

## California Stories

by Joan Lee

My name is Joan Lee, and I am Cambodian. How did I get my name? Well, the way I got my name was from my dad, who is sometimes mistaken for the actor, Jackie Chan. When my dad was in a refugee camp in Cambodia, he met a woman named Joanna Campbell who was part of a Christian organization that helped people from the camps escape to freedom. From what my dad tells me, Joanna was a very nice and caring person. My parents never even considered any other names because they thought Joanna was a good name and the perfect name for me. However, when I was born, the hospital clerk spelled my name J-o-a-n, so my parents just went along with it. They enrolled me in school as Joan but call me Joanna at home. When I was younger my mom called me Songvit which means “skinny” in English.

At the time when I was born, my face looked big and chubby. On the day I was born, only my mom, dad and the gynecologist were there. My parents knew I was going to be a girl from the ultrasound. I weighed six pounds and nine ounces when I was born in the evening at Long Beach Memorial Hospital. Nothing funny or unusual happened because I was just a very calm baby. If my mom wasn't home, I would cry until I lost my voice. Once my mom had to go to the store for some cooking supplies and put me down for a nap, so that I wouldn't know she was gone. But when she came back, I was in my dad's arms crying in a squeaky little voice that was all I had left because I had been crying the whole time she was gone.

Now I am very quiet around people, which is very different than when I was younger. I am not into sports, but I really love arts and crafts. That is very different from my mom who is very energetic and loves to exercise. All of the girls in my family have long hair, but I have just recently cut my hair. My dad keeps pushing me to play some kind of sport, so I am considering track and field. I am in the fifth grade and will be going to middle school next year where I will be able to try out for track and field, but I don't think I will get on the team. At least I will have the opportunity to try out.

I am here in California because my parents were able to escape from Cambodia. I am glad that my parents came here. Otherwise, I would have been raised in Cambodia and would not have my friends and the kind of life that I have here in California. I am a different person because I live in California than I would be if I had been raised in Cambodia. I would like to visit there someday, but California is my home.

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