

## My Learning Coach Experience with College Bound

Andrea Robb, July 2008

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I have been the "Learning Coach" for Cindy Nim for 10 years. It may sound cliché, but I'd have to say that for many of the years, I've been learning from Cindy more than she has been learning from me.

Cindy was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade when I first met her at the North Beach Barnes and Noble. She was there reading with her current Learning Coach, Tony. He was moving so it was our "passing of the baton" meeting with her. Cindy was a shy, adorable, smart girl. She is of Chinese-Vietnamese descent and her parents are first generation immigrants who have four children. Cindy is the youngest. I remember Cindy studied me a bit, but then quickly warmed up to me. She offered me some of her "Flamin' Hot Cheetos" as an invitation to be friends. We laugh about that to this day.

Cindy has been an incredibly easy kid to mentor – so I was very lucky in this way. She has been getting straight As for most of the time I have known her. As I watched her breeze through school year-over-year, we decided to encourage her to apply for a *Schools Resource and Mentoring Team* (S.M.A.R.T) scholarship. This SF program gives middle school scholarships to private schools, if the child qualifies academically and family qualifies financially.

Cindy did qualify, though there were bumps in the road which she managed through. Her parents were unsure of the program – it was an unknown and they didn't speak English well enough to be in conversation with the program about it. So Cindy's older brother was involved every step of the way to make sure the program knew that the family would support this transition if Cindy qualified. Cindy also struggled with the standardized tests in the beginning, since English was her second language and so the tests can be tough to master, despite her inarguable smarts. Cindy was accepted into the program and went to Chinese American International School for middle school.

After mastering that learning curve and winning the hearts of the teachers at the school, they encouraged Cindy to apply to another scholarship program, *A Better Chance* (ABC), so she could continue with the private schooling at their International High School. Cindy thrived there. She is now fluent or conversant in four languages (Cantonese, Mandarin, French, and English). Her high school is one of the very few schools in the country offering the *International Baccalaureate* (IB) and she took the extremely challenging IB curriculum and tests in her senior year – all of which were well beyond my capability to help. In fact, she likes to remind me that I stopped "tutoring" her in about 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Her strengths are in math and languages. Those are not my strengths, she'll remind me.

Cindy's family has been incredibly dedicated to Cindy's well-being and education. They stick together as a tightly knit group. We once shared in their family's special Chinese New Year's dinner (her mother is revered in her extended family as the best cook). Her family had some tough times while I've known them, such as when they needed to find a new home when the North Beach Housing Development displaced their residents while they rebuilt the complex. They also weathered a rough patch when their mother and aunt were severely injured in a car accident. But as Cindy said when I asked if they needed help, "No we're okay. We're all doing our part as a family to take care of each other."

Cindy is wise beyond her years, but still has a sweetness and curious zest for life, which makes her spirit welcomed and admired by all who get to know her. She flew to Michigan for our wedding 5 years ago where she met many of our friends and family who still ask about her to this day.

I'm proud to say that Cindy just finished her first year at UC-Santa Barbara. She admits that her high school program made for an easy first year in college. Cindy makes frequent visits home, so she stops by for visits to play with our one-year-old. She was one of the first to baby-sit our son. I feel so lucky to have met Cindy, who has a permanent home in our family's heart.