



Class of 2007

Silver Circle Profile
By: Kevin Wing

Profile: **gayle yamada**



gayle with Peter Jennings, Dan Rather & Heather

For most of her life, **gayle yamada** has been a unique individual. She has never wanted to blend in with the crowd. For her, that began at a very early age.

"I was looking for my identity," says yamada, who has certainly made her mark on the world of Bay Area television through nearly four decades working in local broadcasting, producing long-form documentaries and co-authoring two books, among many other achievements.

"When I was 13 or 14, I was going through this whole identity search," she says. "I was living in Washington, D.C., and I was one of the very few Asians who lived there at that time. It was really hard to search for your identity when there were hardly any other Asians around."

Still, yamada wanted to be different.

If you haven't already noticed the way her name is spelled—with all lower-case letters—you now realize how much being unique meant to her.

"I wanted to be different in some way than just ethnically," yamada recalls. "In junior high school, I began spelling my name in lower-case."

yamada, lower-case or not, has worn more than her fair share of hats. She is an award-winning executive producer, director, producer, and writer with extensive experience in the commercial, public and cable television, radio, and print industries. She was inducted in 2007 into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences to recognize her many decades of outstanding work in broadcasting.

Born in Japan on a U.S. Air Force base near Tokyo, yamada's parents decided to bring her and her three sisters to the United States once they began speaking Japanese. They had been scarred by their wartime experience of being put in internment camps in the U.S., and wanted their children to speak perfect English. The family's first stop was Hawai'i. The family lived there for a year. Then, when the girls started speaking pidgin English, their parents, **Gordon** and **Kiyo**, moved them to the Midwest, where Gordon worked at Wright-Patterson

Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. The family remained there for two years until yamada's father received a fellowship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and with that, an opportunity to live in Boston.

"I loved Boston," yamada says. "We belonged to a small group of young families that were my dad's colleagues, and we did everything together. We lived in a house that was built before the Civil War and had a lot of parties there."

After their year at MIT, in 1963, the Yamadas moved to the Washington, D.C., area where gayle's father worked for the federal government.

"It was a great experience living there," she recalls. "We went to the Smithsonian all the time. I never knew you had to pay to go to museums until I left D.C.!"

In 1976, yamada earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the College of William and Mary. She also waited tables in Williamsburg. The summer of 1976, of course, was the summer of the nation's Bicentennial, so yamada figured that many tourists who came to the nation's capital to be a part of the Bicentennial celebration would also visit Williamsburg.

"But, no one came," she says. "It was very unfortunate. I didn't make a lot of money waiting tables."

In early 1977, yamada was ready for a new adventure. She wanted to work in the world of communications. She wanted to move to California. So she did.

"I wrote letters to places where I hoped I would get a job, and I talked with some people who were doing radio," she says. "I was still trying to figure out what I was going to do. But, I decided I wanted to move to San Francisco. I'd been to southern California before. I'd never lived in San Francisco, and I wanted to live among Asian Americans."

yamada's first job in the Bay Area was working as a waitress at a Japanese restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown. But it was difficult for her to find a job in broadcasting. She ended up landing a

continued on page 11



continued from page 10

public affairs internship at KFRC radio, which, at that time, was an AM powerhouse with the likes of the legendary **Dr. Don Rose** ruling the morning airwaves.

She held on to the internship for a few months, then was hired at KCBS radio to work in its traffic department, putting radio commercials in order of when they would air.

"It had nothing to do with news, and I wanted to get into news," yamada says. "I wanted to be a journalist. I went in to the newsroom every night, even on weekends. I volunteered writing stories and doing interviews, anything they needed. Eventually, I was offered a position as entry-level desk assistant. I took quite a pay cut from \$160 a week in traffic to \$110 a week in the newsroom. I lived on a combination of my savings and my salary, living in a little railroad apartment in the Mission District. Those were good times."

yamada remained at KCBS for a couple of years, eventually advanced to editor on the news desk. Then, she had an opportunity to go to China as part of a friendship delegation to Shanghai from the city of San Francisco.

"Many civic leaders from northern California went, and the whole delegation was led by a deputy mayor of San Francisco," she recalls. "I didn't have enough vacation time, so I petitioned that I be given a special leave of absence from the station, but the news director, **Jerry Nachman**, said no. Some colleagues intervened on my behalf, but he still said no. So I quit."

yamada spent three weeks in China as part of the delegation, then returned to San Francisco and found a job as an assistant assignment editor at KPIX Channel 5, the CBS affiliate. Almost immediately, her hard work ethic and dedication earned her a promotion to assignment editor.

It was a heady time for yamada. KPIX's newscasts catapulted to the top spot in the ratings, and she and fellow journalist **David Hosley** (*Silver Circle '86*), who she had met at KCBS, decided to get married. They would move to Florida, where Hosley was hired as an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Florida in Gainesville. They returned to San Francisco to get married on a weekend in October at a church in Pacific Heights. A small

wedding reception was held at Fort Mason, followed by a larger reception later in Washington, D.C., where Hawai'i Congressman **Sparky Matsunaga** serenaded them with the Hawaiian Wedding Song.

They returned to Gainesville, where Hosley was the news director at the commercial radio station on campus. yamada, on the other hand, was hired as the morning news anchor and news director at the new public radio station in town that was just going on the air. That made them news directors for competing stations, and it was one of yamada's most fun jobs. She had the chance to create the news programming and string for National Public Radio. She also became the restaurant reviewer for the *Gainesville Sun*. "I'd go to parties and no one wanted to talk about the radio station," she recalls, "Only where to eat!"

The couple remained in Gainesville for two years, where she graduated with a master's degree in communications from the University of Florida. She graduated with honors as well as the outstanding graduate student with a 4.0 grade point average.

South Florida was the next stop for the couple. Hosley was hired as program director for a radio news station there.

"I decided I would get a job in TV in Miami," yamada says. "I interviewed at all the TV stations in Miami and chose an associate producer job at WPLG, an ABC affiliate. It didn't pay the most, but I was promised more opportunities. I signed a two-year contract in 1983, first working as the noon show producer, then starting up a new morning show. Eventually, I filled in as a producer on all of the station's newscasts."

When yamada moved to Florida in 1981, she said she would live there for five years. Since she and Hosley traded off moving for jobs, this next time was hers. So, in 1986, with no job, she decided to return to San Francisco. Fortunately, she and her husband had signed a contract to write a book on the history of women in broadcast news, and he got a summer teaching job at Stanford University, where they lived in married student housing.

"We wrote the book in three months," yamada says. "I lived in the library."

Later that year, yamada returned to KPIX as a casual news writer. She was destined to stay there

continued on page 12



continued from page 11

for only a short time, however. Late in 1986, she accepted an opportunity to work at KQED Channel 9, San Francisco's PBS station. Yamada worked on *We The People*, a four-part series that focused on the nation 200 years after the signing of the Constitution in 1787. It was hosted by **Peter Jennings**. The programs were shot across the country, and Yamada handled the location shoots with Jennings.

"There was no blueprint for this show whatsoever," Yamada says.

"Peter was a wonderful person to travel and work with. He was a gentleman all the time. He was hard-working. I remember sitting on a curb with him in the middle of New York one night, rewriting a stand-up. He was the best."

The program aired in 1987, and it went on to win a prestigious George Foster Peabody Award, among many other honors.

"When *We the People* was done, KQED really wanted to hire me," Yamada says. "The general manager eventually hired me as the director of children's and cultural programming in 1988."

She remained at KQED until 1991. In 1990, Yamada gave birth to what she calls, "our greatest production," the couple's daughter, **Heather Yamada-Hosley**.

The couple's next personal production was more of a challenge. In 1992, their son, **Drew**, was born weeks after Yamada returned from shooting segments of *Yan Can Cook* in Asia. It was a life-changing time for them, because Gayle suffered a stroke on her return and was hospitalized until her baby was born. He lived only four days.

"After he died, I realized how delicate life is," she says. "It was very difficult to go on after he died. But, I had my daughter, and she needed me. Because of her, I needed to stay alive. David was incredibly supportive, coming to the hospital every day."

Eventually, the couple would establish a scholarship in their son's name at Yamada's alma mater, the College of William and Mary, designed for students who desire to study and travel abroad but can't necessarily afford it. "Travel is one of the greatest ways to learn," she says, "about different cultures, different ways people live, different ideas. I took Heather to all seven continents by the time

she was 14, and I wanted other young people to have a similar opportunity and experience."

"It is important to acknowledge Drew," Yamada goes on to say. "He was a person like you and me, and he was alive, however short a time. He affected me a lot and allowed me to touch other people. Like you said, it is one way to keep his memory alive."

In 1994, Yamada and friend and former KPIX colleague, **Dianne Fukami**, decided to go into business with one together, forming Bridge Media, Inc. Their production and consultation company, now almost 20 years old, produces documentaries, informational series, feature-length segments, corporate videos and non-broadcast educational projects. They have a second company, Media Bridges, Inc., a non-profit that is dedicated to educational projects.

Education is at the forefront of Yamada's mind right now: she is earning a Ph.D. in World Cultures from the University of California, Merced. She is in her third year and is in the middle of writing her dissertation.

To prepare, Yamada has read more than 500 books, papers and articles in the last two years. A daunting task, but if anyone can do it, she can.

Yamada has served the journalistic community well. She is one of the early members of the Asian American Journalists Association, and has also served, at two times a decade apart, on the Board of Governors of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

She has received countless honors for her work, including an Edward R. Murrow Award from the Radio Television News Directors Association for best documentary writing for *Uncommon Courage*, which told the story of Japanese-American soldiers during World War II who "fought with language as their weapon."

In her free time—when she has free time—Yamada enjoys traveling, hiking, cooking and making jewelry.

To her husband and their daughter and to the television profession, she is a gem.