

Share Your Heritage: Sheena Richardson

My heritage story is quite unique. My father is a 3rd generation Japanese American and my mother is a 3rd generation Chinese American. My great grandparents came to Hawaii to work on the sugar plantation fields. During this time people from China, Korea, Japan, Philippines, Portuguese, and Hawaiian came together to form Hawaiian "local" culture. Growing up in Hawaii, I have experienced lots of different cultures and people. It was normal to go to my Filipino friend's house and eat *pancit* (noodles) with their family or go to my Puerto Rican friend's house and eat *pastele stew*. Coming together and sharing meals with my friend's families is the essence of Hawaii and what we call "the spirit of Aloha". In Hawaii from kindergarten to 12th grade, Hawaiian language and culture is a requirement. I spent many days chanting and dancing hula, learning about native birds and plants, cultivating taro, and singing songs in Hawaiian. In my personal life, my Japanese grandmother played a big part in teaching me the culture and traditions of Japan. I grew up going to Bon-dance festivals and went to a buddhist temple on the weekends. My grandmother spoke Japanese and helped me pick up the language. I then went on to study formally from 7th grade all the way through college and I also studied abroad in Japan. My mother also played a part in teaching me about Chinese culture. We celebrated Chinese New Year and she taught me to make *gau* (sweet rice cake) and we made dumplings and wontons together. My heritage doesn't stop at Hawaiian, Japanese, and Chinese because when I was 5 years old my father remarried a Korean woman. She didn't speak much English and so I went to Korean language school with my half-brother and we learned how to read and write fluently in Korean. I also grew up celebrating Korean traditions with her. My heritage is a mixture of Asian and Hawaiian heritage. Today, I am trying to incorporate my heritage and traditions to my kids whom are multiracial (Black, Japanese, and Chinese).