

Across the street from the McDonalds on Ninghai Road in Nanjing, China, an old man holding a large placard sat in front of what used to be an apartment complex. Standing around him on this Friday evening were thirty to forty people--his family, friends, and neighbors. As a little girl played on heaps of rubble and trash in the empty lot, these men and women told passersby why they were gathering on the street.

The placard told the old man's story. "I am 70 years old," it read. "I lived in this building for 40 years. Now the government has evicted us, torn down the building, and given us nowhere to go. They have not given us a penny. We want to be heard and treated fairly."

Talking with the old man's daughter, I learned that a company had expressed interest in that piece of land, prompting officials to sell the land for a profit.

Government officials wanted to move these families from central Nanjing to the outskirts of the city. They refused. They made a living on busy Ninghai Road by selling boxed lunches for 3 *yuan* (\$0.40) to students and workers, repairing shoes and leather goods, and operating a small newsstand. No one would stop to buy their wares in a small village on the outskirts. The families had carved out a niche in this urban environment, and the government wanted to uproot them.

The families had tried to contact local government officials and plead their case to no avail. No one answered. This had gone on for five cold, winter months while they lived in makeshift shelters erected on the empty lot. Now they were demonstrating because they wanted to be heard. Around the corner, officials waited with trucks to take them away.

After offering my prayers of support and promising to tell all my friends about their situation, I walked slowly back to my dormitory at Nanjing University. How could the government do this to its own people? How could local officials simply turn a deaf ear to these families? I had studied Chinese government and read about often corrupt or callous officials. Still, it was a shock to come face to face with officials who not only refused to acknowledge these families' needs but also refused to acknowledge their own role in creating this need.

As I walked, I thought about how to solve this problem. It would not be enough simply to build houses for these families elsewhere. Or even to restore their building. The fundamental attitude of government officials, business leaders and even the Chinese middle-class toward the disenfranchised and indigent needed to change. Unskilled and unschooled people needed opportunities to receive job-training or further education. Equitable and humane urban development policies needed to be implemented.

The following day, the families were gone. I never saw them again.

In the United States, people normally do not disappear like this, but many groups of people and problems are conveniently overlooked. Freeways, railways and garbage dumps cut wide swaths through poor communities. Toxins in the water or air poison less affluent neighborhoods. The mentally disabled are pushed out of main communities and out of sight. "City, cleaning" often means herding homeless people out of civic centers without giving them alternatives or shelter.

I have been involved for many years in nonprofit and community organizations. I have cleaned up beaches, taught conflict resolution skills to inner-city students and served meals to the homeless.

These direct service programs are necessary to meet society's current needs. Yet, societal changes must also be sought. Policies and programs should address long term community needs and problems to be truly effective. My desire to participate in developing these policies and programs based on them leads me to pursue a degree in policy studies.

Both my undergraduate and my post graduate experiences have prepared me for this degree program. As an East Asian Studies concentrator at Harvard, I developed research and analytical skills. My research interests included women's liberation during China's Communist Liberation and Chinese immigration to Boston. Following graduation in 1997, I spent one academic year at Nanjing University. While there, I had the opportunity to observe, discuss and debate many of China's current social problems and to work with a developing non-governmental organization as a volunteer with the deaf school.

My current position at Los Angeles Regional Foodbank has clarified my goals for working in the public sector. It is important work that clearly alleviates an immediate and pressing human need. Yet I find myself wanting to address the issues behind and surrounding hunger and to look at policy changes that will support those struggling to get back on their feet.

Last spring I spent a day in Sacramento lobbying for immigrant rights. I accompanied a young immigrant girl from Los Angeles to a meeting with one state senator. A teenage mother, she was trying to finish school and provide for her family. She needed childcare, job training, food stamps, and affordable housing and insurance. She wanted policy makers to respect her as a contributor in society, and she asked for policies supporting education and independence that, could allow her to succeed. She did not want to be treated as an eyesore in the "good society" or a burden to be disposed of or reluctantly carried.

In a way, the Chinese families I talked with wanted much the same thing. Soon after the demonstration, I asked some of the Chinese students I taught what they thought of the families' plight. I will never forget what one said to me: "In every developing country or city, there will naturally be people who have to make sacrifices for the sake of progress and growth." She shrugged her shoulders. These people, whoever they were, would just have to be sacrificed for the greater good if China was to move ahead.

I am pursuing a Master in Public Policy/Policy Studies degree because I want to develop policies that do not sacrifice people for progress, prosperity or any other goal. I want to work toward just and effective policies that represent the needs and the interests of all communities and treat all people as individuals that, given the resources and opportunities, can be contributors.