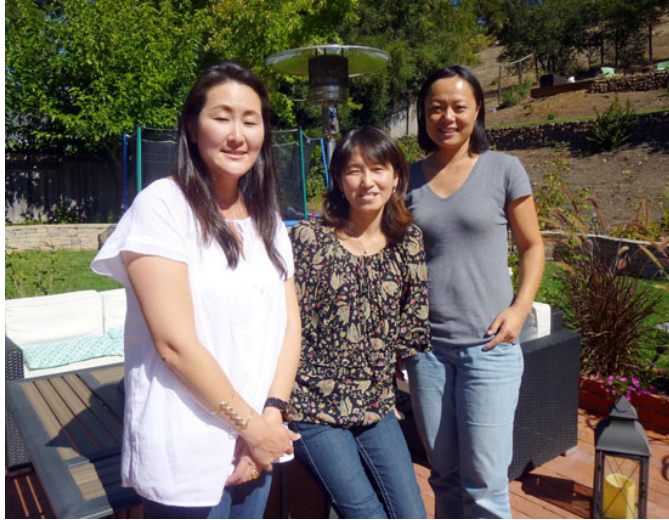


Published November 19th, 2014

Cultural Differences Add to Lamorinda's Tapestry

By Sophie Braccini



Yuriko Magagna ,Yukyeong Kim, and Yue Li
Photo Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda Asian-American residents have a diverse tapestry of origins, histories, and cultures that skillfully mesh with the rest of the population and contribute to its development. Yukyeong Kim, Yuriko Magagna, and Yue Li are three young local mothers who have developed a friendship since meeting in Lamorinda. Li came from Beijing, China as a graduate student and is raising her family here. Magagna was raised in Mexico by a Japanese family and attended Sophia University in Japan where she met her husband, who is an American. Kim is Korean and came here two and a half years ago, after her husband started a four-year assignment in the Bay Area.

"This is my first time living in a foreign country," says Kim. Her husband's South Korean company recommended Lamorinda for its learning environment. "I met many Korean people here; we have not formed a formal group, but at the end of

the year we have a big party with 50 or 60 people. Life here is wonderful," she says, adding that at the beginning it was hard because of the cultural differences. Family dynamics are quite different here, she explains; dads are more involved in the family life, supporting the kids' sports activities, for example, while men in South Korea are mostly focused on work.

"At first it was difficult, but eventually I became more comfortable, I find the difference very interesting and I enjoy it," says Kim. She says that her husband is eager to go back to South Korea at the end of 2015. "The family ties are very strong in Korea," she says.

Kim feels that she has been changed forever by the expatriation; it opened her mind, not only about Western ways, but also about other Asian countries and people. Kim was a journalist in South Korea, and she's been sharing her thoughts with her friends in a blog. She thinks her kids are also enjoying the environment, but thinks when they go back, they might have a shock as to the amount of work that will be asked of them. They already have additional schooling with Kim teaching them Korean after school.

Additional schooling is very popular among Yue Li's family as well. "It is a common problem for parents like us who came from China, that our children are more American than Chinese," says Yue Li, "so every Saturday I take them to Chinese school in Pleasanton for two hours." Her elementary school age children have also practiced Chinese 40 minutes daily for the past three years.

"Sometimes I wonder if I am being a Tiger Mom," says Yue Li with a smile, "but Chinese language and piano are the two things I don't want them to quit."

Campolindo High School sophomore Austen Li, from a different Li family in Lamorinda, went to Chinese school for a while, but says he didn't do the homework. "And now I regret not maintaining the bilingualism," he says. His sister Anya, a freshman, adds that they understand when their parents speak Mandarin to them, but that they respond in English. "At home the cultures are clumped together," she says.

As with other cultures, food is a link they share with friends, especially during the holidays. "We do get together with Chinese friends for Chinese New Year, share food and catch up," says their father, Zhan Li, dean of the School of Economics and Business Administration at Saint Mary's College. "We also used to play cards or sing Karaoke."

Both Austen and Anya say their friends, who come from a variety of backgrounds, are

important, but that the link with their family comes first.

Their father says, "This is a great place for any minority group to really get involved in the American culture." He notes how technology is changing the communication landscape. Li belongs to the online app, WeChat, where a Lamorinda group formed. He noticed that since he joined that chat he pays more attention to Chinese news; it made him more connected to his roots and up to date with what's happening. "Deep down, we are still Asian and we do not want to lose our roots," says Li. "My wife and I are the cultural bridge generation."

Sharron Sue is a third generation American whose grandparents came from the Canton Province of southern China and her husband is of Japanese ancestry. She does not speak Chinese or Japanese but her family maintains traditions and celebrations, such as Japanese-inspired events advertised in the Nichi Bei Weekly (nichibei.org). Sue formed the Lamorinda Asian-American Club in 1996 with other friends of Asian descent. "We started the club to be a place for Asian-Americans to discuss common issues, cultural differences, civic involvement, and build a community," she says. At the time most members had kids in local schools and discussed classes, then college applications became the hot topic. The group also started an annual golf tournament to raise funds for different causes. "We bought books for the school libraries to promote diversity," she says. "We wanted kids going to the school libraries to see pictures of kids that looked like them or were in similar situations, doing normal things in everyday life."

The Lamorinda Asian-American Club also organizes culturally relevant activities such as a recent Kimchi workshop. For more information on the club, contact Sue at nssue@aol.com.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA