

# MY ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) STORY BY ALICE HONG

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Many things happened in 1997: Britain returned Hong Kong to Chinese rule after occupation since 1841; IBM's "Deep Blue" defeated World Champion Chess Player, Garry Kasparov, bringing AI to a new chapter; Princess Diana died during a car crash in France; and Madeleine Albright became the first female Secretary of States in US History. I wasn't living in Hong Kong and didn't know how to play Chess, but for me, life went up-side-down in 1997 (at least that what I thought at the time).

One day in 1997, my father handed me what it looked to be my passport and told me: "you and your sister will move to the United States and live with your mother." My parents divorced before I was five years old and I was raised by my grandparents, then later moved in with my father and stepmother. I was a regular high school girl who has a boyfriend and social circle that I adored. Yes, I enjoyed watching American TV shows like 90210, Knight Rider, MacGyver, and The A-Team, but never in my life I thought I would leave Taiwan, nonetheless to a place where I can't speak its language. I was frightened but must obey.

November 1997, my father flew my sister and I to LA, where we then, as two teenage girls, flew to Ohio together. That was our first-time seeing snow. We stayed with our uncle for a few days and flew to Memphis where our mother and her family resided. Trying to make up the time she missed in our lives, she didn't pressure us to go to school. My sister adapted the new lifestyle very well, she always loved American food and thought she was in heaven. I, on the other hand, made doughnuts and hot cocoa, my only choice of meals outside my mother's cooking. Memphis looked nothing like what I saw on TV.

Taipei City has a nickname: The City Never Sleeps. Even an underage girl like I was, there's vibrant nightlife for me. What did Memphis have after 9PM? NOTHING! Although "Deep Blue" won the Chess game, Email was not yet universal. It took about 3 weeks to a month for hand-written letters to exchange across the ocean. I was depressed, missing my boyfriend and friends back home dearly. I watched two weeks of news and told my mother I wanted to go to school. ESL (English as Second Language) program at that time was not commonly offered at schools. Not wanting to stay home and be bored out of my mind, I told my mother that I'd drop a grade and go to class with my sister. I remembered vividly the first day of school when we walked out of the Admin office: all the students in the hallway stopped whatever they were doing and just stared at us. Shaking inside, I put a smile on my face, held my sister's hand, and waved at them. Classroom life was very different and took a bit time for me to adjust, too. I "forgot" my name was "Alice" when the teachers called roll but moving from one class to another was interesting and having a locker made me feel like 90210 (in most part of Asia, HS and below, students stay in the same classroom and different subject teachers go to the students). I managed finished HS and got into a local University. I eventually finished my Master's in Sciences from Boston University.

Being an Asian, there's a stereotype: smart and have good technical skills. For me, however, those are just the result of how we are: being resilient. I couldn't say it better so I'm just going to quote Bruce Lee: *"Defeat is a state of mind; no one is ever defeated until defeat has been accepted as a reality. To me, defeat in anything is merely temporary, and its punishment is but an urge for me to exert greater effort to achieve my goal."* Sound familiar? That's Hyve's "Can-do" attitude.