

STOCKTONSpeaks!

JOHN LO

Coming of age is different for each person. It may not be a single event that makes one feel older, but a series of events that allow a person to join the community of adults. This is the case for John Lo, a young Hmong-American, born and raised in Stockton.

John's parents were often away from the home, so he took on parental responsibilities when they were gone. By age 13 he cooked, cleaned and took care of his younger brothers and sisters. Older siblings were not available to help. Although often frustrated, he accepted these responsibilities. Looking back, he feels he did a good job; in fact, this may have been his first step toward adulthood.

Education is greatly valued in his family. When his parents were young, they awoke at the break of dawn to farm. Their hard work earned, in the long run, different opportunities for their son. His most important job while growing up was to go to school. His parents insisted that good education was the key to success, and he made them proud through his studies.

However, after graduating high school, John enlisted in the military instead of going to college. In his mind, this was another step toward becoming an adult. College is not the only place, he felt, where one receives an education. He had made his own decision, and now he was ready to move away from his parents and his home.

He served three years in the military and currently has three more years in the National Guard. John's parents weren't pleased with this decision, at first. However, John reasoned that serving in the National Guard is of great importance to his family's adopted nation. Further, military service was part of his community's heritage. Hmong played a key but unrecognized role during

the Vietnam War; the death rate of the Hmong was ten times that of American soldiers.

Regardless of their differences over education, in John's eyes and in the eyes of his parents, he will become a complete adult only when he gets married. This step carries with it irreversible responsibilities. His father has confided in him that adulthood is measured by a person's contribution to his community and his family. When John can support them both, he will be "grown up" in the eyes of his father.

While John believes that maturity, at times, may require going against his parents' wishes, he treasures the values of his childhood, transmitted through family conversations and cautionary Hmong tales (one which, he remembers fondly, was quite like the story of Noah's Ark). He knows that his family's advice is always worthy of consideration. And he had never forgotten these words from his father: "If you do something, you should do it all the way. Never do half the effort."

John feels that he is fully dedicated to everything he does. As a young boy he cared for his siblings, and as a young adult, he has become a protector of his country. For John, these efforts are all steps toward maturity, all part of the same story—his own.

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Ethnic Group: Hmong American

Generation: Youth