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# meeting place

A MAGAZINE BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY ... CONFERENCE 2016 EDITION



*Still from the short film ARRIVAL. Used with permission.*

JUNE 2016  
KAANet.org



# Widening the CIRCLE



## Consider HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is a safe, effective, non-toxic, all natural system of healing based on the Law of Similars. It was developed in the 1700's by German physician Samuel Hahnemann. Homeopathic remedies stimulate the body's own innate ability to heal itself. Homeopathy offers individualized care that can be used for acute and chronic conditions. This includes, but is not limited to, first aid, ear infections, allergies, anxiety, hormonal issues, ADD/ADHD, depression, colds, cough, flu, eczema, infectious diseases, and emotional trauma.

As an adoptee and adoptive mother I have found that homeopathy is one of the only healing modalities that truly understands that the adoption can lead to trauma with lifelong physical, emotional, and mental consequences; regardless of how young a child is separated from his/her birthmother. My daughter's severe separation anxiety dramatically improved with homeopathy. Once I witnessed this deep healing, homeopathy became my calling.

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- [www.healthascend.com/Homeopathy/adoption.html](http://www.healthascend.com/Homeopathy/adoption.html)
- [www.findahomeopath.org.uk](http://www.findahomeopath.org.uk)

by Sara Smith, CCH, (cand)  
New Leaf Homeopathy, LLC  
<https://newleafnh.com/>

## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

### *My advice to first-time conference participants is:*

Do not be afraid to ask questions. *(Oh Myo Kim)*

Take breaks and make friends *(Carolyn Hathaway)*

Take it slow. Do only what you feel comfortable doing. *(Rosita Gonzalez)*

Don't be shy. Everyone else has been where you are now. Jump in and get the most out of the weekend.  
*(Whitney Fritz)*

Listen to your heart. *(Jen Hizinger)*

Remember that this is not just a conference, but a community. It can take some time to get to know people and break into what might feel like already established relationships, but know that you are seen, you are welcomed, and you are important! If we haven't met yet, please introduce yourself!  
*(Aerial Ashlee)*

Listen and take in all you can from people who have walked the path. *(Lee Fritz)*

It is okay to feel overwhelmed and seek the appropriate space here to unwind - whether it is in the "debriefing" sessions, alone in your hotel room, or with others outside of the sessions.  
*(Erica Gehringer)*

# ... Welcome to KAAN 2016 ...



## Wellness & Self-Care Tips for Conference Participants

Conferences can often be a daunting experience for many attendees, especially first-timers who aren't entirely sure what to expect. While it can be a positive experience to learn and engage, it is crucial to remember that self-care is equally important. Take a deep breath and consider these small suggestions to keep you balanced throughout the weekend:

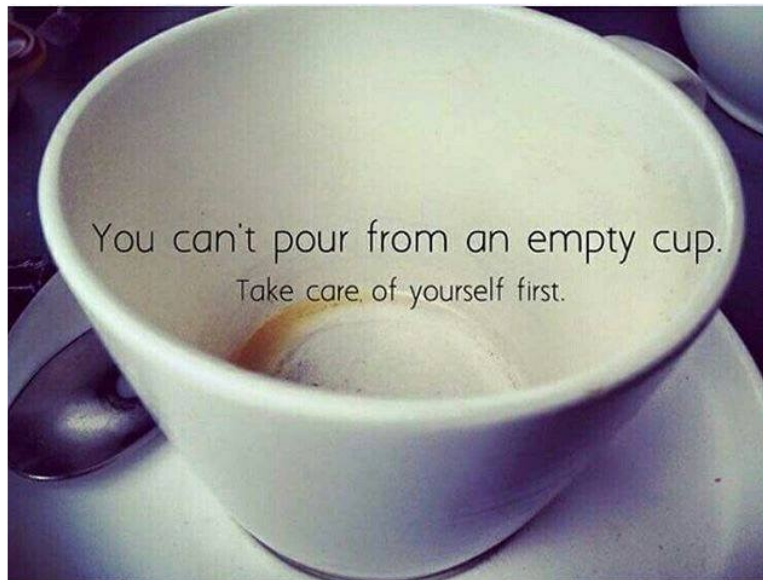
- **Eat well and exercise.** Taking care of your body can impact the way you think and feel throughout the day. Eat healthy snacks throughout the day. Join the casual Saturday morning jog with Stephen (6:15 AM in the hotel lobby).
- **Prioritize self-care.** Make sure to cover the basics - eat, sleep, etc. New this year, there will be a quiet room where participants can journal, reflect, or just take a break.
- **Meditate.** Meditation can be helpful in processing the conference experience. Join us on Sunday morning for an intentional space for prayer and renewal.
- **Meet someone new.** Year after year, KAAN is known for bringing people together. We come to learn, listen, share and connect.

Try to step out of your comfort zone and be open to others.

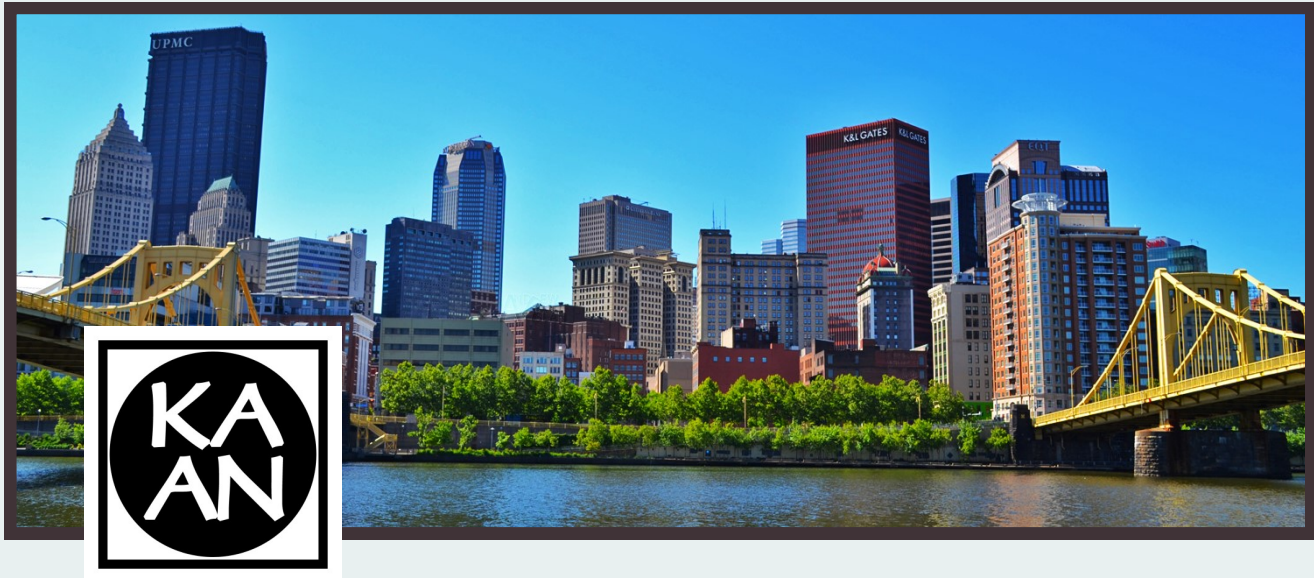
- **Keep a journal.** Channeling your thoughts, feelings and reactions can be a valuable outlet. Here are a couple ideas: Write twice a day and include how you're feeling in that moment and why, what you've learned and what questions linger.

- **Embrace your individual experience.** It can be a profound experience to meet and connect with other adoptees and families formed by adoption. Allow for whatever feelings and reactions

come up for you. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel while at KAAN. We're here to listen. Feel free to approach any of the conference volunteers with questions or feelings.







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Stacy Schroeder

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/ SECRETARY**  
Kimberly McKee

**TREASURER**  
Michael Stanley

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Eric Hathaway

**WELLNESS COORDINATORS**  
Katie Naftzger  
Stephen Johnson

**EXHIBITOR/VENDOR GREETER**  
Michael Stanley

**MISSION**

To improve the lives of Korean-born adoptees by bringing together the community for dialogue, education, and support.

**VISION**

- ◆ To provide annual conferences that renew and connect individuals and organizational leaders, especially Korean-born adoptees and also including other Koreans and Korean-Americans as well as family members through birth, adoption, marriage, or parenthood. We also welcome members of other international or interethnic adoptive communities.
- ◆ To offer an ongoing source of community information and conversation through our website, e-newsletter, blog, and social media options;
- ◆ To serve the community with a spirit of collaboration and respect.

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### IMPORTANT

Refer to the one-page conference schedule insert (called “session matrix” for short) for the most up-to-date schedule and for locations for each session and event. This insert contains details not available at press time.



## ADOPTEE VOICES

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This is one of those years when our speakers have really lived into our conference theme. Take a look at the sessions (and the articles!) in this magazine and you will see what I mean. We at KAAN are serious about **widening the circle** of conversation around adoption and that is EXACTLY what will happen at #KAAN2016.

Read on to hear about what it is like to be in reunion with your Korean family ... or to be jealous of those who are. To learn what it is like to return as a KAD to Korea to live. To use your artistic gifts to express your unique perspective. Get ideas from others engaged in activism, advocacy, and allyship. Be inspired by people who took risks and grew as a result. But, most of all, learn what it is to be accepted. We all yearn for that and seek it in a multitude of ways.

At KAAN, we want to hear your voice. Adoptees are at the center of what we do but we value everyone. If you love someone who is an adoptee (whether that person is your spouse or partner, your parent, your son or daughter, your relative, or your friend), you are an important part of this organization. You will learn so much from the adoptees who speak here. You can help make a difference in their lives and, in doing so, in your own life as well.

We are so glad you have chosen to be a part of this conference and community. I hope you experience all three parts of our mission this weekend ... that you engage in dialogue, learn something new, and find meaningful support. Let us know how it goes!



Last year I wrote to you about why #BlackLivesMatter is significant to the lives of adoptees and their families. The impact of institutionalized racism to communities of color directly affects our members of the transracial, transnational adoption constellation. This is what prompts me to implore you to consider the long-term effects of the 2016 Presidential election and local elections occurring this November. When xenophobia and white supremacy have become normalized and inserted into mainstream political rhetoric, we cannot afford to consider how people of color including adoptees will be impacted. Asian Americans have first hand experience with the rise of xenophobia in the U.S. from Japanese internment to the murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit, MI. These events cannot be seen as isolated. When we see internment used by one candidate to justify anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia, silence is not an option. To believe that these events do not affect transracial, international adoptees and adoptive families overlooks how adoptees of color experience racism and xenophobia (e.g. assumptions that Asians are not Americans).



One of the most unique aspects of the annual KAAN conference is its ability to generate and facilitate deep, meaningful conversations around issues such as race, ethnicity, and belonging. These intentional dialogues provide the tools for us to engage in conversations about the election as well as other current events. Outcomes such as these are one of the highlights I discovered as part of the study, "Examining the Past, Considering the Future: The Impact of KAAN (Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network) in the Lives of Adult Adoptees and Adoptive Families." More information about the preliminary study findings can be found on page 17. If you would like to participate in the oral history collection for the study, I will be available to document your historical memories of KAAN throughout the conference.

– Kimberly McKee, Assistant Director & Secretary

# staff greetings



I recently read an article about a 13-year-old adoptee who committed suicide. She was described as a straight-A student with perfect attendance, an excellent volleyball player who had an infectious smile. The article goes on to describe her feelings of feeling alienated because of her Asian heritage and wanting to be more like her white parents. One look at this young lady and the first question that comes to mind is “Why?”

I think many of us who attend KAAN understand the feelings that this young lady felt and wanted in some way to “fit in” more. I can’t help but think that, if she had one more layer of support, would she be with us today?

Our mission at KAAN is to “improve the lives of Korean-born adoptees by connecting the community and providing opportunities for dialogue, education and SUPPORT.” Now more than ever we need to support each other. Hopefully this year you’ll have the opportunity to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones, and build relationships that will last a lifetime. I know on some of my darkest days I leaned on friends from KAAN and I’m so grateful for the support they offered.

Thank you for attending the #KAAN2016 conference. Pittsburgh isn’t the easiest place to get to and in the summer there are hundreds of other things you could do. This conference wouldn’t be possible without the commitment from everyone who attends. My hope is that, for the next 48 hours, each of you live in the moment, laugh until you cry, and love who you are and who you are with.

– Michael Stanley, Treasurer





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- Providing support to our children and the entire family

Connect-A-Kid congratulates our partners at KAAAN for another successful conference!

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KOREAN CONSULATE GENERAL  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

June 24, 2016

Dear Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network members:

On behalf of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea, I am delighted and honored to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network on the occasion of the 18th Annual National KAAN Conference 2016 in Pittsburgh, PA.

Korean-born adoptees and their families are one of the key components that make up the overseas Korean community. It is important to make sure that they feel connected to their heritage and culture. To this end, I find encouraging that the conference reflects this.

Korean Americans, including Korean-born adoptees, play indelible role in bridging Korea and the United States. Vibrant people-to-people exchanges and cultural understanding cement this alliance based on the shared values of free democracy and market economy. Many like-minded organizations, such as KAAN, further solidify and strengthen this bond.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank KAAN for their dedication and continued good work. I hope you will have a constructive conference through providing a platform for dialogue and education, and building a broader support network.

I wish you abundant happiness, health and success in all your endeavors. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Young-Hee Chun'.

Young-Hee Chun  
Consul  
Consulate General of  
The Republic of Korea in New York





# Time for “Arrival”

*Korean Adoptee Alex Myung Talks About His New Animated Film*

*Alex Myung, 28, is a freelance fashion designer who lives in New York City. He was adopted from South Korea at the age of four months, and grew up in Albany, New York. He is the creator of “Arrival,” a 2D, hand-drawn animated film that is about 22 minutes long. “Arrival” will be shown at the KAAN Conference on Friday, June 24, in Pittsburgh.*

*Myung spoke recently with Mark Hagland, a fellow Korean adoptee who is a journalist, about his experiences around the making of “Arrival.” Below is the text of that interview.*

**MARK HAGLAND:** *Congratulations on your achievement!*

**ALEX MYUNG:** Thank you!

**MH:** *How long did it take you to complete “Arrival?”*

**AM:** Well, you could say that it required about three years’ work, but that was spread out over five or six years, to be honest.

**MH:** *What’s it about?*

**AM:** It’s about a boy who lives with his mother. He grows up and decides to move away. So he and his mother send Polaroids to each other to let each other know how they’re doing. And it’s about his struggle to come out as gay to his mother. And his struggle to come out comes out in his romantic relationship. There’s no dialogue. There’s some text. On the Polaroids, some things are written down. But that’s all the text that’s really necessary.

**MH:** *Tell me about the soundtrack ...*

**AM:** We worked two composers—their group is called Upright T-Rex. Their names are Ross Wariner and Cody Uhler. They were formerly Nashville-based. They’re people whom my producer had met at a party. It was all very happenstance, really: she met one of them and said, ‘Hey, we’re making a film, you should check it out!’ At the time, I was getting on a plane to go on vacation to Germany with my father. I had assumed that we would wait until the film was completed to add the sound. But I started listening to their samples, and we ended up beginning to work throughout the entire production process. And a lot of what they wrote influenced how I worked—the scenes, the colors, etc. We even added certain scenes because the music was so good. So they ended up writing 13 original tracks for the film. They worked with us for the last two years of the three-year period.

**MH:** *Has your film been shown anywhere yet?*



**AM:** It's actually going to be debuting at the Seattle International Film Festival, on May 29.

**MH:** *And you'll be there?*

**AM:** Unfortunately, I won't be there. They kind of let us know a little bit too late. And we just found out that we were accepted into another independent film festival taking place soon.

**MH:** *What motivated you to make this film?*

**AM:** Honestly, I really liked working on my student thesis in college, and when I was done with that project, I realized how much I enjoyed it. It was called *Juxtaposed*, and it had to do with adoption. I realized that that might be the last moment I could work on something completely my own. And I wasn't really doing anything that summer, and decided to try something else. And it ballooned into a really intricate story line, and I realized that this was not something I could do within one year. Originally, the story line was about a guy living with a cat in a light-house. Eventually, it blossomed into his being a boy in love with another boy, and that there was a mother character. And over time, I shaped it, and my producer had a lot of input into it. It was pretty much motivated by the fact that I like to tell stories. And I'm better at telling stories that come out of my personal experience. The things that are familiar to me work better for me creatively.

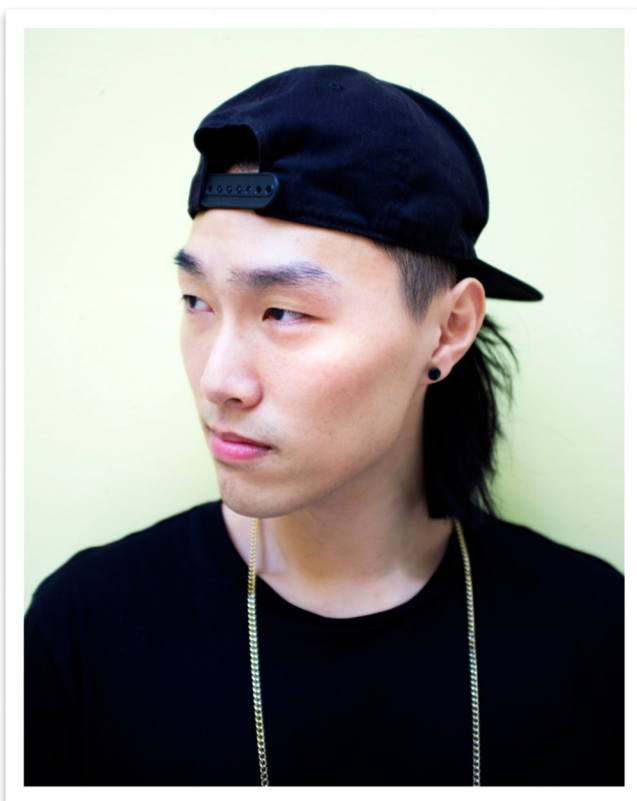
**MH:** *What would you like people to take away from the experience of viewing this film?*

**AM:** It's about a gay character, but I never wanted it to be a "gay film." It's sort of based on a couple of past relationships I've had. And it's more about people who are indifferent and choose not to make choices. There's this saying that life is about the journey. But there are people who—when it comes to the point where they have to make a real, hard decision, they sort of run away from it. And they don't take a moment to decide to move beyond the particular moment they're in. The main character isn't sure he wants to come out to his mother, and instead of really facing that issue, he chooses to do nothing about it, and it has a negative effect on his relationship with his boyfriend, and he doesn't talk to his mother for a while. He chooses not to deal with it. So what I

really want people to take away from the film is to take about what kinds of hard decisions people have to make in their lives, and whom it's affecting beyond themselves. And that there are always people there to support you, regardless of the choices you have in front of you.

**MH:** *Let's talk about the intersectionality in your identity. Like me, you are both a transracial Korean adoptee, and a gay man. How might those identities, those journeys, have influenced your thinking in the development of this film?*

**AM:** Because there are so many aspects I've had to figure out, like being gay, being adopted, because I had to do it earlier on, and because it's not just one thing I'm figuring out, it's given me a better sense not only of who I am as a person, but—there's more than one piece of me. In fact, I'm multiple things, and I can use those to my advantage. One thing doesn't define me. A lot of people have tunnel vision: they figure, oh, I'm this gender, or race, or sexual orientation, and let that one identity define them. So as someone who is, I guess I would say, a double minority, it affects how I think about things. I see



myself in both characters, but the main character is other people I've met—he's not me.

And we're different in the sense that I really am



aware of the kind of person I am, but the main character really doesn't know what kind of person he is, which is why he's so scared. In my case, when I was younger, I always found myself a couple of steps ahead of other people. They were figuring things out. And because we were in a position where we had to figure things out, I felt I had gotten there. So in the film, this was the kind of situation where one person in the relationship knows what he wants and other doesn't.

**MH:** *This is also adding to the literature of adult transracial adoptees. Would you frame this as being a part of that literature, too?*

**AM:** I think it could be. What's been interesting is, people who've seen the film, even just straight male friends who have had different lifestyles than me, they've said they were really able to connect with the main character. This one person whom I've known for years who's very unemotional and a real "dude," he came up to me and said, I really related to this person's position, and I connected to this in terms of my relationship with my mother. And that was great. Because this character just happens to be gay. I never wanted that to be the focus of the film. And the fact that that straight male friend connected with it, was amazing. And as adoptees, we start off with a lot of questions about who are parents are and what our relationships with our parents are.

And some people who are adopted are very afraid to talk about serious things with their parents—whether being gay or wanting to do birth search or being bullied in school—and there's whole idea that

adoptees who don't really get a taste of what it means to be Korean—you could substitute him being gay for him being adopted and not wanting to think about being a different race. So it's about communication, and his being afraid to talk to his mother.

**MH:** *Would you like to do another film?*

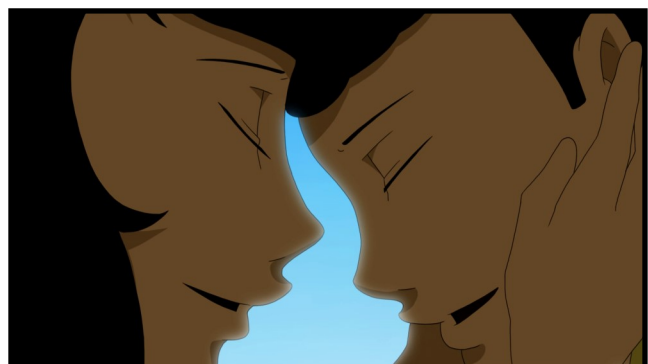
**AM:** Yes, I would! But ohmygosh, I had to take a year off work to finish this. I did a kick-starter in 2013, and raised money, and kind of kept working on the film but also working part-time at my day job, and then after about one-and-a-half years, I said, OK, I need to solely work on this or it'll never get done. And it's one of those things where one day, you'll say, this is great, I'm living the dream, I'm an artist! And then the next day, I felt like it was the stupidest thing I'd ever be done, like, I'll be broke, I'll never finish this! And I had this list of things I wanted to do when the film was done, to remind me of those things and keep going. It was like Gandalf standing on the path, saying, you shall not pass! And people had donated money and helped to support this project—so there was a sense of relief.

**MH:** *It'll be great to have this screened at the #KAAN2016 Conference.*

**AM:** Yes, it'll be great to have people who weren't a part of the film, or close friends who were in some way involved, see it. It'll be nice to see people who might not even know me, and see their reaction. And even if it's negative, that doesn't matter to me. I just want people to see it.

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*Learn more about Alex Myung on page 46.*







# A R R I V A L

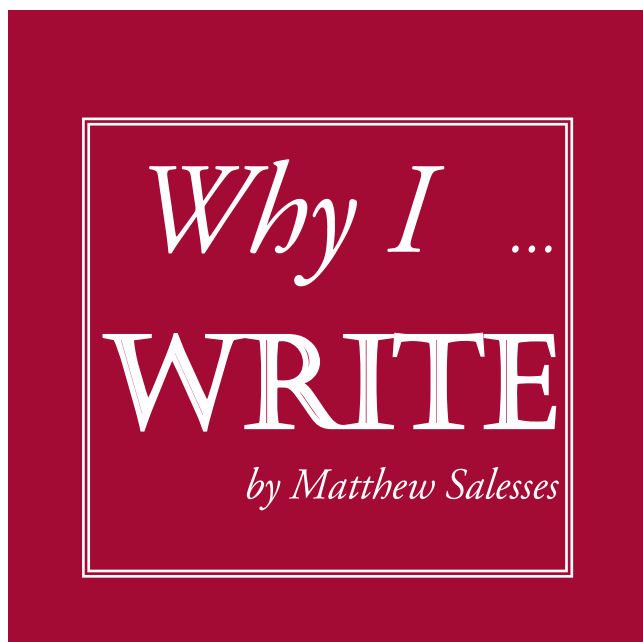
A SHORT FILM BY ALEX MYUNG

WRITTEN / DIRECTED BY: ALEX MYUNG    PRODUCER: AMY BENAROYA  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: JOHN COMPTON, JOHN TRUEX, ERIC SHERMAN  
ORIGINAL SCORE BY: UPRIGHT T-REX

2016

[facebook.com/arrivalshortfilm](https://www.facebook.com/arrivalshortfilm)





First appeared in *Stymie Magazine*

In Korea, on your first birthday, you predict your future profession by choosing from a number of different symbols: a stethoscope, a paintbrush, a bow and arrow, a pouch of gold coins, a set of scrolls, etc. What you pick up is what you will do with your life.

When my daughter turned one, my wife placed the stethoscope closest and spread the other objects out around the table. We were dressed formally, my wife and baby in hanboks (traditional Korean clothing) and I in the suit I married in. My family had just eaten a meal we had planned for weeks, mixing ceremonial Korean food with Western food for my parents. My wife had rented decorations, these symbols, the drapery to create the display at which our daughter posed, from a Korean housewife outside the city, who had bought everything for her own child and then had such demand from potential borrowers that she had started a business. The baby didn't like the feeling of the stiff silk of the hanbok and would only wear it for a short time—we had tested her limit the day before—so we had to move quickly. My mother snapped photos, my brother videotaped, and my daughter reached over the stethoscope for the scrolls (which meant she would be something like a Jill-of-all-trades).

"No, no," my wife said. "We have to do it again."

We got everything in place a second time. The baby squirmed and looked displeased. Finally, she chose the gold, and we all clapped.

The next day, we repeated this ceremony for a group of friends. We repositioned the stethoscope with more strategy. But the same thing happened. The baby ignored what was in front of her and grabbed the scrolls. On the do-over, she took the stethoscope. We breathed a sigh of relief.

\*\*\*

I tell this story here, in an essay about why I write, not to reinforce the old myth that writing, like priesthood, chooses us. I tell it because the reason I write is something like stubbornness. At a certain point in my life, I chose the pen, and whenever I get the chance to do it over, I choose the pen again. If you keep doing something, I believe (in a self-fulfilling prophecy kind of way), you can become someone who does that thing.

\*\*\*

As a child, I thought the difficult part of growing up was simply finding something you loved enough to do your entire life. Then someone would pay you to do it. Now I recognize the wisdom in starting from a young age on a practical career path, spending an education on skills people will actually pay for. Maybe this recognition is part of becoming a parent. Maybe this is what people mean by growing up? So why don't I give up writing if I wouldn't wish it on my daughter? Why do I invest our futures in an impossible "profession"?

I wonder if it is fear, or determination, or simple mulishness. I am afraid that it is too late to go back and choose again, but I know it is not too late. I am afraid of failing at what I want. I am afraid of doing something I hate for the rest of my life. But more than that, I am afraid of being defined by some outside force.

I spent my childhood defined by other people. I was the Asian kid. I was the adopted kid. I was the

kid who was good at math. I was the kid who x, y, z. I felt as if there were an invisible person standing next to me who always introduced me, or judged me, like a color commentator on TV. When people looked at me, or spoke to me, when they thought they were getting to know me, they were only getting to know the descriptions this invisible person gave them. Of course, the invisible person was theirs, not mine, was less about me than about other people, but I didn't know that then. I believed that how I was seen was my own problem. That a part of me was responsible, and I needed to get rid of that part.

I think the moment I really thought I could do this—write—was the moment I started to define myself. The moment I took control of how to represent my vulnerabilities. My first story with an adopted narrator, who, though even more screwed up than I was, was there on the page because I let myself be there on the page. It wasn't that I was writing "me", but that for once I wasn't trying so hard to avoid writing me, trying to write like the Dead White Males in the canon.

Why do I write? I write to express who I am. I write about my self-definitions—father, husband, adoptee. I write because this is what I chose and I

refuse to give it up. I write because writing is a time when I know what I want, and who I want to be.

I understand my wife's desire for our daughter to be a doctor, to live a more secure life than ours. Do you have to have deep-seeded problems to write? I wonder how much my feeling of having been voiceless, of not having control over who I was, made me a writer.

Recently, I was talking to a friend about an essay she wrote, in part, about how (white) Americans get to or think they get to define Asia and Asians. One of the quotes she mentioned was from a review of Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*, something about how Johnson makes the "paper mache" of North Korea "into a real place." We talked about how strange a statement that is, since North Korea is, of course, real and *The Orphan Master's Son* is fiction. A few days later, I came across a quote from 1954, in *Newsweek*, in which the (white) writer says that what James Michener does is "make Asia real." The same basic idea 59 years older, before the Civil Rights Movement, before the Vietnam War, and still. It takes a white writer to make yellow people and countries real (not even getting to a critique of the work).

I want that idea to change—I need it to change—for me and for my daughter. I stubbornly hold onto the belief that we can change it. Why do I write? I write to share my particular truth, what the truth is like for me. I write because I believe in this profession, and in words, and in people who write and read carefully. I write because I believe that writing can change us. I write so my daughter won't have to feel defined by the outside world, so she'll be able to define herself and no one will try to make her stop.

---

*Matthew Salesses is one of the talented adoptees featured in KAAAN's 2016 Friday evening showcase and the author of *The Hundred Year Flood*. A full bio is available on page 45.*



# Get Involved with **KAAN**

This is KAAN's 18th year of serving and connecting the community. We have grown and changed in some ways but still pursue the same goal ... to improve the lives of adoptees and their families through dialogue, education, and support. This year, we begin a **five-year strategic plan** to guide us to 2020. Listen at the conference luncheon for more details.

These pages list some great opportunities to participate in KAAN. In addition to those posted elsewhere, you can:

- \* Apply for the Advisory Council (*form available on our website*);
- \* Share information about KAAN with your friends and family and invite them to attend;
- \* Donate to support our work and mission (*gifts are tax-deductible!*);
- \* Pass on ideas for conference speakers and topics to [info@KAANet.org](mailto:info@KAANet.org).
- \* Complete your conference evaluation at [survey-monkey.com/s/KAAN2016eval](http://survey-monkey.com/s/KAAN2016eval) by July 15.

## CALL FOR SESSION PROPOSALS

for

### KAAN 2017

Pittsburgh, PA

June 23-25, 2017

**\*\* Submit Aug 15 – Nov 1 \*\***

Details at [www.KAANet.org](http://www.KAANet.org)

Some of our best sessions have grown out of conversations at previous conferences. Got a topic you feel should be addressed? Jot down your thoughts and submit a proposal for KAAN 2017. Our theme and other proposal details will be posted on our website by mid-August.



#### **SCENES FROM #KAAN2015 IN ST. LOUIS**

*Above:* Katie Naftzger and Joy Lieberthal discuss how to assess adoption competency in psychotherapy and mental health services.

*Right:* Performer Marissa Lichwick-Glesne and her spouse.



*Above (l-r):* Presenters Jannie Kruse, Allen Majors, and Jenn Tavenner enjoy some downtime in the beautiful hotel lounge area.





## Preliminary Study Findings

From February - November 2015, KAAN partnered with Kimberly McKee on the study, "Examining the Past, Considering the Future: The Impact of KAAN (Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network) in the Lives of Adult Adoptees and Adoptive Families." **Forty-eight adoptive parents of Korean adoptees and seventy-nine adult Korean adoptees participated in the study's survey components.** These two constituencies were asked to complete two different surveys designed to capture how KAAN and its annual conference best serves these populations. The findings are currently undergoing analysis and this year's attendees can see preliminary results in the poster near registration.

Respondents—adoptive parent and adoptee—routinely noted that the conference is an event where everyone understands the complexities and nuances around the adoptive family. For example, an adult adoptee participant noted: *"KAAN is the one place where I feel 100% understood and accepted. It is the only place I have ever been where people understand what I feel regarding being adopted and feel similarly to me. It gives me a feeling of belonging that I treasure."* Similarly, an adoptive parent attendee wrote: *"It is a great mix of both adoptees and adoptive parents. As an adoptive parent, you are presented with opportunities to learn things that can help you be a better parent. It also provides a great resource for your adopted children to build relationships with those who can understand their experiences."*

Discussing the youth program, adoptive parents note:

- *"I think it is a great opportunity for my kids to make connections with other adoptees their age and also with young adult adoptee volunteers that they can look to as mentors."*
- *"My children have made friends with their mentors that they have had through the youth program. They have made strong memories of being at the hotel, attending their events and more."*

Complementing the survey component of the study are oral histories collected from members of the adoption constellation and adoption stakeholders involved with the KAAN conference ranging from attendees to speakers and performers. Following data analysis, McKee will share her findings with the KAAN Advisory Council to help the organization look ahead to its continued growth in the twenty-first century.

Kimberly McKee



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## THE BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER: HOW MY KOREAN MOTHER GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO TRANSITION

*by Andy Marra*  
Credit: [Huffington Post](#)

Growing up, I remember making a pact with myself. As an adopted child I promised to find my family in Korea, but how exactly that would occur remained a mystery to me. I luckily had the unconditional support of my American family, even if they were stumped by my vague plan.

I later came out as a trans woman in 2003. I was also fortunate enough to receive an outpouring of love, acceptance and support from family and friends.

But there was always one barrier to my life of intersecting identities that I struggled to overcome. I could never find the will to move forward with my transition — taking hormones or surgery — despite the opportunity to do so. And my hesitation was largely due to my unknown family living far away in Korea.

Like me, more than 200,000 Korean babies and children have been sent overseas. But less than 3 percent of us are able to find our families. The odds were clearly not in my favor. But what if I did find my family after all these years? And how would they handle meeting a young woman instead of a baby boy who should have grown into manhood? I

was left with few ideas to reconcile my concerns.

In 2010 I had the opportunity to return to Korea for the first time. I was thrilled, nervous and reminded of my childhood pact. My time spent in Korea was life-changing, but the prospects of finding my family were less than promising. I visited my adoption agency seeking information. I was instead greeted with prickly resistance.

I had been warned of this institutional reluctance in advance. But I was still angry at their lack of understanding and support. So I took a defiant but calculated risk: I secretly copied down information from my file when the agency representative left the room to retrieve a business card.

It was my last day in Korea, and I was still reeling over the newly acquired information. After finishing breakfast with two friends, I abruptly asked them to go on an adventure with me.

“I want to look for my family today,” I told my friends sitting at the table. “Will you come with me?”

My friends quickly agreed. Before we left, I made the decision not to wear anything that would

out me, just in case my search proved to be of some success. I wasn't happy, but I didn't know anything about my family. I wanted to have the chance to get to know them first before I felt safe and comfortable enough to come out as trans. But I needed time to navigate the labyrinth of cultural and language barriers.

So I wore jeans and a T-shirt instead of a dress. I put away my jewelry. I pulled back my long hair into a ponytail and didn't wear any makeup. I looked at myself in the mirror and found someone else staring back.

We took a short subway ride to Seoul's suburbs and looked for a local police station. I politely asked for help, but the officer behind the desk refused, offering a lengthy bureaucratic response. "A search process takes at least 10 days or longer," the officer dryly explained. "Fill out this form and we will contact you if we find anything."

The respectful banter went on for about 30 minutes. Then I lost it.

"Help me!" I shouted at the officer, who jumped back in surprise. My voice cracked, and I began to cry. "I am an adoptee," I explained through my tears. "I need to find my parents. I have waited all my life for this moment. I'm supposed to leave tomorrow, but I can't go without knowing my family is fine. Please help me!"

Something in the police station changed after my emotional breakdown. The officer consulted a national database. She called other police stations in the country. Officers were dispatched to knock on doors. And to our surprise, my mother had been located less than an hour away from the station.

"She wants to meet you," the officer reported. "She is already on the way with your older sister. They should be here in an hour."

My friends and I waited in front of the station. Soon two women emerged from a car and began to walk in our direction. I stood in front of two women with faces that mirrored my own. With an awkward bow, I introduced myself to my Korean mother for the very first time.

"Hello, Mother," I said in broken Korean. "It is nice to meet you. My Korean is not very good. I am very sorry."

I could feel years of emotions rushing to the surface. I also felt ashamed that my first words sounded more memorized than heartfelt. I bowed my head and began to uncontrollably sob.

But my mother looked past my language skills. She released a guttural wail that I had never heard before and rushed to hold me in her arms. "You've come home! My baby is home!"

All I could do was weep in my mother's warm embrace.

That night I extended my stay in Korea for two more weeks. My family and friends back home were ecstatic with the news. Stay in Korea, they encouraged. Enjoy the time with this part of your family that you finally found.

In the flurry of activity, my friends and I stored my luggage containing all my dresses, skirts, jewelry, makeup and heels at the hotel. I wasn't ready to come out to my Korean family. I couldn't mentally or emotionally process anything beyond the fact that I was sitting next to my mother, who wouldn't let go of my hand. I first needed time to soak all of it in.

My mother cooked a big meal on my first day staying with my newly found family. She timidly placed a bowl of seaweed soup in front of me. Eaten on birthdays, the soup is consumed by pregnant women and represents the first food passed on from mother to infant.

"I know it's not your birthday," she gently explained, "but this is your first meal that I have made for you, and it felt right." Tears slid down my cheeks over the symbolism held in the bowl of soup.

I was quickly introduced to several of my family members, including my grandfather, who decided to present me with a Korean name. After a few days at his favorite fishing spot, my grandfather named me Hyun-gi, roughly translating to "bright ground." He selected the name in honor of finding my way back home and finding my place in the world.

The time spent with my Korean mother allowed me to experience her uncanny intuition. She quickly figured out what I liked to eat. She knew when I would wake up or when I needed to stretch my legs and go for a walk. She could even somehow anticipate the emotions spinning around my head. She was just like my perceptive mom back in upstate New York.

But one day my mother's instinct took me by surprise. She sat me down on the couch. "Hyun-gi," she said calmly through my friend, who volunteered to translate for my family. "I have a question: What is worrying you? You seem worried about something. You can tell Mommy."

I wasn't exactly sure of what my mother meant, and I shrugged it off. But she gently persisted. "There is something deep in your heart that you haven't told me."

My mind briefly flashed to my gender identity, which remained a secret. But how could she know? Most of my belongings were still stored at the hotel, and I had nothing on me that would out me as a trans



person. I pushed away my initial alarm.

"There are plenty of things you don't know about me yet," I replied smoothly. "But we will learn more about each other as time progresses on."

"May I offer a hint at what I am talking about?" my mother carefully suggested. "Please don't be offended by my hint. But I don't think you will be."

I nodded with tense curiosity and waited.

"I think it has to do with how pretty you look."

A shiver went down my back as the words left my mother's mouth. I asked my friend if she had translated correctly. She quickly nodded. We were both stunned.

"What should I do?" I asked my friend as dread began to course through my veins. "She seems to know something. How is that even possible?"

I turned back to my mother, who was waiting for someone to speak in Korean. "Mother," I began but immediately trailed off. I could feel my insides churning and looked away.

My mother held on to my hands. "It is OK," she said. "What is on your heart?"

Silence filled the room. "I can't tell you," I finally replied. "I'm afraid of what will happen. I don't want to lose you when we have just met."

"I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" my friend nervously asked. "What do you want me to translate for you?"

Time seemed to stop. I sucked in a deep breath and shook my head. "No. I need to do this on my own terms. I need to say this in my own words if I'm going to tell her who I am."

I turned to face my mother, who was still waiting patiently. I looked down at her lap, where she held on to my clammy hands.

"Mother," I slowly repeated in Korean. "I am not a boy. I am a girl. I am transgender." My face reddened, and tears blurred my vision. I braced myself for her rejection and the end to a relationship that had only begun.

Silence again filled the room. I searched my mother's eyes for any signs of shock, disgust or sadness. But a serene expression lined her face as she sat with ease on the couch. I started to worry that my words had been lost in translation. Then my mother began to speak.

"Mommy knew," she said calmly through my friend, who looked just as dumbfounded as I was by her response. "I was waiting for you to tell me."

"What? How?"

"Birth dream," my mother replied. In Korea some pregnant women still believe that dreams offer a hint about the gender of their unborn child. "I had dreams for each of your siblings, but I had no dream for you. Your gender was always a mystery to me."

I wanted to reply but didn't know where to begin. My mother instead continued to speak for both of us. "Hyun-gi," she said, stroking my head. "You are beautiful and precious. I thought I gave birth to a son, but it is OK. I have a daughter instead."

She then asked if I wanted my grandfather to rename me something more feminine. She insisted that I feel comfortable and at ease. No, I said to her in Korean. I wanted to keep my name for its meaning. I couldn't help but feel a mixture of shock, disbelief and a spark of hope.

To this day I am astounded by my mother's supernatural intuition despite the language and cultural barriers that still exist between us. I felt a great sense of relief when she helped me come out.

My mother started to show her acceptance through simple acts. She would brush my long hair after I took a shower. She gave me a facial to soften my skin. She asked me if I had any boys chasing after me. We finally went to retrieve my luggage containing the rest of my belongings.

I showed her pictures of my life back in the States. At one picture she exclaimed, "Look at your legs! You have legs like Sharon Stone!" She turned to my stepfather and beamed. "Hyun-gi inherited those legs from Mommy."

Soon after, my mother asked about my appearance. "I have a question," she announced while setting down a plate of freshly sliced pears and a fork. "You are a girl. Why do you still dress like a boy?"

"I was originally afraid of what you might think," I replied while jabbing a pear slice. "But I also wanted you to see me before I made any plans to change my body. You never saw me grow up. I felt this was the least that I could do."

There was a brief pause before my mother spoke. "Thank you," she finally replied with misty eyes. She cleared her throat and smiled. "Now eat up. I don't want your family in New York to think that I didn't feed you well."

I maintained an androgynous appearance during the time spent with my family, despite their surprising acceptance. Even my stepfather was supportive. "It's better to have more daughters anyway," he shared when my mother told him the news.

But I wanted to treat the coming-out process slowly and with respect. I didn't want to rush anything



with a family that was still largely unfamiliar to me. Decades of life experiences were crammed into a couple of weeks. I wanted to give everyone ample time to adjust.

On my last night in Korea, my mother took the family out to one of her favorite restaurants. I sat down at the low table wearing jeans and a T-shirt with my hair pulled back. She spoke warmly to the wait staff as the rest of us ate.

My friend leaned over to translate in between mouthfuls of noodles. "Your mom is talking about you," she reported. Then suddenly the expression on her face changed. "She just introduced you to the waitress as her daughter."

I almost choked on my noodles. I slowly looked up at the waitress, who offered a smile and a friendly wave. I responded with a slight bow. That night I began to understand my mother better. She truly saw me as her daughter regardless of what I wore or looked like.

Almost two years have past since I last saw my family. My Korean mother and I regularly keep in touch through weekly Skype video calls. And both my Korean and American parents have spoken to each other. They have exchanged gifts and are eager to meet each other in the near future.

My relationship with my Korean mother has

gradually become more relaxed. She now cheekily refers to me as her "sassy girl." My younger siblings call me "big sister."

Over time I have explained more of my life to my mother, including my work in the LGBT community. In turn she has responded with a strong sense of curiosity. I once described my work at GLSEN. She followed along slowly, repeating the words aloud in Korean: Gay. Student. Safety. School.

I nodded encouragingly. She nodded back at me and proclaimed, "OK! Good!"

I have also found my mother to be quite modest when she talks about her own life. I discovered that she is active in her church as a worship leader and volunteers in the soup kitchen. But I also learned that my mother boldly told her pastor and church friends about having a trans daughter living in New York City.

"It's not an issue," she said, unfazed. "You need to come to church with me on your next visit."

I don't take any of these touching moments for granted. But it was only a few weeks ago that my mother told me that she had been watching a Korean talk show solely about trans people. The television network canceled the program due to mounting pressure by some anti-trans viewers.

My mother pivoted the conversation to ask about

my own transition. "Do you want to?" she asked.

I was surprised by her question but offered a general idea of what I might want to do as she listened intently. First, hormones. Then I'd consider my options for surgery.

"This is a good plan," my mother stated.

I was about to change the subject, but my mother interrupted me. She leaned in closer to the computer screen. "My daughter, you are beautiful."

My cheeks flushed at the unexpected compliment. But I was suddenly reminded of my naïve childhood pact and that somehow everything I had hoped for had come true. I had found my family in Korea and had come out as trans. I no longer felt the insecurity or fear once associated with my reluctance to begin taking hormones or consider the idea of surgery.

And in that moment I realized that it was because of my mother in Korea. Her love had given me the final affirmation to move forward and become the person I was always meant to be.

I could feel tears begin to well up in my eyes. The time was right after years of waiting. I could begin the next part of my transition. And I could now do it with the support of my entire family living in both the States and Korea.

"Thank you, Mom," I said, quickly wiping away my tears.

"For what?" She looked surprised by my reaction. "Why are you crying?"

"Just for everything. I love you. OK?"

I wasn't sure if she picked up on my personal epiphany, but I'd like to believe that my mother's intuition filled in some of the blanks. A smile replaced the look of concern on her face. "Mommy loves you. Jesus loves you, too. Please pray to Jesus, OK?"

I laughed. "OK, Mom. I'll thank Jesus for my nice legs."

"Oh, you sassy girl!"

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*Andy Marra is the Saturday morning keynote for #KAAN2016. To learn more about her, visit page 44.*

## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

### My favorite way to relax is ...

- carving clay and stoking a wood fire kiln. (*Rosita Gonzalez*)
- binge-watch K-dramas (*Whitney Fritz*)
- enjoying an evening on the balcony with my husband, my cat, and a glass of crisp white wine. (*Aeriel Ashlee*)
- watching Steeler football (*Lee Fritz*)
- with friends (*Jen Hilzinger*)
- cooking! (*Oh Myo Kim*)
- meditating. (*Carolyn Hathaway*)

### My favorite Korean food is ...

- ddeokbokki (*Whitney Fritz*)
- bulgogi (*Lee Fritz*)
- dolsot bibimbap (*Stacy Schroeder*)
- kimchi bokum (*Jen Hilzinger*)
- kalbi jjim (*Oh Myo Kim*)
- spicy pork and mahndu (*Carolyn Hathaway*)
- sam tang (*Rosita Gonzalez*)
- Korean BBQ, especially galbi (*Aeriel Ashlee*)







*Bethany Carlson is a Korean American adoptee who grew up in western Michigan. As an M.Div candidate, she is interested in how lyricism enhances sacred liturgy, invites eschatological imagination, and transcends our understanding of narrative time. She is a Kundiman Fellow and a member of the Lilly Graduate Fellows Program in Humanities & the Arts. Bethany holds an MFA in creative writing from Indiana University, and her chapbook of poems, *DIADEM ME*, was published by MIEL Press in 2014.*

## On Belonging

*by Bethany Carlson*

In the glow of pink streetlights,  
I rearrange the day's myths

*How American you are!* My foster father cooed,  
and I was proud of the seamlessness

in my becoming, the smooth overture  
of assimilation, my silhouette sharpening

against his thick accent. How my hands shook  
tying the hanbok into a single-knotted bow,

the lining acoustic against my jeans.  
When he pressed a jade cross

into my palm, I believed myself Other  
enough to hate the girl costumed

in such a garment, reds and yellows garish  
against the plain sky, my plain English.

I had forgotten how loss had cooled  
my tongue so many oceans ago.

Recast my heart, oh Lord,  
as the silver threads of a birth mother's

memory while time weaves from root  
to crown; the fine unspooling that makes me

desperate,

desolate; loved.

# BETWEEN TRIBES with Ellie Conant

In memory of our friend Ellie Conant, who passed away on January 1, 2016

*Today is Jan 2, 2016, a day after Ellie's death. When she and I labored together over this essay in late summer, 2014, Ellie already had the lymphoma to which she eventually succumbed. We just didn't know it yet. In Oct 2014, her doctor had her run, not walk, to the emergency room to have an array of mysterious symptoms evaluated. Her fiancée, Melissa, was with her that day and has been stalwart, loving, and brilliant every step of the way. We should all have a Melissa. And we should all have an Ellie. I am grateful that we conceived of this essay to give expression to the power of connection, and to provide Ellie with a platform to share her luminous, kick-ass voice. I wish there had been many more opportunities.*

*Ellie, like so many others, I will miss talking with you every single day. Please visit. — David Amarel*

**DAVID AMAREL:** Last spring, Martha and I decided the time was ripe to lower our own voices as regular contributors to Gazillion Voices. We dialed back the volume and, with the “one loony mind” I described in our introductory column, we independently arrived at the same idea: our ongoing and less frequent contributions will assume a dialogue format, querying and collaborating with others. Because, for us, the adoption discourse is less about what we have to say, and more about what we need to hear.

For this initial dialogue, I am partnering with a remarkable person who is neither adoptee nor adoptive parent. Nevertheless, if I believed in an orderly universe, I would insist that Ellie Conant entered my family's life through divine intervention.

Lately, I have been obsessed with strong personal connections: in my work as a psychotherapist and anywhere I spot it. There is something about the experience of deep identification with another, of getting it and being got, that feels simultaneously natural and transcendent. Some call it love.

In my professional work, it continues to astonish me that my relationships with clients can at times feel so deep, knowing, and intimate—while in other settings I may easily assume that we have nothing in common. Intense and nourishing connections are

rooted in a willingness to seek, recognize, and cultivate points of commonality and shared experience. In psychotherapy, I often think (and sometimes say aloud) that the most powerful connections are often analogous, not identical.

Given my obsession with profound analogous connections, it is fitting to share my first dialogue with Ellie Conant, a friend ostensibly untouched by adoption. For reasons knowable and unknowable, Ellie gets us and, I hope, feels got. She stepped into our world when my children were quite young, like an astonishing yet perfectly fit piece of the evolving puzzle that we call family. To say that Ellie embodies the brother-sister each one of us longs for is a woeful understatement.

But enough. Here is a real piece of magic for you, dear reader. I will now perform the seemingly impossible—namely, to shut up and listen.

**ELLIE CONANT:** I was throwing a weekly queer party in Manhattan and met a woman on the dance floor who caught my eye. We began dating, and among several unique qualities about her, I was surprised to learn that she was very religious. Within a few months, I met her family and joined in Shabbat prayers and meals, learning Hebrew words and customs of the Jewish faith. I visited many synagogues

and assisted with her business, which revolved around performing for the Jewish community.

As a Korean, masculine-presenting lesbian, my presence was not always understood. Although the many temples she performed in were queer-friendly, I always felt like an outsider. Being a bi-racial Korean and Caucasian person, I already had a pretty good idea of what it meant to not quite belong. I recall times I sat in the crowd to watch a performance and felt claustrophobic, surrounded by scores of white people praising God and singing in Hebrew. There were also times when, in front of me, men would get uncomfortably close to my girlfriend, conveying a sort of ownership over her and



sending me a message: “She is Jewish first and gay second.” It reminded me of my step-dad who steamrolled into my life and diminished my Korean experience, or the fathers of my past girlfriends who never acknowledged my relationship with their daughters. I grew even more weary of men during this time.

Months went by, and my girlfriend told me she wanted to introduce me to her cousin, David. I was hesitant at first because I didn’t want to deal with yet another man’s entitled energy in my life, especially a family member holding tight to a certain religious smugness. When she told me that her cousin David didn’t practice, I felt a sense of relief – paired with guilt for feeling said relief. My girl-

friend said he had rejected his religion and was essentially the black sheep of the family. At this, I was intrigued and fascinated. I was equally fascinated that David and his wife Martha are adoptive parents to Korean children.

The night before our visit, I went shopping for my favorite childhood treats in Koreatown. We took a short subway ride the following day and entered David’s house: I was met with a wave of goodness, of realness. David and Martha smiled through their eyes; their children looked at me with keen curiosity, seeing themselves in me, me seeing myself in them. It was love at first sight – and I mean the very moment I laid eyes on them. Their determined daughter immediately tackled my H-Mart bag, snagged the dried seaweed snacks, and annihilated a pack in record time. Their son took his time and studied me with his beautiful, curious eyes. My girlfriend seemed a bit on edge as I soaked in a genuine sense of belonging to this family, bringing out treat after treat, sharing the little bit of my heritage I knew with people who wanted to share with me, void of the uneasy feeling of not being Korean enough. There were no set prayers or awk-

ward silences.

In that moment, I felt everything enough for this family, and they felt everything enough for me.

After meeting David and family, I knew I needed more time with them. I found my “tribe” and wanted in. I began babysitting the kids here and there, getting to know them, and savored the adult time I had with David and Martha when they returned home. Our connection was undeniable for many reasons. The first thing that stood out was that I wasn’t the token queer in their lives. All of their very best friends and even the godfathers of their children were gay. They were the queerest straight couple in my life!



I will say what struck me the most was David's presence. I was always a bit nervous around straight white guys with all that privilege and sense of ownership, but David listened and responded without condescension; his thoughts were articulate, sans misogynistic language. He was present and aware of himself. David was a unicorn to me. Also, David's partner, Martha, was unreal to me too: she and he didn't follow the typical patriarchal family dynamic. Martha had a strong presence, and we liked to joke that she and David were basically lesbians together! Gender felt practically irrelevant in their home, and to say it felt refreshing is an understatement.

Knowing David and Martha's children has helped me see my half-Korean experience as something to celebrate, regardless of not feeling like a "real" Korean. I remember noticing the Korean flag hanging in the children's room. It was so beautiful

with the bold yin-yang symbol representing balance and the foreign yet familiar text surrounding it. The flag, sewn together to create something so beautiful and balanced, could easily represent us, foreign yet familiar too. I recognize Korean writing but cannot read it, hear Korean words but do not understand it. When I meet first-generation Koreans, I feel a kinship through our physical traits and certain gestures (e.g., using both hands to exchange money) but a disconnect in our upbringing.

With these children, I feel connected. They are adopted; I am not. I have a Korean mother; so do they. They have Korean fathers; I do not. We all have a white father. We have all been to Korea. We are Brooklynites. We know how to say "delicious" and "thank you" in Korean but not much more. We have experienced racism. We have experienced privilege. When the three of us are together, we are physically Korean and we are Americans—but each

of us has a divide in our heritage, and within that divide, we are deeply, intrinsically connected.

**DAVID:** Ellie, you found me out: I am a unicorn! Only, my magical horn was replaced with an impressive Semitic schnoz. Seriously, I find it both fitting and intriguing that your narrative begins with the religion issue. Our shared rejection of convention and dogma was, for me, the starting point of coming together. Before I fully understood it, you and I also recognized something in each other—not only you and the children. That recognition is firmly rooted in our mutual descent between tribes.

While it is a bit jarring to hear myself labeled a "black sheep," I do recognize the feeling—the subtle (or blatant) stigma. Isn't it ironic that I consider my beliefs to be directly traceable to my upbringing? If I am a black sheep, well then, when it comes to religion I was raised by

sheep of the same race! My parents, both holocaust survivors, made forced-choice philosophical and emotional decisions about what they could and could not accept on faith. Similar to what another columnist for *Gazillion Voices*, Susan Devan Harness, recently shared, their existential "bullshit tolerance" hit a low point—and remained there. Ellie, I cannot understand why other family members never grasped that, but that is the topic for a different column.

The critical point that you raise for me, and the apogee of connection, has everything to do with tribalism and strong (read: overbearing) culture. Ellie, you vividly remind me that the curious and queer-feeling of rejecting while simultaneously being rejected by the tribe is perhaps the strongest force that draws me to you. You understood that feeling deeply and palpably. (So does Martha, but sometimes a partner's perspective is just too close for comfort—and hence harder to accept.)



I can only guess at how inside-outside my children will feel as they mature. I cannot be certain of what tribes they may choose, reject, or feel rejected by. But I do know, undeniably, that the force is strong, Luke, between you and the two of them. This force transcends your shared Koreanness. The children have many relationships with Korean-Americans and adoptees of diverse ages and backgrounds. Yet, somehow, you became instantly necessary to one another.

I also believe that, for the quickly maturing children as well as the slowly maturing me, your personal identity quest sucks us in. Like those quietly assertive tattoos, you wear your thoughtful gender-busting right out on your sleeveless arms. My children eat that up like so many Choco Pies. And so do I. Secret lesbian or not (I'll never tell), I actually do give plenty of thought to gender identity, the range of masculinity, as well as the specialized role of father. Is father even a specialized role? To me, that profound yet elusive question lives, evolves, and grows alongside our children.

Martha adds: "We also learn from Ellie. We have become more conscious about gendered language in our lives and are grateful for the ways that liberate our children's worldview. We have kids who see strangers struggle with gendered language in Ellie's presence: 'Sir? Umm... Miss?' They watch Ellie carve a non-binary Jack-and/or-Jill-O-lantern, and they learn that they do not need to surrender any aspect of their own identities. Above all, our kids know that 'Ellie is just an ELLIE,' someone we love and who loves them. That is more than enough in itself."

**ELLIE:** Since meeting David and the family eight years ago, I have joined them at four Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network (KAAN) conferences. The conference has always resonated with me as a place welcoming the non-traditional Korean experience. A memory that sticks with me is from KAAN Albany when I helped supervise the young and

teen adoptees. Among the many activities planned for our field trip was making mandoo in a Korean church basement. A few church elders were on hand to show us how to make the mandoo properly. As the kids and I all fumbled with the dumpling wrappers, laughing and being goofy, I distinctly recall the elders' faces. They seemed puzzled. They saw a mini sea of young Koreans who didn't act... Korean. It was a rainy weekend and the kids were a little extra unruly from being stuck indoors. I sensed disappointment and concern from the elders. When it came time to cook the mandoo, the elders took over and hastily pushed us out of the kitchen. I still wonder to this day if those elders felt sorry for us, if they had volunteered their time that Saturday to help the children whom they viewed as being abandoned by their own people. That is a whole other can of worms to tackle, but I'll never forget the solidarity and protectiveness I felt with all the adoptees that day. I realized we all had one thing in common, for sure: our awkward and often confusing encounters with first-generation Koreans.

There are codes and mannerisms, ways to act that are very specific to the first generation. My mom immigrated to the U.S., and, during my childhood, she taught me to be modest, quiet, and humble. As a teen we clashed hard, and when I came out of the closet she shut down. My love for her remains strong but not without conflict and anxiety. I've



come to realize in my 35 years how important chosen family is. Untying myself a bit from members of my bio family has opened my mind and heart to those who take me in by choice. In this respect, I also consider parallels to the adoptee experience. Blood may be thicker than water, but in my humble opinion, water flows more freely.

When David suggested that I write with him for *Gazillion Voices*, I was initially hesitant. I felt the same when he asked me to speak on a panel at KAAN. His reaching out for my voice has been a cathartic process for me. I always thought: "I'm Korean but not adopted; I don't want to crash a crucial space meant for adoptees." Also, as a lesbian, I have worked hard to create queer safe spaces, so I was especially sensitive to the topic. I've come to realize that, as the queer community has expanded and evolved, so has the KAAN and adoptee community. I believe the Korean hapa story can only enhance and aid dialogue as we work to further connect to each other; what I've learned and have had the privilege to share is that there is a profound parallel between the hapa and adoptee experience.

At KAAN, our panel discussion was about looks: the looks we get, how we feel about our looks, how our identities are impacted by looks and looking. Hanging out with David's family, we have experienced the collective "freak show" stares. But I believe that the stares, curiosity, and confusion work to enhance our bond. In a world where my queerness and racial identity make me an outcast, just as transracial adoptees have to deal with false assumptions about them, or being an Atheist in a hyper-religious family turns you into a "black sheep," I cherish how I can share, compare, honor, and grieve what it all means with David and his family. Through them all, I have met incredible adoptees from everywhere. I have forged healthy relationships and boundaries in my daily life because, quite simply, I chose to focus my energy on chosen family that encourages me to nourish, not diminish, my experience.

**DAVID:** My friend, I am grateful that our personal stories converged, and we recognized that we are kin. For me, even "chosen family" may not fully convey the bona fides of those essential bonds.

As we have discussed and processed countless times, it was not without strain when you and my

cousin broke up, years ago, and we (still) chose you. There were hurt feelings, fractured relationships and, of course, *The Guilt*. In this regard, no one is a better Jew than I.

But here is something that I never told you, Ellie: Through my relationships with other adoptive families that I love and admire, I have learned that my personal experience of "forced-choice" is hardly unique. The more that we adoptive parents understand and accept the very real and deep disruption of a transracial, transnational adoption, the easier and more clear-cut it becomes to make choices that support any restitution for our children. Bridges will burn. So be it. The children had far more massive and vital bridges laid to waste.

Finally, how can I say this without devolving into Hallmark sentimentality? You chose the children, you were chosen, Martha and I chose you, and you chose back. Those decisions, like adoption, were irrevocable for me. When you showed up with your purple hair, gender-creative confidence, and your H-Mart bags brimming with treats, you were family. You are.

Thank you, Ellie, for joining me in this dialogue.

**ELLIE:** Thank you and the family for the most unexpected, extraordinary and insightful journey EVER. Also thank you to *Gazillion Voices* for your work to build the sturdiest platform out there for adoptees and their tribes to stand on and be heard and emboldened.

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If you would like to honor Ellie and contribute to her legacy, read about Ellie's Fund (*next page*).

As of May 2016, this fund has raised \$1525.00 towards the support of the voices of queer, bi-racial, and/or multiracial speakers at the KAAN 2016 conference. Many thanks to all who have contributed!

You can also purchase a "Love ~~the Sinner~~, Hate ~~the Sin~~" T-shirt (*like the one Ellie is wearing in the photo on the next page*) at the conference to support the Astraea Foundation, another of Ellie's chosen charities.





## The ELLIE CONANT MEMORIAL FUND (*Ellie's Fund*)

We are deeply saddened to announce the death of longtime KAAN friend and contributor Ellie Conant on January 1, 2016. Ellie played an important role in a number of conferences over the last seven years, bringing her own brand of style and heart. She came first as a nanny for a family attending the conference and then, like a piper, gathered more children around her. The next year, we made it official and signed her up as a youth leader. She also served on several speaker panels, sharing her unique story and perspective with the community.

Ellie was a very special kind of cool, someone who could walk into a room and instantly put everyone at ease, someone who truly saw people and reached out when they needed her.

In Ellie's honor, Martha Crawford and David Amarel (close family friends of Ellie and her partner Melissa) have partnered with KAAN to create The Ellie Conant Memorial Fund. Here, in Ellie's

own words, is why the memorial is a fitting one. Excerpted from a piece (*at left*) that she and David wrote for Gazillion Voices magazine several years ago, Ellie expresses her initial hesitancy to speak up at KAAN before recognizing the relevancy of her participation:

*"...I always thought: 'I'm Korean but not adopted; I don't want to crash a crucial space meant for adoptees.' Also, as a lesbian, I have worked hard to create queer safe spaces, so I was especially sensitive to the topic. I've come to realize that, as the queer community has expanded and evolved, so has the KAAN and adoptee community. I believe the Korean hapa story can only enhance and aid dialogue as we work to further connect to each other; what I've learned and have had the privilege to share is that there is a profound parallel between the hapa and adoptee experience."*

*---from *Between Tribes with Ellie Conant*, Gazillion Voices, 2014. All rights reserved.*

Thank you, Ellie, for all that you have given to the community and will continue to give through this fund. You will be missed.

## FUND Details

The Ellie Conant Memorial Fund supports the voices of queer, biracial, and/or multiracial people by sponsoring KAAN conference costs for speakers of these identities. Gifts to this fund will help keep Ellie's spirit and legacy alive through an organization she strongly endorsed.

KAAN (the Korean-American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network) was founded in 1998 to improve the lives of Korean-born adoptees by connecting the community and providing opportunities for dialogue, education, and support. In pursuit of this mission, KAAN also rallies a network of allies and family members to face common issues together. Ellie was an active member of and leader in this community.

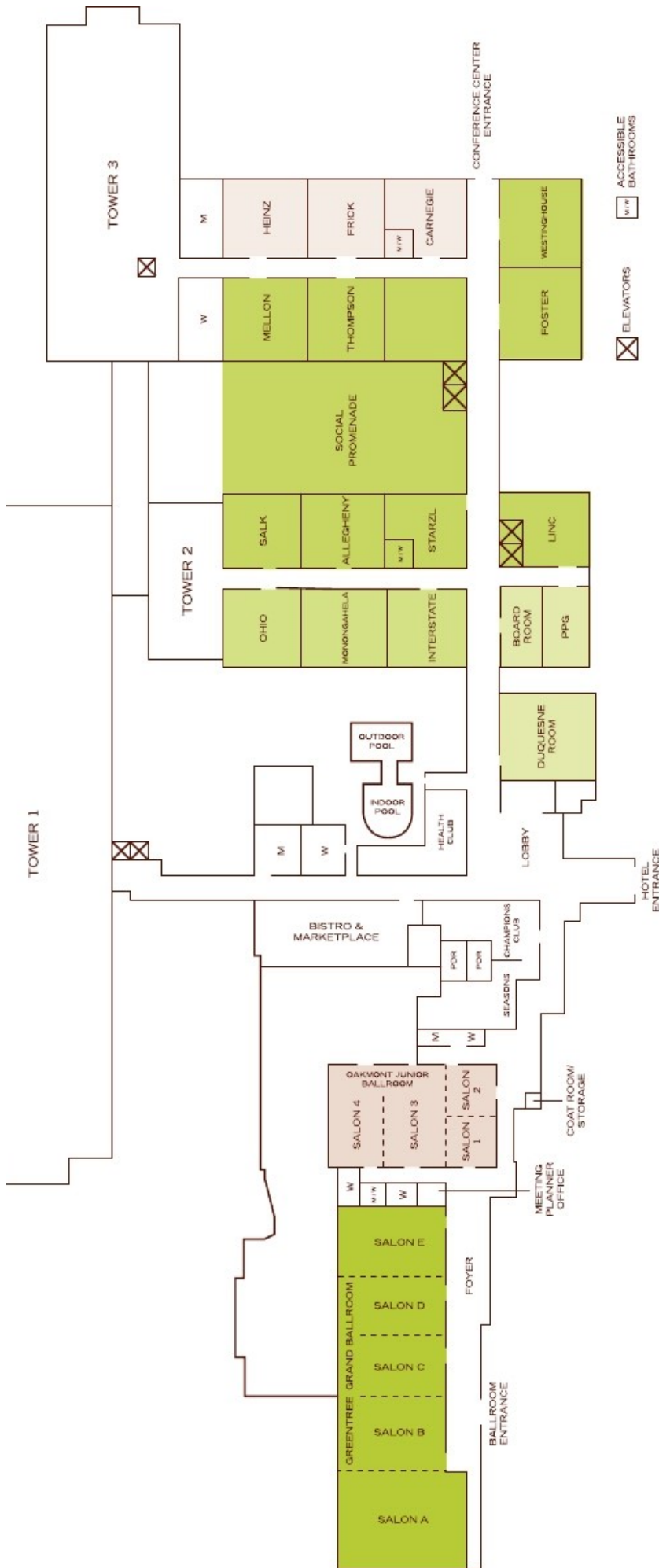
To make a tax-deductible gift in Ellie's memory:

- Mail a check payable to KAAN (write "Ellie's Fund" in the memo line) to KAAN, Box 714, Camp Hill, PA 17001
- Donate via [www.KAANet.org](http://www.KAANet.org), designating "Ellie's Fund" in the comments section

KAAN is nonprofit as a project of The Foundation for Enhancing Communities (TFEC), fiscal sponsor (EIN 01-0564355). Acknowledgment letters and online receipts will list The Foundation's name, not KAAN's.

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*The official registration and financial information of The Foundation for Enhancing Communities may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1.800.732.0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.)*



**PLEASE NOTE**

*Adoptee-only sessions are marked in red italics.* Schedule accurate as of press time. Check your magazine insert for up-to-date listings and room assignments.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 24**

**1:00-5:00PM**

Registration, Exhibit Hall, Bookstore

**1:30-2:30PM**

- ◆ Adoptees in College
- ◆ K-Dramas & Adoption
- ◆ Newcomer Orientation
- ◆ *Newcomer Orientation*

**2:45-3:45PM**

- ◆ History of Korean Adoptees in the U.S.
- ◆ Mentoring Adoptee Youth
- ◆ Authentic Empathy
- ◆ *Presidential Election, Race, & Microaggressions*

**4:00-4:45PM**

Conference Welcome

**5:00-7:00PM**

Adult-Adoptee-Only Dinner (*adv. reservation necessary*)  
Community Dinner (*optional, order off menu*)

**7:00-8:00PM**

Registration, Exhibit Hall

**8:00-9:30PM**

Adoptee Showcase/ Q&A  
Reading from *The Hundred Year Flood* by author Matthew Salesses; Private screening of short film *Arrival* with director/ animator Alex Myung

Cultural Activities with Selahart

We recognize that the material discussed at the conference may be overwhelming at times. For your convenience, a **QUIET ROOM** will be offered throughout the day on Friday and Saturday. Please feel free to take advantage of it as needed. See the matrix insert for the location.

# schedule

## SATURDAY, JUNE 25

### 6:15AM Recreational Jog

Meet in lobby.

### 7:00-8:30AM Continental Breakfast

- ◆ 7:30 First-time Participant Meetup
- ◆ 7:30 Youth Breakfast Meetup  
(*Field trip 9-4:45PM*)
- ◆ 7:30 Registration & Exhibit Hall Open
- ◆ 8:00 Keynote – *Andy Marra*

### 8:45AM-10:00AM

- ◆ *Korean Tourist to Resident*
- ◆ The Puzzle of Parenting
- ◆ Living with Challenges
- ◆ Adoption Narrative

### 10:45-Noon

- ◆ You Don't Play Football
- ◆ Starting the Race Conversation
- ◆ *Partners: Part of the KAD Conversation?*
- ◆ LGBTQ Adoptees & Allies: Open Forum

### 12:00-1:30PM Luncheon

Keynote – *Legacies of Korean Adoption/Oh Myo Kim, JaeRan Kim*

### 1:30PM Book Signing

Meet at bookstore

### 2:00-3:15PM

- ◆ *Advice on Birth Search*
- ◆ Understanding the Good Adoptee (*Adoptee-only discussion open for others to listen until final Q&A*)
- ◆ Commonalities Among Transracial Adoptees

### 3:30-4:45PM

- ◆ *Feminism*
- ◆ *Balancing Families: Birth & Adoptive*
- ◆ Recentering Race
- ◆ Biracial Children of Adoptees

### 4:45-5:15PM

- ◆ Support Forums (*see matrix*)

### 5:30-9:00PM Social & Gala Dinner

5:30 Pre-Dinner Social with cash bar

6:00 Meal, Recognitions, Raffle

Adoptee Group Photo

Performance – *Selahart*

7:45 Youth Pool Party (*approx. time*)

## SUNDAY, JUNE 26

### 7:00-8:30AM Continental Breakfast

### 7:30-8:00AM

Prayer & Reflection Space (*drop-in*)

### 8:30-12:15PM Youth Activities

- ◆ 8:30-11:00 Youth Program Medley
- ◆ 8:30 My Brother/Sister Was Adopted (*breakout*)
- ◆ 9:45 My Parent is An Adoptee (*breakout*)
- ◆ 11:00 Good-bye Party

### 8:30-9:30AM

- ◆ Navigating Social Spaces
- ◆ DadSpace & the Modern Family
- ◆ *Exploring My Identity in HS & College (adoptees 16-20+)*
- ◆ *Adoptees as Parents*
- ◆ AfterKAAN: Where Do We Go From Here?

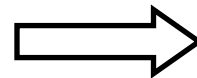
### 9:45-10:45AM

- ◆ Adoption Narrative Writing Workshop
- ◆ *The Spouse's Perspective*
- ◆ *Dealing with Microaggressions in HS & College (adoptees 16-20+)*
- ◆ Adoptee Advocacy
- ◆ *AfterKAAN: Where Do We Go From Here?*

### 11:00-12:15PM

- ◆ Closing Coffeehouse – *A Performance on Identity* by Susan Harris O'Connor with discussion led by Amanda Woolston and David Amarel

For the full schedule for our **CHILD-CARE & YOUTH PROGRAMS**, turn the page ...



Detailed session descriptions begin on page 33 and speaker bios on page 41.



# YOUTH & CHILDCARE PROGRAMS @ KAAAN

## general information:

Our childcare (ages 3-7) and youth (ages 7-17) programs are integral parts of KAAAN's conference. Many who attend are young adoptees; the program is open to siblings and children of adoptees as well. Our most important goal is to connect youth to the community. We progress from casual activities to ones of deeper conversation. Friendships are frequently forged between participants and with mentors.



We are proud to again partner with Connect-a-Kid to deliver these programs. This year's CAK coordinator is Courtney Huber.



Childcare will be offered in four blocks, covering the major session slots of the conference. Parents utilizing the childcare room are expected to work on one of the blocks for each child enrolled. Time will be pretty informal, especially if the group is small, and will include a number of activity stations plus other opportunities. Some participation with the older youth on Sunday may occur, including the closing party.

Parent must print and complete the consent form in order for their youth to participate in the field trip. This year, the group will be traveling to the Duquesne Incline and the Carnegie Science Museum. These activities are designed to give participants time to get to know one another in a fun, non-threatening environment and to give them a positive experience of traveling in a primarily Asian-American group.

## youth and childcare schedule:

### FRIDAY

- 1:30-3:45 PM Youth Games & Activities with Connect-a-Kid mentors (*drop-in*)  
Childcare Block #1
- 8:00-9:30PM Cultural Activities with Selahart (*parents accompany children 10 & under*)

### SATURDAY

- 7:30AM Meet Connect-a-Kid mentors and peers in ballroom for breakfast and parent-check-in. Turn in signed consent forms. Group to depart ballroom together for introductory games and rule-setting before field trip.
- 8:45-11:30AM Childcare Block #2
- 1:30-4:15PM Childcare Block #3
- 4:45PM Parent pickup of field trip youth.
- 7:45PM (*approx.*) Pool Party (*parents accompany non-swimmers and all children 6 & under*)

### SUNDAY

- 8:30-11:00AM Youth Program Medley  
Childcare Block #4 (*merged with Youth Medley at times – still under separate supervision*)
- 8:30-9:30AM My Brother/Sister Was Adopted (*special breakout for non-adopted siblings of adoptees*)  
Exploring My Identity in HS & College (*special breakout for adoptees 16-20+*)
- 9:45-10:45AM My Parent is An Adoptee (*special breakout for children of adoptees*)  
Dealing with Microaggressions in HS & College (*special breakout for adoptees 16-20+*)
- 11:00AM Good-bye Party with Youth, Childcare, & Mentors
- 12:15PM Parent Pickup (*please be prompt*)

# session notes

## friday @ 1:00pm

### Registration and Exhibit Hall

Pick up conference materials and browse our bookstore and exhibit and vendor tables.

## friday @ 1:30pm

### Adoptees in College: Transformation and Inclusivity

*Aeriel A. Ashlee M.Ed.*

College is a transformative time for young adults. This can be especially true for transracial adoptees, as they search to find community and explore their racial identity. This session will begin by examining the Asian American Racial Identity Development Model that is widely used to understand college student development, and consider how it may exclude the unique narratives of transracial Asian American adoptees. Participants will then be invited to engage in a reflective dialogue about transformative college experiences around racial identity development and discuss ways to promote inclusivity for transracial adoptees in college.

### K-Dramas and Adoption

*Sara Campbell MSW*

Hallyu, the Korean Wave, has brought Korean popular culture into the international limelight. Korean film and drama enjoy intense popularity all over the world. Discussion will address a variety of examples of adoption, Korean adoptees, and single mothers in dramas over the past two decades. Also discussed will be the spectrum of responses and effects from consumption of Korean popular culture from both the adoptee and the adoptive parent perspectives. Examples from specific dramas as well as a suggested viewing list will also be included.

### Newcomer Orientation

*Stephen Johnson*

This conference packs a lot of emotions, epiphanies, and energy into one weekend. Learn to pace yourself, set and respect boundaries, and make the most of your time here.

### Newcomer Orientation

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

**\* ADOPTEES ONLY \***

This conference packs a lot of emotions, epiphanies, and energy into one weekend. Learn to pace yourself, set and respect boundaries, and make the most of your time here.

### Youth & Childcare Programs

*Connect-a-Kid*

See listing on page 32.

## friday @ 2:45pm

### A History of Korean Adoptees in the U.S.

*Joy Lieberthal LCSW, Hollee McGinnis MSW, PhD candidate*

A review of the history of Korean adoption from the perspective of the adopted person. For over 50 years, children have been adopted from South Korea. Who are the adopted ones, where are they now, and what are they doing? What is the impact of this community on the Korean American diaspora? How are Korean adoptees impacting the conversation around adoption, identity, immigration, community and creating relevancy in the history of the United States in the 21st century.

### Mentoring Adoptee Youth

*Sara Campbell MSW, Courtney Huber*

Mentorship for youth is a time proven model that benefits the young person on multiple levels. Mentorship for adopted children by adult adoptees, particularly transracial adoptees, helps them to develop healthy identities specific to issues of race and culture. Learn more about Connect-A-Kid's team based mentorship program which provides support to the adopted child, family, and adult adoptees.

### The Power of Authentic Empathy

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

Adoptive parents will learn why empathy is so critical when it comes to parenting your child, teen or young adult. Katie will discuss when empathy turns into pity, why that is an issue and how to combat

it. She will invite adoptive parents to think personally about how they can relate. When authentic empathy is there, it can be incredibly powerful and when it is not, your relationship can suffer. Highly recommended for parents who are first-time conference participants.

### The 2016 Presidential Election, Race, and Microaggressions within the Family

**\* ADOPTEES ONLY \***

*Kimberly McKee PhD*

As transracial adoptees, discussions of race and microaggressions with our adoptive parents and siblings may be fraught with tension and contradiction. Often these conversations become more prevalent during a year of a presidential election. Yet, we also know that even in non-presidential election years, race is a political issue. This session offers adult adoptees the opportunity to discuss strategies for negotiating racial microaggressions in the family, specifically as it relates to politics. We will consider what it means when family members are unaware of the fact that their perspective on race damages the communities of color adoptees' claim membership and share tools for navigating these conversations.

## friday @ 4:00pm

### Conference Welcome

Meet some of KAAAN's leadership and get the latest conference news. Adoptees, this is the best place to be to connect for the adoptee dinner as well.

## friday @ 5:00pm

### Adoptee Dinner (offsite)

*Stephen Johnson*

Pre-registration required.

### Community Dinner Meetup (optional; open to all)

We'll be gathering in a special section of the hotel's Seasons Restaurant. Wear your name tag and drop in at your convenience. Order from the menu and pay the hotel directly.

## friday @ 7:00pm

### Registration and Exhibit Hall

Pick up conference materials and browse our exhibit and vendor tables. Bookstore will NOT be open at this time.

## friday @ 8:00pm

### ADOPTEE SHOWCASE: Author Reading and Private Screening

*Matthew Salesses, Alex Myung Wager*  
Matthew Salesses will be reading from his acclaimed novel, *The Hundred Year Flood*, about a Korean American adoptee in Prague. *The Hundred Year Flood* was an Amazon Best Book of September, an August Kindle First pick, a Millions Most Anticipated of 2015, a Buzzfeed Best Book of Summer and Fall, a Refinery29 Best Book of Summer, and a Gawker Best Fall Read.

Alex Myung wrote, directed, and animated the short film *Arrival*. This beautiful 2D-animated film explores one boy's struggle to face the truth of his life and love, and reveal it to the person he cares about most. *Arrival* delves into the often unexamined ripple effect that hiding your true self has on loved ones around you.

### Cultural Activities

*Hosted by Selahart with support from Connect-a-Kid*

Get active with hands-on activities: jonghi jeopki (Korean paperfolding), taekwondo, and more.

Open to everyone. Children 10 & under should be accompanied by a parent.

\*\*\*\*\*

## saturday @ 6:15am

### Recreational Jog

*Stephen Johnson*

Meet in the lobby for a relaxed 3-4 mile jog through the local community.

## saturday @ 7:00am

### Continental Breakfast

Please wear your conference name tag.

## saturday @ 7:30am

### Youth Breakfast Meetup

Meet up with other conference youth at a special table in the ballroom prior to heading out for the day. (Parents must stop by the table to sign in their youth.) Group will travel with adoptee mentors from Connect-a-Kid to the Duquesne Incline and the Carnegie Science Museum.

### Breakfast Meetup

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

If you are traveling alone or are new to KAAAN and would like a friendly place to land for breakfast, look for the reserved tables in the ballroom and join us!

### Registration and Exhibit Hall

Pick up conference materials and browse our exhibit and vendor tables. See sign for bookstore hours.

## saturday @ 8:00am

### Opening Keynote:

#### Passing as Myself

*Andy Marra*

What does it mean to be your authentic self? Andy Marra shares her personal story about what it means to tackle the complexities of identity against the backdrop of family, community, and culture. Andy recounts some of the joys, challenges, and surprises experienced along the way when she decides to let go of the pressures to conform as something else and instead lead a life that embraces her whole and complete self. From finding and building a relationship with her family in Korea, to living her truth as a transgender woman, to unpacking what it means to be a Korean-American, Andy shares her take on authenticity and what it means to lead a life on your own terms.

## saturday @ 8:45am

### From Korean Tourist to Resident

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Rosita Gonzalez MS in Communication Research, Tammy Ko Robinson, Simone Eun Mi, Laura Klunder (Seungmi Ly)*  
Listen to the voices of Korean adoptees as they share their experiences from their first trip to Korea to

living as residents. Hear distinctly different narratives from those searching, in reunion, parenting, archiving and engaging in activism. Our discussion of remigration welcomes questions from attendees about resources and challenges in an extended Q&A at the end of the session.

### The Puzzle of Adoptive Parenting

*Amy Partain, Margie Perscheid MS, Sara Smith*

As parents, it is easy to slip into a "checklist" mentality, checking the boxes of things we need to do for our kids. But helping a transracial adoptee form a healthy identity is more like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. Adoptive parents must begin to put down the corner and edge pieces of the puzzle when their children are young, laying a foundation of understanding and openness about race, adoption, culture and language, and community and family. We will talk about personal experiences and share resources to help parents begin piecing together the puzzle.

### Living with Challenges

*Shannon Jordan, Kristin Jordan, Jaime Hooker, Niki Lake*

If struggling with your identity as a Korean adoptee in a world of differences wasn't already enough, try living with often debilitating and chronic health issues while navigating challenging systems and multiple identities. This session will provide the audience with insight into several adoptees' ongoing journeys of overcoming illness. The discussion will also include an open dialogue for adoptees to share their experiences or challenges with disability and chronic health issues in hopes of creating a stronger community. Participants will leave inspired with practical tips to thrive in a chronically challenging world.

### Adoption Narrative: Expanding Identities and Communities

*Antonio Aeillo, Martha M. Crawford LCSW, Matthew Salesses*

Writing and sometimes sharing our narratives as members of the adoption community can serve many functions: self-discovery, building



community, addressing the isolation of under-representation, and advocating for adoption to be included in larger discussions of race, class, culture, and family. During this session, we will discuss various narrative models for using writing as a method of healing, empowerment, and subversive movement against restrictive biases that are active in our culture and in ourselves.

## **saturday @ 10:15am**

### **"You're Asian, You Don't Play Football": A Discussion on Masculinity in Asian America**

*Benjamin Kim Oser, Noah Sinangil*

Do you recognize the name Hines Ward? Not only because we're in Pittsburgh, but the name also represents something far -- the most famous Korean-American football player of all time. Asian-Americans in tough and physical sports in the US are few and far between. But have you heard of Kaleb Kim or Reggie Ho? This session will highlight America's evolving sense of masculinity, particularly among white-Americans and Asians, and how both groups are perceived in mainstream sports. This presentation will provide examples of often overlooked achievements, personal struggles with identity, and conversations about the shifting masculinity of Asian Americans.

### **Starting the Race Conversation**

*Katie Bozek Ph.D., LMFT, Erica Gehringer, Martha Crawford*

Talking about race is crucial for white adoptive parents, especially when speaking with their children of color. However, the thought of initiating these conversations is often a daunting and difficult task. This session aims to prepare white adoptive parents for the race-related discussions they will encounter at (and outside of) the conference; explain how and why they must respect adoptee, and other people of color's voices and spaces; encourage them to be open to topics that might be challenging and uncomfortable at first; and overall provide ways to move the conversation forward as white parents.

### **Partners: Part of the KAD Conversation?**

#### **\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Dawn Tomlinson*

Should our spouse/partner/significant other be part of our experience as Korean adoptees? The way we navigate the intimate relationships in our lives depends on our expectations. Join us as we explore together what those expectations are, and what is meaningful for each person. This session includes active discussion and group participation.

### **LGBTQ Adoptees & Allies: Open Forum**

*Michael Burdan, Kate Zielaskowski MS, Alex Myung Wager*

#### **Co-sponsored by the Ellie Conant Memorial Fund.**

This session aims to provide a safe space for conversations revolving around the intersection of sexual orientation, gender identity and adoptee status. The panel of self-identified LGBTQ adoptees will share their experiences and create a safe space to discuss and question what it means to have these intersecting identities and/or support others as allies.

## **saturday @ 12:00pm**

### **Luncheon and Midday Keynote: Legacies of Korean Adoption on Global Child Welfare**

*Oh Myo Kim PhD, JaeRan Kim PhD, MSW, LISW*

By 2004, it is estimated that the number of intercountry adoptions had reached almost 45,000 adoptions per year (an increase of 42 percent from 1980). While the establishment of a global adoption network has no doubt reshaped the demographics of receiving countries, it has also had often overlooked implications for sending communities.

Two Korean American adult adoptee researchers, Oh Myo Kim and JaeRan Kim, will present more information about this topic based on their forthcoming chapter (with co-author Randy Tarnowski) in *Handbook of Global Child Welfare* (Routledge). Using a case study

approach, the authors examined the impact of intercountry adoption on global child welfare for three countries: South Korea, Guatemala, and Ethiopia. These countries were chosen for their unique and complex relationship with intercountry adoption.

Specifically, this keynote will focus on the following questions:

- What cultural, social, and economic factors allowed for the movement of children across national borders?
- What has been the impact of international adoption on the local sending communities?
- Lastly, what support can Korean adoptees offer as members of a larger international adoptee community?

For further information on the presenters:

<https://jaerankim.com/portfolio>

<http://www.bc.edu/schools/lisoc/facultystaff/faculty/kim.html>

## **saturday @ 1:30pm**

### **Author Book Signing**

*Various speakers*

Stop by the bookstore to get your purchases signed by their creators.

## **saturday @ 2:00pm**

### **Understanding the "Good" Adoptee**

#### **\* ADOPTEE DISCUSSION \***

*(Non-adoptees invited to observe this session and ask questions at the end)*

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

Katie will facilitate a discussion with other adoptees on the meaning of being a good adoptee -- what that entails, why the discussion is important and what happens when we are not able to achieve it. She will share personal narratives and general clinical examples. Non-adoptees are welcome to attend to listen. There will be time at the end for questions.

### **Commonalities Among Transracial Adoptees**

*Mark Hagland, Rebecca Nirmala Peacock, Susan Harris O'Connor MSW*

Adult transracial adoptees of all backgrounds share many commonalities: racial identity formation,

lifelong experiences of racism, marginalization and exclusion, issues around adoption and adoptee identity, body and facial image issues, questions around birth family and birth search, dating/relationship issues, and issues around family and friends. This session will include a panel of adoptees who are East Asian, South Asian, and African, and will provide insights into the commonalities they share as transracial adoptees.

### **Am I Ready To Search for My Birth Family?**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Ariel A. Ashlee M.Ed., JaeRan Kim PhD, MSW, LISW, Jannie Kruse, Hollee McGinnis MSW, PhD candidate*

Beginning the search for your birth family is a big step. How can you tell if you are ready for the range of emotions and answers you might find? Join in this frank conversation with other adoptees. Leaders will share some of their experiences and give advice on how to prepare.

### **saturday @ 3:30pm**

#### **Intersections of Empowerment: Korean Adoptees & Feminism**

*Kate Firestone MA*

This interactive presentation will explore the intersections of Korean adoptee subjectivity and feminism. Using the work of theorists like Jacqueline Jones Royster and Lisa Lowe, special attention will be paid to the ways in which cultural representations of Asian female sexuality affect how female Korean adoptees construct their individual and group identities. Adoptees, adoptive families, spouses, friends, allies, and institutions are invited to consider their roles in the construction, perpetuation, and resistance of these representations, as well as create tools and critical frameworks for interrogating those representations in ways that empower and affirm adoptees.

#### **Balancing Families: Birth & Adoptive**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Lee Fritz, Whitney Fritz MBA*

This session is an honest conversation about the struggles and rewards of navigating relationships with adoptive families post-reunion. We

will discuss the challenging landscape of balancing families.

#### **Recentering Our Conversations About Race**

*Erica Gehringer, JaeRan Kim PhD, MSW, LISW, Katie Bozek Ph.D., LMFT, Susan Harris O'Connor MSW*

Many mainstream conceptions and narratives of race focus on white peoples' feelings and experiences. Intended for intermediate and advanced audiences, this session aims to challenge these narratives by re-centering our conversations around people of color, who are most negatively and directly affected by race relations in the U.S. Adoptees from different professional backgrounds will discuss behavioral, educational, and media techniques that can be used to "retrain" ourselves to not allow the conversation to derail back to a white audience.

#### **The Journey of Bi-racial Children of Adoptees**

*Alyson Yost BSN, RN-BC, CHPN, Bevin Hale MEd., Sara Smith, Carolyn Scholl*

#### **Co-sponsored by the Ellie Conant Memorial Fund.**

Hear the experiences of four mothers who are adult adoptees with bi-racial children. Raising bi-racial children can bring forth unexpected moments of validation and fear. Listen to the difficulties and profound joys that have been experienced as well as concerns for the future. This session will include time for Q&A.

### **saturday @ 4:45pm**

#### **Support Group Meetups**

A quiet place to decompress and process feelings from the day. No formal session—just a safe place to talk. Separate spaces for first parents, adult adoptees, parents of adoptees, and partners / siblings of adoptees.

### **saturday @ 5:30pm**

#### **Pre-Dinner Social**

Cash bar, light appetizers, raffle tickets, time to mingle and get good seats.

### **saturday @ 6:00pm**

#### **Gala Dinner & Raffle**

Enjoy dinner, cash bar, and conversation with your tablemates before we begin our evening festivities. Pro-

gram will include recognitions, raffle, adoptee group picture, a performance by Selahart, and more.

#### **Pool Party**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Youth and children interested in a chaperoned pool party will be dismissed partway through the dinner (approx. 7:45PM). Parents should drop off and pick up their children at the pool (children who are 6 & under or are non-swimmers should have a parent with them at the pool).

\*\*\*\*\*

### **sunday @ 7:00am**

#### **Continental Breakfast**

Please wear your name tag.

### **sunday @ 7:30am**

#### **Prayers and Reflection**

Visit this quiet place for prayer, meditation, or reflection. Come and go as you want ... there is no specific service or structured gathering.

### **sunday @ 8:30am**

#### **Vendors and Exhibitors**

Come check out the work other organizations are doing and purchase items from our vendors.

#### **Youth Program Medley**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Youth can choose from a variety of options, including special breakouts posted in this listing and on page 32.

#### **Dadspace and The Modern Family**

*David Amarel PhD, Antonio Aeillo, Matthew Schroeder*

In a fast-paced world of evolving roles, both biological and adoptive fathers desire and are also expected to be equal participants in parenting. Historically, we have been conspicuously absent in discussions of the adoptive family, but that is changing. Whether in straight or gay relationships, all men are expected to step up. In this session, we provide a forum to concentrate on parenting from the father's point of view. We will talk about the children's unique relationship with (and needs from) their dads. Discussion topics include: racial identity, sexual identity, white privilege, patriarchy, and models of masculinity.

### **Navigating Social Spaces in Romantic Relationships**

*Alysha Flynn, Brian Proberbs, Becca Zielakowski, Kate Zielaskowski MS*

Being an adoptee involves navigating a variety of social groups. Many Korean adoptees start this life-long process in their white adoptive families and continue throughout their lives with their peers, colleagues, and partners. We will talk about how as Korean adoptees, we enter other social groups outside of adoptee/Korean circles, such as white, black, and gay spaces, both individually and with our partners. Discussion will center around the meaning and process of this and how navigating these groups impacts both the Korean adoptee and their partners.

### **Adoptees as Parents**

**\* ADOPTees ONLY \***

*Alyson Yost BSN, RN-BC, CHPN, Jenn Tavenner, Bevin Hale MEd., Mark Hagland*

Listen to the experiences of four adult adoptees who have become parents. Becoming a mother can raise unexpected issues especially as an adoptee. Hear how becoming a parent has had an impact on our own identities, our relationship with our own parents, and how it has sparked feelings about our birth families. There will be time at the end for questions and answers.

### **Exploring My Identity**

**\* ADOPTees AGES 16-20+ ONLY \***

*Kate Firestone MA, Benjamin Kim Oser*

Maybe you know what you want to do with your life. Maybe you are just starting to figure it out. Either way, you are beginning to spend more and more of your academic, work, and social time separately from your parents. This leads to questions. Who are you, really? Who do you want to be? Are there labels you would like to shed, new identities you would like to explore? How does the world see you and is it different from how you would like to be seen? Join peers and older adoptees to talk about how to find and define yourself at this time in your life.

### **My Brother/Sister Is An Adoptee**

**\* NON-ADOPTED SIBLINGS OF ADOPTees AGES 7-17 ONLY \***

*Martha M. Crawford LCSW*

Your parents brought you to this conference to learn more about your brother or sister, who is adopted. Whether or not you like it, this is a good thing. You will find people sometimes ask rude questions or make jokes about adoption and will want to do something about it. Still, it would be nice if something at this conference was about YOU. Well, guess what? This session is. Join with other non-adopted siblings of adoptees, including a few who are already grown up, to talk about what it is like to be the sibling of an adoptee.

### **sunday @ 9:45am**

#### **Dealing with Microaggressions in High School and College**

**\* ADOPTees AGES 16-20+ ONLY \***

*Aeriel A. Ashlee M.Ed., Michael Burdan, Mark Hagland*

Racial jokes on social media. Comments around the holiday dinner table. Classmates repeating a snide political jab at someone of color. We've all been there. How do you respond? Connect with your peers and other adoptees to learn some tips and tools for handling these challenging moments.

#### **The Spouse's Perspective: Life with An Adoptee Partner**

*Jannie Kruse, Uhriel Edgardo Bedoya, Jenn Tavenner, Michael Tavenner*

This session hopes to discuss the complexities of romantic relationships with Korean adoptees from the perspective of adoptee partners. Over time, common relational issues can be identified and mitigated, but this remains an ever-evolving process. Participants will leave with an awareness that will ultimately create stronger relationships.

#### **Adoption Narratives (Part 2): Writing Workshop**

*Antonio Aeillo, Matthew Salesses*

A writing workshop - supporting members of the adoption community in using narrative as a process of

self-discovery and a method to build community.

### **My Parent Is An Adoptee**

**\* CHILDREN OF ADOPTees AGES 7-17 ONLY \***

*Katie Bozek Ph.D., LMFT, Amanda Transue-Woolston MSS, LSW*

Your mom or dad is an adoptee. Just like them, you have questions about birth family you may never have met. You are not always sure when it is OK to ask, though. Maybe your parents are different races too, and you get questions at school about that. Here's a chance for you to ask your questions and talk with others who share the same experiences as you.

### **A Panel on Adoptee Advocacy**

*Joy Lieberthal LCSW, Jen Hilzinger, Melanie Chung-Sherman LCSW PLLC, Martha M. Crawford LCSW*

Kids and adults both often need advocates - for everything from racism to societal bias. This session will explore issues surrounding being and having an advocate. Among the diverse experience and opinions of the panelists, many have attempted avenues of advocacy for their own kids as well as others at school and in the community, all with varied degrees of limited success. We intend to discuss when to step in for your child and how, when to let your child lead, and when & how to use identity privilege as potential leverage.

### **sunday @ 11:00am**

#### **Closing Coffeehouse**

#### **Widening the Circle: A Performance on Identity**

*Susan Harris O'Connor with Amanda Woolston and David Amarel*

Susan Harris O'Connor will perform her pioneering work on identity theory, captured within her autobiographical narrative. This model, published in *The Harris Narratives: An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee*, is the result of three months of introspective research through which she unfolded four dynamic and non-hierarchical dimensions of her mind's identity: vulnerable, solid, bi/co-existent and roles. This presentation offers the



audience a relatable framework for the complicated topic of identity. Susan will be joined by educators Amanda Woolston (an adoptee and Lost Daughters' founder, psychotherapist and author of 'The Declassified Adoptee'); and David Amarel (an adoptive parent, clinical psychologist and writer). After the performance, discussion will focus on how this model of self-knowledge and growth can be effectively used in psychotherapy.

**Youth Closing Party**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Gather with friends and mentors for games and yummy treats.

★★★★★★★★



*congratulates*

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# YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Meet **Nick Schroeder**, an incoming freshman at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Though Nick grew up a few hours away in central PA, he's spent enough time visiting family and attending sports games in Pittsburgh (he's a loyal Steelers, Pirates, & Penguins fan) that he knows it well. Since he's also a long-time KAAAN participant (with doses of year-round exposure as son of the director), he's the perfect choice to welcome new youth and feature as our youth for 2016.

**What advice do you have for kids and teens coming for the first time?** Have fun. Talk to people. Listen to your mentors.

**When did you first attend KAAAN? What were your impressions?** I was twelve. It was close to my house that year. I loved the outdoor pool. I met my friend Davis and right away wanted to come back the next year.

**What is it like having your mother as one of the leaders?** It's weird. She's always busy at the conference. She knows everybody.

**You seem to enjoy knowing what will happen and giving your opinion.** That's true. And I liked coming up with ideas for this year's field trip.

**What activities are you involved with?** I just graduated. In high school, I was on the stage crew for three years. I like working behind the scenes, seeing how things work and the pay off for the time you put in. Our school is large, so we use nice equipment and build complicated sets and tricks, like a giant ark in *Children of Eden* and flying characters in *Mary Poppins* and *The Little Mermaid*. I really enjoyed working the spotlight for the musicals and for community events, including the Lunar New Year Festival.

I also played rec basketball, refereed for younger kids' games, helped out with AV at my church, and taught myself how to play hockey.

**You taught yourself?** Yes. I learned to rollerblade in my driveway then added the stick. I watched videos on how to stop without falling. Then I practiced



skating backwards. And then I went to the rink and learned to ice skate. Now I go to several local rinks and play open hockey several times a week. I've already found some places to go this fall in Pittsburgh.

**What are you doing this summer?** I am working as a camp counselor outside Gettysburg.

**What made you choose that job?** It's one of my favorite places in the world. I've been going there since I was a baby ... it's where my parents met each other. You get paid to play all day. I enjoy working with kids. They're fun to hang out with and much smarter than you think.

**What do you plan to study at Duquesne?** Not sure yet ... sports marketing or maybe theater design or technical directing.

**Anything else?** Let's go, Pens!





First issue, Fall 1997



Fall 2012 anniversary issue



Summer 2003

# Korean Quarterly

is your award-winning newspaper reporting on the diversity of the Korean American community!

**Korean Quarterly** was formed in 1997 by adopted Koreans, 1st, 1.5/2nd generation Korean Americans and adoptive parents. Our mission is to be a voice for people and ideas not represented in the mainstream media and provide independent and alternative reporting on issues of identity, racism, politics and the arts and be a forum for the ideas and creativity of the entire Korean American community.

**Korean Quarterly** focuses on the place where identity, creativity and culture intersect. From the Twin Cities to Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Honolulu, Europe, Seoul and Pyongyang, we have been there to give voice to a variety of viewpoints and issues.

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# speaker bios

## **Aeillo, Antonio**

Antonio Aeillo is the Content Director and Web Editor of PEN American Center, the world's leading literary and human rights organization. While working on his MFA in fiction at The New School University, Aiello managed PEN's Prison Writing Program and co-wrote and edited PEN's *Handbook for Writers in Prison*. He is the founder and editor of *PASSAGES*, a quarterly journal of contemporary international literature. His stories and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in/on the *Literary Hub*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Alimentum*, *Anderbo.com*, *Revolving Floor*, and *Natural Home & Garden*, among other publications. He lives on a suburban homestead in Montclair, NJ with his wife, two children, and their chickens.

## **Amarel, David**

David Amarel is a clinical psychologist in private practice in NYC. He is also an adoptive parent and tween-wrangler to a son and daughter both born in Korea. David has been a regular contributor to *Gazillion Voices* magazine and to annual Chuseok meals that occasionally soar. He is currently writing a novel about trauma and the power of surprising connections.

## **Ashlee, Aerial A.**

Aerial A. Ashlee, M.Ed., is a doctoral associate in Educational Leadership at Miami University in Oxford, OH. As a self-identified transracial adoptee, Aerial's research interests focus on how to make college experiences more inclusive for Asian American transracial adoptees. Aerial has been a scholar-practitioner in higher education for more than nine years. She is Co-Founder of Ashlee Consulting, a social justice education firm that seeks to develop brave space for bold conversations. Aerial recently co-authored her first book, *VITAL: A Torch For Your Social Justice Journey*.

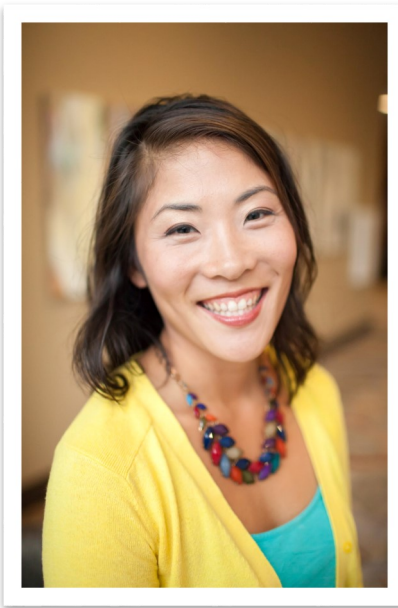
## **Bedoya, Uhriel Edgardo**

Uhriel Bedoya is a native of Panama and has lived in the U.S. for two dec-

ades. A global payments technology professional, he has done business in over 15 countries and has traveled to over 35, including his first trip to Korea in 2011. He returned with his wife Jannie, a Korean adoptee, in 2014 for her birth family search, a life changing experience that has shaped their journey as a couple. He and Jannie reside in Miami.

## **Bozek, Katie**

Katie Bozek was adopted from Korea at the age of six months. She is currently a licensed marriage and family therapist and owns a private practice in her community. Katie also works as an adjunct professor at two local universities. When she is not at the office, she can be found spending time with her three amazing children.



*Aerial Ashlee*

## **Burdan, Michael**

Adopted at the age of three years, Michael Burdan grew up in Pennsylvania and received a master's degree in counseling. He is currently living near DC and attending George Washington University. Michael is studying organizational management and

has spoken about his experiences at previous KAAAN conferences.

## **Burlbaugh, Brenda**

Brenda Burlbaugh is from Annapolis, MD, and has two sons adopted from Korea, ages 4 and 5. She owns [www.CourageinStone.com](http://www.CourageinStone.com), an online retail site for motivational and inspirational gifts. Brenda enjoys traveling, cooking (well, mostly eating), fine wine, jogging, reading, and napping. This is her third KAAAN conference.

## **Campbell, Sara**

Sara Campbell is an adult adoptee who has been involved with the Korean adoption community since 2003. She has been to multiple KAAAN conferences and is a member of KAAAN's Advisory Council. Sara is also the Partnership Specialist at Connect-a-Kid. She continues to teach, demonstrate, and display a positive aspect of the adoption triad. Sara has also worked as a mental health professional for Hope Network (nonprofit organization) for the past nine years.

## **Chung-Sherman, Melanie**

Melanie Chung-Sherman LCSW PLLC specializes in adoption-related counseling for triad members such as transracial adoption, complex trauma, attachment research, grief and loss, search and reunion, and identity related to life span issues. She is currently the Clinical Director of Post Adoption Services for a counseling clinic at ChristianWorks for Children, in Dallas, Texas. She has worked in the field of child welfare for close to 18 years within the realms of international adoption, foster care, child protective services, and domestic adoptions in a myriad of positions. She was also adopted from S. Korea in the 1970s and is married with two children.

## **Crawford, Martha M.**

Martha Crawford LCSW is a clinical social worker, psychotherapist, and clinical supervisor with a generalist private practice in NYC for the past 20 years. She is the author of the blog *What a Shrink Thinks*, and has pub-



*Lee and Whitney Fritz (far left) with Whitney's birth family in Seoul*

lished and presented on adoptive parenting with adopted colleagues. The Korean American Adoptee Adoptive family Network (KAAN) conference has been an annual and cherished gathering of community for the Crawford-Amarel family for 10 years.

#### **Eun Mi, Simone**

Simone Eun Mi is working as International Public Affairs manager in Seoul, Korea for KoRoot. KoRoot is a guesthouse for returning Korean adoptees and an NGO serving the adoptee community. Through the experience of adoptees, KoRoot operates within Korean society. Besides working for KoRoot, she is a journalist, photographer, and a highly gifted educator. Simone Eun Mi is a Dutch adoptee from Korea who grew up in a rural area in The Netherlands where she was the only child of color in the school. In 2015, she was a speaker at the IKAA conference in Rome. This is her first KAAAN conference.

#### **Firestone, Kate**

Kate Firestone is a Korean adoptee, adopted at three months of age and raised in central Pennsylvania. She is currently undergoing her first year as a doctoral student in Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University. She is simultaneously serving as a Graduate Writing Coordinator at MSU's Writing Center. Her academic interests include the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, space, and identity.

#### **Flynn, Alysha**

Alysha Flynn is an adult Korean adoptee. This is her fourth KAAAN conference.

#### **Fritz, Lee**

Lee Fritz was born in Busan, South Korea, and adopted at 4 months of age. He went to school and lived in Harrisburg, PA all his life until he was married to Whitney in 2013 and relocated to Nashville. Lee has a desire to someday learn more about his birth family. He's had the unique opportunity to see the interaction between Whitney and her Korean birth family, which most adoptees do not get to witness first-hand. Having a better understanding of this family dynamic is key for Lee in making his future decision to either start a birth family search or leave things in the unknown.

#### **Fritz, Whitney**

Whitney is a Korean adoptee who was given the unexpected opportunity to reunite with her birth family and begin to develop relationships with that nuclear core, as well as a large extended family. Six years later, she maintains regular contact with them and has experienced all of the ups and downs of navigating the complexities and dynamics of these relationships. Whitney has made every attempt to remain an open book throughout the experience in an effort to offer a perspective to adoptees and their families

about what a birth family reunion can look like. She is quick to emphasize that she is not an adoption expert and that her experience is just that - her experience.

#### **Gehring, Erica**

Erica Gehring is a Korean American adoptee, adoption researcher, and most recently, an adoption home study specialist. She also plans to continue expanding her work and engagement within the adoptee community. Her main goal in life is to support and advocate for people with marginalized identities, those who are very often left out of (positive) mainstream conversations and spotlights.

#### **Gonzalez, Rosita**

A writer, ceramicist and mother, Rosita Gonzalez serves as an editor at The Lost Daughters and recently edited the Flip the Script Anthology with Amanda Woolston and Diane Rene Christian. A Korean adoptee, she has spent the last year living in Seoul and searching for her first family and her adoptive father's Korean son. Her journeys and work can be found at Mothermade, the blog.

#### **Hagland, Mark**

Mark Hagland is an adult Korean adoptee, born in South Korea in 1960 and adopted by American parents of Norwegian and German descent. He grew up in Milwaukee, WI, and came to Chicago for graduate school, where he has lived since 1981. He has been an active participant in the KAAAN Conference for 14 years. He speaks regularly on transracial adoption-related topics for a variety of audiences.

#### **Hale, Bevin**

Bevin Hale was adopted from Korea at the age of 4 months and grew up in the St. Louis area. In 2006, she traveled to Seoul to attend her first KAAAN conference. She is an elementary school teacher who currently resides in Boston with her husband and two children.

#### **Heitzig, Ellen Picklesimer**

Ellen Picklesimer Heitzig was adopted when she was five months old and grew up in central Illinois with her younger sister, also adopted from Korea. She received her master's degree in social work from Washington

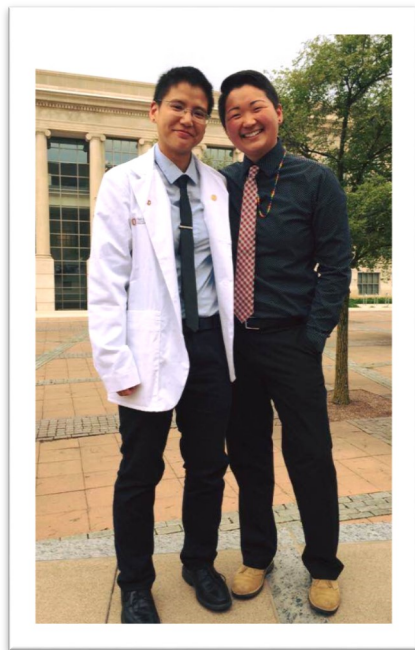
University in St. Louis and is currently a district social worker with the City of St. Charles School District. Ellen is currently the social worker for Sejong Cultural Experience Inc. and travels on the annual Korea trip each year. In this position, she works with adolescents and has facilitated biological family reunions.

#### **Hilzinger, Jen**

Jen Hilzinger and her husband have three children - two they adopted from China and South Korea, and one born to them. Their children are 21, 18 and 9. Jen has participated in KAAN Conferences for over eleven years in many capacities. Currently she serves on the Advisory Council for KAAN.

#### **Hooker, Jaime**

Jaime Hooker is an adult adoptee who recently connected with the KAD community on a trip to Korea last summer. She lives with cerebral palsy and mental illness. Jaime is an active advocate in disabled community and looks forward to sharing her



*Erica Gehringer (right) with best friend (also her first Asian American friend) who helped her overcome internalized racism and affirm her queer and non-gender confirming identities*

experiences with others. This is her first year attending KAAN.

#### **Huber, Courtney**

Courtney Huber previously served as the Director of Marketing for Connect-A-Kid and recently accepted the position as CEO of Connect-A-Kid alongside with their President, Robin Kim. Courtney has been active in Connect-A-Kid for 2 years and previous to that helped to form the first Asian American Employee Resource Group at her previous employer, Discovery Communications, and helped to form the first Asian Pacific Islander Club at her alma mater, Salisbury University. She served as a counselor and attendee at Camp MuJiGae at the Parsons Child Campus in Albany, NY. Courtney was born in Busan, South Korea, raised in Sparks, MD, and currently resides in West Palm Beach, FL.

#### **Jordan, Kristin**

Kristin Jordan is a Korean adoptee who grew up in Syracuse, NY. Kristin's youngest sister Shannon, also a Korean adoptee, is a person who has Cerebral Palsy. Together, Shannon and Kristin have recently connected with the KAD community and returned to Korea in 2013.

#### **Jordan, Shannon**

Shannon Jordan is an adoptee who lives in Syracuse, NY. Shannon was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy soon after her arrival to the US as an infant in 1981. Shannon recently connected with the KAD community and is eager to share her experience as an adoptee who lives with disabilities. When she is not busy listening to K-Pop music, Shannon can be found behind her iPad with a box of tissues watching DramaFever.

#### **Kim, JaeRan**

JaeRan Kim is Assistant Professor at University of Washington, Tacoma. JaeRan has over 15 years of experience working with foster and adopted children and families and has developed numerous training curricula for child welfare professionals. JaeRan's research focuses on child welfare including adoption, foster care, institutional care, and children with disabilities.

#### **Kim, Oh Myo**

Oh Myo Kim, M.Div., PhD is Assistant Professor of Practice in the Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology Department at Boston College. Dr. Kim's research focuses on the intersection of culture and identity with international, transracial adopted adults. She is also interested in family-style orphanage care, cultural socialization, and expressive writing interventions. Dr. Kim is a mindfulness-based therapist who specializes in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance & Commitment Therapy, and eating disorders.

#### **Klunder (Seungmi Ly), Laura**

Laura Klunder is the Social Justice Education Specialist at the Multicultural Student Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Laura grew up in the suburbs of Milwaukee, and received her bachelor's and master's degree from UW-Madison's School of Social Work. After leaving Wisconsin, Laura served as the Assistant Director of Campus Programs for Leadership and Social Justice at Macalester College in Saint Paul, MN. Laura returns home to Wisconsin, USA after living and organizing in her home of Seoul, South Korea with Adoptee Solidarity Korea.

#### **Kruse, Jannie**

Jannie Kruse was adopted at the age of two from Korea. She returned to Korea for her first trip home in 2011 with her husband Uhriel. She attended her first KAAN in 2012 in Albany, NY, and it was a revelation to spend time with other adoptees where often words were not needed in order to be understood. She and Uhriel have been presenters at KAAN since 2012, sharing the complexities of marriage involving interracial adoptees.

#### **Lake, Niki**

Niki Lake is passionate about intercultural service and helping refugees, international students, and students with disabilities. Her first exposure to Korea and Korean adoptees was during a trip to South Korea in 2008 with InKAS. Her self-study Korean language facilitator at the time, a former InKAS volunteer in Oregon, suggested that she apply for the program. Since then, she has explored her Korean roots and identity as an adoptee



both while living in Korea in 2009 and most recently while in southern California.

#### **Lieberthal, Joy**

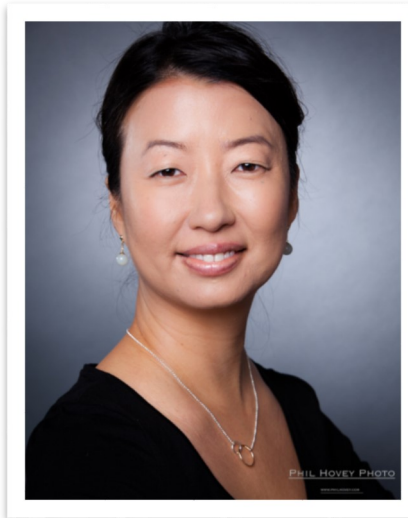
Joy Lieberthal is a social worker in private practice in New York City. She works primarily with international adoptees both as a clinician and advocate. She was adopted from Korea at the age of 6 and has been in reunion with her birthmother for over twenty years.

#### **Marra, Andy**

Andy Marra possesses more than a decade of communications experience working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations worldwide. Andy currently manages communications at the Arcus Foundation, one of the largest private conservation and human rights funders in the world. Prior to coming to the Arcus, she was the public relations manager for GLSEN, a national organization working to ensure safer school environments for LGBT students in K-12 education. Previously, she was co-director of Nodutdol for Korean Community Development, and a senior media strategist at GLAAD. Andy's work and commentary have been found on programs ranging from NPR's "Tell Me More," The Rachel Maddow Show, and Access Hollywood, as well as outlets including the Associated Press, Jezebel, The Guardian, The New York Times, People, Politico, Reuters, and The Wall Street Journal, among others. Andy has served on boards and advisory councils, including Chinese for Affirmative Action, the Funding Exchange, Human Rights Campaign, and the National Center for Transgender Equality. She has been honored by The White House for her contributions to the LGBT community, profiled in The Advocate's "Forty Under 40," and listed as one of The Huffington Post's "Most Compelling LGBT People." She is also a past recipient of the GLSEN Pathfinder Award, the National LGBTQ Task Force Creating Change Award and the Colin Higgins Foundation Courage Award. Andy currently lives in New York City with her fiancé Drew. Follow Andy on Twitter at @andy\_marra.

#### **McGinnis, Hollee**

Hollee McGinnis, MSW, is a prominent speaker, writer, and community organizer on intercountry and transracial adoptions. She is currently a PhD candidate in social work at Washington University in St. Louis. Her dissertation, funded by the Korea Foundation and U.S. Fulbright, examines the mental health and academic outcomes of adolescents in orphanages in South Korea. Prior to returning



*Hollee McGinnis*

to school she was the policy director at the Donaldson Adoption Institute where she headed a national study on adult adoptees' adoption and racial identity. In 1996 she founded Also-Known-As, Inc., a non-profit adult intercountry adoptee organization in New York City.

#### **McKee, Kimberly**

Kimberly D. McKee, PhD is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Liberal Studies at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI. Her current book manuscript, tentatively titled *Markets, Children and "Love": Interrogating the Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex*, interrogates the institutional practice of international adoption and traces the origins of what she terms the transnational adoption industrial complex. Her second project explores how racialized and sexualized depictions of Asian/Asian American women circulate within the U.S. as a result of American militarism abroad and its impact on the female adoptee body. She is currently KAAAN's Assistant

Director and serves on the Advisory Council.

#### **Naftzger, Katie Jae**

Katie Naftzger, LICSW, KAAAN Advisory Council member, has presented workshops and lectures at KAAAN and other conferences and institutions for many years. In her private psychotherapy practice, Katie sees children, teens, adoptive parents and families. She runs a group for young adult Asian adoptees. She also enjoys running online and local groups for adoptive parents. Currently she is working on a book about parenting adopted teens. To learn more, visit [adoptiontherapyma.com](http://adoptiontherapyma.com).

#### **O'Connor, Susan Harris**

Susan Harris O'Connor, MSW, Lost Daughter's and AAC Board member is a nationally known solo performance artist of her book *The Harris Narratives: An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee*. She is published by the Yale Journal of Law and Feminism and the esteemed British journal, *Adoption and Fostering* where her racial identity model and theory is elaborated on. She is also a contributing author to *Flip the Script: Adult Adoptee Anthology*.

#### **Oser, Benjamin Kim**

Benjamin Kim Oser, adopted at three months old from Seoul, has been involved with athletics since the age of five. He has been playing competitive ice hockey since he was eight, which includes collegiate club hockey for NYU. He is currently an educator and leadership administrator at Drexel University, as well as the camp director for a Korean culture camp in New Jersey. He is passionate about supporting the adoptee community, specifically relating to confidence building around male adoptee identity.

#### **Partain, Amy**

When Amy Partain and her husband started the process to adopt their son from Korea in 2006, she had no idea how this little boy would change her life. Learning about race, culture and trauma transformed not only Amy's parenting style but her life. Now she strives to share the knowledge and resources that have helped her with other adoptive families.

**Peacock, Rebecca Nirmala**

Rebecca Peacock is a co-founder of Lost Sarees, a group uniting Indian adoptees and building bridges to South Asian communities through arts, education and advocacy. Rebecca resides in Seattle, Washington with her husband, Dave, and daughter, Trisha. At the end of 2011 Rebecca and Dave travelled to India, where they adopted Trisha from Ashraya Children's Home in Bangalore. The journey marked Rebecca's first trip to her home country since her adoption as an infant.

**Perscheid, Margie**

Margie Perscheid is the adoptive parent of two young adults, both of whom were adopted from Korea. She is a current member of the KAAN Advisory Council, was co-founder and President of Korean Focus Metro DC and served on the Board of Directors of the Korean American Coalition DC chapter. Margie has spoken at the American Adoption Congress, Adoption Initiative and KAAN conferences. Her blog, Third Mom, and website, Korean Adoption Advocacy, share her perspective as an activist adoptive parent.

**Proberherbs, Brian**

Brian Proberherbs is of West Indian descent, and is the life partner of a Korean adoptee. This is his first KAAN conference.

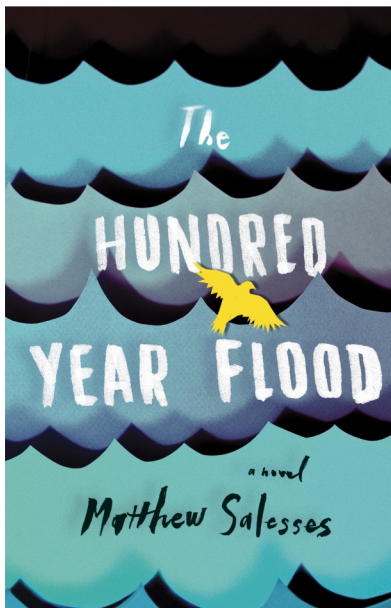
**Robinson, Tammy Ko**

Tammy Ko Robinson is an artist-researcher with interests in decoloniality and the stewardship of airwaves, land, and water. Her body of work recently spans her remigration to South Korea and includes video, installation, and archive creation. Concurrently, her writings on art and culture have appeared in *The Hankyoreh*, *Pressian*, *article*, *SPACE Magazine*, *Asia-Pacific Journal*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, *KoreAm*, and *Flash Art*. Tammy serves as an Associate Professor at Hanyang University teaching courses in cinema, virtualities and new media, and is a Senior Researcher with the Asian Arts Complex, Gwangju. Her work on adoptee matters spans her 1998 MA thesis on intercountry adoption law to current service on the Adopt-

ee Researcher Committee for the Emigration Museum of Korea.

**Salesses, Matthew**

Matthew Salesses is the author of *The Hundred Year Flood* (Little A/Amazon Publishing), an Amazon Best Book of September (2015) and a Kindle First Pick, and a season's best selection at BuzzFeed, Refinery29, Gawker, and elsewhere. His other books include *I'm Not Saying*, *I'm Just Saying*; *Different Racisms*; and *The Last Repatriate*. Matthew has written about adoption, race, and parenting for NPR's *Code Switch*, *The New York Times Motherlode*, *Salon*, *The Toast*, *The Millions*, the Center for Asian American Media, *The Rumpus*, *Glimmer Train*, *American Short Fiction*, and



many others. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Creative Writing & Literature at the University of Houston.

**Scholl, Carolyn**

Carolyn Scholl was adopted at 22 months and grew up in California. She has been very involved with adoption organizations such as AKASoCal and KAAN. She lives in California with her husband and two children.

**Schroeder, Matthew**

Matt Schroeder is the father of Nick and Allison, who were both adopted from Korea. He enjoys the op-

portunity to talk with and learn from other adoptive parents and adult adoptees. He is especially pleased that KAAN 2016 is in Pittsburgh, home of the NFL's pre-eminent franchise.

**Schroeder, Stacy**

Stacy Schroeder is the president and executive director of KAAN and lives with her family in Pennsylvania. She also coordinates Ta-ri, a local group that brings together those with ties to Korea for cultural and community-building activities. In 2007, she organized a weeklong camp for young adoptees and their families. Stacy's previous nonprofit experience includes serving as a full-time camp director, working at a library, and co-authoring a book. It brings Stacy joy to see the bonds forged at KAAN continue to flourish and bring support throughout the year, including for her son and daughter, who are teen adoptees themselves.

**Selahart**

Selahart is a cultural performance and teaching group comprised of students from Korea who come to the U.S. to learn and share Korean culture. The group is especially interested in supporting adoptees and their families. Based in central PA, Selahart regularly performs in the community and works with other groups such as Ta-ri and Camp Rice.

**Sinangil, Noah**

Noah Sinangil was adopted from Seoul, Korea at four and half months old and raised in New Jersey. He has two sisters, one of whom is also adopted from Korea. Since he was young he has had a strong interest in Korean culture. He began attending Camp Sejong, a cultural camp for Korean-Americans, at the age of nine and has been a counselor there for the past two years. He graduated from high school last June and currently attends Rowan University, where he is majoring in Biomedical Engineering.

**Smith, Sara**

Sara Smith is a Korean adoptee, adoptive parent to a Korean born daughter and biological parent to

two sons. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and children. Sara is a homeopathic consultant in private practice at New Leaf Homeopathy, LLC.

**Stanley, Michael**

Michael Stanley is a professional financial advisor and KAAAN's treasurer. He splits his time between New York City and Philadelphia.

**Tavener, Jenn**

Jenn Tavener is an adult Korean adoptee. She was born in Pusan, South Korea. This will be her sixth KAAAN conference and she is excited to share her experiences. She currently lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and two children.

**Tavener, Michael**

For Mike Tavener, growing up in a suburban neighborhood with mixed ethnicities, it was easy to fall in love with a beautiful Korean girl. It was acceptable (at least to him), and on the outside, appeared innocent enough. He didn't consider his family's perception, and most of them were silent about it. His grandfather said that it may be best if they "remained friends." Young and naive, they looked past race and still have a long lasting relationship.

**Tomlinson, Dawn**

Currently President of AdopSource, a Minnesota based non-profit working with internationally adoptive families, Dawn Tomlinson is involved in local Korean communities. She was a dance mom for her daughter's Korean Drum and Dance group for years. As a KAD artist, Dawn's work was accepted last year in the Gallery Show in Seoul called SISO, through InKAS,

and this year's show "Reflections." Currently, she serves at Camp Choson and has spent five years as Parent Workshop Coordinator. Dawn is a board member of KAWA MN, a member of the Shinparam Korean Drum Group, and has written articles for Korean Quarterly and KoreAm.

**Transue-Woolston, Amanda**

Amanda Woolston is an author, speaker, activist, and licensed social worker who serves children and families as a therapist and consultant in the behavioral health field. She has served the adoption and foster care communities through individual and family clinical work, group work, writing and presenting, and working for positive policy change. Her writing and presentations have reached broad audiences through multiple books, magazines, major news and radio interviews, and conferences, and she has engaged with legislators at the state and congressional levels on adoption policy. You can find her writing in various publishing corners of the adoption world, but mostly here, at Gazillion Voices Magazine, Social Work Helper, Lost Daughters, and her personal blog, The Declassified Adoptee.

**Wager, Alex Myung**

Alex Myung was adopted from South Korea and raised in Albany, NY. In 2005, he moved to NYC where he graduated

from the School of Visual Arts with a BFA in 2D Animation. He has spent the past five years working as a Tech Designer for companies such as Tiffany's, Diane von Furstenberg, DKNY, and 3.1 Phillip Lim. Myung is currently finishing up his second animated short film "Arrival" about a boy struggling to come out to his mother.

**Yost, Alyson**

Alyson Yost is an adult Korean adoptee who was adopted at 4 months old. Alyson traveled back to Korea in 2010 with G.O.A.L.'s First Trip Home, and she has attended and presented at many KAAAN conferences. Alyson actively participates in local adoptee organizations in Central PA, including Ta-ri and Korean Adult Adoptees of Central PA. She currently works as a Registered Nurse at



*Amanda Transue-Woolston*

**Many thanks to our speakers for volunteering your time and expertise to the community. Your voices are part of what makes KAAAN strong.**

*If you are interested in applying to be a speaker at KAAAN 2017 see page 16 or visit [www.KAANet.org](http://www.KAANet.org). Proposal forms will be posted in August 2016.*



Penn State Hershey and resides in Harrisburg, PA with her husband, 2 children and 2 step-children.

**Zielaskowski, Becca**

Becca Zielaskowski recently graduated with a degree in health administration. She lives and works in the Bronx and is married to a KAD. This is her first KAAN conference.

**Zielaskowski, Kate**

Kate Zielaskowski is an adult adoptee who was adopted from Seoul as an infant. She is a research project coordinator at Memorial Sloan Kettering in NY. She lives in the Bronx with her wife and two dogs.



*Sara Campbell with boyfriend*

## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

### KAAN has helped me ...

- feel validated in my transracial adoptee and woman of color identity. *(Erica Gehringer)*
- to connect with other adult adoptees from varying backgrounds, not only Korean adoptees. *(Rosita Gonzalez)*
- to be a part of a community and remember my worries, fears, celebrations, and joys can be shared and through that sharing either diminished or multiplied. *(Jen Hilzinger)*
- connect with other adult adoptees. *(Oh Myo Kim)*
- develop my voice as an adoption scholar. *(Aeriel Ashlee)*
- become a better parent, sister, aunt - in general, a better human being. *(Carolyn Hathaway)*
- meet and learn from some amazing people. *(Stacy Schroeder)*
- connect with other KADs for the first time ever! *(Whitney Fritz)*
- begin to discuss issues I otherwise wouldn't have....and meet my wife! *(Lee Fritz)*

### I wish that ...

- someday we can live in a society where organizations like KAAN are not even needed. But for now, I am so happy to have an avenue like this for KADs! *(Lee Fritz)*
- all mothers and fathers have the support (material and otherwise, love and encouragement) they need to be really good parents to their children. *(Jen Hilzinger)*
- more people took the time and set their egos aside to listen to the perspectives of others ... in this case, especially the voices of adoptees. *(Stacy Schroeder)*
- someone could "beam me" back to Seoul. *(Rosita Gonzalez)*

### A topic we do not talk enough about in adoption is ...

- mental health *(Jen Hilzinger)*
- both sides of birth family reunion - difficulties and joys. *(Whitney Fritz)*
- the other side of birth family reunions...that of the birth family. *(Lee Fritz)*
- its relation to oppression (such as racism, classism, sexism, ableism, nationalism, and heterosexism) and how it very frequently reinforces and maintains these systems of power. *(Erica Gehringer)*
- rights to birth family information. *(Oh Myo Kim)*
- the impact it has on the next generation ... the children of adoptees. *(Rosita Gonzalez)*



## Notes for ADOPTIVE PARENTS

by Melanie Chung-Sherman LCSW PLLC

*Some people have the gift of looking at situations and being able to concisely extract and verbalize the lesson to be learned from them. Melanie Chung-Sherman (bio on page 41) is one of those people. The following is a series of remarks and observations made based on her interaction with adoptees and adoptive families. She initially shared this wisdom on Facebook; it is gathered and reprinted here with her permission.*

Be careful not to immediately, and many times, erroneously correlate "birth family rage" and adoptee/foster youth frustration directed towards adoptive parents (more particular adoptive moms) because they are angry at their birth parents. Unless you explore that belief from a heartfelt, safe, and genuine place, you really don't know. That may or may not be true--and falls into the antiquated "primal wound" theory. It creates a paradox that can bind relationship and stifle growth. Why is it that so many are willing to jump to that reasoning without truly deconstructing all dynamics? Collectively, I have yet to meet any child, teen, or adult so binary.

Connection-based parenting does not equate abdication of parental roles and healthy boundaries. Kids need balance between structure and nurture to feel safe and secure. Too often I hear parents struggling with the pendulum of implementation--particularly if they choose to earnestly come to terms with aspects of their own childhood. It is important to allow grace and patience in this process. Some may find they go too far to either side as they re-establish what it means to parent and relate to their child with the hopes of not repeating the attachment patterns they grew up in. What we tend to overlook is the loss involved in this paradigm shift--the loss of understanding and support from familial systems that have managed "just fine" for generations before, the loss of what was familiar, the loss of societal reinforcement--and with loss comes grief. Grief forces us to strip everything away. . and, frankly, I want to go back to what was before even if I know it was idealized. Connection-based parenting is not about changing the child, but changing our adult hearts--and most of the time, that involves laying us bare and exposing our internal mess a few times, but not forever. That creates grief and is an essential part of the pendulum.

Unhealthy family boundaries include "mind-reading," in which adults model to kids that things "should be"

a certain way without explicitly asking or requesting their needs. This creates an environment that is both toxic and unsafe because a child is not meant to "know" the inner workings of an adult. They are constantly on edge. Giving voice to kids means learning how to use our adult voice in a healthy, introspective, and grown-up way.

A child's negative behaviors without adult insight and accountability into their adult response (and triggers) to the child can equate the 3-Ds ... disobedience, defiance, and disrespect--along with the immediate assumption it is past trauma alone. Balanced adult awareness and compassion equates healing to do things differently in relationship--and model what they seek. Trauma cannot stand alone in a bubble and neither can compassion. Both are expressed relationally.

Adopting a child of color and not intentionally creating nurturing and on-going relationships with people of color who mirror them ... is like asking them to believe in a religion and never taking them to a place of worship or to be around others who model those beliefs--and yet expecting them to know once they are adults.

Last night our adoptee groups (ages 5-17 years old) met. Over and over again, bullying comes up regarding race and adoption. Many kids do not have the words to explain what is happening to them, particularly transracial adoptees, ranging from peers and adults intrusively touching their skin, hair, or asking about their eyes to aggressive verbal abuse related to their early history such as "You must be a crack baby" to "Go back to Africa. . .China. . .Russia. . .or your loser [real] parents." Painful statements kids are hearing about something they cannot change--and can retraumatize them. Many kids shared they have not told their parents because they wanted to solve it them-

selves or "I tried to tell them, but they just tell me [they] didn't mean really mean it that way." Adults must not minimize these experiences, but be aware by becoming aware of their own adult discomfort with past bullying experiences as well. They must acknowledge and remain actively curious about how it is impacting their child. Parenting is tough. Add the complexity of race, trauma, and adoption--and it elevates everything.

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What if we rephrased "acting out" to "feeling out"? The number of times I hear that phrase throughout the day by adults describing kids, or even other adults, when behaviors do not match expectations... Aren't we just feeling our way out of a problem most of the time? Whether good or bad, we all want to be seen, be known, and be understood, and most of the time those incidents happens without words. Honestly, I need an adult tantrum once in a while, too.

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Verbally acknowledging and questioning one's roots, ethnicity, and past history before adoption is an initial process of integrating the head with the heart...actively moving into search and reunion, on one's own terms (separate from the childhood narrative), jump starts integration by merging idealization with reality...and begins an entirely different journey that creates newfound ownership of story.

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An adoptee's truth and life narrative are not debatable. The lived experiences will inhabit a spectrum of discomfort and tension when spoken earnestly and genuinely that far exceeds the narrative of rescue. Authenticity demands a looking-glass absent of partiality or minimization. It is what that individual is making sense of.

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What are the ethical dilemmas involved with registering the DNA of minor adoptees by adopt parents when they young? It is one thing for me, as an adult, to intentionally register my DNA into a public, international database such as 23andMe or Ancestry to seek answers. How does this transpose to adoptee rights and voice/choice long-term? Who/what is dominating that conversation for adoptees? What are potential implications from the vantage point of adoptees coming of age in this new horizon of search and reunion? Search is a very personal and individualized event for adoptees...I grapple with these thoughts as I hear about more parents moving forward on this. Wondering how this will be received as

they reach adulthood. I see adoptees working through premature search initiated by parents, but who were too young to understand the dynamics and are now working through reunion on their terms.

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There is a very fine line between voyeurism and exploitation in the name of activism and social change. We must constantly seek to incorporate as many perspectives first, particularly those least represented in privileged discussion, to ensure we act in the best interest of all collectively.

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Parents ask when they should seek professional therapy for their child ... when the parent is willing to enter into the healing process as well. Healing is relational--and a child cannot be expected to do all of the hard work independent of their parents' hard work.

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What does healing really mean? Under whose authority or definition? If the individual does not feel broken or harmed, but according to another they are considered unhealed ... what does that do in the long-run? Not all trauma is the same. Not all trauma means brokenness. We must remember this in the 'healing' field.

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When working with children who have been impacted by early trauma, remember their brains and bodies have adapted in a survival state. When they become dysregulated, many times they can regress behaviorally/developmentally to less than half their chronological age (or younger). A great question to ask, "Would I tell a baby this?" As adults, we are kids' external "modems"--we must attune and model, not just talk at or demand. Our brains grow in safe relationship and experience--only then can we download info adequately. If that is missed, we must go back to move forward with kiddos who missed that early on in life.

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Executive functioning is like our air control tower to help us safely launch and land multiple planes...but, when kids are impacted by early trauma, their towers need more fine tuning before successfully sticking most take-offs or landings. Kids need adults who have intentionally mastered and re-mastered calm under pressure when their own planes are grid-locked.

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# A DAY IN THE LIFE

*A reflection on two years of living as an adoptee in Korea.  
by Laura Wachs*

These days, my free time is spent alone. I live in Seoul, South Korea. The air is so thick, I forget I grew up in the Emerald City, raised by evergreens and mountains. Here, everyone wears a mask to protect their lungs. Dust in the air is as harmful as the cigarettes they methodically chain smoke. I find it a comfort to embrace the ways we repair ourselves one day and kill ourselves the next.

In the mornings, I wake to a place more window than room. Color streams through stained glass and illuminates a row of religious statues. Jesus, Mary, Jesus on the cross, Jesus holding his hand out and Jesus as a Little Boy. The bookshelves are full of bibles written in hangul. If I were to find God, the time would be now. If I were to verify my rejection of God, the time would be now. It's proven to be the latter, as I masturbated the first night I moved in. What is a greater act of retaliation against shame the world places upon you, than to love yourself anyway?

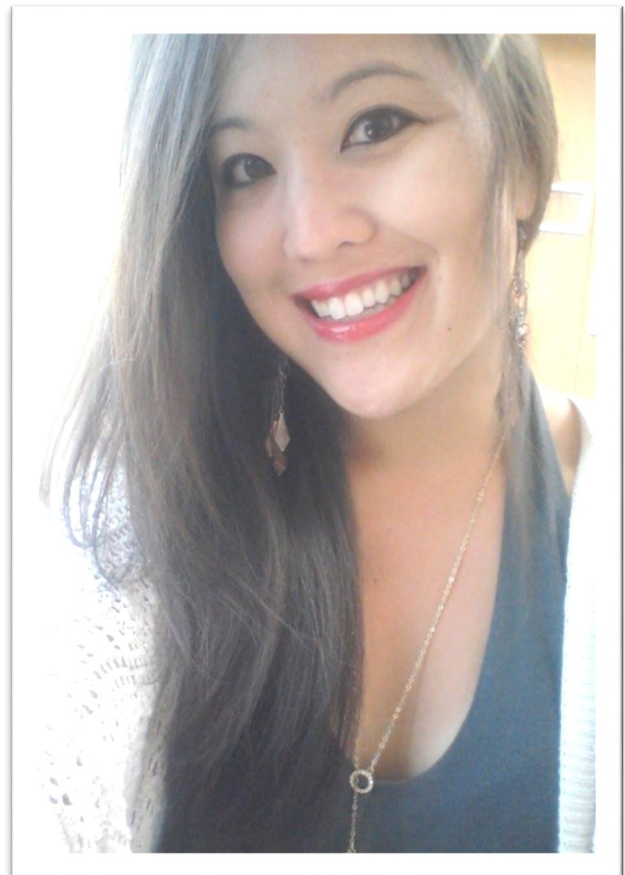
It is May and Spring is taunting the sky with her mood swings. If it doesn't rain, I'll go on a run. I'm not sure if it's toward or away from something. If it does rain, I'll write poetry. I'm not sure if it's toward or away from something. The wind is cold, but not as sharp or unforgiving as winter was. Justify discomfort with a larger discomfort, and life isn't so bad.

Last week, I visited my Korean Brother's art installation. He's a writer, photographer and one of the wisest of souls I know. I asked, "Do you create art in the moment or let it ripen before plucking it from your heart?" He answered, "When I was

young, I'd write with impulse, but now that I'm older, I wait". Said, "It's like when you hike up the mountain. My body no longer offers agility. I must walk slow. When I walk slow, I see things I wouldn't have otherwise noticed."

Today, I am 27. I wonder about everything I have missed. Everything, I will still miss on purpose.

This morning, I skyped with my best friend. He's one of those people who I don't need to put on a pretense for. If I did, he'd call me out. There is something to be said for holding eye contact half-way around the globe. To accept the inevitable pauses in conversation. To ramble on about mundane trivialities of a 9-5 schedule. As we spoke, I



told him about how I felt I'd created two separate worlds. He replied, "It's not like your life was erased here." Brings up names of people and places that send my mind into nostalgia. Affirms the power of history.

Seattle is my first home. Its busses and streets held my aching body. It taught me what it was to be weak and what it was to be strong. At night, I'd walk downtown for hours. Watch the homeless. Curl up on benches. Call friends from a payphone. After the suicidal fantasies wore off, I found myself amid Capitol Hill. Week nights, filled with poetry readings and craft beer. Hipsters and wannabe hipsters. Gay burlesque shows, lesbian bars and 24 hour diners.

The thing I miss most though is the smell of fresh and the color of green. A cityscape painted alongside the lake. How light flirts with the water.

Gangnam is my second home. Its subway and uneven sidewalks hold my aching body. It teaches me how to long for a mother and how to and not to belong. When I speak, my tongue flops like a fish out of water. When I bow, I feel like the missing piece of a puzzle. Round 1: BBQ and somaek. Fists loosen. Round 2: LP Bar and beer. Shoulders relax. Round 3: Karaoke and soju. Sing as if it's liberation. Round 4: Night Club and

shots: Dance like you are not your body. Round 5: Hangover soup and more beer: It's the thought that counts.

Sway arm in arm at the crosswalk. It doesn't matter if you stand or you fall, for you will still be together. Crawl into bed at dawn.

My most breathtaking moments are noteworthy for the fact that they're godless. I don't pray to protect my lungs. I'm not sure if I'm running toward or away from history. If I want to find love or to miss it on purpose.

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*Laura Wachs is a Korean Adoptee poet born in Seoul, South Korea and raised in Seattle, Washington. She's written for over a decade and performed for 6 years. Her features include Seattle Poetry Slam, Rain City Slam, Breadline, Antioch University, Bellingham Poetry Night and Everett Poetry night, among others. She is an event organizer and curated benefit shows for the Crisis Clinic of King County to support the Mental Health field and ASK to support Korean adoptees. She successfully funded the Kickstarter Project "The Voices of Korean Adoption" and currently resides in Seoul to teach poetry workshops and publish a book. This book will bring awareness and support to organizations for single mothers and adoptees in Korea. She likes cheap red wine, dogs, and hugs.*

## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

It is important to widen the circle in the adoption community because ...

... there is such complexity to adoption that it's important to hear multiple voices. *(Oh Myo Kim)*

... adoption is a very complex issue that is often misunderstood, overlooked, or dismissed, and having adoptee and adoptive family allies makes it a lot easier to navigate. *(Erica Gehringer)*

... to the degree with which we can listen to and work with each other, we can accomplish far more together than apart. *(Stacy Schroeder)*

... adoption is a part of our world and if we as a community do not support it through education and 'getting out there' our kids, at VERY young ages, are often asked to explain themselves and the originations and legitimacy of their families. That's adult work. *(Jen Hilzinger)*

Some of the Best of ...

# HARLOW'S MONKEY



You may have already heard of Harlow's Monkey, a blog which began in 2006 and gives an "unapologetic look at transracial and transnational adoption," Harlow's Monkey



writer JaeRan Kim really blazed the way for many other adoptee voices online. Kim is a regular presenter at KAAN, including this year, and, in the spirit of our theme of Widening the Circle, we wanted to excerpt some of her work here. See what Harlow's Monkey has to say about spouses of adoptees, behaviors of allies, interactions amongst adoptees, and what it is like to be around adoptees who are in reunion when you are not, You will find each piece as relevant as the day it was written. Want to learn more? Mosey on over to <https://harlows-monkey.com>.

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## Being Married to Harlow's Monkey January 7, 2007

Being married to a transracial adoptee is no picnic in the park. Just ask Mr. Harlow's Monkey.

We've been together for almost 20 years and in March, we'll have been legal for 18 years. And to say that I tested Mr. HM those first few decades is quite an understatement. I have many friends who are adopted and one thing many of us have in common, whether placed in same-race, domestic, international or transracial adoptive homes, are issues with trust and attachment.

For some adopted persons, that can translate as being stand-offish, cold and commitment-phobic,

with a tendency to leave people before they leave us.

For others, this might translate into clinginess, jealousy and neediness with a tendency towards suffocating the very people we love the most. This is what's referred to as insecure attachment.

Either way, it can be very difficult for the partner or loved one of an adopted person, especially if it seems that they've suddenly become obsessive about their adoption. And if you are partnered to a transracially, transculturally adopted person, this could be triple the whammy.

Because the subject of adoption is so child-centric, I often wonder whether adoptive parents think about what their child is going to deal with as an adult. So I was interested in this "Partners of Adoptees" information sheet from the Benevolent Society's Post Adoption Services that I found through another web site. One of the paragraphs in this information sheet states: *You have probably grown up with your biological family. This is a very different experience from being part of an adoptive family. Adoptees are cut off from things that non-adopted people take for granted - birth parents, the extended family, genetic inheritance and sometimes ethnic or racial origins. Adoptees often search in order to re-connect with the past and contrary to many people's belief, those who search are not necessarily unhappy with their life. Adoptees who have had a happy adoption can also experience feelings of emptiness, of yearning and of something missing in their lives.*

The grief associated with this sense of loss can sometimes surface at the time of specific events, such as the death of an adoptive parent, the illness of a loved one, or on "happy" occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries or the birth of a child. These situations can all be reminders of the lost birth family.



When Mr. HM and I met, I was 18 and very much in my "adjusted adoptee" stage. In fact, I sometimes spoke to adoptive parents at my church, telling them exactly what they wanted to hear. I had no idea that other adopted persons might not share my opinions or feelings because I never spoke to any other adopted people. That's right, for the first two decades of my life, I did not ever talk to another adopted person about how I felt about being adopted.

Imagine Mr. HM's surprise when in my mid-twenties, I began to delve into my adoption "issues." It made sense that as I became an adult and started to develop an identity separate from my parents that I would look at the role that adoption played in my life. For the first time, I was with someone who I felt completely safe with and I processed my feelings about being adopted alongside of him. But there were many times when he just couldn't understand the depth of my feelings.

Mr. HM had long dealt with my issues of trust

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**" 'Why now?' is a common question, especially towards those of us who were "adjusted" earlier in our lives and then found ourselves - well, not maladjusted - but questioning."**

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and abandonment, which manifested in both little and big ways. For instance, I once threw a temper tantrum for days because he'd picked me up from work at the wrong entrance (I worked at the giganto Mall of America at the time). I raged on and on, terrified that he'd forgotten about me and I'd be stuck there all alone. I was a grown adult at the time, and yet the anger expressed outwardly really masked a fear - a fear that I knew deep in my soul - that I was not wanted or worthwhile and was abandoned yet again. I really had to work hard to get to the point where I didn't personalize everything as a sign of his commitment to me. Pretty ironic, since it was actually me who was always on the verge of leaving.

Dealing with my dislike of holidays - especially birthdays - was a big question mark for Mr. HM. As was my stressful hot and cold relationship with my adoptive parents. Although he knew I had some issues with my adoptive parents - after all, we eloped partly because of them - he did not know just how much the guilt&gratitude/anger&abandonment pendulum would continually swing throughout the years.

I don't know what it's like for other transracially adopted persons, but my adoption issues came after my racial identity issues. And often, the two overlap to the point that it's impossible to separate which behavior or feeling is adoption-related, racial-identity-related, or if in fact it is both at the same time.

Some Korean adoptees I know felt pangs of regret that they married white spouses either because of lack of diversity where they lived or because of their inner negative feelings about Asians. Imagine being that spouse when your partner suddenly regrets being married to you because you're white. Many adopted Koreans get divorced or separated after they begin to address their adoptions.

I've known some marriages and relationships fall apart because the partner just could not deal with the adoption, search for birth family, or anger/issues with adoptive family. Some are accused by their non-adopted partners of being overly dramatic or acting like a victim.

"Why now?" is a common question, especially towards those of us who were "adjusted" earlier in our lives and then found ourselves - well, not maladjusted - but questioning.

What would it be like to be the partner of someone who at the beginning of the relationship refuses or does not recognize their adoption history. And then BAM! Suddenly something triggers it - perhaps it's the birth of your child, or maybe it's the death of an adoptive parent, or even contact somehow with their first parent(s). Imagine being there with that person when their whole life changes. And what do you do if your partner becomes a different person as a result? Imagine being the person whose partner feels they were cheated out of marrying someone of their racial or ethnic community.

At times, my friends and I have joked that there should be a special support group for spouses and partners of adoptees, kind of like Al-Anon (and while we're at it, I'm sure my daughter is going to blame some aspects of my mothering on adoption too).

For Mr. Harlow's Monkey, one of the most trying times was when I decided I needed to go to Korea to do a birth family search and I did not want him to come with me. It was something I felt I needed to do with other adopted Koreans, those who shared the same experience of being adopted from Korea. And when I returned, empty handed and spent months depressed and angry? Not the most fun way to spend a winter.

Adoption has life-long impact on us, the children who were the subjects and objects of adoption; how

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**“Don't get stuck feeling guilty for the oppression of the past.**

**Know that the past is not your fault, but the present and future are your responsibility.”**

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we deal (both in positive and negative ways) with our adoption experience affects not just our immediate adoptive families. Adoptive parents must recognize that their children will be adults.

Adults who will likely partner. Adults who may have children someday. And those partners and children will be the recipients of whatever unresolved issues the adopted individual might struggle with.

I'm very fortunate to be partnered with Mr. HM. He calls me an outdoor cat, because he knows that I'm ornery and need a lot of space. It hasn't always been easy for us, and those ten years or so when I was really struggling to figure out who I am as a Korean American adult adoptee were difficult. I im-

agine we'll have other hard times too, after all most relationships go through rough spots. And since I can't ever be un-adopted, these issues will likely resurface many more times in our lifetime together.

As the partner of a Korean American adoptee, that's part of the package.

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## **Behaviors & Attitudes of Allies to Transracially Adopted Persons**

*From a presentation at the Rainbow Families Conference*

Ways to be an ally:

- Interrupt offensive jokes. Even if they aren't about your child's racial or ethnic group, if you stay quiet you are "showing" your child it's okay to make fun of people of color.
- Educate yourself and support the social justice issues and causes of the racial and ethnic community your child belongs to, both in the U.S. and from the country of origin.
- Read books/articles/view films by adult transracial adoptees.
- Interact and find support from other adoptive parent allies and likewise support other allies.
- Don't judge other's experiences, especially if they seem negative. Seek to understand their experiences. Don't dismiss experiences of racism.
- Acknowledge the powers and privileges bestowed upon you based on your social group membership. Understand your privileges as a white person and as a parent, and help others understand their own privileges.
- Utilize your power to bring about social change that benefits all people, especially those underprivileged from your child's community.
- Seek to understand all the different forms of oppression - gender, racial, class, LGBTQ, etc.

- Notice the numerous intersections between different forms of oppression.
- Let your actions speak louder than your words. Participate in your child's racial/ethnic community because you value the diversity, not just for your child.
- Don't make your child be the "bridge" for you.
- Don't expect external rewards for your work as an ally – feel good and be proud about the work you do.
- Don't expect your child's racial or ethnic community to welcome you just because you want to participate, and especially if you want them to be invested in your child. You need to be invested in their lives as well.
- Walk your talk.
- Know there are different ways of doing and seeing everything.
- Be comfortable with criticism and feedback. Accept that others may stereotype you.
- Don't buy into stereotypes. Try to acknowledge your own prejudices and baggage. Take ownership in your own conscious and/or unconscious participation in oppression. Use examples that don't exclude a particular group's experience.
- Don't get stuck feeling guilty for the oppression of the past. Know that the past is not your fault, but the present and future are your responsibility.
- Demonstrate your ally role through your actions rather than trying to convince others of it through your words.
- Don't expect someone else to represent an entire social group, especially just because you are parenting one from their community.
- Remember to speak only from your own experience, and do not assume your child speaks for his or her entire racial/ethnic group.

- Don't assume to know what support others want and what's best for them.
- Recognize that no one form of oppression is more significant than another – there is no hierarchy of oppressions.
- Accept that none of us are experts in diversity.

*Materials adapted from: Ederer, Jeff & Barnes, Lori: Allies for Social Justice. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/reslife/asj/>, ACPA 2000  
<http://www.unh.edu/residential-life/diversity/attitudes.htm>.*

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**The personal is political and the political is personal**  
*July 11, 2006*

Several years ago when I became a SAHM, I joined a "mom's group" in my city. I thought it would be a good place for me to connect with other SAHMs and give my kids an opportunity to make friends too. Let's just say it was a miserable experience. I had hoped that I would find some SAHM's that shared my world view, but unfortunately this group just wasn't a good fit. For a few years, I avoided other SAHMs because I believed they were "all the same" and I thought I'd be unwelcomed.

As it turned out, I just had to look some more, because eventually I did find some SAHMs that I connected with.

I had the same experience with finding my TRA community.

I originally joined a group of Korean American adoptees back in 2000 because of my friend K. I ended up going to Korea with some of them later that year. But after some bad experiences, I almost stopped hanging out with other adoptees all together. What I didn't realize was that I had expected this first group of KADs to fulfill all my expectations and share all the same experiences and opinions. But we didn't – we were a very diverse group in age, geographical location, marital status,



professions and adoptive experiences. Oh, and we had completely diverse personalities as well.

What I have since learned is that when we are deep in the middle of some kind of search for a community of others who share our views, we are likely to be the most judgmental and defensive. Then we say hurtful things or become argumentative, instead of listening and understanding. Naturally, we are looking for others to validate our experiences. I remember thinking I'd found some KADs that shared my experiences and felt betrayed when it turned out they didn't. I know it was silly for me to have felt betrayed when these KADs were just expressing their experiences, but I was just longing so much for someone who thought like me.

Recently, a post on another KAD blog spurred on a comment from a fellow KAD who disagreed with the contents of said post and proceeded to make some pretty nasty comments.

My first reaction was to raise the hackles and want to post a comment skewering said adoptee for the very unsavory comment. Then, I felt an immense sense of pity, because in my own judgmental mind I immediately \*assumed\* that this poor KAD must be in complete and utter denial.

I've been thinking about this a lot lately. I know there exists this very deep and divisive canyon of extremist thinking regarding international and transracial adoption. On the one side are those who are against the practice of IA and TRA and on the other side are the proponents.

Or, at least, that's what everyone wants you to think. The reality is, most of the adoptees I know are somewhere in the middle. And a lot of other non-adoptees are too.

But, as if we don't have enough things to navigate through because of our experiences in adoption, TRA's are double sucker-punched each and every time someone wants us to "take sides."

I still have a hard time believing the KAD who commented is not in denial about his/her experience because the words used sound suspiciously close to what I've heard for years from a-parents or from the general non-adoption-triad public at large.

Words such as "lucky" and "grateful" and "blessed" thrown against "selfish" and "bitter" and "ungrateful."

I was thinking that perhaps it all came down to the very last sentence of the comment, where the kad writes, "Stop sounding like a selfish teenager and making those of us who appreciated our adoptions look bad. We all aren't ungrateful, sorry souls."

There it was - the reason why this KAD was hatin' on the TRA's who speak about the negative side to TRA. I can only speculate that maybe this KAD was angry because s/he is feeling the pressure to defend the positive aspects of adoption in order to

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**“ ... there exists this very deep and divisive canyon of extremist thinking regarding international and transracial adoption. On the one side are those who are against the practice of IA and TRA and on the other side are the proponents.**

**Or, at least, that's what everyone wants you to think. The reality is, most of the adoptees I know are somewhere in the middle. And a lot of other non-adoptees are too.”**

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avoid being categorized as a "bitter, angry adoptee." Because there is no middle ground to take, in this debate of either/or. Adoptees are left feeling that they must either "appreciate their adoption" as this particular KAD stated, or they are labeled "bitter."

It is to everyone's detriment to continue this charade that adoption is always a perfect, shiny, sparkling thing. Refusing to acknowledge the problematic nature of adoption is irresponsible and potentially

damaging. Sticking your fingers in your ears while singing "la la la" does not mean that the complexities and problematic issues of adoption go away, it merely means you are participating in the continued growth of said problems and issues. Maybe even fanning the flames a little.

If you fell off your bike and got an ugly road rash on your knee, would you clean it (even though it stings) and treat it well, hoping to minimize the scarring? Or ignore it until it becomes a big, pus-filled, raging infection?

Adoption seems like a very personal thing because we are dealing with the most intimate and personal of all human functions – procreating and continuing the species. Of course, it's personal to the a-parents who find themselves wanting to parent. It's personal to the birth mothers who find themselves unsupported and pressured by society to "give up" their children for other people to raise. It's personal for the children caught up in between.

But adoption is not merely a personal thing, it's much bigger than that. It's a function of very large and very impersonal societal, governmental and institutional systems. Adoption is a multi-million billion dollar industry. There are people who profit off the agony and despair of children being forced out of one pair of arms and into another. Including social workers like myself, working in the field of "child welfare" [but trust me, I would be more than happy to find another profession should we find ourselves in a world where every child was healthy, safe and living with their families]. Adoption is also a reflection of how societies value women and the mechanisms of social control used to force certain behaviors from women. It always makes me scratch my head to think that the countries that proudly and publicly wave the feminist banner are the ones who profit most directly from the abysmal treatment of other women through the mechanism of adoption. Why are we not supporting and fighting for women to keep their children – if not with the mothers individually, then within biological family systems?

Sometimes we get so caught up in the personal that we forget to think critically about whether we've been suiting up to defend a bad idea. Our societies have had numerous such incidents in our recent and not-so-recent pasts. Those who question the establishment are always the first to be thrown to the lions. We need those who are willing enough to put themselves forward to criticize and critique systematic processes and policies and fight for change.

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## Jealousy *November 29, 2006*

Every time I hear about an adoptee who has reunited with their families, the green-eyed monster makes a visit. I have witnessed three reunions and have had many more friends reunite with their bio families and while I am beside myself with happiness for them, it also reminds me that I am still waiting.

Still waiting to know who I look like. Still waiting to see myself reflected in someone else's mannerisms. Still waiting to know the real reasons why I was abandoned at 14 months. Who was I living with before that cold, winter February day in 1970? Who took care to bundle me up properly and leave a note tucked into my little jacket with a name and birthdate?

A friend of mine who is the same age as I but was domestically adopted just found his sister. My friend reunited with his mom and his brother many years ago, but has been waiting for the day his sister would look him up. Last month, they were able to meet in person. Just thinking about it now gives me chills. It's pretty heady stuff to digest. Despite their many difference, they do have many things in common – especially their musical talents, which no one else in their family has.

When I went to Korea in 2000, it was specifically to search for my Korean family. When people asked if I was taking a vacation, I'd tell them it was a trip – but it was anything but a vacation for me. It

was my very first attempt at trying to put together the puzzle pieces of my life. There were very few breadcrumbs for me to follow. My parents knew nothing about Korean geography and thus I'd been told I was born in Seoul. Fortunately, I had a Korean American friend who discovered I'd grown up in the town I was really born in - Daegu. She was able to give me a map and some clues about the person who left me on the steps of the city hall that night.

An adoptee friend of mine once described her unknown history as a novel with the first few chapters ripped out. That is exactly what it feels like sometimes. There is no prologue or introduction. Only the imagined and the unknown. That is what I grieve the most.

Sometimes I've had people tell me that they wish they'd been adopted, because they lived with such dysfunctional families. Others have said my story isn't such a big deal because everyone hates their family. That's something only someone with the privilege of knowing their family can say. I was so anxious about the tenuous and uncertain place I lived that I was a serious and tense child and moody teenager, like many other kids - but was always willing to please my adoptive parents because there was nothing worse than feeling like I wasn't wanted. After all, the only thing I knew was that I wasn't wanted and that's why I ended up in the United States. If I blew it here, with my adoptive family, I was losing it all.

The other night, at a work event, another adoptive parent made the "I wish I'd been adopted" comment and it made me wince. Some of those who say this are serious - I don't believe it's always a flip statement - but it still pains me to the core. I am not trying to invalidate their bad childhoods. Yet how can someone say that they would wish for the most devastating thing that happened to me - the complete and utter loss of my Korean family? I can't imagine ever saying that I wish someone else's parents would die or ditch them.

Several of my friends who have reunited have very complicated relationships with their families. I have seen a lot of pain and confusion over how

much of a relationship to have, how much energy can be expended in establishing a relationship with people who are all but strangers, especially if that involves language barriers and geographic distances half the world away.

One of the things I don't discuss often is that I thought I had found my Korean family, and then it turned out they weren't. Back in 2000, a family contacted me. For a couple of months we corresponded through interpreters and they were so convinced that I was the youngest daughter in the family that they offered to pay for a DNA test in order to convince me. I received a 5-page letter, in Korean, which was kindly translated to me. The family was clearly heartbroken over the loss of their youngest member and they sent me gifts. One of the sisters even sent me a cross-stitched picture with a message about me, their "sister."

Two months after I swabbed my cheeks, the results came back. Negative.

A teeny tiny part of me was relieved because I was in shock throughout the whole "are they-aren't they" process. But once I received the fat packet of papers in scientific language I could not understand it hit me hard. I actually grieved for the family whose hopes were dashed. To this day, I've not shed a single tear but it does not mean I don't cry inside often. I feel I am still traumatized about this event and that was the main reason why in 2004, when I went to Korea a second time, I did not search again.

My friend is in the honeymoon stage of his reunion and I hope all goes well for him and his newly found sibling.

And I do hope that maybe someday I'll get to experience a little of that joy.



*Read more at:*

<https://harlows-monkey.com>



# Thank You . . .

To all of this year's speakers and presenters (pages 41-47)

To this year's youth planning team and adoptee mentors (pages 4, 32)

To all of KAAN's volunteer staff and leadership (page 4)

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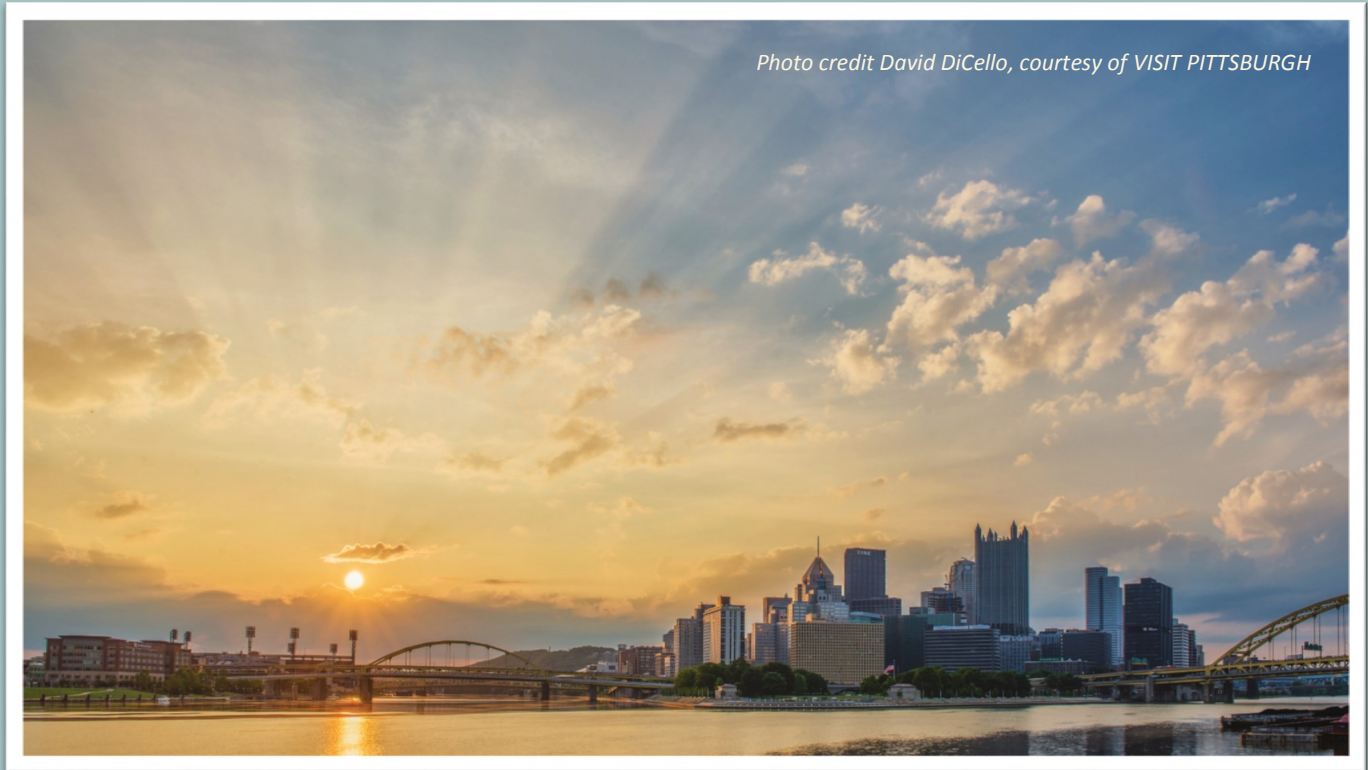
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