



### **Launched Into a Life of Diversity**

Posted by Sharon Wong on May 16, 2011 at 09:09 AM EDT

In January, I had the privilege of being assigned from NASA Goddard Space Flight Center to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to work as the special assistant to the director of the newly created Office of Diversity & Inclusion. So how does someone who started off 26 years ago as a software engineer at Kennedy Space Center end up as a diversity and inclusion specialist?

Personally, diversity has defined me from Day 1. Born and raised in Jamaica, in an intensely Catholic family under Chinese cultural values, I immigrated to the United States to attend college in West Virginia, where I went from reggae music listener to avid country-and-western fan.

Professionally, it started with a phone call in 1988 to attend an agency-wide meeting at NASA Headquarters on the status of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). That meeting began a life-long journey for equality and equity. Soon after I attended a federal AAPI conference and learned that the model minority was a myth, and that equality and equity, unfortunately, were not part of everyone's workplace reality.

I returned to Kennedy and started our AAPI employee group, and then progressed to other civil rights advocacy groups. Eventually, it turned into my full-time job when I became Goddard's Diversity Officer, helping ensure that everyone is valued and respected for who they are and what they bring to the table. Diversity & Inclusion is rocket science – it is hard work and means being thoughtful, deliberate, and mindful. At Goddard, our motto for diversity and inclusion is "Making Space for Everyone." We've come a long way since we started our diversity-and-inclusion journey in 2000. Goddard recently ranked #2 out of 224 agency components in "Support for Diversity," and #7 overall in the "2010 Best Places to Work in The Federal Government."

At OPM, I'm bringing what I love to a broader audience to effect change. We assist agencies in recruiting, retaining and developing a diverse, high-performing federal workforce and one that reflects the public we serve. We also ensure equity and diversity in all aspects of federal government. This is the reason I do what I do – while I have a particular place in my heart for the AAPI community, my personal mission is to facilitate the creation of a diverse, inclusive and welcoming environment where we can be the best possible. I invite everyone to join in this journey!

*Sharon Wong is Special Assistant to the Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) (on detail) at OPM, and Diversity Officer at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.*