



**Akemi Alden, far left, swings and shows off the two new teeth that are coming in. Her mother, May Masunaga, helps little sister Ayumi. Both girls were adopted in China by Masunaga and Scott Alden.**

Sacramento Bee/Renée C. Byer

# 6-year-old Akemi's autobiography is short and sweet, part of a state project

**By Will Evans**  
BEE STAFF WRITER

**H**er Chinese name is Xiu Jie Guo. It means bright and pure. Her Japanese name is Akemi. It means bright and beautiful. "My Mom and Dad chose Akemi because its meaning is close to my Chinese name's meaning. I was born in China on June 10, 1998. My Mom and Dad adopted me when I was 8 months old." And that is how her story begins. Akemi is chronicling her short life story in her first-grade class at Genevieve

Didion K-8 School in the Pocket area. It is part of a statewide campaign called "California Stories Uncovered," highlighting the state's diversity of experiences. Akemi's last name is Alden. "It's English," Akemi explains Friday afternoon. "I don't really know what it means, but it's not Japanese." Dad steps in: "You know a lot about your last name." "Oh yeah, John Alden the Pilgrim!" Her classmates are writing about a relative who came to California from

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First-grader Akemi Alden, left, flips through a magazine at her Pocket area home with father Scott Alden and sister Ayumi. The girls were adopted four years apart in China.

# Stories: Akemi giggles a lot

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somewhere else. Akemi is writing about herself.

Class members will display their stories, along with photos and illustrations, on April 27. The project is sponsored by the California Council for the Humanities, and other local events run through April.

Akemi has matured through the process, said her teacher, Aileen Nishio. Akemi interviewed her parents to understand her identity.

"Every time I write, I learn something new about when I was a baby and 4 years old," Akemi says. "I never knew my Chinese name."

All her parents know is that she was left in front of a police station in China at 1 day old. She went to an orphanage.

Akemi's mother, May Masunaga, is second-generation Japanese American. Her father, Scott Alden, has mostly Danish ancestry.

They couldn't have children and opted for adoption. Inspired by another family's example, they flew to China to get Akemi.

Right now, she is hyped on sugar: M&Ms and candy gum, mostly. She prances around, grabs the cat, throws the yarn, tiptoes in ballet shoes.

## IF YOU GO

"California Stories Uncovered - Family History Projects" is on display April 27, between 3 and 6 p.m., in the gymnasium of Genevieve Didion K-8 School, 6490 Harmon Drive, Sacramento. For more information, call (916) 433-5039.

For information about other "California Stories Uncovered" events in the region, go to [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org) or call (415) 391-1474.

poking in, she talks with a cute little lisp. She giggles a lot and squeals sometimes.

"I'm only shy on tests," she said.

"Did you know that I used to drink beer with my great grandpa? That's my lie."

Akemi is full of little lies.

She was in a movie once. "April Fools!"

"There's a spider on your head. April Fools!"

"I do karate lessons, too. No - fake!"

Akemi is not sure what she feels about being adopted.

"It's a hard question to answer for me," she said.

Her parents are very open. They took her to China at 4 years old to

Akemi was glad to get Ayumi, now 3.

"I've always wanted someone to play with and not to be lonely a lot. Most of the time when I was young I fought with my parents a lot. ...

"I fight with my parents a lot now," she said.

"April Fools!"

On the trip to China, Akemi realized she was adopted, she said.

"It reminded me of my birth mother not keeping me," Akemi said.

"I don't even remember her face," she said. "I always think about my birth mother, once in a while when my mom says 'China,' or 'mother.'"

She writes of it in her autobiography.

"Sometimes I feel a little sad because my birth mother couldn't keep me. Growing up in California is fun and good because it's like being on a journey. I learn new things and go to new places. I'm lucky because my Mom and Dad chose me."

And that is how her story ends.

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