

## A story spanning nearly 6,000 miles Stevenson senior, grandfather in China team up for book

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### Body

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When schools closed in March due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Lily Jiang took the social isolation as an opportunity to reconnect with her roots by co-writing a bilingual book with her grandfather who lives nearly 6,600 miles away. Written in English and Chinese, "Blue Lavender: A Journey Together" juxtaposes the 17-year-old Stevenson High School senior's life growing up in Long Grove with her 80-year-old grandfather's experiences in Xinjiang, an autonomous territory in northwest China. "Our stories might not be drawn from the same place, but we both want to share this journey through time ... our cultural background, experiences that we've had, emotions that we've experienced," Jiang said. Their book is an anthology of writings, including poetry, short stories, and historical pieces about life in Xinjiang.

It is Amazon Kindle's No. 1 new release in Asian literature. Proceeds from book sales will go toward scholarships for students in Xinjiang through Jiang's nonprofit, Blue Lavender. Xinjiang is home to idyllic mountains, deserts, lavender fields and many ethnic minority groups, including Turkic Uighurs — a predominantly Muslim people facing religious persecution, including forced sterilization and being rounded up into detention centers, characterized as "re-education camps," by Chinese authorities, according to various human rights groups. "With all the news about Xinjiang, it's more important that people can read my book and see experiences and perspectives of my family history," Jiang said. "We lack cross-cultural communication as a society. If people can be educated and open their minds about different cultures around the world, there will be less misunderstandings and polarizations from being an immigrant or a minority." Jiang's grandfather, Yaowu Shang, is part Uighur and part Han Chinese. His hometown of Yining — a remote city along the ancient Silk Road trade route — has streets lined with Mediterranean-style houses painted in bright blue hues with wooden windows. Jiang hasn't been able to visit him since 2016 due to security concerns and increased pandemic travel restrictions. A first-generation Chinese American, Jiang didn't see herself reflected in the books she read in school. In fifth grade, she began writing works of fiction, poetry and stories about residents for Long Grove Living community newsletter. "She's an amazing young lady," publisher Harvey Stein said. "She's got a great work ethic." Jiang now is managing web editor of Stevenson's Statesman school newspaper. She has earned several state and national writing awards and produced a podcast series for the International Youth Politics Forum, a student-run, nongovernmental organization that provides education on international issues. "Lily is kind of the rare commodity that every teacher is looking for because she is all about growth and progress," said Dean Bradshaw, Stevenson student newspaper adviser. "We can set a bar for her at whatever level. She is going to do whatever she can to reach that bar and push herself past it. Now, she has grown

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into this really amazing student leader." In the past year, Jiang interned with the U.S. State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program, writing features on dozens of global leaders, including heads of state, prominent journalists, CEOs, nonprofit founders and supreme court justices. "Writing really became my own way of exploring the world and finding answers to problems I experienced," Jiang said. "Now, it's really a way for me to be that role model for others."

## Graphic

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Paul Valade/pvalade@dailyherald.com Stevenson High School senior Lily Jiang wrote an e-book, "Blue Lavender: A Journey Together," during the pandemic with her grandfather, who lives nearly 6,600 miles away in China. It offers a historical glimpse into the Xinjiang province, a remote and ethnically diverse region in China. Paul Valade/pvalade@dailyherald.com Stevenson High School senior Lily Jiang wrote an e-book, "Blue Lavender: A Journey Together," during the pandemic with her grandfather, who lives nearly 6,600 miles away in China. It offers a historical glimpse into the Xinjiang province, a remote and ethnically diverse region in China. Courtesy of Lily Jiang Lily Jiang and her grandfather, Yaowu Shang. Courtesy of Lily Jiang Lily Jiang and her grandfather, Yaowu Shang. Courtesy of Lily Jiang Lily Jiang and her grandfather, Yaowu Shang, at Sayram Lake in China in 2016. Courtesy of Lily Jiang Lily Jiang and her grandfather, Yaowu Shang, at Sayram Lake in China in 2016. Courtesy of Lily Jiang Lily Jiang's grandfather Yaowu Shang. Courtesy of Lily Jiang Lily Jiang's grandfather Yaowu Shang.

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