaded necklace.

The ultimate outcome of his trip to Seattle was rather like the outcome of his visit to Vancouver four years earlier: to discuss what he considers to be the "universal values" of love, dialogue, respect, equanimity, reason, happiness and especially compassion. Rather than proselytize about his own Tibetan Buddhist faith, or speechify about the fate of Tibet, the Dalai Lama barnstorms city after city, country after country, reminding us of what we already know.

Iyer describes this particular gift of the Dalai Lama's as helping people "return to the clutter and commotion (of their lives) a little differently, in part by seeing how they could change the world by changing the way they looked at the world."

"The Dalai Lama liked to talk of 'human beings,' nearly always preceded by the pronoun 'we,'" Iyer says, "but what he was really talking about was 'human becoming,' and the ways each one of us could travel along the open road to becoming more compassionate and responsible." ☺



WORDS

WED., APRIL 23

SPOKEN WORD: Spoken Word Wednesdays happen every week at 8pm at the Bellingham Public Market, 1530 Cornwall Ave. The event is free. For more info: 714-0800.

THURS., APRIL 24

JARED PAUL: Slam poet Jared Paul gives a free reading at 8pm at WWU's Underground Coffeehouse in the Viking Union. For more info: 650-3263.

FRI., APRIL 25

RICK BAROT: Tacoma poet Rick Barot shares his newest collection, *Want*, at 7pm at Village Books, 1200 11th St. For more info: 671-2626.

SAT., APRIL 26

BURNING WORD: Workshops, readings, concerts and more will be part of the Burning Word Festival from 9am-7pm at Whidbey Island's Greenbank Farm, 765 E. Wonn Rd. Entry is \$8-\$15. For more info: (360) 331-7099 or washingtonpoets.org.

GREEN PRIMER: Kathleen O'Brien, co-author of *The Northwest Green Home Primer*, talks about sustainable living at 7pm at Village Books, 1200 11th St. For more info: 671-2626.

SUN., APRIL 27

MENDING: Jane Kirkpatrick reads from her new tome, *A Mending at the Edge*, at 4pm at Village Books, 1200 11th St. For more info: 671-2626.

MON., APRIL 28

OPEN MIC: A literary Open Mic starts at 7pm at Village Books, 1200 11th St. All are welcome. For more info: 671-2626.

POETRY NIGHT: Sign up to read your creations at Poetry Night at 8:30pm every Monday at Fantasia Espresso, 1332 Cornwall Ave. For more info: 715-1634 or poetrynight.org.

TUES., APRIL 29

KNUTE SKINNER: Former Bellingham professor and nationally acclaimed poet Knute Skinner returns to town to give a reading at 4pm at WWU's SMATE Building, room 150. The event is free. For more info: 650-3350.

COMMUNITY

THURS., APRIL 24

CAREER FAIR: Drop by the Spring Career Fair from 10am-2pm at WWU's Mac Gym at the Wade King Student Recreation Center. For more info: 650-3240.

HEALTHCARE MEETING: United for National Healthcare will hold a meeting at 7pm at Bellingham's Laborers Hall, 1700 N. State St. For more info: 714-8999.

IRAQ TALK: A panel discussion on "Occupation in Iraq" starts at 7pm at WWU's Fraser Hall, room 4. For more info: (206) 298-0848.

DRAG BINGO: Help out the Evergreen AIDS Foundation by attending Drag Bingo from 6:30-10:30pm at Norway Hall, 1419 N. Forest St. Admission is \$20 and includes bingo, food and drink vouchers. For more info: 671-0703.

FRI., APRIL 25

SPRING FLING: A "Spring Fling Fashion Show" starts at 7pm at Harley-Davidson of Bellingham, 1419 N. State St. The event is free. For more info: 671-7575 or harleyofbellingham.com.

SAT., APRIL 26

FARMERS MARKET: The Bellingham Farmers Market is open from 10am-3pm every Saturday through December at the Depot Market Square, located at the corner of Railroad Avenue and Chestnut Lane. For more info: 647-2060 or bellinghamfarmers.org.

SAFETY FAIR: The 7th annual Haggen Safety Awareness and Community Fair happens from 10am-1pm at Barkley Village. For more info: 650-8359.

CAT ED: Attend the Alternative Humane Society's Cat Education Day from 11am-4pm at Garden Street United Methodist Church, 1326 N. Garden St. For more info: alternativehumaneassociation.org.

GRANGE CENTENNIAL #4: An all-ages celebration focusing on "Grange Centennial: 1981, The Fourth Generation: Today and Tomorrow" happens from 3-8pm at the Rome Grange, 2821 Mt. Baker Hwy. For more info: 671-5768.

LATINO HERITAGE: Mariachi music, tango and Panamanian dancing and food from Peru, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic will be part of tonight's "Latino Heritage Celebration" at 6pm at WWU's Viking Union Multipurpose Room. Entry is \$10-\$15. For more info: 650-7275.

RAINBOW PROM: Whatcom Community College's Queer Straight Alliance will hold a Rainbow Prom—open to those 16 and older—at 7pm at the Syre Student Center, 237 W. Kellogg Rd. Admission is by donation. For more info: 927-0341 or wccqa@gmail.com.

APRIL 26-27

DIRTY DAN DAYS: A boat race, chowder cook-off, live music, yacht tours, an up-hill piano race and much more will be part of the Dirty Dan Days Festival happening from 9am-5pm throughout historic Fairhaven. For more info: 739-9625 or Fairhaven.com.

EARTH SALES: Celebrate the tenets of Earth Day from 9am-4pm by participating in the 8th annual Earth Day Garage Sale. Look in local newspapers for participants. For more info: 738-4561.

LINUXFEST: The 9th annual LinuxFest Northwest happens from 10am-5pm at the Bellingham Technical College, 3028 Lindbergh Ave. Entry is free. For more info: linuxfestnorthwest.org.

MON., APRIL 28

TRAGEDY, TRIUMPH: Dr. Craig Broyles will give a free lecture on "Discerning God's Intervention in Tragedy and Triumph" at 7pm at the Mount Baker Studio Theatre, 104 N. Commercial St. For more info: logos.com/lectures.

WED., APRIL 30

WORLD ISSUES: "Post-Genocide Rwanda" will be the topic of a free World Issues Forum at noon at WWU's Fairhaven College Auditorium. For more info: 650-2309.