

## FEATURE

A Young American Series

# An Exciting Life

By Xiaoyu Yan

*Editor:* 15 year-old [Xiaoyu Yan] is a forward-looking young lady. She is talented in music, art and academics. Her friends wish her luck in realizing her dreams. Miss Yan's determination and perseverance in achieving her goals have been and will continue to be a primary factor for her success. Also, the support from her parents, teachers, peers and mentors has played a significant role in shaping her character and life. Here is how she describes her life-experience.



### Pre-school Days

I was born in Shanghai, China on February, 1989. Both my father Qingyun Yan and mother Yimin Zhu were medical doctors in Shanghai since 1985. They were delighted to have me, their little angel. They told me that I showed a strong liking in music as a toddler. I would clap and laugh with all types of music. As I began to walk and talk, I have always loved to sing and dance. As a child, I loved art. The first thing I did every morning was to draw. My [paternal] grandfather has kept all my "master pieces" so I can always review my achievements. I loved to draw joyful scenes where people are celebrating. There were fireworks, balloons, and flowers. I guess my parents saw my innate and potential talent for art. so they sent me to [Xuhui] District Art Kindergarten, one of the best kindergartens in Shanghai, to be influenced and surrounded by art. That was when I began learning to play Zheng, a classical Chinese musical instrument.

I don't recall much of my childhood except that love surrounded me. I have received much encouragement from my parents and grandparents. My mother kept everything in order for me. She took me to the kindergarten and to my Zheng lessons. Every now and then, my

father brought me little surprises: cookies, a kite, colored pencils and musical and storytelling tapes. My [maternal] Grandmother has always been the family's nutritionist. My [maternal] Grandfather told me about the Chinese history and introduced me to popular Chinese novels - ([Shui-hu Chuang], [Sanguo Yanyi], and [Xiyou Ji]). My [paternal] grandmother is one of three doctors in my family besides my father and mother: On occasion, she would teach me some medical skills. My [paternal] grandfather has been my companion for most of my free time. He and I built houses using legos and raced each other to win computer games. My aunt took me to shopping and we had fun. To me, my family members are necessary parts of my life that I will always treasure. As I grow up, they continue to influence and help me.

When I was old enough to attend school, my parents again sent me to one of the best private schools in Shanghai: the [Aiju] Art Elementary School. I started out as a student who likes to socialize. As a result of too much talking in the class, I did not get the top grades at school, obviously. However, starting in third grade, I began to realize what is right and what is wrong. My cousins were the best at their schools; that served as my impetus to become an excellent

student. Gradually, I changed to be the model for the class and teachers' favored student. My best subjects were English and physical education. I was also one of the best singers in the school choir and one of the top five Zheng players in the Zheng ensemble. Moreover, I enrolled in Youth Spring Music Orchestra that performed at the professional level.

There is one memory I cannot forget, in 5th grade, I had the opportunity to represent the children of China to come to the U.S. as a diplomat. I was one of the 20 people that came. We visited San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York City. In Washington, D.C., the Chinese ambassador greeted us at the Chinese Embassy and dined with the group. We visited the Capital Hill, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the White House, the Corcoran Museum of Art, and Kennedy Center of Performing Arts. In Philadelphia, I saw the liberty Bell that called for freedom. In New York, I visited the Julliard Musical Institute, strode on Broadway and Walt Street, and saw the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty – a symbol of hope to the immigrants! was very fortunate to walk on the top of the World Trade Center, to admire the prosperous New York City. In San Francisco, I saw *the Golden Gate Bridge and the U.S. Naval Station* at Treasure Island. Lastly, I relaxed at Universal studios, Disneyland and Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles. My memory of that trip was full of joy and pride of my achievement. As a result of that diplomatic tour, I became more aware of the American history and culture.

### Initial Experience in the U.S.

In 1995, my father was invited to come to the United States, doing chemical research in Los Angeles. In 2000, he was granted a certificate for permanent residence in the U. S. (the Green Card) and my mother and I came to Los Angeles to join him. That was the beginning of my 6th grade. I attended Southpointe Middle School. On the first day of school I did not understand a word everyone else was saying. I went home crying. I

was really sad. Back in China, I had a lot of friends and success, but here in America, all I saw was apathy and emptiness. My Zheng was left quietly in my room. I was downcast without hope. Later, I found few Chinese friends in my ESL (English as a Second Language) class. We exchanged views on our new environment in Chinese and hung out together. After a while, life in America did not seem that hard any more.

I did pretty well in class, but I did not assume leadership in any group. My sociable and dashing self turned silent and hesitant. I thought I would never be the same again, but deep in my heart, I longed for my lively self to return. Meanwhile, my ability to speak English was improving at a fast rate that I did not notice. A year later. I was placed in the regular classes with the American students. That was scary! On the first day of regular class, I stayed close to one of my Chinese friends: both of us were not talking. Surprisingly the day turned out to be fairly good. I began communicating with the students in English, but nevertheless the Chinese group stayed together.

Although my parents were not wealthy back in Shanghai, but we never thought about being frugal with our money. In Los Angeles, we just had enough money for us to pay for the house rent, maintaining a car, and buy some groceries. Despite how little and immature I was, I learned not to be wasteful and extravagant with the family's financial resources. Sometime, I would envy how pretty and novel my Taiwanese friends' stationery was, and I would stare the fancy clothes other teenagers wore, but I was satisfied and content with everything I had - my family and its love.

In those days, my parents and I rode in our old Camry and listened to Chinese CDs, we were happy. When there *was a hardship, we were always there for each other*. It was the powerful love that gave all of us the will to challenge the adversity. Occasionally, I thought about how lucky my friends in China were; they did not have to endure the hardship of life that I was struggling

with and they did not encounter the difficulties one must overcome to assimilate into a society of different language and culture like I did. However, I was fortunate indeed, to have come to America and receive one of the best education in the world. I experienced one of the most life-impacting changes in one's life, and have gained more new life experience than many of the average teenager in China. Yes, I am fortunate indeed.

### **Mainstreaming**

My family and I were just getting used to the social environment in Los Angeles when we had to move again, barely a year after coming to the U.S. In February 2001, my mother received an offer from the Washington University in St. Louis to do research in the school of medicine. My father also found a position in the same medical school. My parents decided to move to St. Louis, where I am living now. This decision struck me like a thunderbolt; I did not know what to expect. On my last day at Southpointe, I cried. On the plane to St. Louis, I cried. Although there was nothing in Los Angeles that was important enough for me to miss, it was the place I was used to live, after one and a half years of adjustment in my life style. I could not imagine what the new environment would be like.

On the first night in St. Louis, I dreamed about a leaf It was blown away from the tree branches and carried far to a place where it was covered by dirt and dust. On a sunny day, a warm breeze came and unearthed a large fragment of what was left of that leaf, and carried in its lap. The leaf did not know where it was going and whether there would be storm or sunshine to where it was heading The next day my father drove me to the Parkway West Middle School. There were a few Asians in the school. Everybody stayed together and spoke the same language - English. How scared I was. I never did make an English-speaking friend before. To my surprise, in every class I went, students came to me and talked to me in a friendly tone. I was delighted. I realized that making new friends was not that hard. After a month, I had lots of buddies.

Subconsciously, my true self that was buried after I came to the U.S. came back to me again.

During the two years at Parkway West Middle School, I joined math club and participated in the State Math Counts Competition. Our team took third in the State of Missouri. It was refreshing, I never really liked math before. It was Mr. Lee., my math teacher, who really spurred my interest in doing math problems. I also enjoyed orchestra, surprisingly. In less than a month, I taught myself how to play a violin. I liked my orchestra teacher, Mr. Patano, who would provide me with ample opportunities to perform my spectacular skills at playing the Zheng. Later I met Ms. Wang, who introduced me to the Chinese cultural group, which invited me to play every now and then. I was happy again.

I am really busy now at Parkway West High School, especially around the holiday season. I am frequently invited to perform Zheng music. I made the fourth chair in the first violin section of the school's Concert Orchestra. I was elected as the freshman treasurer for the Student council of the 2004-2005 school year. I am also involved in the publication of the Reflections, a school magazine that collects students' writings. In the fall, I play Junior Varsity tennis for the school. I play the leading role in my own math club that I found this year. All math manias are my friends. Furthermore, I am working on creating a website for myself All the honor courses keep me busy at all times. In addition, I am also taking Spanish, but I am not overwhelmed. I really like that course and I take pride in having a 100% overall percentage in that class. During my free time, I like to draw still life pictures. I can draw cars as authentic as they are in a photograph. Music is another important part of my life, especially classical music. They inspire my imagination.

### **Current Status**

My success is splendid and seems boundless. I promised to bring good news to my relatives in China every week I call them. Whether my achievement is little or great, it

would bring them great pleasure. I am still working to realize my new dreams. I have built up faith in myself after the difficulties I went through over the last three years. My parents once worried that I would not be good at writing English articles. Now, I have no difficulty in writing this autobiography. I believe that if a person is pushed to his/her breaking point, this person can do amazing things. As the saying goes: Where there is a will there is a way. My friends and family inspire me and it is my job to fulfill my goals.

*Yan Xiaoyu is a 15 year old girl and an established Zheng musician. In her 5th grade, she had an opportunity to come to the United State to perform Zheng music. Later, when she was in 6th grade, she came to the United States with her parents. She and her parents are currently residents of St. Louis county of the State of Missouri.*



*Drawing 1, Village Scenery*



*Drawing 2, Lady on the Moon*