Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on July 9, 2008.

The hallway in psychologist Edna M. Esnil’s house speaks to key passions in her life: multiculturalism, travel, and creativity. On one wall is a large map of the world. Pins in one color mark her travel history; another color indicates places that her husband, Michael Buckle, a graduate student in kinesiology and sport psychology, has been to; a further color denotes locations they have traveled to together; and a small red flag sits atop their next destination. On the opposite wall hang photos that she has taken of Japanese snow macaques. Esnil dreams of filling their house with pictures of people, architecture, and animals from around the world.

Esnil grew up in Daly City, California, in a mixed Latino and Filipino neighborhood, the daughter of immigrants from the Philippines who themselves had German and Spanish, as well as Filipino, roots. “My parents didn’t go to college, and in high school I never thought I would go to college either. I would marry and have kids.” After graduation, a friend persuaded her to attend the local junior college with her. Since Esnil’s grandparents lived in Sacramento, when an educational opportunities program became available at California State University, Sacramento, Esnil decided that she would attend there. She was enthralled by a course that Addison Somerville taught in multicultural psychology. Mentored by Somerville, Esnil then went on to obtain a doctorate in counseling psychology from the University of San Francisco.

Currently, Esnil maintains an independent practice and is director of training at Notre Dame de Namur University Counseling Services. An early career psychologist, she has become active at the local (San Mateo and Santa Clara Psychological Associations), state (California Psychological Association), and national (American Psychological Association Divisions 35, 42, and 52; Asian American Psychological Association) levels.

Her interest in issues of multiculturalism, Esnil believes, stems from her background. Having specialized in multiculturalism during her internship year at the University of California, Davis, Esnil has integrated this focus into the training curriculum at the Notre Dame de Namur University Counseling Services, as a practice specialty, and through conference presentations. “I think it is important to examine contexts—developmental, gender, multicultural—the ways that they impact on an individual’s values, attitudes, and behaviors. As psychologists, it can help us understand people’s specific attitudes and behavior.”

The convergence of Esnil’s interests and skills is represented in the photograph of the Japanese snow macaque on this month’s cover. The photo was taken with a Canon Digital Rebel XT on a memorable trip that Esnil and Buckle took to Japan in December 2006. As a practitioner of judo since the age of five, Buckle had dreamed of traveling to Japan. As an amateur photographer, Esnil was drawn to the possibility of seeing animals unique to the area, particularly the famed snow monkeys.

The somewhat arduous trip to Jigokudani Yaen Koen, the area where the monkeys are located, involved planning for cold weather hiking. Having stocked up on proper clothing and foot gear in Nagano, they took a 45-minute train ride, followed by a taxi ride at the end of the train line, after which there was a moderately difficult trek up a mountain. A sole monkey sat in the path, as they strolled around. As the natural hot springs—the onsen—came into view, all of a sudden they could see many monkeys playing, play fighting, running up and down the tall trees on the mountains behind the onsen, grooming each other, and splashing in the hot springs. A baby monkey blew bubbles as he was dunked into and out of the water by another baby monkey.

Esnil and Buckle had had no idea what they would see, but it turned out that their timing, during the two days they spent there, was perfect: Snow monkeys are most likely to come out to relax and play in the onsen when it is snowing. (For the opportunity to observe the area—and the monkeys themselves—the reader is directed to a live webcam located at the onsen, http://www.snowjapan.com/e/daily/webcam/nagano/snow-monkeys.html.)

Professional photographers had been waiting for this moment of macaque activity. The professional photographers went past a metal gate directly in front of the onsen, climbing down in order to get really close to the monkeys. Esnil followed them down.

When dry, snow monkeys have soft fluffy fur. The snow monkey in the photo on the cover of this month’s American Psychologist was decidedly damp. Shooting from approximately two feet away, Esnil was drawn to an anthropomorphized (and gendered) sense about this particular monkey: “It looks like he’s thinking, contemplating, checking things out before moving. The photo describes the process of thinking about things, rather than acting impulsively. As human beings and as therapists, we encourage our patients to be purposeful and intentional before taking action.”

Recent research (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008) helps support Esnil’s valuation of travel to inform both a multicultural perspective and creativity: “Not only may acquiring the ability to adapt to and mentally juxtapose aspects of different cultures help people become increasingly culturally intelligent, but the mental processes involved in exposure to heterogeneous environments may have the beneficial side effect of enhancing creativity as well” (p. 178).

REFERENCES


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