

## We Still Have a Long Way to Go to Make Our Place in America By Gloria Chan

I was born in San Francisco, to immigrant parents from China. My parents can be considered late comers compared the extensive history of travelers and immigrants of the East. It was only after the multiple exclusion acts during the late 1800's and the early 1900's, and decades after 1965 that my parents had finally step foot on American soil. My parents had no intent on following the traditional idea of making enough money in the United States, then going back to the mother land to live in a big house and prosper there. My parents were married in Hong Kong during 1982. My father first arrived here shortly afterwards because he had relatives who were already citizens and they acted as his sponsor. Much like the older generations of immigrants; once my father had been able to settle down, he got my mother to go to San Francisco to join him.

My father had chosen San Francisco because of its large population of Chinese who mostly lived in Chinatown just five minutes away from our cozy apartment. Although we only lived one block away from Cala Foods (the Ralph's of Northern California), my parents would still go to Chinatown every Sunday to buy our groceries. I always had a great time, because it was a weekly routine of going to have dim sum for lunch, then shopping for groceries afterwards. It was always so crowded with people of all ages, many who were families like us and people that crossed the street even when the lights weren't green. I remember having to walk out in the streets just to avoid all the people and fear of old ladies pushing me down so they could get to their discount vegetables. I believe the reason that my parents had always gone to Chinatown instead of Cala Foods was the fact that they get the chance of getting the feeling of being home. This was a three-block radius of Chinese stores, Chinese food and Chinese people.

Chinatown was an area that the Chinese immigrants were once confined to. This was a place that was roughly two blocks long at the time and they still managed to fit someone in at every nook and cranny of this area utilizing the alleyways for quick access to the bigger streets. Chinatown is small and cramped, but now houses roughly 16,000 people who are mainly the Chinese elderly. Not all of the seniors were part of the earlier migrations, some are actually ones who had just arrived, yet they don't have the ability to leave the confines of Chinatown, because this is where they feel the most comfortable. Many still have yet to acquire enough of the English language to venture into the rest of the city and communicate properly.

It is mind boggling, yet the fact is even after a century of being in this country, many people have just started their lives here. Like the first ones who stepped off that boat, many have just arrived at the airports. My parents had arrived years after the exclusion acts, yet their plans of action weren't too different from people years before them. History is still being played over and over again. This was something that I didn't realize until now. Never have I had to compare the life that shaped me with ones that seemed so far in the past. It is frightening to know that we are not done here, that we have yet a long way to go before gaining equal stature in America.

There is always a chip upon the shoulders of Asian Americans to ironically live and be the model minority. We have been set on such a high pedestal that people are afraid to fall off. It had not been until college that I had realized what was going on and what kind of path I have been heading towards. College is right before the gateways into adulthood. It is the final test before the push you out into the real world. I have now realized the many responsibilities I have as a student, an adult and most importantly a daughter. I don't have a choice, I can not fail, and I have to do well in school because this is the only way I have to even get the opportunity to compete in the world out there. I consider myself one of the luckier Asian American kids with immigrant parents. My parents have never pressured me to get straight A's or achieve that 1600 on my SATs. They have only asked that I do my best. It was in college this would not be like high school anymore, because school might not be there anymore and I will become the soul provider for my parents once they no longer have the ability to support themselves.

Yes, it is true that as Asian Americans, we still have a long way to go to make our place in America. Yet, it is still comforting to know that we did not completely stand still in all these years. There have been many achievements of Asian Americans over time and hard work. This will only be our goal to continue making our voices heard and our needs met until the achievements become countless.