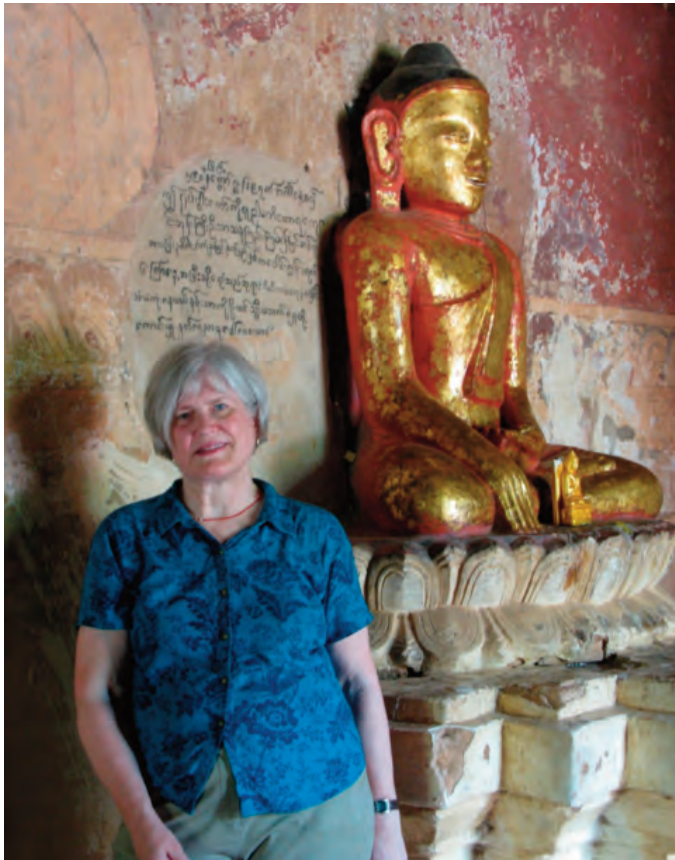


## Getting to Know the Neighbors

by Martha Foster



Martha Foster distributed *Kosmos Journal* in Burma (Myanmar).

This fall, as a Kosmos Global Ambassador, I will take *Kosmos Journal* issues to friends and colleagues in China. I'll go to the Sichuan International TV Festival and Program Market on behalf of Living Earth Television (LETV), a US-based nonprofit. My colleagues and I will screen American documentaries subtitled in Chinese, offer a workshop for new Chinese documentary filmmakers hoping to find international broadcast opportunities, and scout for outstanding new Chinese documentaries for broadcast in the US.

LETV's work is introducing neighbors around the world through documentaries, and I do that with film and with *Kosmos Journal*. The pages of *Kosmos* are often so rich and dense that I need to pause frequently in reading and viewing to just absorb the tumble of recognition, ideas and appreciation they generate. Documentary films often offer me the same richness of experience, insight and connection.

Living Earth Television grew from an experience I had while going to Sichuan in September of 2001, when I left the US in order to serve on a jury at the festival I'll visit again this fall. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was driving to the (then) Chicago Historical Society for a meeting and listening to the news

as it unfolded on NPR. A few weeks later, I was following the news on CNN English from my hotel in Chengdu, Sichuan.

I had worked with film and video festivals for decades, embracing the thoughtful, passionate films that often turn up. I was frustrated that these films are usually available only to such small audiences and rarely broadcast locally or nationally, let alone internationally. I knew, as did countless others immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, that it is not a luxury but a necessity to get to know one another across cultural borders.

We are sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins. We must demolish stereotypes of the 'Other' needing to be feared, defended against and attacked. The world is literally our neighborhood, and we need to get to know our neighbors. For a few brief weeks, people around the world poured out their compassion and support with the refrain, "We are all Americans." We *are* all Earthlings.

Waiting at my hotel one morning for a call about the next jury meeting, I suddenly had a crystal-clear vision of the need for easy, global, public access to these films. Documentary is an on-the-ground tool for building the global community so passionately and intelligently envisioned in the pages of *Kosmos*. A few years later, I founded LETV. I wanted to help build the infrastructure for this piece of the global commons.

LETV's work has focused on ethnic and cultural understanding and has expanded to include powerful environmental documentaries that we are sharing with Chinese audiences through a long-term collaboration with the D.C. Environmental Film Festival. Our initial project has begun with documentary exchanges with China; future plans include expanding the focus to the other BRICS nations, to first peoples around the world—and to the entire world.

LETV launched its first national broadcast of a Chinese documentary, *Kindergarten*, directed by Zhang Yiqing, in late 2010 on LinkTV. In 2014, we will continue providing translated Chinese documentaries for national US broadcast on PBS World and other channels. At the Sichuan Program Market in November, we will offer a dozen American environmental documentaries to Chinese provincial, metropolitan, regional and national broadcasters.

While broadcast/webcast is crucial to easy access to these films, screenings for live audiences are necessary for experiencing their impact. With audiences totaling over 4,000 on a tour in China in 2010, filmmaker David Novack and I had the privilege of screening David's film *Burning the Future: Coal in America* for college

*continued on page 81*

# Love of Humanity Made Manifest

by Mary Davidson



Mary Davidson

Sometimes we live with a word for decades and consider that we know exactly what it means, what it refers to and how best to use it. I did not title this article “Philanthropy” because I imagined that readers might turn the page to avoid this conversation. I wonder how many of us know the real meaning of this word.

In fact, the Greek roots of the word ‘philanthropy’ refer to ‘love of humanity,’ a broad and deep concept that is certainly not just about money. Over a long time, philanthropy has come to suggest the act of giving money away, and a philanthropist, we think, is one who is extremely wealthy and has the means to give away large sums of money. Some might say that philanthropy has become a business in and of itself, with corporate structures and huge staffs to accomplish this generosity. The intentions are always good, and how could anyone question the idea of giving to and giving back to improve humanity and conditions on our earth?

What about *love of humanity* and the real meaning of the word ‘philanthropy?’ It is not a matter of how much money is assigned by staff members sent around the world to assess problems and to write reports about who needs more money, about who is hungrier, which village needs plumbing or where illness is most prevalent, although all of that is good, productive and can create meaningful change.

Large tax deductions, buildings named, awards given for the most generous person—though very real—do not define or measure philanthropy. They serve to remind us that generosity has some very real consequences beyond the results of working toward a more sustainable and healthy population and earth.

The holy books of the great religions all speak of generosity and teach that giving money to alleviate suffering, hunger and despair is a good and worthy thing. Generosity nurtures those who give and those who receive, which is why this is spoken of in our spiritual texts.

Philanthropy, however, is an even greater goal and represents a deeper yearning. The highest purpose of philanthropy is based in a profound, almost immeasurable concept of *love of humanity* and does not depend on coins, but rather on the need that each human feels to be a member of a greater community than oneself.

There are many avenues to satisfy this yearning and many steps to tread in pondering generosity and love of humanity.

As a member of this tapestry of global citizenry, how can we best reflect on the starting point of a love for humanity? In the first instance, how can we articulate our own love of humanity? Does this concept have meaning for each of us? How can we express our deepest need to be connected and to connect with each other as an expression of this love for humanity? Can we look in the eyes of the cripple lying on a street in Mumbai with appreciation and respect? Can we hear the cries of children in the refugee camps of Pakistan without turning away? Can we touch the hands of a woman suffering with AIDS for an hour or two? Can we suffer with the baby elephant orphaned and abandoned, wandering the savannahs of Tanzania after the mother’s tusks have been removed and she lies dying, alone and forgotten in the rush for money?

The idea that philanthropy is about the coinage of the realm is too intimidating and too easy. It is far more difficult, risky and challenging to truly love our fellow citizens as equals in this great global community. The time is now to make that commitment to be a philanthropist in this world gone mad with hatred and conflict that no amount of coins can or will change.

*Mary Davidson’s experiences range from classroom teaching to fund-raising and alumni affairs. She travels to Africa frequently to improve the quality of life for those in poverty and was initiated into the Maasai community in 2009. She serves on the Staff and Board of Kosmos and several other organizations, including World Learning. Mary is committed to lifelong learning and her passions include music and theatre. She holds advanced degrees in Business and History and was employed by The Bank of New York for 25 years.*

*continued from page 80*

students and public audiences, with the blessing of the Chinese censors. The film addresses the devastating practice of mountain top removal coal mining in West Virginia and clearly shows how the local people have organized to take on the industrial interests that are ruining their drinking water and health, as well as the glorious beauty of their land. At every screening, one of the first comments was, “It’s so much worse than that in China.” Amazing discussions ensued.

These films further a dialog in which *Kosmos* is a leading voice. This year, LETV will continue its part in that dialog, with public screenings, broadcast and the web, in both the US and China. It’s a small start, and an enormous dream, for our neighborhood here on Earth.

*Martha Foster, founder and CEO of Living Earth Television, has worked with film festivals, museums, universities and PBS stations. She has graduate training in anthropology and in film and video production. A Kosmos Global Ambassador, she wrote for the Kosmos Fall/Winter 2010 issue about taking Kosmos and American documentary films to Burma (Myanmar).*