

## Sangha Voices: Val Wang

CIMC has a rich history of practitioners, teachers, staff, and volunteers all committed to practicing meditation together in community. *Sangha Voices* is a way for us to deepen our connections and get to know one another better. We will be interviewing members of each of CIMC's many [Community Groups](#).

This month, Zeenat Potia spoke with **Val Wang**, a community member of CIMC's **Little Buddhas Sangha**. This sangha, led by Jim Austin and Zeenat Potia, is an opportunity for parents and small children (ages 3-8) to explore a family practice. Through singing, playful movement and storytelling the group learns how to spend time together mindfully. Meetings are currently being held online, one Sunday each month from 10:00-10:30am.



### ZP: How did you hear about the Little Buddhas Sangha?

**Val:** In 2010 when I moved to Boston, I would attend adult sittings and classes, and decided that when I had children, I was going to bring them to CIMC, and they would turn into meditating, peaceful beings. Eventually, when my twins turned three, I brought them to Little Buddhas, and the opposite happened. They were unruly and non-participatory. Yet, it felt like a gentle space for them to experience the teachings. They learned movement practice through "Animal Yoga," and stillness through listening to the sound of the bell. Other kids rolling around on the floor helped. The more they went, the more they understood. Overall, they enjoyed the songs, movement, craft, and most of all the snacks! For me, it is an opportunity to get a tiny bit of practice in. After the twins were born, my own meditation practice totally disappeared for five years and this became a way for me to stay in touch with that and expose my children to it.

### ZP: Tell us a little bit about your family.

**Val:** We have 8-year-old twins. Maurice, who goes by Momo has a very busy body and mind, he never stops moving and never stops talking. And he was this way right from the womb, a kicker. August, or Augie is already somewhat quiet, has a lot of stillness and calm. They are both very different. My husband Graham Jones is an anthropologist. He has an abiding interest in other cultures, and a curious and respectful attitude towards others. Everyone is very artistic in our family. The kids and Graham are amazing at drawing, and I write and make films. I started writing as soon as I could pick up a pen at age five. My identity as a writer came much more slowly. It was when I was living in Beijing after college that I was able to contact that part of myself. I wasn't encouraged to be a writer by my parents who wanted me to find something

more practical to do. Most importantly, I didn't see in America writers who look like me and were telling the kind of stories that I wanted to tell.

### ZP: What purpose and value does the Little Buddhas Sangha provide to your family?

**Val:** It is a time of the month where we're meant to be contemplative and step back and not try to accomplish anything, and just be with ourselves. Our kids enjoy the friendships they've made at Little Buddhas, and it gives us a sense of community. Neither Graham nor I was raised religiously so having a space to go to where there is some gentle non-verbal spiritual direction, such as the sound of the bell, is very grounding. During the pandemic, we've all had to deal with our emotional landscape, and this practice of being with has been hugely important. We also appreciate the simplicity and repetition of what happens at Little Buddhas. The ritual of the three gems (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), pouring of the water, lighting lamps, and arranging the flowers is beautiful.

### ZP: If you were to invite somebody to come check out the Sangha, what would you say?

**Val:** It is a low key, low stress environment, where there is tolerance for movement and sound, and children are free to be themselves. And learn how to cultivate mindfulness. Augie says, "I learn how to be calm like Buddha." While Momo says, "If something is bothering you, just let it roll on by."

### ZP: Who or what is inspiring you currently?

**Val:** I recommend watching *The 40-Year-Old Version*, a semi-autobiographical satire about a Black playwright dealing with racist white institutions. In books, *Interior China Town* by Charles Yu and *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty.

### ZP: Thank you, Val!