

# CARMENWAHLIANG

## An Interview with Carmen

**What does diversity mean to you?** To me, supporting diversity is to embrace differences in identify, thought, perspective, and ability. These attributes contribute to a more enriched and comprehensive understanding of the challenges we encounter and how to solve them. Without diversity, we would not be able to see what else is possible.

**Why is diversity important?** Diversity is critical because it institutes the idea that we all bring something to the table. Our contributions to others and the community matters. We all have a valuable place in this world. Accepting these beliefs enables all of to be and perform at our best.

**Who are you?** I am an Associate Clinical Professor in the UCSF Department of Family and Community Medicine and the Associate Medical Director of the ZSFG Adult Urgent Care Center in the Mission neighborhood of San Francisco.

**Tell us about your family or upbringing?** I am a 2<sup>1/2</sup>-generation Chinese American from Metro-Detroit. My father was an immigrant who could only afford a middle school education. My mother was born and raised in Detroit during the riots. Since the age of four, I had worked in my family's restaurant business every week through high school.

Because of our ethnicity and physical appearance, we were not strangers to bullying and discrimination. My older sister and I would get into fights with her elementary school classmates for being different. Kids would taunt us with racial slurs. We lived in a community where conformity in appearance, religion, and behavior were expected and valued. I also had extended family members who would question my identity because I was not fluent in a Chinese language. They would use derogatory labels and regard me as someone who was losing her identity.

I learned to rise above this negativity and judgment. My mother would ask me, "Why do you care so much about what others say about you?" In other words, why do I place so much value in people who are so negative and do not know who I really am? My parents always accepted me for who I was and never made me feel that I was "not enough." To them, I was never part Chinese or part American: I was a whole person.

I came to love being different at a very early age. My parents gave me so much hope that I could achieve anything. Had it not been for them, I would not be the happy and successful person I am today.

**Are there other social identities that you have?** Asian American, Chinese, Toisan, female, spiritual, human

**How has this lead to opportunities or lead to barriers?** I know that being a minority will always create barriers to acceptance in the U.S. Unfortunately, gender discrimination continues to pervade my personal and professional life. People will always judge me, for better or for worse, by my appearance. Many have tried to convert me because I do not follow a certain religion. People have even thought less of me because I am Toisan and not Cantonese. Being different has always created adversity that others who have more mainstream social identities do not have to encounter. Although others may regard my social identities as barriers, I consider them as great opportunities. Through adversity, I have learned how to be strong, and I continue to be proud of who I am. Through adversity, I can see more clearly than others what is equitable and fight for what is right. Through adversity, I have still achieved success and happiness.

**What else should we know about you?** I have been a drummer since age ten. My mother thought I had asthma and decided I should pick up an instrument that did not involve me blowing into it. I participated in drum competitions throughout middle school and high school. In college, I managed to convince my roommate to set up my drum set in our small dormitory room. I was also in an Asian American performance arts troupe. We created a small band and performed on and off campus. After residency in Washington, I joined a taiko group and performed in and around Seattle. Today, I am proud to say that after many residential moves, my drum set has a permanent place in my living room.

**Tell us about your work!** Currently, some of my work has been focusing on performance coaching and workforce development. As a physician leader, it is essential that I support my staff and colleagues in doing their best work. Through the UCSF Department of Family and Community Medicine, I have had opportunities to engage in workforce development in the Urgent Care Center and share my knowledge and experience as a presentation speaker within the San Francisco Health Network and at national conferences.



**Carmen Wah Liang, DO, MPH**  
Associate Clinical Professor

## INSPIRATIONS

Family: Kido and Seiji



Colleague: Binh An P. Phan

Place: Chinese Historical Society of America – San Francisco, CA: Chinese American Exclusion/Inclusion exhibit (where I can visit my grandmother!)

Quote:

"You make your own happiness."

– A Friend