

Laura Williams

Applestein-Sweren Book Collecting Prize

Goucher College Library

Collecting the Adoption Story, One Page at a Time

“Because we are linked by blood, and blood is memory without language.”

- Joyce Carol Oates, *I Lock My Door upon Myself*

Only over the past recent years, have I began compiling this personal, intimate collection of books that are extra special to me in hopes that my collection will benefit and relate to others whose lives have been touched by adoption. The preceding quote is taken from one of the books in the collection. I think it really reflects the importance of appreciating one’s past in the light of international adoption. I am a Chinese adoptee, adopted when I was seven months old to Caucasian parents and my vision for the collection includes books for the adoptive family seeking guidance in a time of uncertainty, support in times of stress, and validity in times of doubt.

I decided to create this collection over the 2013 winter holidays. I had just graduated high school, and was attending community college due to a failed scholarship program. I was still unsure, at that time, what I wanted to dedicate my time and energy towards. This deeply concerned me because I felt like I had a bunch of passion but nowhere to direct it. My American Grandma and I spent these winter days together, talking a lot about my future. This time I had alone with my Grandma really helped solidify what was important to me, who was important to me, and where I could see myself in the coming years. After spending time with her, I felt like the clouds of uncertainty were breaking and I was finally able to feel the beam of energy from the sun’s rays. I want to connect people. I want to help form *families*.

With this new wind of aspiration, I sent out and applied to Goucher College. Throughout this transition period, I began digging into the wealth of adoption books in our basement of our house in the predominately white suburbs of New Jersey. I wanted to start gaining a broader perspective by looking at adoption from additional angles. I live the adoption story, now I wanted to study the adoption story. This is when the particular books in my collection started to come together from pieces of my past as I looked to the future. Since then, I have grown to love and appreciate everything about being part of not only a family, but a transracial family.

The books in the collection have really been assembled from the pre-existing assortment of adoption related readings my parents own. However, I made my decisions of books to include based on the timelessness, practicality, and clarity in writing my adoption story. I regard my selection of books to be a timeless snapshot of international adoption as it encompasses the past, present, and future of the adoption identity. All the books in my collection have pushed me towards a stronger level of self-appreciation and love for those who I call family. I intend for my collection to provide references of reliable literature for future adoptive families to look to when navigating their own adoption stories. Each page in the collection contributes color and texture to the broader image of the concept of adoption.

This is an intimate and personal collection of books which has become increasingly important in my life and continues to shape my interests and work. After just one semester at Goucher, I have developed another wind of aspiration. I see myself working with LGBTQ individuals and couples interested in international adoption. With this in mind, I have high hopes for what will be new additions to my collection in the coming years pertaining to this newfound interest within the topic of adoption. I intend for this evolving collection to be a steadfast resource for all styles of adoptive families for generations to come, including myself.

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### Annotated Bibliography

(Twenty representative items)

Bower, Jeanette Wiedemeier. *Self Awareness Tool: Are You Ready to Parent a Child of Another Race, Culture or Ethnicity?* St. Paul, MN: North American Council on Adoptable Children, 1998. Print. I think this is the best guide book out there for determining adoption readiness. It is a simple soft cover, binder ready, dialogue of determining self values, temperament, and goals. It is important in my collection because of the guidance it provides to the prospective adoptive parent. This book looks at adoption from the agency perspective.

Brodzinsky, David, Marshall D. Schechter, and Robin Marantz Henig. *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self*. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Print. I read this book during my time at community college. I am a big fan of David Brodzinsky's work. This is my go-to book for understanding the emotional baggage of adoption. This book focuses on the adoptee in regards to what it feels to be adopted at different stages of life. One of the individuals in this book named Kate made me feel less alone. She noted how she always felt like she "wasn't good enough" which caused her uneasiness in forming relationships with other people in her adolescent years. Reading about her, brought to my attention topics that I had never thought about before. I have this book to thank for comforting me

and allowing me to continue towards self-acceptance and appreciation for adoption. This book looks at adoption from the researcher perspective.

Cao, Lan, and Himilce Novas. *Everything You Need to Know about Asian American History*. New York: Plume, 1996. Print. I include this book in my collection because it is an easy to read, concise guide to the history of my birth country. I picked up this book between the times of middle school and high school, after a peer with Asian parents made me feel like not a “real” Asian by quizzing me to prove that she knew more than me about China. By reading this book, I felt more at ease with my general knowledge of Asia which in turn, brought me to a higher level of self-acceptance. The learning of Chinese culture is a key piece to my adoption story. I participated in Chinese language class from an early age and have done about ten years of Chinese folk dance. Being surrounded by people who look like me definitely benefitted my subconscious. However, my favorite information I learned from this book is about how Chinatown formed in New York City. I have a special relationship with Chinatown, NY because that is where I met a strong support group of Asian-Americans from the Chinatown Youth Initiatives organization. This book looks at transracial individuals from a historical perspective.

Cox, Susan Soon-Keum. *Voices from Another Place: A Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries*. St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book, 1999. Print. This is another important book in my collection because it shares intimate individual stories of adopted individuals from Korea. I like how this book shares stories about Korean adoptees who grow up content on who they are, whereas others continue to question their personal identities for years to come. This goes to show how perspectives

are relative to the individual. Each adoption story is different regardless of similar features. This book looks at adoption from the adoptees perspective.

Dorow, Sara. *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to Their Children*. St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book, 1999. Print. Eldridge, Sherrie. *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*. New York, NY: Dell Pub., 1999. Print. Ae Ran Won is a home for unwed mothers in Seoul, Korea. Most mothers chose adoption for their children, and each was asked to write a letter to her child. This is a perspective often unheard, but crucial to the adoption story. The letter that touched me the most included the quote, “Finally, I will not ask you to forgive me, the one who had to send you away like this. I just wish that someday, when you get to be the age of a mother, you can understand me. From far away I will pray for your happiness, my beautiful princess” (Dorow 20). Forgiveness is not an easy thing to come by for an adoptee. The way this birth mother is aware of this shocked me. There can be so much emotion in this act of putting your child up for adoption. This is an essential book in my collection for these telling letters from birth mothers.

Evans, Karin. *The Lost Daughters of China: Abandoned Girls, Their Journey to America and the Search for a Missing Past*. New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000. Print. I picked this book up a couple of years ago, only to put it right back down. I was not ready to read about abandonment in China, especially as it pertains to my adoption. However, I added it to my collection because of this personal relevance. The concept that sticks with me the most from this book is the red string theory. This theory is based on a Chinese proverb that reads, “An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstances. The thread may stretch or tangle but will never break.”

Evans' use of this theory in the context of adoption helped me come to terms with why I ended up with my adoptive parents. This book looks at adoption from the analytical adoptive mother perspective.

Gulden, Holly Van, and Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb. *Real Parents, Real Children: Parenting the Adopted Child*. New York: Crossroad, 1993. Print. Even though the name is clique, this book is a valuable reference for adoptive parents during times of uncertainty. For years, my parents referred to this book when I would ask questions that have unknown answers. When I read it, I learned more about what situations and experiences shape who I am today. This makes me appreciate my past and childhood in greater ways. After interacting with this book, I see my adoptive parents in a newfound light or admiration. This book looks at adoption from the analytical perspective.

James, John W., Russell Friedman, and Leslie Landon. Matthews. *When Children Grieve: For Adults to Help Children Deal with Death, Divorce, Pet Loss, Moving, and Other Losses*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Print. Written in empathetic prose, this book relates to the grief an adopted child feels living with his or her adoptive family. Loss is experienced by everyone, and adopted kids usually experience this from an early age. I learned from Brodzinsky's writings, that grieving the loss of a birth family is a continual process an adoptee goes through at each stage of cognitive development. As new perceptions of self arise during adolescence, new adoption questions and grieving periods are experienced. This book holds its place in my collection for its timeless relevance and importance to all types of grief.

Jelloun, Tahar Ben. *Racism Explained to My Daughter*. New York: New, 1999. Print. Concepts from this book sticks in my memory. As I read it, I felt like my sense of race shifted. I

cried at parts because I remember how right my adoptive parents taught me by the teachings of this book. I cried because of how such hate could exist between humans. And I cried because this book offers a profound gesture towards a harmonized image of humanity. I enjoyed reading the reflections from other writers which are added to the book. These reflections bring Jelloun's concepts to relevant racial situations. The reader gets to experience these racial situations with those reflections. I add this book to my collection because the concept of racism will always be a factor in transracial adoption.

Johnson, Kay Ann. *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China*. St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book, 2004. Print. This book is essential to my collection because it illustrates Chinese culture in regards to childcare and the perception of gender. Another book personal to me, I learned a lot about the effects of culture on its people. I had not realized the power of cultural influence in decision making. The contents of this book is relevant to the perceptions of gender specifically in China, but also in general. In other words, this book shifted my perceptions of gender roles in any culture. This book looks at adoption from the analytical and historical perspective.

Johnston, Patricia Irwin. *Perspectives on a Grafted Tree: Thoughts for Those Touched by Adoption*. Fort Wayne, IN: Perspectives, 1983. Print. This is a touching compilation of the birth mother stories in the form of poetry. The writings were written by people from around the world whose lives have been touched by adoption. By including the many angles adoption is perceived, *Perspectives on a Grafted Tree* is a versatile read for anyone interested. This book looks at adoption from all three perspectives in the adoption

triangle (birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptee) and is important to conceptualizing adoption in its entirety.

Nam, Vickie. *Yell-oh Girls! Emerging Voices Explore Culture, Identity, and Growing up Asian American*. New York: Quill, 2001. Print. I appreciate literature that can make you feel at home in a strange place just by reading. Simply the title drew my attention to the wordplay used by Asian-Americans. For example, Asian-Americans noting themselves as “banana boys” or “Twinkies” in good humor. These silly names go without question, but there is a deeper meaning that sits at the core of transnational individuals in more ways than one. This book helped me come to term with this dual-identity of having American values with an Asian face. It was comforting to read about what all these other Asian-American girls were faced with and how they reacted. The sense of belonging sought by many of the individuals in this book takes on different forms. At the end of the day, it is ok to be this new breed of person, and it is ok to tread the turbulent waters of being caught between two cultures. Who knows what one may find? I want this book as a part of my collection because it takes a look at the relationship between the inside and outside of a multinational individual.

Register, Cheri. *Beyond Good Intentions: A Mother Reflects on Raising Internationally Adopted Children*. St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book, 2005. Print. Reflection is a constant factor for all parents. With hindsight being 20/20, the sharing of individual experiences adds to the growing picture of international adoption for current and future families. This book really helped me develop a stronger empathy towards my adoptive mother. I now see how an adoptive mother can be just as scared, if not more so, than the adopted child.

It earns its place in my collection for having broadened my empathy towards adoptive mothers. This book looks at adoption from the birth mother perspective.

Rogers, Fred, and Jim Ill. Judkis. *Let's Talk about It: Adoption*. New York, NY: Putnam & Grosset Group, 1994. Print. I adore this children's book because it provides pictures of real children with their families (not just drawings). Fred Rogers has a way of simplifying words and sentences for a clear understanding of his messages. I really like the attention given to how important you are to your family. Roger likens the story of how you came into your family to that of a love story, "Your family needed and wanted a child to love and care for, and you needed a family to love and care for you" (Rogers 7). No matter the differences in building a family, there is always love at the center of it all. I include this to my collection because it is my go-to book when explaining first introducing the concept of adoption to younger children.

Silverstein, Shel. *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1981. Print. I instantly fell in love with this book as soon as I found it one day during high school study hall. I had to share it with all of my friends. It is a metaphorical story about a Missing Piece who is in search for where it can fit into a circle, in order for them to roll together. After some failed attempts to find where it fits, the Missing Piece meets the Big O who shows the Missing Piece how to roll by itself. Eventually the Missing Piece wears down its edges and develops an O like shape and is able to roll on its own. The Missing Piece had the capacity to roll by itself all along. This process of self-awareness as an adoptee echoes this concept. I include it in my collection because it illustrates that we all have the capacity to stand on our own two feet, even if we feel like we cannot sometimes.

Tessler, Richard C., Gail Gamache, and Liming Liu. *West Meets East: Americans Adopt Chinese Children*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999. Print. The saying goes “when east meets west”, referencing the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures influencing each other. But in the case of American adoptions, the west (Chinese child) really does meet the east (coming to America). This is another good book for understanding the variance in adoptive families. Some strategies work for some families, while some do not. I include this book in my collection because it explains both the international adoption system in part, and what effects it has on the culture of American families. This book looks at adoption from the researcher perspective.

Trenka, Jane Jeong. *The Language of Blood: A Memoir*. St. Paul, MN: Borealis, 2003. Print. This book brought the search for identity into the real-world for me. In my opinion, Trenka, rips open the adoption piñata and exposes a gaping void in an adoptee’s personal identity only to then accept the mysterious and unknown. That is the adoptee experience. In Trenka’s instance, she was able to meet her birth mother, Umma, and Korean siblings. While in Korea, she experiences the startling comparison of what is and what could have been in her adoption story. I enjoyed reading this memoir because of the intimate feel and revealing the intensity and somewhat overwhelming event of connecting with birth parents. This book is part of my collection because it also adds to the exploration of being lost between two cultures. This book looks at adoption from the adoptee perspective.

Waybill, Marjorie Ann. *Chinese Eyes*. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1974. Print. This is a succinct and real children’s book tenderly relevant to teasing and bullying amongst adolescent children. This book attests to the humble commonality of all humans beyond the adolescent hurtfulness of teasing. Books with similar stories of overcoming teasing, exist for other

types of races. This book belongs in my collection because teasing and bullying is almost essential to childhood.

Williams, Laura. *All About Me: for Ms. Fella's Class*. Verona, NJ: Forest Avenue School, 2002.

Hardcover Print. I wrote this book in first grade as a school assignment. I rediscovered it during my family's recent residence move. I was just reading it for fun, until I got to the very last page. It read "I wish I could fly so I could go to China and see my orphanage and where I was born." I broke my own heart. It is essential to my collection because it represents how adoption has been and always will be a part of my life, and it reminds me of who I have become.



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Annotated Wish List

(Eleven other book titles)

Alperson, Myra. *Dim Sum, Bagels, and Grits: A Sourcebook for Multicultural Families*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. Print. I am drawn to the title of this book. I am interested in adding this to my collection because of the focus on guidance in multicultural families.

Brodzinsky, Anne Braff, and Rosy Salaman. *Can I Tell You about Adoption? : A Guide for Friends, Family and Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2013. Print. Anne Brodzinsky is married to one of my favorite adoption researches, David Brodzinsky. She is, in her own respect, a highly acclaimed psychotherapist and also works with adopted children. I am interested in this recent book of hers to add to my collection because it will reveal what topics in adoption are being addressed for the middle school ages. This is at a third grade through seventh grade reading level about the experiences and challenges that follow the adoption process.

Brodzinsky, David, and Adam Pertman. *Adoption by Lesbians and Gay Men: A New Dimension in Family Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print. I am really interested in this topic of adoption for LGBT individuals and couples. I have aspirations after my attendance at Goucher to pursue adoption work with LGBTQ individuals interested in international

adoption. I have been longing to read this book as it pertains to my current and future interests.

Doherty, Berlie. *The Snake-stone*. New York: Orchard, 1996. Print. This book caught my eye as I was surfing the internet for middle school level readings about adoption. From the brief description I read, it is about an adopted boy who has the talent to become an Olympic diver, and wonders about his birth family. He tricks his adoptive parents into sending him to his birth area. I do not have any middle school level readings to my collection, but I would like to eventually scale the shelves of book stores for more literature for teenagers.

Marcus, Eric. *Making Gay History: The Half-century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*. New York: Perennial, 2002. Print. I am not an expert in the history of same-sex marriage in America. I perceive this book to be useful in providing practical knowledge of the history of same-sex legislature. It is important to understand the history behind LGBTQ individuals in order to work for them.

McCutcheon, John. *Happy Adoption Day!* Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. Print. In my opinion, I feel that is important to leave that decision of whether or not to celebrate it up to the adoptee. I chose not to annually celebrate my adoption day with my family until recently. This book is written for elementary school children, and believe it is important to add to my collection of adoption literature.

Mucciaroni, Gary. *Same Sex, Different Politics: Success and Failure in the Struggles over Gay Rights*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2008. Print. I am interested in the failures in the struggles over gay rights. I hear about the successes in the news now and then, but the failures are not as popular to hear about. This book is a valuable addition to my collection because it pertains to my further interest and current curiosity.

Quiroz, Pamela Anne. *Adoption in a Color-blind Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. Print. I do not want to judge a book by its cover, but the contents of this one seems straight forward. The subject of color-blindness is especially relevant in 2015 as it has been for many years before. The addition of this book to my collection will add depth to the perceptions of adoption with attention to the color-blind society we own and operate.

Richardson, Justin, and Peter Parnell. *And Tango Makes Three*. New York: Simon & Schuster for Young Readers, 2005. Print. This is a popular children's book telling the true story of penguin behavior at the Central Park Zoo. This book teaches children about adoption and same-sex parents. As the acceptance of same-sex marriage grows in states across the United States, this book is a valuable addition to my collection for educating younger children about same-sex adoptive parents.

Schoettle, Marilyn. *S.A.F.E. at School: Support for Adoptive Families by Educators*. Silver Spring, MD: Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), 2003. Print. I found this book when researching the C.A.S.E (Center for Adoption Support and Education) organization. There is a C.A.S.E office about 40 miles from Goucher College. This is an especially interesting book to me because when I was first thinking about what career path I wanted to take, I thought about the implementation of adoption discussions to the public school health class curriculum. The addition of this book to my collection will be important for potential work with teachers and parents in addressing adoption related issues in the education system.

Sixsmith, Martin. *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee: A Mother, Her Son and a Fifty-year Search*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2009. Print. I recently saw the 2013 film adaption of this book starring Judi Dench and Steve Coogan. I instantly fell in love with the story and the

person, Philomena Lee. It makes me happy to see real-life adoption stories take the spotlight in popular media and literature. This would be a marvelous addition to my collection since it adds not only birthmother perspective, but also attests to the possibilities of uncontrollable outcomes birth parents, especially mothers, sometimes face.