KAMILA CARTER AND TOD CARTER

1. GROWING UP MULTILINGUAL

Kamila Carter and her younger brother Tod Carter Jr. were born into a multilingual family of English, Spanish and American Sign Language. Both of their parents, with strong interests in languages themselves, are very supportive of Kamila and Tod Jr. to learn new languages.

Their father, Tod Carter Sr., has been interested in languages since his childhood. Being born deaf didn’t stop him studying languages. He learned and mastered American Sign Language at school; and as he grew up, he always requested different language books for his birthday present. Tod Sr.’s wife, Cecilia, was also born deaf. She was raised in a Spanish-speaking family and learned American Sign Language later on.

After Kamila and Tod Jr. were born, Tod Sr. communicated to them in American Sign Language while Cecilia spoke to them in Spanish. During preschool, the family spoke mostly English at home. The children’s paternal grandmother, Judy Carter, spoke to them in English and sometimes in American Sign Language. Kamila and Tod have also spent many summers with their maternal grandparents in Mexico where they only spoke Spanish.
2. THE BEGINNING OF A JOURNEY

When Kamila was in kindergarten, the family found out about the Confucius Classroom program at Riverview International Academy in Lakeside, California. Thanks to her parents interests and support in learning languages, Kamila went to elementary school at Riverview Elementary where classes were taught in both English and Mandarin Chinese. Kamila took Spanish as well. She was very talented in languages and did an excellent job in this program.

On March 22, 2015, Kamila participated in the Southern California Council of Chinese School Competition at the age of seven. Despite being a little nervous in the beginning, she spoke and competed in Chinese bravely in front of the judges without her parents or other adults present. Kamila not only showed excellent Chinese language skills, but also the ability to quickly adapt to new rules and cope with stage fright.

Tod Jr., two years younger than Kamila, has also
been a member of the Mandarin program at Riverview Elementary School since he entered kindergarten there in 2013. At Riverview his Chinese language experiences have been similar to his sister’s. In addition, Tod Jr. plays Chinese Yo-Yo. He learned how to play it at the school’s Yo-Yo Club and has performed Chinese Yo-Yo with club members during many Confucius Institute events, including the Chinese New Year Festival at Balboa Park and SeaWorld this February. Tod is very happy to have the opportunity to perform Chinese Yo-Yo.

Besides Chinese Yo-Yo, Tod studied meditation, abacus, Chinese chess, Hula and Lion Dance, along with leadership and many other skills in the “Three
Treasures Program.” He believes that learning different skills, especially languages, will strengthen his ability to solve different problems and help him be better communicate with people and understand them.

3. IN VOLVEMENT WITH THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

Kamila and Tod have both participated in the South-West Region Chinese Bridge Competitions hosted by the Confucius Institute at San Diego State University (CISDSU). In third grade, Kamila took part in the Chinese Bridge Competition for the first time. In fifth grade, she won the first place in the elementary school group through her outstanding Chinese language proficiency and spectacular Chinese art demonstration. The competition consisted of three parts: a speech in Chinese, a quiz on Chinese History and Culture, and a talent performance. In her speech, Kamila talked about her wonderful relationship with a Chinese exchange student she meet and made friends with at school. She then answered all quiz questions correctly. For the talent show, she performed A THANKFUL HEART, a Chinese song, in Chinese Sign Language. This experience gave Kamila an opportunity to compare American Sign Language with Chinese Sign Language. After the competition, she couldn’t wait to teach her friends and classmates how to
sing this song in Chinese Sign Language.
At the 2018 Chinese Bridge Competition this March, Kamila won the Best Speech Award in the 6th-8th grade group and Tod won the Best Talent Award in the 4th-5th grade group. More significantly, they have learned from this competition the importance of patience and perseverance, which are vital for their personal growth in the future.

Over the past years, Kamila and Tod have participated in all the Six Arts performances organized by the Confucius Institute. They have performed in various venues in San Diego, including Asian Cultural Festival, Moon Festival at Balboa Park, and many Chinese New Year Celebrations. They both served as emcees for the first time at the Six Arts Performance at SeaWorld, which proved to be a remarkable cultural and educational experience for the audience. Kamila and Tod impressed the audience by emceeing seamlessly in English, Chinese and American Sign Language.

Kamila and Tod’s participation in numerous Chinese activities organized by their school and the Confucius Institute has inspired them to visit China this summer for the first time in order to learn more about the Chinese people and the Chinese culture. As for the family, more stories will be there to tell in the future. ■

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Tod Carter performing Chinese Yo Yo at the Chinese New Year celebration in SeaWorld. February, 2018