

STOCKTONSpeaks!

KAREN CAIREL

For Karen Cairel, coming of age was a journey, involving many small steps and the support of loving family ties. She treasures the model of her grandmother, who showed her that adult life could be bright and positive. Her Buddhism and her Japanese heritage provided the values that guided her to maturity. She fondly remembers the support of her parents, who adjusted quickly as she began to make adult choices. In sum, she was warmly cared for as she inched toward adulthood.

Karen's grandmother has always reminded her how lucky she is to have choices growing up. Children today have toys never dreamed of in an earlier time, and so many of them! Karen can "go to a movie" if she wants; her grandmother never had the chance. Money was limited and time was short—there was always work on the farm to be done after school, which left little time for play with friends. But the hardships of life never left Karen's grandmother bitter. In fact, they had just the opposite effect—they taught her to always celebrate the sunny side of life.

As a child, Karen's feelings about religion focused on the social life it provided. She went to church to see her friends and enjoy their company. The church also held events that attracted the participation of the youngsters in the community. Looking back, she realizes that Buddhism had a major impact on her choices growing up. Although Karen considers herself first and foremost an American, she still finds that many Japanese values are ingrained in her. She is proud of her heritage. Part of becoming an adult was her realization of precisely how important Buddhism is in her life.

In her extended family, Karen is the youngest of all the children of her generation, making it a challenge to outlive the idea that she was not

yet ready to be a grownup. However, her parents helped her smooth the transitions in her coming of age. She always felt their respect and acceptance as well as their physical affection. They worked hard, and from them Karen learned that you should never take for granted the things that you have in life.

Moving away to college was a particularly big step. She no longer had all the rules, parental guidance and structure she had at home. She felt like an adult because she was now able to make decisions about what and when to eat, when to come in and go out. Still, she knew that her parents continued to have high expectations for her. These were not the same expectations that other parents had for their children. They never pressured Karen to make lots of money, get a high-paying job, or to buy a new car or house. They wanted her to succeed, of course—but their primary expectations were about how she would treat people throughout her life. They taught her, by example, that you should always treat others with the highest respect.

As she grew older, married, and had a child, she began to have more in common with her parents. There was more to discuss. With the birth of her son, Karen felt she took a particularly important step toward maturity. Her grandmother has even more to tell her, reminding her often how lucky she and the child really are. Her relatives, now that she is a mother, have fully recognized her status as an adult. They have included her in adult conversations, asking her opinions on an ever-widening set of issues.

Karen is now mindful that it is *her turn* to serve as example for those who will come of age after her. Ethics and morals must be passed on, as well as the value of having fun while not taking things for granted. She consciously tries to make good decisions in her life in the hope that her

actions will assist future generations. And she hopes to provide enough financial stability that her children, too, can pursue higher education.

This is the new step she wants to add to the whole family's coming of age journey.

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Ethnic Group: Japanese-American
Generation: Youth