

# *Instilling Goodness and Developing Virtues from the Past for a Strong Future*

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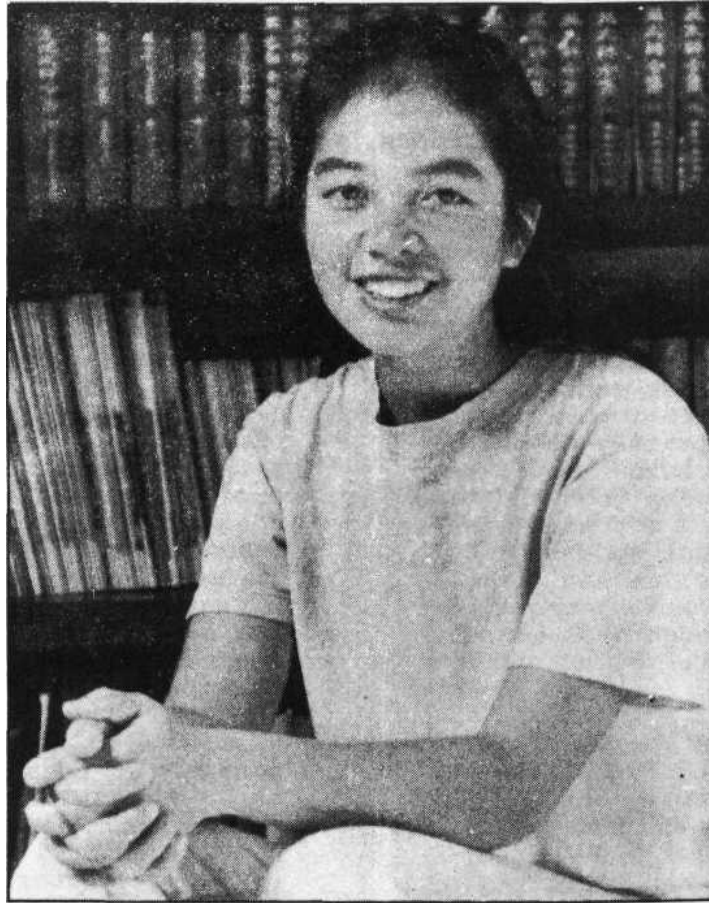
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## ***Developing Virtue grad enters Stanford***

*By Li BEI WEN  
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Li Bei Wen

*Shari Epstein, 18, relaxed at home recently and talked about her education and her excitement at entering Stanford University this month.*

Shari Epstein is 18 and already setting records.

In August, she was the first graduate of Developing Virtue Secondary School at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas who had completed all of her school years at the local, private, religious school.

"I'm happy about the education I've received and think many other children would like it too. I encourage them to try it," said the dark-haired, young woman.

Obviously, the school successfully educated its first alumni. She was accepted, not only at Stanford where she has chosen to further her studies, but also at every other university where she applied—Harvard University, and the University of California at Santa Cruz, San Diego, and Berkeley.

She liked Harvard, which is where her father, Dr. Ronald Epstein, received his undergraduate degree, but felt it was too far from home.

"Berkeley was intensely city and I'm not used to that. It was hard to choose. I visited each place and saw what I liked and the environment. I'm interested in classical Chinese, and that brought it down to Berkeley and Stanford. Stanford had more time to talk to me in the registrar's office and other places I visited," she said.

At the Buddhist school in Talmage, Shari had an opportunity to study subjects not available in public schools.

From the beginning of her first year, she has studied Chinese language and speaks it fluently. She studied Tai Chi which gave her the benefits of exercise, health, and concentration.

"It is so beautiful. We would do it outside in the morning and with the mist rising over the lawn it was incredibly beautiful," she recalled.

Shari found a course on meditation and memorization very helpful.

"It sharpens your memory and study skills and your concentration ability. We don't memorize books, but just poetry, and passages from different classics. It's very beneficial. You really have it when you memorize something, and the meaning comes through. It's a good way to investigate and think about something. Your memory will improve as you advance. It's another thing that needs practice, like Tai Chi," she said.

Shari also studied Chinese calligraphy, English, geography, history, social studies, art, and all the other required subjects in any high school.

Some science and math classes she took at Mendocino College because her high school was too small to offer these subjects to just two or three students.

"I had teachers from many countries and people coming from culturally diverse places—interesting people. It was exciting to have the constant knowledge of different ways of doing things," Shari said.

In addition, her education was enhanced and tempered by the Buddhist philosophy of striving to be a good person, beginning with being a good child in the family, through being a good citizen of the world."

We emphasize how to behave and act in different situations. In school, relating to classmates, teachers, friends, and everyone in general. We are encouraged to actively think and do these things to actually develop kindness.

"In concrete terms, what is that? Well, for example, to help your parents by realizing the work they do to raise children, to get along with brothers and sisters, be a good student and respect our teachers."

She said, on the other hand, students are also taught to think for themselves and to bring up ideas in the classroom, but to do so in a harmonious way.

"Honesty is really important in our school. And we are taught the importance of public service, our responsibility as citizens and the importance of making a contribution—to do something to help others, not just benefit ourselves," she said.

With the small school, each student gets lots of special attention, and children of all ages are together in a classroom.

"You learn to work together and help each other. The older students help younger children," she said.

She also liked the separation of the male and female students, with women teaching the girls and men teaching the boys, although there were exceptions to this rule when necessary.

"I liked it. Especially in high school, it makes for more relaxation and concentration," she said.

In classes, students might study people who have been a good model—people from all different cultures and religions.

"So, if you go to this school, you don't just learn about Buddhism. Not all the people who teach and live at the City of 10,000 Buddhas are Buddhist. We have Muslims, Christians, and people from every religion.

"We are taught other ideas. All cultures and religions have these basic values and that's what's important, not that one is The Thing," she stressed.

Shari said there are students at the school from Ukiah, Hong Kong, Palestine, Malaysia, and Canada, and once there was a student from Israel and one from Hungary.

The serious young woman is excited to get on with her education. She wants to become a teacher but isn't really sure what her major will be.

"I'm interested in classical ideas, but also biology and things I haven't even discovered yet. I want to try a bit of them all."

Studying most of her life at the Buddhist school, (she did spend about a year at River School before the Buddhist school was established), she believes, has not set her apart from others of her age in the surrounding community.

"I don't feel it has. I have many friends at Ukiah High School and Mendocino College. I've met a lot of wonderful people who are my Friends. I never felt it separated me.

"It's different, but I've found it's ok to be a little different. It's made me aware that every person has special qualities that make them different. You can learn from them all."

Shari wants to be an elementary or secondary teacher in public schools and hopes to incorporate some of her lessons on values with her students.

"Partly," she said, "because I know the benefits I've gotten, and also because I think children are really important for the future of the world. When they grow up they will be the leaders, the teachers, the lawyers, the business people, workers, and journalists."

She said she does not feel apprehensive about leaving the protective environment she has grown up in, and modestly remarked, "There are so many things I want to do, and so many things I will get to learn. The most exciting thing to me is the seemingly boundless opportunity I have to learn different things."

She has the full support of her parents. Dr. Epstein, who earned his Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley, has just been named chancellor of the Americas for the Dharma Realm Buddhist University, and her mother, a graduate of the Cheng Chi University in Taiwan, works for Mendocino County.

Shari has a four-year-old brother who has just enrolled in Instilling Goodness Elementary School, following in his sister's footsteps.