

STOCKTONSpeaks!

MARGARET SANCHEZ

Margaret Sanchez has spoken two languages almost from birth: Spanish and English. This allowed her to appreciate her dual cultural heritage from a young age. She was born in French Camp in 1952 and raised in Stockton, the third oldest of eight children. Her father, a mechanic, had Northern Valley Yokut, Ohlone, and Me-wuk ancestors, while her mother was of Mexican descent. Her grandparents on both sides were part of her childhood; they used both English and Spanish at home and served Margaret both Spanish and Native American dishes.

Margaret's favorite memories of her childhood reflect the close bonds she had with her brothers, sisters, and parents. They were a tight knit family and continue to do things together to this day. They celebrate birthdays, holidays, and vacations as well as attend "pow-wows" with each other.

Margaret's family took numerous camping trips, trips that served to strengthen their ties one to another. She was introduced to wildlife early and learned to respect all of Mother Earth during family campfire talks. Through storytelling she learned her family history and "the old ways." She also learned to respect older people, no matter who they are or what they do. For example, Margaret has always maintained a high regard for her older brother, in part because of the difference in age.

Although Northern Valley Yokut, Ohlone, and Me-wuk people were not part of the mainstream during Margaret's young adulthood, she was taught to be proud and to hold her head high. Her parents made sure that the family never forgot their heritage. They reminded the children that their own childhood had been different. Margaret's parents endured the depression, working in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley. They wanted their family to

succeed and made education a high priority. Margaret and her siblings were reminded often never to tease each other, to “be good,” and to stay in school.

At fifteen Margaret took on adult responsibilities in the family. She washed, cooked, sewed, and helped out wherever necessary. In her eyes, she had become a woman. Along with her brothers and sisters, she was sent to Catholic schools. Her mother was a person of faith and saw the Catholic Church as part of her Hispanic heritage.

Margaret received a general education and elected to attend cosmetology school. Her parents helped her obtain the appropriate training and, with their help, she became an accomplished hairdresser. To this day, she credits her success to the solid work ethic she learned from both parents, as they were such hard workers themselves.

The Sanchez family still lives in Stockton, never having left their hometown. Margaret explains, “We always stuck together as a family in good or bad times. We never forgot who we were or where we came from.” She wants her children and grandchildren to learn these same lessons, lessons she learned in late childhood. “Always hold your head up high and be proud of who we are; don’t let anyone put us down. Always do well and work hard.”

She came of age by embracing family responsibilities and reaffirming the family ties forged in childhood; as she passes on her wisdom, family continues to be focus of her very rich life.

Author: Jessica D’Anza

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Ethnic Group: Native American

Generation: Middle