

**Name: Mai-Yan Katherine Kwan
Los Angeles, California
Graduated:1998**

I have fond memories of my time at QHS. I was involved with Student Council, participated in soccer, basketball, track and field and softball. I was no star athlete but loved the camaraderie of team sports. I remember Mr. Benning's slide shows exposing us to exotic places beyond Canada, math actually being fun thanks to Mrs. Joyce and the gym roof catching on fire.

After QHS, I moved to Los Angeles, California. At that point, I already knew I wanted to do something creative but with a technical aspect. I was interested in some of the product design programs offered in Montreal, but wasn't ready to move out on my own, so at my father's encouragement, I joined him in Los Angeles. Once in Los Angeles, I tried to enroll at the local high school assuming I would have to do another year of high school due to the difference in school systems between the US and Canada. To my surprise, I was told to go to college.

In fall of 1998, I started attending Pasadena City College. The culture shock of going from a 300 person school to a campus with 20,000 people was overwhelming! I studied there for a few years completing all of my core classes while working on a portfolio to apply for art school. I was eventually accepted into the Graphic Design Program of the Art Center College of Design and got a BFA in Fine Arts in 2004.

QHS definitely played a role in my path. It was a safe environment to try new things and navigate my temperamental teenage years. I remember a conversation with Mr. McLeod where he told me his girlfriend was a graphic designer creating CD covers. I didn't quite understand what it entailed but liked the sound of it. I later joined the yearbook team with Lisa Clark. I initially didn't have a strong interest in it, but I ended up enjoying the process of curating content, doing page layouts and putting a book together. I didn't realize it at the time, but that was my first introduction to graphic design.

I believe having a strong support network is really important for success. Starting out as a native French speaker with two working parents and eventually a single-mom household, I needed a lot of academic and emotional support. It was given without reserve from all the staff, teachers and friends' parents I have had the chance to encounter and for that, I'm extremely grateful. Without a doubt, the strong community, access to resources and opportunities at Holland and Quebec High school were instrumental in getting me to where I am now. I'd like to specifically mention two wonderful women, Anna Maria Romani and Patsy Henderson, to whom I offer a heartfelt thank you for providing a kind and positive presence during those formative years.

In 2008, I quit my design job and went on a bike tour from Los Angeles to Quebec city. The trip took about 4 months and was a turning point for me. I rediscovered my love of the outdoors which led to *Dirty Gourmet*, a company I founded with my two friends. *Dirty Gourmet* started out as a blog to document camping recipes and has since turned into a cookbook titled: *Dirty Gourmet, Food For Your Outdoor Adventures*. This company has grown and taken many shapes in parallel with my more steady design career.

Being self-employed for the past 7 years as a freelance environmental graphic designer and entrepreneur has been equally hard as it has been fun. I crave the challenge and variety. I don't think I can ever go back to a 9-5 job!

I am focused on continuing to promote *Dirty Gourmet's* mission of eating great food outdoors while paying the bills with my design work. My main goal is to maintain a balanced lifestyle between work and play.

For students heading out into the work world – don't be afraid to say yes and be proactive in steering your course. Participation in new experiences helps build exposure to potential interests and connections. Following graduation, I worked for an architectural firm, an advertising agency and a corporate in-house design team. Each was worlds apart from one another forcing me to adapt to different work settings, processes and team dynamics. After 2 years, I had the confidence and know-how of someone with a lot more work experience and a very clear path for what I was looking for professionally.

Dirty Gourmet, Food For Your Outdoor Adventures is available at Indigo Books and Amazon. www.dirtygourmet.com