

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE ASSOCIATION

Voices ^{at} the Seashore

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Reflecting on
Roots and Rest

BY BLANCA CHANG JOHNSON

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Each May, I take advantage of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) month to dive deeper into my Asian heritage. Though I don't speak Mandarin or Cantonese, I've always been fascinated by the complexity and sophistication of Asian languages, the mystery within the characters, the drastic difference in meaning depending on pronunciation, inflection, or intonation, and as in all languages, the subtlety of nuance.

My paternal grandfather immigrated from Guangzhou to San Francisco in the early 1900s and later traveled south to Guatemala where he met and married my Spanish grandmother whose parents had immigrated from Europe a generation before. Together, they established a successful textile business and raised nine children, including my father.

None of them, and as a result none of the grandchildren, were taught Mandarin or my grandfather's native Cantonese. As children of an interracial marriage (once viewed as highly irregular and even immoral to some), in a time when assimilation was not only preferred but often demanded over uniqueness, losing our ancestral languages was considered the price

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of a provisional acceptance. A steep price, in my opinion, as it's a tremendous loss to lose language, and in so doing, a part of our own heritage and history.

Seeking rediscovery and reconnection, I recently read *"Peach Blossom Spring"* by Melissa Fu and was reminded of the Mandarin character for tree (*mu*, 木), which one of the story's protagonists points out also looks like a tree. When you place two side by side, they mean small wood (*lin*, 林). If three are placed in a character box, they mean forest (*senlin*, 森). And, when you place a person and a tree together, they mean rest (*xiu*, 休)... **Rest is literally a person by a tree.**

I love that. I found such comfort in that realization and in that moment of reconnection to my own family tree. My epiphany: no wonder it's so restorative and feels so great to be among trees! I'm so grateful to have spent the earliest parts of my childhood with my paternal grandparents and to have had the exposure that I did to my Chinese roots. Remembering them is my way of honoring them. I hope you find some time at Point Reyes National Seashore to rest and restore yourself.

Blanca Chang Johnson loves spending time at Point Reyes National Seashore and serving as co-chair of the Point Reyes National Seashore Association.