



## Li Keng Gee Wong

April 6, 1926 - July 16, 2018

Li Keng Gee Wong, 1926-2018

Li Keng Gee Wong, a retired pioneering schoolteacher and author of a memoir about her immigration from China to Oakland, California, during the Chinese exclusion era, died on Monday, July 16, 2018, in Oakland. She was 92 years old.

She was born on April 6, 1926, in Goon Du Hahng village, Toisan County, Guangdong Province, China. A daughter of Gee Ghee Gheng, aka Gee Seow Hong, and Gee Suey Ting, aka Gee Theo Quee, she entered the U.S. in late November, 1933, after being detained with her mother and two sisters for six days at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay. Her father had immigrated to Oakland in 1912.

She and her family settled in Oakland's Chinatown. She attended Lincoln Elementary School and Oakland Technical High School. In 1950, she received her teaching credentials from the University of California, Berkeley.

She started teaching in 1950 in the Mt. Eden School District, an unincorporated area of Alameda County near Hayward, then at the Decoto School District, and finally at the New Haven Unified School District in what is now Union City, a total of 33 years. Primarily a second-grade instructor, she was the first Chinese American teacher in all those districts. After retirement, she took a writing course taught by Nancy O'Connell at Chabot Junior College, Hayward. O'Connell and her fellow students encouraged her to write a memoir about her immigration experience.

Her memoir, *Good Fortune: My Journey to Gold Mountain*, was published by Peachtree Publishers, Atlanta GA, in 2006, when she was 80 years old. She has spoken widely about her life story and book, locally and nationally. Her book is used in many middle schools.

For 47 years, she lived in San Leandro with her late husband, Roger L. Wong, who owned a plastics fabricating business. She is survived by two children, Stanton Kirby Wong, and Karen Weller; three grandchildren, Amanda Wong, Brian Weller, and Andrea Weller; and siblings Lai Wah Chop Webster, Nellie Wong, Flo Oy Wong, and William Gee Wong, and many nieces and nephews.

In 2011, she moved into Piedmont Gardens in Oakland. Her affinity for Oakland Chinatown remained strong. "You can take Li Keng out of Chinatown, but you can't take

Chinatown out of Li Keng,” she said in retirement.

Memorial services and entombment will take place at 10 a.m., Friday, August 17, 2018, at Chapel of the Chimes, 4499 Piedmont Avenue, Oakland, CA 94611, followed by a celebration-of-life luncheon at Peony Seafood Restaurant, 388 9th Street, Suite 288, Oakland CA 94607, 510-286-8866, <http://peony388.com>.

The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in Li Keng Gee Wong’s honor to the Angel Island Immigration Foundation, <http://www.aiisf.org>., 870 Market St., Suite 941, San Francisco CA 94102, 415-658-7691.

# Comments

---



“ Li Keng was my dear friend, even though more than 50 years, different races and life challenges separated us. We both loved Shirley Temple movies, telling the truth, beautiful flowers, pigs, helping others and were not afraid to get mad or sad about injustice together. Li Keng taught me everything about the Chinese American experience, and also how to be an amazing, additive and tough person while still loving yourself and being proud of who you are, and at the same time being flexible and adaptive. I met Li Keng through my work at Angel Island Immigration Station, where she was once a detainee, and then major donor and supporter! 60 years later, to tell the unheard and much needed stories of the brave and beautiful people, like Li Keng, who immigrated to the US through Angel Island. She was simply the most wonderful, smart, sassy, tough, loving, dear lady I have had the pleasure to call my friend. I miss her so much, and sometimes walk by Piedmont Gardens just to feel her presence. Li Keng was the embodiment of the American Dream, and again my wonderful friend that I was so lucky to know. I love Li Keng, and everything she taught me to become a better person. I'm sorry and sad the rest of my life, that we didn't say goodbye before she went to heaven, where I'm sure she is also making things better. Kendra Lee Adams, Oakland, CA



**Kendra Lee Adams** - May 02 at 03:50 AM

---



“ Mrs. Li Keng Wong was a neighbor of mine in San Leandro for not enough years. I remember her warmth and kindness and always her strong spirit! She will live in my memory forever and outstanding woman and friend.

**Daci L. Armstrong** - August 11, 2018 at 02:51 PM

---



“ I worked in the room next to Li at Alvarado Elementary and because I was 5'11" tall she put me to work hanging posters and getting things down that were a little to high for her. Enjoyed her spirit and life story. Sorry I wasn't able to be there to share memories.

**Maureen Middleton** - August 10, 2018 at 12:44 AM