



The changing face of 多伦多 (Toronto)



12 who make a DIFFERENCE

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Chan Hon Goh Entrepreneur has been the National Ballet's principal dancer since 1994

By **NATALIE PONA**, TORONTO SUN

The first thing that comes to Chan Hon Goh's mind when listing her accomplishments isn't what you'd expect from a principal dancer and entrepreneur.

"As Chan Hon Goh the woman, I'd say giving birth to my son is the moment I'm most proud of. It's such a miracle, giving birth to your child," Goh says, from Vancouver, where she's on maternity leave from her "professional base" of Toronto with her 3-month-old son, Avary.

But it's Goh's public deliveries she's famous for, such as her Juliet in productions of Romeo and Juliet.

"Every time that I'm on stage, the moments go by so fast," she says. "I feel so lucky, so satisfied, that when I go to work ... it doesn't feel like work I'm just lucky they call it work and I just call it something I love."

Raised by parents who had been dancers in China, she has been the National Ballet of Canada's principal dancer since 1994 -- the first Chinese principal dancer in that company's history.

She also dances for the Suzanne Farrell Ballet in Washington, and has been a guest in dance companies in Europe, Australia, North America and Asia.

But Goh didn't always have it this good.

Born in Beijing, she immigrated to Vancouver in the 1970s as an 8-year-old (she wouldn't reveal her current age).

'VERY ISOLATED'

She spoke no English and had a tough time making friends.



(Cylla Von Teidemann, National)

"I was very isolated because I couldn't communicate with anybody," Goh says, adding she was the only Chinese girl in her Grade 2 class. "With my black hair and my home-cooked lunches, it was hard to fit in."

Goh doesn't look back on those hard times regretfully.

"In the long run, it made me a much stronger, more determined person," she says. "It was a hard lesson to learn and accept but it really became my approach through the rest of my life."

Though her parents ran a ballet school in Vancouver, the Goh Ballet Academy, Goh didn't train seriously until she was 12.

Before then, her parents encouraged her to choose a different career, knowing the challenges a dancer faced, such as a short-lived career in an intensely competitive industry.

But Goh had her heart set on dancing.

"In dance, whenever the music played, I felt this sense of movement and I could express myself and it was liberating to dance and be happy," she says.

SHOE COMPANY

Goh has her hand -- or foot -- in other aspects of her industry too. She started a shoe company, Principal Shoes by Chan Hon Goh, 10 years ago. She runs the company with her husband, Chun Che, a former principal dancer in China who now teaches ballet in Toronto. They were married in 1997.

Among her other activities, Goh is the "Smile Ambassador" for Smile China, she hosted a 2004 fundraising telecast for the Yee Hong Centres for Geriatric Care, and she distributes scholarships to disadvantaged dance students through her shoe company.

"As a human being, (the moments I am most proud of) are all those moments I am able to touch another human being through volunteering," Goh says.

She says she hopes she's a role model for young Chinese dancers. "I try to be to the best of my ability because I didn't have anyone to look up to when I was young. I've had to prove myself and I hope through my actions I am able to inspire young Asian girls to follow their dreams."

Goh will move back to Toronto in June with her family.