



From:

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*Happy New Year!*

Dear Friends,

Sitting here at home on the evening of December 31, 2012, with my cats snuggled around me and wearing three layers of fuzzy clothing against the damp cold, I thought to myself that I have become quite anti-social, dug in with my interminable teaching and research, and no longer in the loop for Taiwan local politics and social movements. But last week my student happened to take a nice picture of me, the first time our department had a Christmas tree; and I had a kitten with me that is looking for a home.

Linda & Plum Blossom, Taipei Med Univ, Xmas 2012

So it occurred to me that I should write a newsletter to remind my friends that I am still breathing, and occasionally even still breathing a little fire. For example, on December 11 *Taipei Times* published my sarcastic "Salute to the Ministry of Education" concerning their current campus program for promoting "citizenship" values. That's what I call fun. I am on notice, as was earlier in the works, that my contract as assistant professor at Taipei Medical University expires as of January 31, and will be renewed after Chinese New Year's if funded by the Ministry of Education.

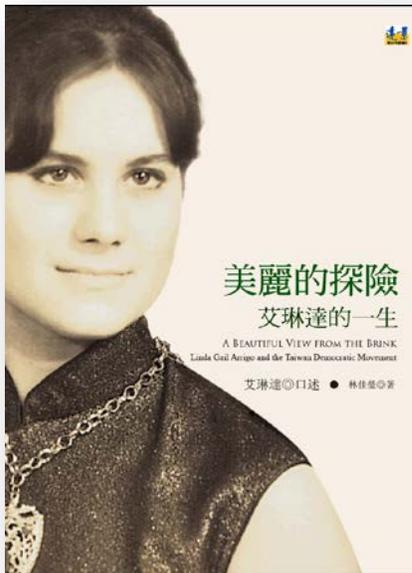
Actually I think it might be a relief to be unemployed, because in the last five and a half years I can feel myself becoming a narrow academician absorbed with rankings, like most of my colleagues. Nodding to the dean's demands in endless "consensus" faculty meetings. Facing students practicing the usual passive resistance – sit in the back of the class, don't answer questions, hide behind an open laptop, don't give the teacher any hint that you are listening. A few students have let slip that they noticed I give easier assignments than five years ago. I don't know if that is why my undergraduate classes suddenly got wildly popular this semester. 115 students vying for 40 spaces in Reading Scientific English; Women in International Perspective (film series) and American Society (election year) with over 60 students each. No, not just easier; I think it's because I've been using films with the readings, e.g. *Brave New World*, with sexy people in tight Star Trek suits.

That is perhaps one way to forget I am getting along in years, soon to be 64 on January 16, and also slowly accreting more blubber, like a whale. All the same I'm well known on campus for dressing

with coordinated bright colors and a little glitter, and my rationale is that with all that surface I may as well be decorative.

Getting along in years, still hiking though more slowly, but more than that feeling ground down by computers. After nearly two years at TMU, with all those administrative notices in tiny Chinese characters on computer e-mail, and PowerPoint projections on high-reflection screens, I got a bad throbbing and fuzzy vision in my left eye. I figured my chronic sinus infection contributed to that, and I finally got that cleared out early this year with nice new medical technology – but now I have been informed I have not just the usual cataracts, but macular degeneration on the left side, i.e. wrinkling in the retina so my vision is getting wavy. Damn computer screens, can’t escape them. I’m not the only one. Blue eyes are more susceptible; mine are hazel. Everyone should excuse that I don’t follow up much on Facebook. I’m taking up the same logic as the Unibomber; technology helps bosses, not workers.

Now to get to real news. In November 2011 my biography in popular form was published in Chinese. The English title is *A Beautiful View from the Brink: Linda Gail Arrigo and the Taiwan Democratic Movement*. (Cover is from a picture taken with my first husband, George Chen, when I was 19. You’re only young once.) I started narrating it to a very lively and politically aware young woman, Rose Chia-Yin Lin, before Christmas 2010, and then in September 2011 I was lucky to find a perfectionist, Una Hsiao-Hsuan Chen, to thoroughly smooth and fact-check the text. The finished book has a lot of color pictures and a few salacious romances to keep young readers turning the pages through accounts of Taiwan history and diatribes about how the US supported not just Chiang Kai-shek but other dictatorships around the world. An English summary may be found on my new website, [www.linda-gail-arrigo.org](http://www.linda-gail-arrigo.org). Having my biography out in Chinese has given me a bit of a fan following in the last year, especially among over-40 Taiwanese women intellectuals. Doing a serious book in English on Taiwan history, *A Borrowed Voice: Taiwan Human Rights Through International Networks, 1960-1980*, together with Lynn Miles in 2008, didn’t get that much traction. Eslite declined to distribute it, saying it wouldn’t make money, while at the same time they distributed Jay Taylor’s whitewash on Chiang Kai-shek.



But I am trying to be seriously academic. What else is there to do? Now that the Taiwan independence movement is all washed up, and we are getting ready to be taken over by China (as outlined in the item I submitted to Jonathan Sullivan’s blog preceding the March 2012 Taiwan presidential election: “Chinese Python Swallowing the Taiwan Frog”). The TI groups like Taiwan Association of University Professors, which I finally joined, are hardly more than old people’s clubs, revisiting in obituaries their previous glory days of struggle.

Seriously academic, now to seriously bore you. If anyone wants to know my future plans, I tell them I want to live just long enough to get the Nobel prize for economics. Does anyone remember that I wrote my 1996 Ph.D. thesis on Chinese peasant economy and demography? A masterpiece of Marxist theory? Shows that there is an ecological rationale for inequality, and it is the heart of the system. It turns out that my related 1986 article is still getting cited in the twenty-first century. But I never published the followup I promised then. How can I explain that, twenty-six years later? Catholic University of Louvain has now reviewed and agreed to publish my thesis – if I can come up

with \$EU 4,000. (I made a trip to four research institutes in Europe in October 2011 to get it rolling.) Anyway, I think my time is nigh: Cornell University and Nanking Agricultural University are now setting out to restore the original data of the survey that was the source of my “pathbreaking” (my term) analysis.

I’ve been able to make more progress in my research and in knowing what’s going on in the world (especially Middle East and Latin America) because of my assistant Jason Kennedy, from Britain by way of Guatemala, whom I persuaded to study at TMU. I hope he will go on to a Ph.D. in global labor analysis, to study the ongoing capitalist melt down.



Jason Kennedy, Linda, with friends at Taipei Train Station

Occasionally left-wing academics do get good jobs. Over the last several years I’ve seen many of my protégés do well. Scott Simon, often back in Taiwan on fieldwork with indigenous people, is now a full professor of anthropology at Ottawa.



Big Blue Bear at Denver Convention Center

Despite my hatred for computer screens, I have to admit that the increasing depth and reach of the internet has helped me reconnect with old comrades, as well as meet relevant recent researchers. I attended the American Sociological Association meeting in Denver, August 2012, with the oxymoronic theme “Real Utopias”, and was impressed with the apparent sincerity of thinking about alternatives. I met up with Berch Berberoglu of University of Nevada at Reno, who studies globalization, and by happenstance he filled me in on why Al Szymanski committed suicide with a shotgun

in March 1984. I had taken that personally, because my research on Taiwan girl workers used his 1975 article “Socialization of Women’s Oppression” as a theoretical foundation, and although I met Al once, I never had a chance to tell him how much it meant to me. I thought that he had become disheartened over the decline of the Soviet alternative. But Berch was at the U of Oregon then, and witnessed personally that Al thought he had cancer, was given Prozac (now linked to suicides), and the autopsy showed that he actually had an orange-sized gallstone. In effect, he was killed at a young and prolific age by error in medical diagnosis. But for that, I wonder how he would see 2008.

If I live longer than I want, I will write the definitive “people’s” history of Taiwan, and thoroughly damn Ramon Myers and his *China’s First Democracy*, in which he gives credit for Taiwan democratization to Chiang Ching-kuo! After 38 years of martial law! Not surprising given that he and similar Western authors like Jay Taylor and Denny Roy stayed away from the front lines of democratic movements, and have been funded directly or indirectly by the KMT as well as conservative think tanks. With a prestigious position and fat salary they are assumed to be “impartial”.

Since this is a New Year’s newsletter, I suppose I should testify that I have a personal life. I did go to one Christmas party, at Miranda Loney and Kenbo Liao’s, as usual. My son Roger J.A. Chen, now a biotech startup entrepreneur in San Jose, says that his new daughter Rosalind is not named after me, but after Rosalind Franklin, whose research led to recognition of the DNA helix; however, little Rosalind’s wide fanny shows her Italian heritage. Little Maxwell is four now.

My mother Nellie Amondson in San Diego is becoming somewhat frail at 91, but she still has bridge parties and walks long distances. She is still remembered among Taiwanese friends for her 1980 human rights efforts with me. My younger sister Sue Ann Arrigo, M.D., has returned from Spain, and fortunately stays with my mother. So this August was the first time in over a decade years that we could have a picture of Mother and Three Daughters.



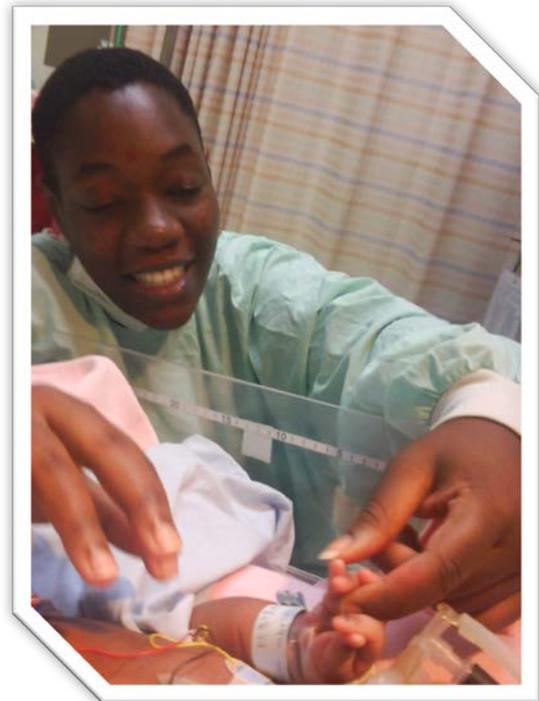
Nellie Ema Gephardt Amondson (91) and daughters Maria Jean (67), Linda Gail (63), and Sue Ann Arrigo (60), at 6281 Hannon Court, San Diego, August 2012.

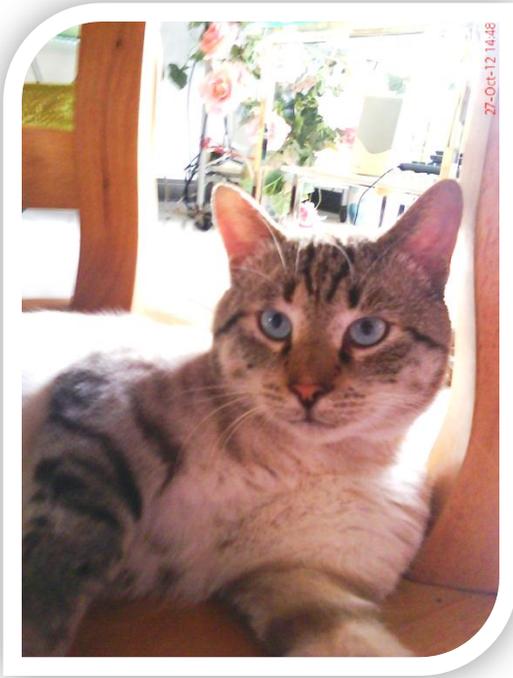


For Thanksgiving 2012 Roger took his grandmother Nellie and son Maxwell on a four-wheel-drive excursion in the desert. That's typical for the offspring of the ever-adventurous Nellie Amondson.

My mother is as ever a social welfare agency in miniature, and is providing a home to three homeless people, with a tent city sprouting under the eucalyptus in the back yard. My older sister, Maria Jean Arrigo, no longer channels for past Amazon Indians, and has amazingly learned to run the insurance business of her husband John Crigler, who goes to a Tibetan monastery in Gansu, China, every year.

This year also I was foster grandmother to David Chao Owili, born October 17 to my student Patrick Owili from Kenya and his wife Miriam. I stayed with Miriam in the hospital for two days; in Taiwan custom, even at the modern hospitals, family members sleep in a small bed next to the patient, and provide non-medical care. David was in intensive care for a day after his birth by C-section, but he was okay after that, and is now a very plump little boy. My friend Wanda Wang, who is always interested in traditional medicine and beliefs, found a volunteer to help Miriam for ten days after she went home, and feed her chicken stewed with sesame seed oil and ginger, the standard nutrition for new mothers. (Wanda and I wrote a paper on Chinese post-partum practices for the Catholic University of Louvain's October 2011 conference.)





There is a new love in my life, named Gilbert (a.k.a. Ginger). I found him in October lolling on his back for the amusement of tourists who fed him scraps from their lunchboxes, near the top of the hills at Jiujuang, Nankang, which is actually just over the hill from Shen Keng where I live on the southeast edge of “New Taipei City” (the old Taipei County). Farmers said he had been abandoned there a year before. I didn’t notice at first that he was hobbling. With his heavy build, Siamese-like shading, banded markings, and big blue eyes, he was obviously not of local blood. He ate voraciously at my house, and didn’t even rile when Honeybee raked his face in jealousy. The other six have accepted him. Gilbert, still the roamer, showed his smarts in that he quickly learned my neighborhood and how to call to be let back in. I paid a pretty penny to get corrective surgery for his front leg, but that has only slightly lengthened it; and now he is back in the hospital after the incision got infected due to my careless bandaging. But he is a cat of very good humor, and I trust we will get through this.

I hope you have been entertained by this newsletter, and are glad to know what I am doing! If not, well, I only send newsletters about once every five years, so you won’t be bothered often! Or you can send me one back in retaliation. Any cat pictures?

Sincerely,

Linda Gail