

Welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

I'm Mario Ritter.

A deadly earthquake has again struck China's Sichuan province. The quake was almost as powerful as the one that hit the area in 2008 killing thousands. But this time, the number of deaths has been much lower.

From China, we turn to the United States, and some very different stories. We hear about how artists in the United States bring color to the lives of amputees. And for pure fun, we tell you about costume gatherings where the participants dress as their favorite superheroes.

China suffered its worst earthquake in three years in the middle of April. Recovery efforts continue in parts of southwestern China.

More than 200 people died in the quake and about 12,000 were injured. An official in Sichuan province says that at least 410,000 need temporary assistance.

Emily Chan is director of the Disaster and Medical Humanitarian Response center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

She says she helped with rescue efforts after the earthquake in 2008 that hit Wenchuan, in Sichuan. She says officials reacted faster to the emergency this time. Emily Chan said the government sent teams within hours to some affected areas.

She says that China upgraded some of its building requirements after the Sichuan earthquake killed almost 90,000 people. Thousands of people died in building collapses because of low construction requirements. The building failures were especially bad among public buildings like schools and hospitals.

Last week, a commentator in the China Youth Daily called on China to learn from Japan in making buildings safer from earthquakes. The commentator noted that in some areas of Ya’an, close to the center of the quake, most buildings were damaged, including homes rebuilt after the earthquake in 2008.

You are listening to As It Is. I’m June Simms.

The loss of a limb because of an injury or illness can be a very difficult experience. Many people regain abilities they lost, like walking, by using artificial, or prosthetic, limbs. Faith Lapidus tells us about an artist who decorates prosthetics.

Pete Nichols lost part of his leg in a motorcycle accident three years ago. He wanted a prosthetic device that was just as flashy as his car. He loves his car. It has bright red paint and racing stripes and shiny wheels. His artificial leg is a bright chrome color.

"I love lots of color and I love chrome."

Pete Nichols did a search online and found Dan Horkey. He is an amputee who had started a company in Seattle called ProstheticInk.com. Dan had also lost his leg in a traffic accident. He decided to add color to colorless prosthetics. He started by adding images of flames.

"It kind of reminded me of the aftermath of my accident, sitting in the hospital and the pain I felt in my leg after they chopped it off."

Dan Horkey uses local artists to decorate prosthetic arms, legs and braces, offering many colors and designs.

“We have people that want Superman. We have requests that are really just unique to the wearer sometime, so that’s what’s really cool about it. It is all about personalizing their limb.”

Dan Horkey has had a variety of customers. Some are military veterans who were wounded in combat. Another was a five-year-old boy about to start kindergarten.

Pete Nichols says the colorful prosthetics attract attention and start conversations.

“Do not hide it. Find that color, that art scheme, that one [artistic] device that is you.”

Dan Horkey says his work has been getting attention across the United States and in other countries. He says amputees are amazed at how a little color and art can lift their confidence.

World events often seem to call for a superhero – a character with extraordinary powers to put things right. So it is not a surprising that comic book superheroes have remained popular for generations. Conventions where people act like superheroes are popular in the United States. Recently, thousands of people attended one such event in Washington. Avi Arditti tells us more.

Acting like superheroes, the good guys, or super-villains, the bad guys, is for many people a way to have fun. Recently, comic book fans went as their favorite characters to Washington's "Awesome Con DC" convention.

Some people enjoyed the make-believe world of the convention and play their parts as if they were experienced actors, like this man and his wife.

"We would like to break out our finest clothes and walk around amongst the inferior masses and look for victims that we can commit our heinous crimes against."

"So have you found any?"

"Possibly, how much is the camera worth?"

Edward Nigma says he and his wife come from "Gotham City." That is the home of Batman, one of the most popular superheroes of all time.

Many take the fun seriously. Dale Harvey stood in brown battle armor with a winged skull across the front. It took him more than four months to make the clothes and equipment of a video game character.

"I get enjoyment out of creating it, out of building it with my friends, just having a good time seeing people's reaction to it. The most awesome thing for me is watching kids, young and old, have a good time seeing a character come to life."

Organizers of the "Awesome Con DC" event say more than 5,000 visitors attended over two days. Ben Penrod is the event coordinator. He says the convention in Washington was small in comparison to other events around the country.

"These types of conventions are huge right now. They have them in every city. This is only a fraction of the size of San Diego every year, or even the one in Baltimore."

Ben Penrod says huge hit movies based on comic book superheroes, like The Avengers, have helped fuel the popularity of events like his.

"You had to read comic books to know The Avengers. Now The Avengers is the third highest-grossing film of all time. And people, everybody knows about it."

I'm Avi Arditti.



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