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Wong Family: Kecia Won-Jones (Youth)

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STOCKTONSpeaks!

KECIA WON-JONES

Growing up, Kecia Won-Jones experienced a variety of cultures. She is ethnically Chinese but was born and raised in a multicultural America. A third generation Chinese-American, she feels a strong connection to her family's ethnic past. On the other hand, she realizes that her parents were assimilated into American culture and that she has lived only in this country. Kecia, however, likes to think she has the best of two worlds. She was fortunate enough to have her own rich cultural heritage while receiving the benefit of the many cultures which contribute to America. She is grateful for the opportunity to celebrate her cultural traditions as well as to share in others.

Navigating diversity has been one of her paths to maturity. In elementary school, Kecia was bussed across Stockton to attend classes. Her parents were both teachers and understood the value of attending a good school. Busing not only provided Kecia access to a quality education but to the multitude of cultures that characterize the diversity of Stockton. Her new environment broadened her horizons in every way. Busing, however, was hard on her family. She and her two younger brothers had to coordinate schedules and travel arrangements daily. Though a chore, busing enabled her to make friends with kids from many backgrounds and to learn firsthand of their lives and experiences.

Attending a good school, even though it was outside her neighborhood, helped guide Kecia's intellectual development. The excellence she saw in her classes, coupled with her parents' commitment to the teaching profession, convinced her of the importance of making the most of her education. To some extent, she equated completing an education with becoming an adult.

Kecia's second-generation Chinese-American parents did not talk to her about their own childhood. They recognized their heritage but did not practice

any rituals associated with coming of age. For Kecia, becoming an adult was marked by gradual changes in the way her parents treated her. Her coming of age evolved slowly, its pace increasing as she grew older.

Kecia recalls that the change accelerated after she graduated from high school and began attending San Joaquin Delta College. Motivated by intellectual curiosity and an interest in broader experiences and different challenges, she was not satisfied with attending college in Stockton, where she had spent her childhood. Kecia worked extremely hard and transferred to University of California at Los Angeles. By attending college away from home, she left her parents' supervision far behind.

Still, when she received her Bachelor of Arts degree two years later, Kecia returned to Stockton to attend graduate school at the University of the Pacific. She hoped to renew her family ties and to interpret anew the diversity Stockton provides. She had left Stockton a child, but returned on the brink of adulthood, with a new-found authority over her own life.

Throughout her life Kecia has had complete support from her family. Whether it was the extra effort necessary to provide her with a quality primary school education or the financial sacrifice needed to underwrite college in Los Angeles, her parents were there for her. They were also responsible for instilling in Kecia the values she holds dear: happiness and hard work. They raised her to treat everyone in a kind way, a value that challenged Kecia on her daily bus rides across town. She learned, successfully, to treat everybody with respect, no matter what might divide them.

These values had a profound effect on Kecia's choice of vocation. Because her parents derived such happiness from educating others, Kecia felt instinctively that her future lay in education. Kecia pursued teaching through college and graduate school, finally fulfilling her dream by becoming an elementary schoolteacher. With a job in her chosen field came self-reliance and a feeling that perhaps at last she was leaving childhood behind.

Confirmation of her new status came when she faced yet another major transition in her life—marriage. Her announcement was a complete and utter surprise to her parents. They, however, had no ill feelings about Kecia's secret and realized that they didn't need to worry about her future with a man they did not know. They loved and respected her enough to trust her judgment—so they were immediately supportive of this new decision.

The final step toward attaining full adulthood in Kecia's mind came with the purchase of her first home at the age of 31. Though she had felt grown up before, she still perceived that here, in home ownership, was a little piece of the puzzle missing in the eyes of some family members. Feeling like an adult is one thing—finally being accepted as one by your *whole* family is another. The new house changed everything, for good.

Kecia now views herself as a full peer with her parents, one ready to carry a new generation into the future. She is now forming of a new family, the next generation, with her husband.

Whenever it was that she technically became an adult, she believes that one never fully matures until you believe within that you have come of age and are confirmed in this belief by family and friends. Kecia, now in her thirties, finally knows it has happened to her.

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Ethnic Group: Chinese
Generation: Youth