

STOCKTONSpeaks!

KATHLEEN PODESTA SALMON

Kathleen Salmon is that rare young American who thoroughly enjoys her rootedness in her family's life. Now twenty years old, she loves her Italian-American family, its customs, its teachings and its celebrations.

Growing up as an only child, Kathleen Podesta Salmon was the center of her parents' attention. She grew up on a family farm in Linden, just outside Stockton, surrounded by a loving, extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. She came to value rural life—the natural surroundings, the proximity to farm animals, and the integration of work and home.

As a young girl, she attended weekly classes at the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, went to Catholic Church every Sunday with her family and learned the power of prayer. The lessons about moral values she received from her church complemented and reinforced those her family impressed on her, values such as personal honesty, respect for elders, treating others with kindness, and giving to charities and the church. Living and working on the land, being enveloped in the warmth of her relatives, and having a strong grounding in her Roman Catholic faith all played a part in making her the adult she is today. She has never rebelled against her background, but instead prided herself on the strengths and values that have framed her world.

Kathleen's family and the people close to her have always treated her like an adult by supporting and by trusting her in everything she does. Since her youth, she has been helping her father on their ranch. When her father assigned her responsibilities, she realized that he had begun to view her as an adult. By giving her those duties, her father was seeing her in adult roles. Kathleen learned to make decisions quickly and to work closely with the orchard's workers. Even though the workers barely spoke enough English to get by, Kathleen did not ask her father for help, but instead took it upon herself to

improve her high school Spanish so that she could better communicate with them.

Kathleen attended Linden schools from kindergarten through the 12th grade. The name “Ladybug” was her nickname as a child. Upon becoming an adult, she has noticed that the nickname has “flown away.” As another sign of adulthood, Kathleen’s family has begun to include her in carrying out family traditions, particularly at Easter, Christmas, and other religious holidays when they gather together. The tradition at Easter is for each family to bring their own special dishes to share with others at dinner. Kathleen has her own specialty and a role to play: “Mine is to bring the cream puffs!”

The biggest celebration that occurs every year in Kathleen’s family is at Christmas. Women in her family prepare the meal, using recipes from her grandmother. “We begin with a toast of brandy cherries, followed by plenty of food such as prime rib, stuffed artichokes, homemade ravioli, fresh baked focaccia,” Kathleen said. “My grandmother loves to cook, so our family enjoys delicious food along with laughter and conversation and Italian music. “

Her extended family gathers regularly for meals; her own family still eats lunch and dinner together whenever they can. Kathleen believes that eating together helps her develop her moral center. Kathleen has promised to learn her grandmother’s recipes and customs in hopes of keeping such traditions alive.

While respecting the career of her mother, a schoolteacher, Kathleen has always been interested in the life of a farmer, like her father. After high school, Kathleen went to Delta College for two years and is continuing her education at California State University, Fresno, where she is majoring in Agricultural Business. Leaving home for college was a milestone on her journey to adulthood. She learned to be independent, to manage her own budget and time, and to accept day-to-day responsibilities such as buying her own groceries.

Before she left for college, her parents gave her some advice: "Be your own person, stand up for who you are, be guided by good morals, and follow your heart to do whatever feels right."

Kathleen calls her parents her "extra support system," saying they push her because they are confident she will accomplish great things. The fact that both of her parents are college graduates makes Kathleen want to go as far as she can, too. While her family has always treated her as an adult, Kathleen, with a youthful appearance, believes that society's acceptance of her as an adult will require her getting a job and having a college degree.

Looking back on her youth, Kathleen recalls that toiling in the orchards gave her a feeling of freedom. She notes that her experience riding horses "taught me responsibility, relieved stress, and helped build my self-esteem." Her patience and hard work culminated in Kathleen becoming a champion rider.

Respect for her elders and the importance of honesty were early lessons that she learned from her family. She also learned the importance of giving to charity and of respecting others. Her Catholic upbringing has been central in the development of her outlook on life. She believes fervently in the importance of her relationship to God.

And one day, she looks forward to having her own family. It's no surprise that she would like to live on the family ranch with them. There, where she was raised, she believes is the best place to demonstrate the value of her work in the orchards, and the best place to continue sharing in her family's holiday customs and teachings.

Author: Jessica D'Anza

Interviewer: Rann Chun

Ethnic Group: Italian

Generation: Youth

