

Orange High student meets Dalai Lama

Jessica Gutierrez reads a poem she wrote with friends and gave a gift to the Buddhist leader.

By Jit Fong Chin
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Orange High School ninth grader Jessica Gutierrez was among the five youths who met the Dalai Lama during his visit to University of California, Irvine, on April 16.

"It was humbling," said Gutierrez, who went onstage to present the Dalai Lama with a tile and a poem written by her and a group of friends.

"I felt very honored to meet him," she said. "It was a very peaceful experience even though I was very nervous before."

The Dalai Lama is the political and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people.

He spoke to 5,000 students at UCI about peace, compassion and courage.

Gutierrez represented Orange County Human Relations, which she is involved with through its BRIDGES program.

BRIDGES is an inter-ethnic program that encourages its middle and high school participants across the county to take

on leadership roles.

Gutierrez is only 15 but she's an old soul. Her father died of colon cancer when she was four. She saw her elder brother sink into depression. At 13, she took a 12-week course at the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill so that she could better understand her brother's condition.

She was the youngest person ever to take the course, but she was allowed to take it because she seemed mature, her mother Olga Gutierrez said.

Gutierrez wants to attend college in New York City.

'Peace of Mind'

Here is the "Peace of Mind" poem by Jessica Gutierrez, Cary Nelson, Thanh Ho, Slorencia Krochik, Johan Hong, Rosa Hong, which Gutierrez read aloud to the Dalai Lama.

Alone I wondered why am I Latina? Why am I an activist? Why am I here?

Alone I questioned: Why are they oppressed? Why are they privileged? Why are they killing?

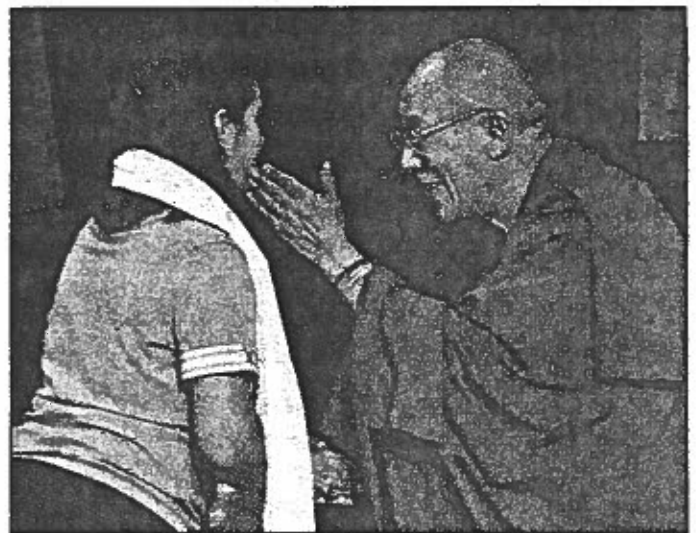
Alone I cried out: Why do we discriminate? Where are we headed? What can we do?

But I was not the only one who asked.

Together we listen. Together we shared. Together we had answers.

And when I looked inside, I saw me, us, you, they.

Great moment



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Orange High School freshman Jessica Gutierrez greets the Dalai Lama at UC Irvine April 16. See story, page 4.