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Booklover-Sustainability

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Like sweet fruit, fresh vegetables, and fragrant flowers, Farmer's Markets are sprouting up everywhere in the greater Charleston area. We find markets in Marion Square on Saturday, in the horseshoe courtyard at the **Medical University of South Carolina** on Friday, and at the Mount Pleasant Farmer's Market Pavilion next to **Moultrie Middle School** on Tuesday. This revival is like coming home to the Lowcountry of South Carolina since its history is strongly rooted in an agrarian society. Trends to buy local, join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), eat slo-food, plant a garden, and think sustainability are growing in popularity as the Farmer's Market once again becomes rooted in the culture of our society. More and more people are thinking about the Earth in a manner that harkens back to a simpler time. The 21st century may be awash in sophisticated technology that changes faster than we can make a purchase, but the desire to plant a garden, compost, recycle, and live a sustainable life is demanding a different outcome from our technology. The conflict is not a modern one. **Pearl S. Buck** in her 1931 novel *The Good Earth* gives the reader the smell of the earth, the sweat of the toil, the value of the land, and the conflict of hard work vs. wealth and easy living all from the point of view of a poor peasant farmer named **Wang Lung**.

I don't remember a time that I didn't know about *The Good Earth*, but it took finding a red hardcover, beautifully illustrated, 1992 *Reader's Digest* edition at **Blue Bicycle Books** on King Street in Charleston for me to begin to read this classic. The simplicity of the language reminds me of a foreigner trying to speak English and adds a dimension to the



story that is tangible. The story begins with the marriage day of **Wang Lung**, a farmer in a small village. We are guided through his rituals and journey to the House of Hwang where he meets **O-lan**, a slave in the house that has been promised to him in marriage. **Wang Lung** is a man whose love for the land is as strong as the ox that pulls his plow. He is anxious to have a wife and family to share the toils of his everyday life and hopefully his love for the land. Nothing else matters to him but the land, and this sets the stage for an intriguing peak into Chinese culture.

Wang Lung's obsession with land coupled with Nature's cycles of drought and full harvest allow **Buck** to give the reader the essentials of Chinese life in the rich and the poor times for a peasant farmer. **Wang Lung's** obsession extends to acquisition, and he uses the family money to purchase land from the House of Hwang which has fallen under the influence of opium and unbridled spending. A drought comes, and the family has no monetary reserve to survive and decides to travel south on a "fire wagon," known in the West as a railroad, to eke out a living. The family lives in a hut on the street in the southern city and can only manage to live hand-to-mouth until an enemy invasion occurs. All **Wang Lung** has thought about is returning to his land in the north. As the city is in turmoil the poor people seize the opportunity to loot. **Wang Lung** and **O-lan** join in and find enough riches to provide them the means to return to their home. The years of prosperity that follow give rise to another dilemma — one of wealth. **Wang Lung** can afford education for his sons, men to help with the labor, time to visit the village's tea

rooms. He ultimately is not able to instill his love for the land in his sons, much to his final dismay.

Pearl Buck was raised in China, the daughter of a missionary. She left China to study at **Randolph Macon Women's College** from 1910 to 1914. Upon returning to China she married **John Lossing Buck**. **Buck** was an agricultural specialist hired by the Presbyterian Mission Board to teach the local Chinese farmers American farming methods. **Buck** was able to immerse herself in the culture of the Chinese farmers of northern China where they lived and observe their lives and customs. She described herself as "mentally bifocal." "When I was in the Chinese world, I was Chinese, I spoke Chinese, and behaved as a Chinese, and ate as a Chinese did, and I shared their thoughts and feelings. When I was in the American world, I shut the door between." This bifocal mentality provides the reader with a unique Chinese experience — one that is given to us by an American who feels as if she is Chinese. We learn of foot binding, the significance of the color red in celebration, the insignificant position of women in Chinese society, the desire for a son to carry on the family name and traditions, and the toils and tribulations of the poor peasant farmer.

The success of *The Good Earth* planted **Pearl Buck** among the internationally-renowned authors, as she became the first American woman to win the **Nobel Prize** in literature in 1938. The book was translated into several languages including Chinese and has been cited as one of the principal reasons for changing the West's view of China. A recent book review in the *Wall Street Journal* written by **Melanie Kirkpatrick** about the biography *Pearl Buck in China: Journey to the Good Earth* by **Hilary Spurling** gives us an opportunity to revisit an old friend. 🌿

Book Reviews from page 51

professionals, from students and new librarians just starting out to veterans searching for funds for professional development. This handy reference is recommended for any library. Considering its usefulness for professional development for librarians, it is particularly highly recommended for academic libraries and institutions that place a priority on investing in their library staff. 🌿

Rumors from page 42

living in a small apartment not too far from **St. Ed's**. He is planning to retire in June 2011 and he says he will keep writing for *ATG*. Whew! Meanwhile, **Tom** is sending a brand new librarian to the **30th Charleston Conference** — **Kady Ferris**. **Kady** got her MLS from **UT Austin** in May and began in August as **St. Edwards'** very first collection development librarian. We are all looking forward to meeting her!

And your on-the-ball **Charleston Conference planners** have arranged for a panel on the **SkyRiver/OCLC lawsuit** and **The Google Book Settlement** on Saturday morning of the Conference, **The Long Arm of the Law** — featuring the lively **Ann Okerson** (Associate University Librarian for Collections and International Programs, **Yale University**); **Bill Hannay** (Attorney,

Schiff Hardin LLP); **Susan Kornfield** (University of Michigan). Can't wait! Take that back. Not yet! Too much to do between now and November!

Have you seen the news that the **GBS Judge, Denny Chin** has been confirmed by the United States Senate as a federal judge of the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals? What will this do to the timeline of the **GBS**. No one seems to be talking right now.

<http://www.asianweek.com/2010/05/31/a-tribute-to-chinese-american-hero-judge-denny-chin/>
<http://mhpbooks.com/mobydives/?p=16199>
<http://wo.ala.org/gbs/articles-blog-posts-links/>

Talk about mind-boggling! Read **Michael Pelikan's** column in this issue. What do **Moby Dick** and **Avatar** have in common? I saw **Avatar** not at all but **Michael** saw it three times. The only three times I did was read his column three times! **Michael** keeps us on our toes

continued on page 62