



Korean Adoptee Creative Writing anthology

Seeds From A Silent Tree:

An Anthology by Korean Adoptees

Edited by Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin

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Review by Sundraya Kase (Spring 1998 issue)

Seeds From a Silent Tree is the first collection of poetry, fiction and personal narrative ever written exclusively by Korean adoptees. In the introduction, editor Tonya Bishoff writes, "Seeds from a Silent Tree emerged from absence searching for presence." The presence of this anthology has been long awaited and speaks to our entire community.

I received my copy of the anthology months ago. I cracked open the first pages and read list of contents; "Roots Remembered and Imagined," "Transplantations," "Reunions" and "Seeds of Resolution." The notion that our lives as adoptees had been neatly compartmentalized filled me with fear and anxiety. I quickly shut the book, set it on my night stand and avoided reading it for months.

When friends asked if I had read it, I smiled, made brief references to the pieces written by mutual friends and moved right along to other topics of conversation. I was relieved when someone actually asked if I would loan them my copy. When asked do the review of this anthology I took it as a sign that the time had come to face up to my anxieties and read the book. I am glad I did.

The voices heard in this anthology resound in the hearts of all adoptees. We are able to hear our own voices in the recounted tales of other adoptees across the globe. The first section "Roots Remembered and Imagined" speaks to our distant past in Korea. It grounds us in the trueness that we each had a history in the soil of Korea. Kimberly Brown writes in First Mother, "existing, but non existent, real, but imaginary, the memory of one who is now old."

The second section "Transplantation" recounts our many "coming to America" tales. These pieces are filled with bittersweet tales of growing up in many locations such as suburbia, rural farms, inner cities, the deep South and middle America. The authors share excerpts of their lives that illuminate the ongoing struggle to balance, define and come to terms with who we are. Ellwyn Kaufman's piece, Bulgogi is poignant and humorous as he intertwines his life story with his personal experience 'creating' his version of a Korean staple.

The third section "Reunions" speaks to the issue of finding birth parents, or other family and discovering a familial connection to Korea. These are the authentic versions of those

happy feel-good snippets we've all seen on T.V. and in the papers — “Adoptee Travels Back to Homeland to Find Real Family.” One need not read between the lines to understand that the life-changing experience of finding family doesn't always have a completely happy ending, that it actually opens up many more questions about who we really are and where we really belong. In Wayne Berry's *Completing My Puzzle*, he honestly addresses this: “I am sad that I cannot speak Korean to my family and express my true feelings to them without the use of a translator, I am also sad that I will never truly understand my family and vice-versa.”

The last section of the anthology “Seeds of Resolution” is a legacy of pain. The raw emotionalism of many of the pieces cuts deeply into the psyche of Korean adoptees and is haunting. The most effective pieces go to the heart of the beast. In *Obstacles and Challenges*, Su Niles writes, “I walk in this skin. And in this skin, I am any American. A single image has been etched inside of me...I realize how much energy it takes to open the mind, however willing the spirit. I slam up against the impenetrable wall.”

If you are a Korean adoptee, read this book to know where we, as an adoptee community, stand together. If you are a parent, Korean American, friend, educator, partner, relative or in any way connected to the Korean adoptee community, read this book. This is a history lesson for us to refer to and travel forward from.