



Video Story Transcript

MY NAMES: GENDER EXPECTATIONS FOR A TAIWANESE

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/JqkbBpi-ptk>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi! I'm Ada Cheng. Ada Cheng. Let me start with my original name. I was born in Taipei, Taiwan and I was born Chen Shu-Ju. In Taiwanese culture and some of the Asian cultures, Cheng, we put our last name in the first place so Cheng is the family name. Shu-Ju, um, that's my given name. In Taiwanese culture, when parents give children their names, uh, it represents, uh, their expectations in terms of what they want and what they hope for their future. It can be about their life; it can be about their career. Shu-Ju. Shu, the character means like a lady. Ju means good luck.

So, I can just imagine my mother going to a fortuneteller and trying to find the right characters for me. Um, and, eh, she would probably talk to my father. "I think it would be great if we give our daughter, uh, this wonderful name and we hope that she will be gentle and... and... and quiet and polite and respectful. Like a lady with a lot of good luck.

So, now imagine my being a little girl, like a tomboy. And then my parents' expectation was that they wanted me to be respectful, polite, quiet and... and gentle like a lady and I didn't like my name when I was growing up. Um, here's the thing, this is what my mother's... as I was growing up, this is what my mother would say, "Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah! You got to wash dishes. You... you're a girl; you have to help out in the kitchen. Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah! Close your legs! You're a girl! Come on, you can't do that anymore. Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah! You can't beat up your brother. He's a boy. You're a girl! Ah, Shu-Ju, what's going on with you? You can't run around naked anymore. You're a girl! Ah, you can't play with boys. Please do not talk back!"

Let sink that, think, sink that, sinking for a while. I grew up like playing, running around, tomboy, climbing, liked to climb trees, climb things, fight with boys. And as I was growing up, I hated my name because how did you... could you convince me to love a name that I knew I was going to fail my parents' expectations. That there was no way for me to fake it, right! Often time you fake it until you make it! There's no way. For me to know I can fake it until I make it. And... and there's no way for me to... when I was a little girl, I thought there... there's no way for me to make it as a woman in this society.

And I rebelled; I refused to do anything required me as a girl. Um... which also very interesting is that I... my mother also gave me another nickname. Um, in Mandarin, it's called Zhi Da Bien. In Taiwanese, it's called Gay Sei. In... in English, it's called Chicken Poop! That's right! My mother called me Chicken Poop. Eh... and it was... so, um, I asked my mother, "Why would you call me such name?"

And she say, "Because you were so small; just like a chicken poop, right?" She thought it was very, very endearing to call me this. Um... ah, she didn't think there was anything wrong with it. But the thing when... as I am older and think back, would she call my brother such a name?

So, I remember when I was 8 years old and I was playing with, uh, neighborhood children. And I was the smallest one in the neighborhood but I was the one, the strongest one with the strongest opinions. I liked to order people around and I would say, "Line up! Do this and do that!" So, often time, after school the children would just stand there and play. So I remember that day, that close to dinnertime, and I was gathering people and say, "Hey, hey, hey! Please, uh, gather up, we're gonna play the game (whatever the game was). We're gonna play again!"

And as I was ordering people around and, uh, I was the smallest one, my mother suddenly appear at the door and then she said, "Zhi Da Bien, Zhi Da Bien! Shi wǎncān!" So, the English translation is "Chicken Poop, Chicken Poop, it's time for dinner!"

And I just froze! And I turn around and I look at my mother and I was exasperated. I was being authority figure, standing in front of a group calling the shot and then, I say, "Five minutes, give me five minutes!" Ah! In my back, I heard children giggling, right! And when I turn around, the kids just started to laugh at me. "Ah, Zhi Da Bien, Zhi Da Bien, right! Your name is Chicken Poop, Chicken Poop! And then I was... I just... I was so mad! I was so frustrated! And I... I just left. I ran away. I said, "You know, I'm not going to play with you guys!" and left.

And when I went home, I finished dinner and I didn't talk to my mother. And that was pretty much the day I kind of lost my status in the neighborhood. I mean, think about it, how many boys will want to play with a girl and to be ordered around by a girl whose name is Chicken Poop, right! Um, and I realize nobody wanted to play with me. Um, when my mother saw me this small or given me this small... um, and later on, uh, you know, my mother and I, ah, my family and I – we stopped talking with each other.

And, um, because I was trying to be my own person, um, wanted to search my own life, um... And it was actually October, 1976, I was in junior high school. We... everyone started to learn English and so one day when I'm home, we have this very small dictionary. And I thought if I started to learn English, I am going to have an English name so I can immerse myself in with... into the environment so I flipped through the dictionary. I found this name list and I looked through the names. In our textbooks, we have Mary, we have Susan, we have... have all these names. I thought I got to find a name that nobody has heard. So, I looked through it and I saw the name... I saw Ada, right! Ada is for the first place, the first name listed under the alphabet A. And I looked at it and I thought, "That's it, Ada! That's the name for me!"

Because at the age 12, the only thing I want to be was number one. So, I thought I wanted to pick the name Ada so I could be number one then and number one forever. So, I pick that name and I stick with it, uh, forever. And I started to introduce myself to everyone as Ada and that's the important part is that when I picked that name, I also wrote a different story for myself. Thank you.