



WAH MEI NEWS



Director's Letter

2018! We welcome the New Year with a refreshed and heightened energy to move towards our future. Over the year, we will share exciting news of Wah Mei School's efforts to drive our mission of bilingual education and a greater display of the work we do. Next up: Wah Mei Summer Camp! I welcome you to stay tuned, stay engaged, and be ready to move with us.

For this edition of Wah Mei News, we welcome Wah Mei School alumna, Katie Quan and her perspective of an evolving Chinese American experience. Enjoy!

Ben Wong, Executive Director
www.wahmei.org

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Chinese in the Sunset Exhibition

Chinese Historical Society of America's "Chinese in the Sunset" captures the seventy year presence of Chinese Americans in San Francisco's Sunset district. Often overlooked by the history of Chinatown, this is the first exhibition to begin researching the district's continuous struggle with discrimination through housing, education, and cultural barriers.

The attitude about Chinese in America was an eighty-year-old social and psychological war in the making. Economic loss and fear of the "unknown" eventually led to the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first national law to exclusively discriminate against a group of people. From 1882 to 1943, our system of law became a weapon of destruction towards those of Chinese ancestry. As such, "red lining" often prevented the likelihood of racial minorities from moving in. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 made these practices illegal. As such, many Americans became up in arms about such policies, often becoming hostile towards their new neighbors.

Many Chinese Americans can still feel the impact of this era, often recalling the pressure from peers and family to assimilate while still attaining cultural heritage. This resulted in how we continue to perceive the Chinese American identity, often juggling a "double consciousness" between the neighborhood upbringing, foods, schooling, and cultures.

However, time is ever changing, never standing still for long.

People tolerate. People learn. People accept. People grow. People transform.

As we too moved forward, Wah Mei's presence in the Sunset is a testimony to changing times. In 1974, Wah Mei's first graduating class became a symbol of this progression in bilingual education and diversity. The history of the community is continuously evolving and as part of the Sunset district, Wah Mei chooses to break out of these barriers. As a school, we teach not only numbers and literacy, but we use them as a way to teach students how to be inclusive and understanding towards one another. We are not simply educators, but we are fighters and we will fight to see a better world.

Just like the history before us, we choose to speak.

The exhibition runs until February 22, 2018 at San Francisco's Public Library, Main Branch 3rd floor (100 Larkin St., San Francisco, CA 94122). For more information, visit <http://chsa.org>.

Coming Home: A Wah Mei Story

Guest Writer: Katie Quan, class of 1998

Life has a funny way of guiding you back home. As a graduate of Wah Mei School, class of 1998, I can certainly say so myself.

Like most children, I cannot recall much from my preschool days. I rely heavily on the stories and laughter from parents and occasional reunions with an old time friend. Touches of squeaky shoes on rainy days, cheerful songs sung both in English and Cantonese, and a sad, but nostalgic goodbye window linger like a whisper of a dream.

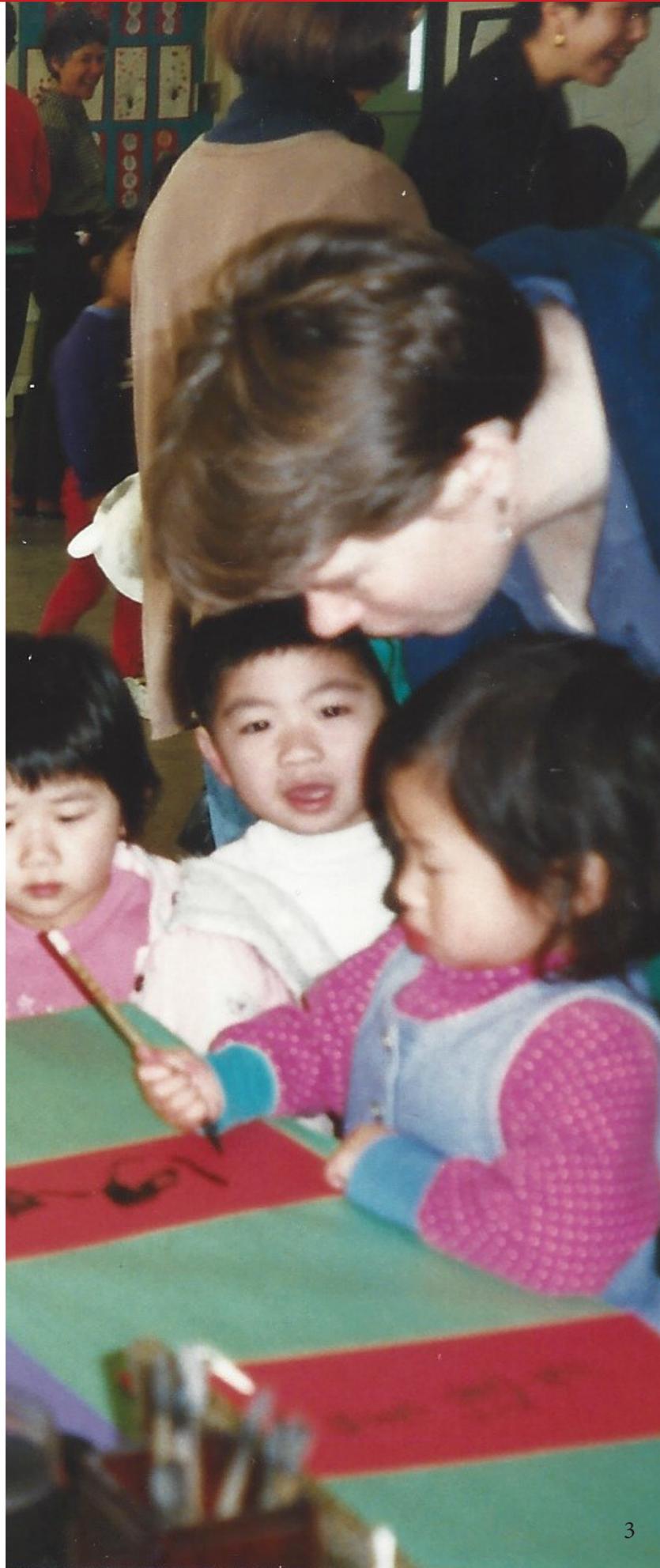
But this story starts years before. Because before me, there were my parents and before them, were their parents. My story is their story and their story is our story.

My family is from Southern China – Gao Gong Village, Hong Kong, and Macau. Arriving in the United States for numerous reasons and at numerous times, their presence became a statement in American history. Some arrived to interrogation stations, located at the edge of free waters. Others came by plane to an unknown world. Kansas. Iowa. Such exotic lands, such exotic faces.

They adapted English slowly. Breathing in and out foreign syllables and sounds became a game of survival. They moved where pink slips of promises were advertised at stop signs and red lights.

We began life in a time of war between skins and blood. We crossed seas and mountains and cries for help, just to be at the Start line with everyone else.

The American Dream came in form of my mother and my father, Kelvin Quan and Karen Lam. My mother was raised in Orange County suburbia. Wavy hair and tan skin, she spoke of a California my father knew nothing of. He called the Golden Gates his home and Chinatown his world.



With a love for history, family, and culture, their journeys joined together in San Francisco's Chinatown at Self Help for the Elderly. Born out of a movement for equality and justice, Self Help continues to provide support for Asian American elderly in the Bay Area. Their love story was sweet – one that as a child, they repeated over and over again as a bedtime story. While my father remembers seeing the brightest smile in the center of the room, my mother's only recollection of my father is a pair of bright red suspenders. The thought always sent me into a fit of giggles.

From there, their careers and interests continued to bloom into pieces of the past, capturing the needs of generations before us and acting upon them.

Wah Mei was one of those pieces.

Like all parents, they wanted only the best of education for their children.

Wah Mei provided a unique opportunity to not only gain access to language and culture, but truly encompass the notion of a global society. While only three years old, there was no time like the present to begin learning about the past and preparing for the future.

Much like other preschools, however, one class graduates while another begins and it was only shortly after my graduation did Wah Mei's influence truly begin to shine.

I began kindergarten at Alice Fong Yu Alternative School with their emerging Chinese Immersion curriculum. Throughout the following years, I attended Wah Mei board meetings with my mother, realizing then, how small preschoolers actually were. My siblings, too, attended Wah Mei and so until the age of ten, I continued to go to celebrations, dinners, fundraisers for the school. As a high schooler, I volunteered a few times with the classes, creating stories with the children and illustrating them into their own books. Eventually, I went to the East Coast for college and came back for a Masters degree in Asian American Studies. This past year, I taught my first few courses in Asian American Studies at City College of San Francisco and so, here I am.



Back to the beginning.
Back to Wah Mei.

Coming home is strange, I'll admit, but comforting. Here, it is familiar. There is still the colorful play structure. Board books. Dressers with hundreds of toy pieces. And of course, a sad, but nostalgic goodbye window.

But it's changed too. And will continue to evolve as all programs for new generations should. Wah Mei is a journey that continues far beyond the walls of the Busy Bee classroom. It travels seas and spaces and time to give children a foundation and a history to claim as their own. With its roots soaked deep in strength and resilience, it will continue to lead the way in bilingual education, stating that no child is ever too young to take the world in her hands and truly become a generation we've been waiting for.

Katie Quan graduated Wah Mei School in 1998. Born and raised in San Francisco, her work is dedicated to community, art, education, and advocacy. Her web comic series, This Asian American life, celebrates the everyday millennial struggles of identity politics. katiequan.persona.co