

## St. Therese Alumnus Remarks CNY 2019

So I assume my teachers chose me because they think I made it out alright, but I don't know about that. Because remember, I'm an acupuncturist. That means I enjoy sticking people with needles for a job, and I can't say if that's normal.

Coming back here to St. Therese, I see so many changes. I hear there's a long waitlist just to get in this school is that right? Wow. My 1<sup>st</sup> grade class had 32 students that dwindled to half that size later on, and all those students were Chinese American. No joke, we had to go on a field trip to a suburban school just to see Caucasian kids our age, which we called pen pals.

During my time, St. Therese was still a struggling little elementary school that always had heating problems, inadequate funds, and unpaid crossing guards directing traffic. Oh wait, that was considered voluntary community service. Kids jumped at that job because that's the *only* time they could tell their parents what to do.

The only extra-curriculars available were choir, Chinese dancing and lion dancing with a framed photo of my awkward pre-teen face (probably) still hanging in the stairwell. We didn't get a sports team until I was half way out the school doors.

Side note about school mascot: Mr. Chrusciel was tasked to come up with a mascot. At the time, Ms. Cavallone wanted tigers, but he thought to ask his 7<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom for suggestions. Alex Tsang suggested warriors, another girl suggested pandas, and I came up with the most Chinese symbol I could think of that wasn't the stereotypical dragon, yet still sound cool, and put out phoenix. In total, 5 suggestions were written on the board and we voted along with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at the time. The result ended with a tie between phoenix and warriors. So, to appease everyone, we took both and became what St. Therese is today. Reflecting on this, everyone should be grateful that the Class of '08 and '09 weren't crazy enough to go with panda. Imagine how ridiculous we'd sound at events. So in advance... you're welcome.

But where we lacked, we made up in other aspects. Cold builds character, and lack of funds builds humility. And most of all, we had dedicated teachers who were willing to work underpaid to give us a solid education.

The U.S., unfortunately, is notoriously known for being bad at STEM subjects, especially math. But as soon as you get in Ms. Hang's math class, she's got that problem solved. She worked so hard to make sure every kid understood the topic. Every day her classroom lights were still on well past 5pm as she sat in her cave built by assignment-filled manila folders deciphering chicken scratch. To the kids that think that using laptops to do homework means you can forgo neat handwriting think again. But she made sure that she wasn't the only one working hard. Ms. Hang pushed us to get ahead of the curve. I didn't realize how far ahead I was until I got into high school and other kids were just learning geometry when that was so 7th grade.

Science was another story on its own. Once Mr. Flip entered the school, he changed the classroom dynamic into a whole different world. And I mean literally a different world. Mr. Flip, how many animals do you have living in your classroom now? I bet not many because he doesn't have a single untamed 5<sup>th</sup> grader.

I love his interactive teaching style. I'll never forget the day he let us clean the floor with liquid nitrogen or the centripetal force demonstrations or the sci-fi books we read because we finished covering all the topics in the textbook. He really knows how to jog the exploratory minds of kids.

Language arts was also pretty solid. Art was always fun and sparked creativity. In my days of linguistics included Mandarin and Cantonese with a dash of Spanish by my middle school years. Mr. Gonzalez you said I'm your best student, but I think I have efficiently returned all my Spanish to you.

I could go on describing all the subjects but there is something much more valuable that unknowingly stuck with me after St. Therese. Something that is invaluable to life, and that is an identity enriched with knowing where I came from.

Looking at the crowd of students here, there is more racial diversity than I could have imagined possible for a little Chinatown school. You guys don't have to look far to interact with people of different backgrounds and heritages like I did. Diversity engenders an understanding of different people and kindles open-minded thinking. But that same diversity can also cause a young mind to forget who she/he is as an individual. Every child wants to fit in with the crowd. But I challenge you students to find your individuality. As you learn more about yourself growing up, you begin to see how important where you come from is. Learning more about where I came from and being proud of it is what gave me the confidence go the unconventional route to healthcare.

After all the countries I've traveled to, from large cities to small villages, I begin to realize how grateful I am to have been given access to such amazing education. I became proud of the community I come from, and that confidence is what will also ultimately lead you to be the best you can be. So, remember where you come from.

Katherine Lai

*Masters of Science in Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine*

Bastyr University, 2018

Fulbright-Hays recipient, 2015

Latin School of Chicago, 2013

School Year Abroad China, 2012

St. Therese Chinese Catholic School, 2009