

Being One } with }



“To reduce waste, it is important to look at necessities versus desires.”

Our 1 World

by Shannon Barry | photos courtesy of Cathy Lam

Reducing energy consumption and decreasing the carbon footprint are becoming imperative, even in a world divided on the issue of climate change. For Cathy Lam, it goes beyond the conventional methods of reduce, reuse and recycle.

“We have to rethink what we want to do for our children and grandchildren,” Lam says.

“We [don’t] have too many choices and choices have always been bombarded by short-term profit.”

Lam, co-founder of Our 1 World, believes our dependency on cars, water and energy has profound factors in the decreasing availability of our natural resources.

“Our planet is facing a grave threat from climate change,” says Zan Dubin Scott, organizer of the Renewable L.A. Green Festival.

“Our unbridled world population growth, which has doubled to six billion

in the past 50 years alone and coupled with our wasteful use of limited natural resources are to blame.”

While Lam’s work in the United States extends through educational outreach at festivals and schools, Our 1 World also supplies different materials in Vietnam based on humanitarian projects and partnerships.

It was this eye-opening realization that caused Lam and her family to rethink their lifestyle and create Our 1 World. In 2000, Lam and her husband Mike took their then fifth-grade son Ben and 3-year-old daughter Emily to travel the developing world for nine months. Cathy found the journey a natural one seeing as how

she had moved to the United States at the age of 12 from Vietnam. It was a journey full of self-discovery and also of impressions of the world at large—significantly in terms of usage and waste.

To conserve natural resources and work against this worldwide threat, Lam successfully created two drastically different locations and opportunities for change—Vietnam and the United States. While Lam’s work in the United States extends through educational outreach at festivals and schools, Our 1 World also supplies different materials in Vietnam based on humanitarian projects and partnerships.

Although Our 1 World has expanded its environmental outreach, they are not an “official” nonprofit organization (with 501(c) 3 status) in order to keep living simple and concentrate primarily on direct programs and partnerships.

“[Our 1 World] is about passion and hands-on; they are not just about the-



Cathy Lam with her family and their electric Toyota RAV4 EV. Their car was featured in the movie *Who Killed the Electric Car?* (From left: Ben, Mike, Cathy and Emily.)



Cathy Lam's daughter Emily, with their rooftop solar panels and her gingerbread house that features candy panels.

ory and blueprint," says Binh Rybacki, Children of Peace International founder and executive director.

"The founders are compassionate and committed to serve Vietnam with heart."

Children of Peace International is a recent partnership that allowed Our 1 World to bring solar cookers to rural and mountain areas in Vietnam. Lam started the soymilk nutritional supplement pilot project in Spring 2006 with 20 solar parabolic cookers provided for rural families in the Phan Rang area of Ninh Thuan Province, Vietnam.

The cookers are made of stainless steel and mounted on a metal frame; these parabolic cookers reflect the sun's rays into a focal point. Families now use the cookers for rice, soup, braised foods and water.

As also the network coordinator for the Vietnamese American Non Governmental Organizations (VA NGO) Network, Lam is able to continue monitoring, surveying and eventually, expanding the solar cooking project. Ten solar cookers

were provided to families outside of Da Nang, Vietnam, and five were also shipped to the United States. Three of the cookers were donated to Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, Calif., and the Lams kept two for demonstration purposes.

Lam brought two solar cookers to Renewable L.A. Green Festival in December 2007.

"Even though it was a slightly cloudy day, Cathy cooked beans and roasted peanuts in the cookers which were an elegant, eye-catching demonstration of the effectiveness of the sun's power to bolster our critical daily energy needs," Scott says.

Although many people cite the pricey costs of solar energy as a problem, Lam believes the long-term health effects of asthma are more expensive. It doesn't take merely money to solve the problems of today, but also thought and

Nearly 600 bags are discarded in California every second. At least 267 species of animals have been scientifically documented to be adversely affected by plastic marine debris. It is estimated to kill over 100,000 marine mammals and turtles each year.

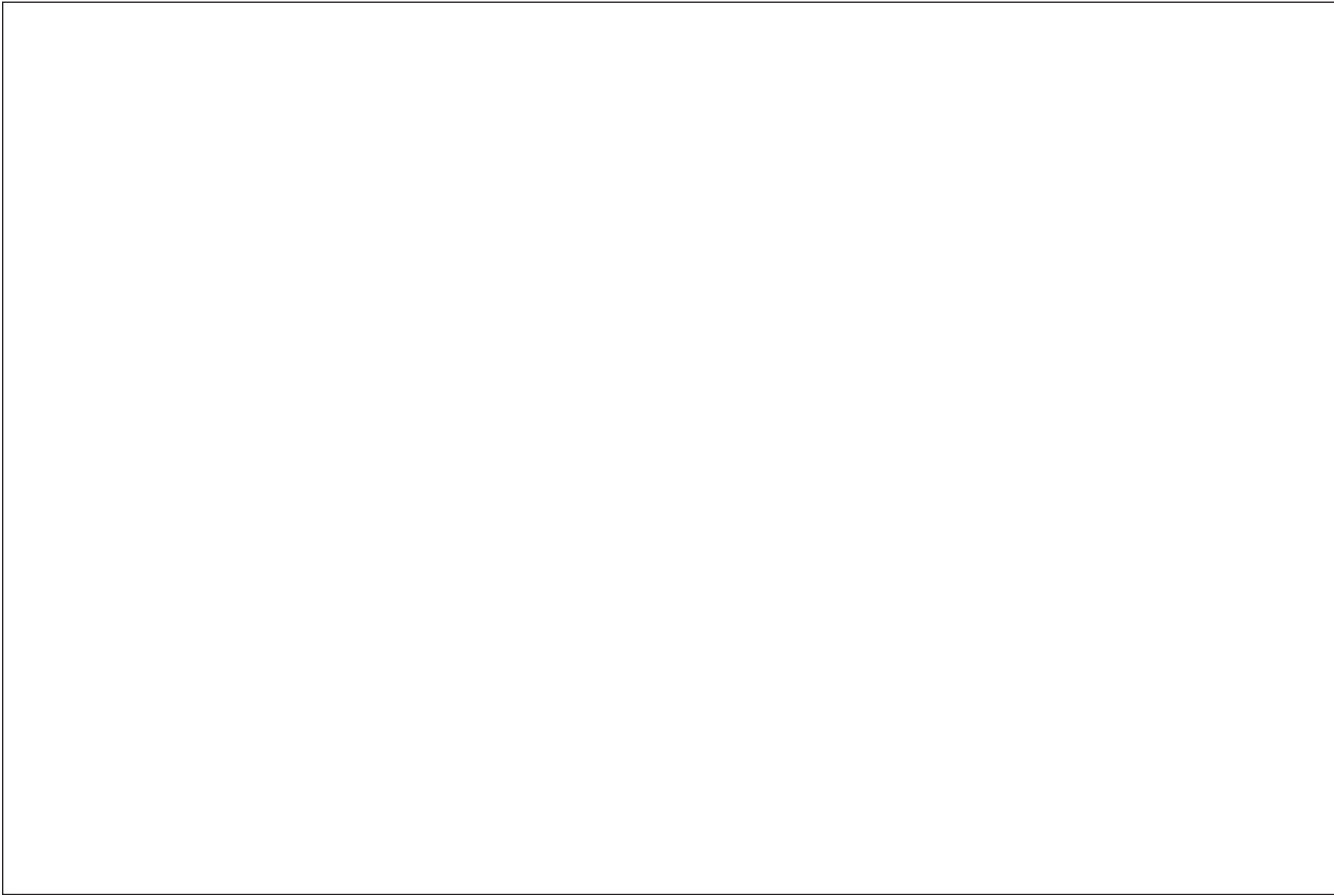
consideration. Since Americans have become reliant on our cars, a huge energy consumer, it is important we look at transportation alternatives. Lam and her family have an electric Toyota RAV4 EV that Mike drives to work everyday. Lam expresses that at first Ben had resisted to their alternative lifestyle, but he has now begun to appreciate the changes. It has been nice

to watch her family make a difference in both the United States and abroad. Ben, who is now a junior in high school, filters his own used oil to run his car.

"To reduce waste, it is important to look at necessities versus desires," Lam says.

"Try to buy food at the local grocer, hang clothes out in the sun and water your lawn according to the season. A simple re-evaluation of living can make a difference, especially when it comes to the excessive use of plastic bags for single items."

Only one to four percent of the 19 billion plastic grocery and merchandise bags used annually in California are recycled, according to Californians Against Waste. That means nearly 600 bags are discarded in California every second. At least 267 species of animals have been scientifically documented to be adversely affected by plastic marine debris. It is estimated to kill over 100,000 marine mammals and turtles each year.





Cathy Lam on her Vectrix electric motorcycle.



Cathy Lam using a solar cooker.

Plastic bags are made from petroleum, a nonrenewable and environmentally-degrading resource, and an estimated 4,000 barrels of oil a day are used for the manufacture of a largely unnecessary product.

"We're creating a lot of trash," says Lam, adding that even when we recycle, it takes energy to turn it into another product. And it is this waste production that organizations like Our 1 World continue to fight against.

Because the United States ships a lot of trash to third-world countries, Americans are unable to see "the ugliness in front of us," Lam says.


Lam's family plans to visit children living in the Kien Giang dump in the Mekong Delta to see firsthand the effects of waste. Even though Vietnam has been green longer than the United States, their way of thinking is starting to become more westernized, Rybacki mentions, referring to their increase in plastic use.

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"We truly are connected to one world and we must all work together to reverse these trends," Scott says.

"What impresses me about Our 1 World is that it provides practical, immediate solutions with long-term results," Scott says.

"Our 1 World takes action. It doesn't theorize or waste its own resources with a heavy administrative workload."

Lam plans to teach a class on everyday healthy habits and how to cook nutritional foods in Hue, Vietnam. Upcoming projects include sustainable feasibility studies in collaboration with others organizations and playing with children. 

For more information or to send donations, visit www.our1world.org.