The Oscars and Immigration:
Our Best and our Worst

Totem Report February 15, 2017
By Bret Anderson

At 12:28 the bell rang and **President Cathy** called the meeting to order while **Ken Grant** herded program participants towards the stage like a sheep dog. We began with a thoughtful inspiration from **Jerilyn Brusseau** who invoked the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "Lord, let me be the instrument of thy peace." Jerilyn recalled the time when refugees from Vietnam were denied entry to California but were welcomed by Washington. We offered prayers to every family in the world for their safety and well-being.

Virginia McKenzie led us in singing "America the Beautiful" in B flat. We sang the second verse which has sentiments that are very relevant today. Marli Iverson accompanied on the piano.

Cindy Runger introduced our visiting Rotarians and **Jann Curley** introduced guests. Jann Curley and **Rob LoBosco** introduced prospective members. **Mike Adams** invited us all to the After Party. Virginia reminded us of the showing of the anti-trafficking documentary "Sold."

For the short program, Jann Curley introduced Brian Taibl, The Movie Guy. We noticed the family resemblance immediately which was confirmed when Brian said, "Thank you mom" for the introduction. Brian, who is a radio personality on KLZ 101.5, KOMO Newsradio 1000/97.7 and KVI AM 570, gets to see lots of movies for his job. He watches over 150 films a year and brings his family along. Their opinions and observations are important and he listens carefully to them.

Brian shared his picks for the Oscars this year. He tags Angela Davis as Best Actress in "Fences." Best Actor would be Denzel Washington also in "Fences." Natalie Portman was fantastic in "Jackie." Best picture will probably be "La La Land" which Brian recommends that we all see. More movies that we shouldn't miss are "Arrival," "Lion," "Hidden Figures" and "Manchester by the Sea." Finally, Bryan's pick for best director is Damien Chazelle for "La La Land."

President Cathy introduced former President **Paul Ishii**. She told us how inspired she was by Paul's many Rotary Programs. Paul began his introduction of the large program by reminding us that this was the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066. This was the order from President Roosevelt that sent 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent into internment camps without due process of law. No wonder Executive Orders make Paul nervous. He read from the official U.S. passport, "The Secretary of State… requests all whom it may concern to permit the citizen …named herein to pass without delay or hindrance and in case of need to give all lawful aid and protection." Doesn't that apply to everybody?

Past President Paul introduced **Joel Paget**, from Ryan Swanson & Cleveland, well known immigration law firm. Joel asked us to remember our own family history and recall a story about a relative coming to the U.S. A show of hands illustrated that just about everyone in the room had one. We also took part in a demonstration to visualize the numbers of different categories of immigrants. My table was immediate relatives. We were able to see the sizes of the groups in different categories. I never realized that there were so many different types of immigrant groups. Joel explained that the 'legal' road to citizenship was a hard one. Typically, someone from the Philippines would have to wait 11 years for their visas to be processed. From Mexico it could take 21 years. The U.S. admits a million immigrants a year while there are 4.2 million applicants. It is understandable why so many cannot choose this path. Even so, there are 40 million legal immigrants in the U.S. and that is 13% of the population.

Joel introduced Jorge Baron, Executive Director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. This organization promotes justice by defending and advancing the rights of immigrants through direct legal services, systemic advocacy, and community education. Jorge shared with us some myths about immigrants:

1. Immigration leads to higher crime rates: According to analysis statistics, an immigrant is 4.3 times less likely to be incarcerated than a native born American.
2. Undocumented people do not pay taxes: Remember that undocumented immigrants come here to work. As a result, their employers must pay payroll taxes. That comes to $13 billion a year. Then there is $10.6 billion in state and local taxes. Washington State received $302 million from the same source.
3. Immigrants take away jobs from legal Americans: Actually research shows that new immigrants take jobs that no one else wants and will work for lower wages. As a result, the only workers displaced are usually previous immigrants.

As Americans with our Constitution, we believe that all human beings have basic rights and deserve dignity and respect. Most of the people who are here as undocumented immigrants do qualify for one form of status or another. They are too poor or too afraid to pursue the legal steps to rectify this problem. There are 11 million such people in the U.S. Of these 234,000 live in Washington and that is 3% of the total. Interestingly, 62% of these people have lived here for 10 years or more. And, 87% of the children with undocumented parents are American citizens. In Washington State, there are 17,000 children who qualify for the Dream Act (DACA).

What can we do? Talk to your state and federal representatives. Let them know when they pass a bill that you approve of. Tell them your opinion about immigration issues. Remind them that religion cannot, by our Constitution, be a criteria for coming to this country. Remember the Pilgrims and why they came?

This is not a Mexican or Indian problem, it is an American one. These people are our neighbors and we are proud of our community values that support helping anyone who needs it. We can, and should, discuss this issue, respectfully, with those who disagree. The best argument is to help people to recognize each other as the good people they are.

President Cathy closed with a post Valentine's Day message: Tell someone that you love them.