Girl Scouts Leader advertising deadlines

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Lisa Ling, Cultural Explorer

International reporter for Oprah, *Oxygen, and National Geographic,* **Ling** *turned a childhood discomfort with her own cultural heritage into a quest to celebrate the world's.*

By Margaret Jaworski

At 34, Lisa Ling is finally content with both her professional life and her personal life. As a correspondent for the National Geographic Channel's *Explorer*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and the Oxygen Network, the intrepid reporter—and Girl Scout alumna—has traveled the world. Her duffel bag is always packed and she's always ready to go. But now, when the reporting is over, she's anxious to return to her Los Angeles home and her husband Paul Song, a radiation oncologist she married in 2007.

Contentment is a delicious, novel state of being for a woman whose girlhood was marked, she says, by a sense of otherness.

Ling grew up in Carmichael, Calif., a suburb of Sacramento. Her father, Douglas, an aviation supervisor, was a young boy when he came to the U.S. from Hong Kong. Her mother, Mary, was 20 when she arrived from Taiwan. Although their marriage wasn't arranged in the traditional sense, it was the result of family pressures. The unhappy union ended in divorce when Lisa was seven and her sister, Laura, was four. The girls stayed in Carmichael with their father and paternal grandmother. Their mother moved to Los Angeles but visited often.

The divorce exacerbated Ling's sense of isolation and cultural disconnect. "We were the cute Asian kids who went to a lot of things on our own," she recalls. "I remember from an early age hustling to figure out how to get us rides to and from school or to the skating rink."

The struggles made an ambitious kid even more resourceful. Financial independence, she figured, was her key to freedom.

Her first break came at age 16 when she was hired as a co-host on a syndicated teen show called Scoiti. Two years later, she moved to Channel One, at the time a fledgling in-school news show. She pleaded her way into international assignments, landing in places like Moscow, where she covered the Russian constitutional referendum.

Her passion for foreign affairs was in full swing. By the time she joined *The View*, ABC's daytime talkfest, she had trekked to 30 countries and interviewed politicians such as Benazir Bhutto, Jimmy Carter, and Mikhail Gorbachev. She was just 26.

Soft-spoken and slender, Ling eventually became the first female reporter for National Geographic Channel's *Explorer*, and the Oxygen Network and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* came calling soon after.

"I still get nervous [on camera] because I want to say and do the right thing," she says. "I try to the best of my ability to engage in a conversation with people I'm interviewing. And I try to learn something from everyone I encounter."

When did your love affair with travel and cultural exploration begin?

In my senior year of high school, I became interested in my cultural

Photographs by Luis Sinco, Getty Images

Get on Track

By helping to transform abandoned rail lines into **walking and biking paths**, *Girl Scouts are making connections in their communities.*

By Weld Royal

Photograph by Erica Stewart

The Minuteman Bikeway, just outside of Boston, Mass., is one of the premier Rails-to-Trails projects nationally.

For most of the last 30 years, the abandoned Saxonville rail line northwest of Boston, Mass., was something to be avoided. Today, though, the four-mile branch line has become a source of community pride. The Cochituate Rail Trail will connect residential neighborhoods with a busy commuter rail station and will offer a leafy escape from traffic and crowds. And Girl Scouts are helping make it happen.

ECO Hero

Girl Scouts are working through the Washington, D.C.-based Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, which was officially sanctioned 25 years ago by a law requiring federal agencies to support the conversion of defunct rail lines into public paths. Since then, communities have developed 1,405 rail trails that meander through nearly 14,000 miles of the country's industrial, architectural, and agricultural heritage. Some, such as Seattle's Burke-Gilman Trail, which passes parks, farmland, and a chocolate factory, offer a new way to explore familiar neighborhoods. Others, such as the Great Allegheny Passage, span multiple states. Last year, millions of Americans went biking, running, horseback riding, inline skating, and skiing along corridors where trains once rumbled.

Girl Scouts have been involved since the movement's inception, says Jennifer Kaleba, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's director of communications. In part it's because the projects are convenient: "The beautiful thing about rail trails is that they run through communities, just like trains used to," she observes. "If you're in a community such as Washington, D.C., where you don't have instant access to parkland or forest, chances are there's a rail trail nearby."

Opportunities to volunteer vary. Some Girl Scouts have installed benches along trails, and one girl built a cabin. In Orangeville, Ill., Sabrina Lewis, now a 17-year-old Girl Scout Ambassador (the new name for 11th- and 12th-graders), thought the trailhead of the Jane Addams Trail looked bare. She planned a flowerbed, applied to the trail commission for permission to do the work, planted flowers, and earned her Girl Scout Silver Award. For her Girl Scout Gold Award, she took her commitment to the trail one step further by helping to install a flagpole.

A thousand miles away, the Cochituate trail caught volunteer Patty Hebert's attention when she was looking for public action projects for Girl Scout Juniors in Framingham, Mass. She and Kandace Matzker had just become volunteers partnering with these Girl Scout Juniors. "We chose a fitness component and one that had to do with community service," says Hebert, 47. The girls were enthusiastic about answering a request for volunteers to clean trash and brush from a section of the planned trail as part of a Saturday "work day."

Nine Girl Scouts gathered that day and donned thick work gloves. "We found old car parts, signs, bottles, tires, and machinery," says Hebert. More importantly, the girls found ways to connect to their community and to work together as a team—two of the 15 designated outcomes of the New Girl Scout Leadership Experience (see "The Big Picture" on page 35). Hauling heavy, dirt-encrusted tires showed the girls what they could accomplish by relying on each other, says Hebert. "We try to stress how important it is to learn to work together, and this really helped."

From Blight to Delight

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Web site at **www.railtrails.org** offers many ways to volunteer. From the site's TrailLink section, volunteers can look up routes in their regions and find contact information for local restoration groups that handle building, maintenance, and cleanup. Events are often organized around National Trails Day, held every June, and National Public Lands Day, which occurs in September.

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