

## STOCKTONSpeaks!

### **SANDRA WON**

Growing up in a close-knit Chinese family, Sandra Won had a happy upbringing with parents who didn't impose adult roles on her. They made sure that she had time to be a child, to play and to experience different sorts of activities. Her entry into adulthood was gradual and, in her mind, marked by a variety of ordinary events in her life.

Sandra Won's grandparents left China for the United States in 1918, bringing with them her father, who was then just 22 months old. Her father, John Wong, engaged in a variety of occupations during his youth and adult life—grocer, shipbuilder, accountant, realtor, and canteen manager. He eventually married and settled down with her mother, who was a clerk-typist at Sharpe Army Depot.

Born and raised in Stockton, Sandra is the daughter of bilingual parents who speak English fluently. She herself spoke only Chinese until she entered kindergarten, when she began to learn the English language. As with so many Chinese-Americans of her generation, English later became her primary language; now she speaks English only.

A childhood of memorable activities and family gatherings fostered her well-being and is the basis for Sandra Won's sound upbringing. Wanting to ensure that their children had experiences that enriched their lives, Mr. and Mrs. Wong arranged for dance and piano lessons. With the family, they embarked on treks to San Francisco for activities and experiences that weren't available to them in their Central Valley hometown.

Sandra recalls seeing the musical *My Fair Lady* on one such excursion. It was an enchanting performance to the youngster who was enthralled by the costumes, scenery, and music. On other occasions, the family visited the San Francisco Zoo and Steinhart Aquarium/California Academy of Sciences in the bay city's Golden Gate Park. Wonderful worlds opened up to her curious mind.

Her parents also encouraged her to become as involved as possible and to join various clubs and organizations. They felt it was part of becoming a well-rounded and successful person in later life. With her parents' backing, the Campfire Girls and church youth groups became havens of social interaction and learning for young Sandra. Meeting other youngsters and engaging in a broad variety of activities was a fulfilling part of her happy childhood.

One of Sandra's favorite memories is having had lots of fun playing with the neighborhood children. Family is also important. The term applies not only to her own nuclear family but the extended family of her parents' siblings and their offspring. She recounts, "I remember going to my grandparent's house in Walnut Grove for get-togethers with many aunts, uncles, and cousins, and eating lots of delicious Chinese dishes." These happy memories have particularly endured throughout Sandra's life.

Sandra identifies herself as a Chinese American. It is a cloak she wears easily and naturally. She explains that her ethnicity and heritage is Chinese, but she was raised following American customs. With Asian parents, her maiden surname name (Wong) and married surname (Won) both being Asian, Sandra calls herself Asian/Chinese. Moreover, she explains, "I look Asian." Cultural expectations of behavior were already established by the family and were not different from those of other people she knew in her social and family circle. Sandra felt very much a part of Chinese-American culture while she was growing up.

At age seven, Sandra began attending Sunday School at the Chinese Christian Center (which later became St. Mark's Methodist Church). She went to Christian youth fellowship meetings at St. Mark's. This regular attendance was a practice she continued through high school and is something very important to her. She feels that her religious background provides her with the moral support she needs to get through life. Her parents are both Christians and attend St. Mark's, where they are still active.

Enrolled in Stockton's public schools from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, Sandra went on to study at San Joaquin Delta College for two years before continuing her education at San Jose State University. As a youth, her career goals were to be a laboratory technician or a teacher. But she also wanted to get married, have a family, and drive a sports car. Her parents said education was very important. They always advised her to go to college, save money, and become independent. When Sandra was in high school, a teacher asked the class how many planned on attending college. Coming from a family where college education was encouraged, Sandra was surprised that only a few students raised their hands. She had thought everyone was expected to go to college!

Growing up, she followed her parents' advice, working hard and saving her money. Sandra didn't eat out as much as her friends did. Along with having this sort of mature self-control, several milestones mark her path toward becoming adult. Getting her driver's license was one step toward independence. But the greatest impact on her and her family was when she got her first job.

It was her first major step toward real independence. She began to feel like an adult with the job and the income she earned. Adding to this feeling of adulthood and independence was paying taxes, living away from home, and paying rent on her own place. People began treating her as an adult when she started teaching at Fair Oaks Elementary School in Stockton. Although by then Sandra already felt grown up, she knew students and staff also considered her an adult when they called her "Miss Wong."

Getting engaged—an event which surprised her family—is the most specific event that Sandra feels finally marked her coming of age. A credentialed teacher by this point, Sandra then proceeded toward two more goals—getting married and having a family. When she became a mother with the birth of Kecia, her first born, Sandra had one of her most valued and cherished experiences

From her own life lessons, Sandra would advise people to do their best, work hard, and complete their education. Moving away from home may be a step toward adulthood, Sandra says, but her financial advice is to move away as quickly as possible from paying rent toward paying a mortgage, instead!

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