

Excerpts from Katie Naftzger's  
new book: *Parenting in the Eye  
of the Storm* ... page 12

*The Search for Meaning*  
by Sarah Gallenberg  
Maloney ... page 16

Ariel A. Ashlee's *My  
Adoption Story*... page 8

Conference  
details begin  
on page 24



# meetingplace

A MAGAZINE BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY ... CONFERENCE 2017 EDITION



*Chloe and Taylor Turner of Chasing Lovely.*

## TOGETHER, WE RISE...

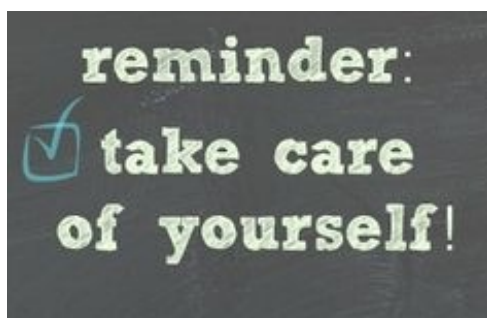
*Negotiating Difficult Conversations in Adoption*



# WELLNESS & SELF-CARE TIPS

## Welcome to #KAAN2017

*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.**

**Prioritize self-care.** Make sure to cover the basics - eat, sleep, etc. We also provide a quiet room where you can journal, reflect, or just take a break.

**Meditate.**

**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.





## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

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

---

#### **ADOPTTEES**

- ◆ Embrace and explore our personal connections as KADs/adoptees but recognize that we are all at different points in our individual journeys.
- ◆ Go to as much as you possibly can. Fill out the survey at the end. Get your voice heard. Be an adult.
- ◆ It's OK to be angry, upset, confused, or saddened by any topics regarding adoption. And it's OK to take the time and space you need to process these emotions, whether it be with folks you meet at the conference, a therapist, friends, family, or just yourself.

#### **PARENTS OF ADOPTTEES**

- ◆ Let your kids be. Don't be defensive. Listen A LOT.
- ◆ You might feel mixed emotions. Try to find other seasoned adoptive parents to process with so that you're not putting those on to your child.
- ◆ Remember that adult adoptees are at KAAN for a multitude of reasons. Despite your excitement to learn so you can better parent your children, respect personal boundaries.
- ◆ Listening is a crucial tool of allyship. Listen to adult adoptees shared their advice and reflections and also listen to YOUR adoptee. Each adoptee's journey is unique!
- ◆ Don't probe too much into what your teen/adult adoptee is doing, thinking, or feeling about their KAAN experience. Let them experience it fully and eventually they will share their thoughts about KAAN. The car ride home is a good time to ask!

#### **NON-ADOPTED SPOUSES & PARTNERS OF ADOPTTEES**

- ◆ Ask your partner what support looks like for them this weekend.

- ◆ You might feel your partner is not spending much time with you or is distant - but this can be an overwhelming experience, especially if it's the adoptee's first time in a KAD space. Try to be supportive and don't take it personally.
- ◆ For white spouses and partners, I'd say to not be afraid of talking about race, racism, and whiteness. These are realities that adoptees have to live with every day and they are things we, as white people, don't have to think about. Being able to talk to our adoptee spouses about race helps us work through our racial bias and it might help them to not feel alone when they experience racism.

#### **NON-ADOPTED SIBLINGS & CHILDREN OF ADOPTTEES**

- ◆ You are a natural advocate for your sibling and possible even a bridge to communication with parents. Use this conference opportunity to listen and learn more.
- ◆ Have fun. This is your community too!
- ◆ This conference may help you understand your parent better. Listen with an open mind.

#### **NON-ADOPTED KOREANS & KOREAN-AMERICANS**

- ◆ Realize that for many Korean adoptees, interactions with Koreans are complicated. Be patient and try not to offer too much "advice" at first.
- ◆ Korean adoptees want to be your peers and friends and family -- not your projects or pity.
- ◆ This is a great opportunity for you to understand the perspective of adoptees, which may be different than what you expect. Adoptees do not want to be considered perpetual children or charity cases but as unique, legitimate voices.

#### **AGENCY PROFESSIONALS, ETC.**

- ◆ Talk less and listen more! You can pick up a lot of understanding if you are willing to listen to the experiences of adoptees and adoptive parents.



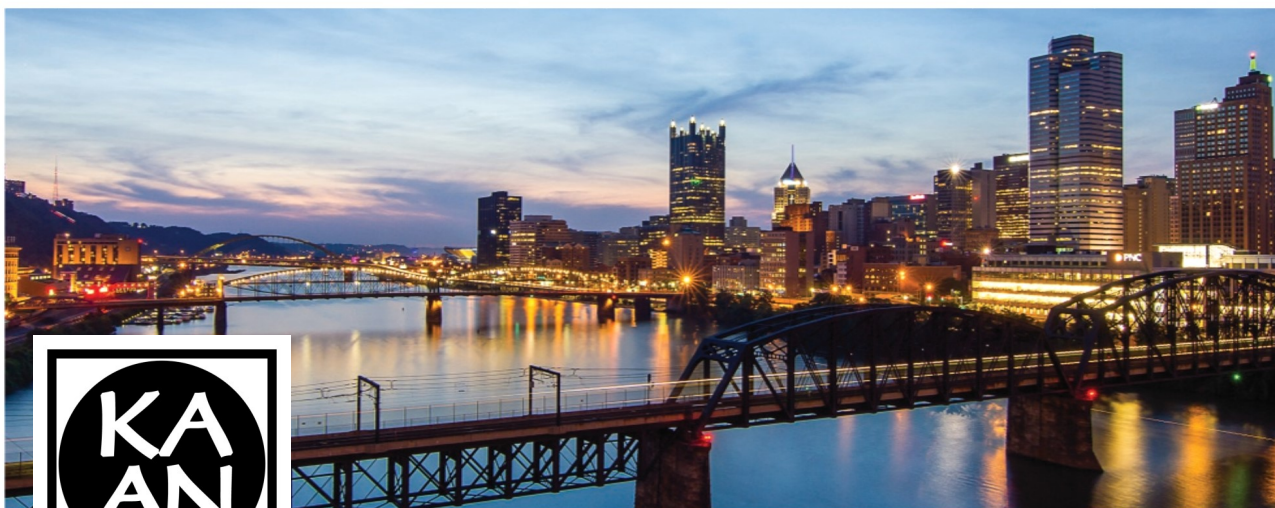


Photo credit Carmine Sarazen/ Visit Pittsburgh

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/ PRESIDENT**

Stacy Schroeder

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/ SECRETARY**

Kimberly McKee

**TREASURER**

Michael Stanley

**ADVISORY COUNCIL 2017**

Airel A. Ashlee, Michael Burlbaugh, Uhriel Edgardo Bedoya, Erica Gehringer, Mark Hagland, Stephen Johnson, Katie Jae Naftzger, Kimberly McKee, Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, Stacy Schroeder, Michael Stanley

**MAGAZINE EDITOR**

Stacy Schroeder

**WEBMASTER**

Carolyn Hathaway

**SPEAKER COORDINATOR/REGISTRARS**

Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, Ellen Heitzig

**BOOKSTORE COORDINATORS**

Suzanne Switzer  
Brenda Burlbaugh

**SESSION PROPOSAL REVIEW TEAM**

Ellen Heitzig, Stephen Johnson, Kimberly McKee, Katie Jae Naftzger, Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, Stacy Schroeder

**YOUTH TEAM** (coordinated by Connect-a-Kid) Sara

Campbell, Michael Burdan, Kate Firestone, Ethan Hilzinger, Allen Majors, Amanda Nestleroth, Brian Slutter, Spencer Stevens, Jenn Tavenner

**AUDIO-VISUAL COORDINATORS**

Carolyn Hathaway, 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.

**CONTACT**

PO Box 714, Camp Hill, PA 17001  
717.574.3629  
[www.KAANet.org](http://www.KAANet.org); [info@KAANet.org](mailto:info@KAANet.org)  
[Facebook.com/kaanet](https://www.facebook.com/kaanet)  
Twitter: @KAAN\_Community

*KAAN is a project of The Foundation for Enhancing Communities ([www.tfec.org](http://www.tfec.org)), fiscal sponsor. TFEC is a 501(c)3 charitable organization and all donations are tax-deductible. 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.*



# contents

## CONFERENCE DETAILS

- 02 ... Self-Care & First-Timer Advice
- 06 ... Featured Voices
- 10 ... Together We Rise
- 19 ... Book Recommendations
- 24 ... Schedule Overview (*centerfold*)
- 26 ... Youth Program Information
- 27 ... Session Details
- 34 ... Speaker Bios and Commentary
- 46 ... With Gratitude

### IMPORTANT

*Refer to the magazine insert/ session matrix 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

- 08 ... My Adoption Story *by Aerial A. Ashlee*
- 12 ... (Excerpts from) Parenting in the Eye of the Storm *by Katie Naftzger*
- 16 ... My Search for Meaning *by Sarah Gallenberg Maloney*
- 20 ... (Excerpts from) “We the Lees” *by Whitney and Lee Fritz*
- 42 ... Lessons Learned through Research: An Interview with *Amanda Assalone*

# FEATURED VOICES



## *Gala Dinner Entertainment: Chasing Lovely*

This Nashville-based sister duo writes their own music, a blend of folk/rock/pop/soul that reflects on "the strangely wonderful (and at times, equally tragic) human experience and our attempt to understand it all. Whatever "it" is." Their new EP (pictured below), to be released this July, will be available on iTunes, Amazon and other digital platforms including [chasinglovely.com](http://chasinglovely.com). All things Chasing Lovely can be found on all the socials under [@chasinglovely/chasinglovely.com](https://www.instagram.com/chasinglovely/).

*Chasing Lovely at a house concert*

To host a Chasing Lovely house concert in your living room, contact: [booking@chasinglovely.com](mailto:booking@chasinglovely.com).



## *Friday Night Documentary: Dan Matthews/ AKA Seoul*

We are so glad to welcome the multi-talented Dan Matthews (DANakaDAN) back to KAAN. This year, the alternative hip hop artist and filmmaker will share his documentary AKA Seoul and also perform at the end of our gala dinner. We highly recommend you watch Dan's original documentary, AKA Dan, available on his YouTube channel. For the link and other details, visit <http://dan-aka-dan.com>.

**DANAKADAN**



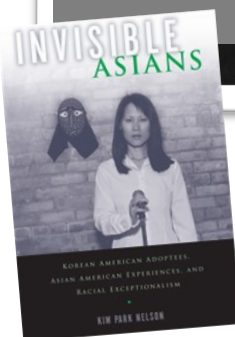


### **Saturday Breakfast Panel: The Complexity of the Asian American Masculinities**

*From left: Noah Sinangil, Benjamin Kim Oser, Alex Myung. We all know that Asian American men face societal challenges when it comes to stereotypes about masculinity. These three community leaders are proudly claiming their rich identities and opening doors for change and conversation.*

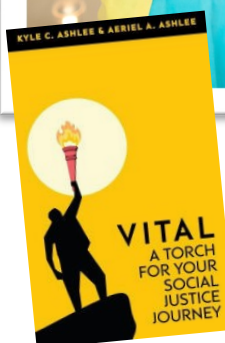


### **Saturday Luncheon Keynote: Kim Park Nelson**



Kim Park Nelson, esteemed professor and researcher, returns to KAAN this year to discuss how birth search is being affected by genetic testing options. She is author of several books, including *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism*.

### **Closing Facilitators: Aeriel A. Ashlee & Kyle C. Ashlee**



Known as "The Social Justice Couple," Aeriel and Kyle met in grad school and have been working together ever since. They will use their personal and professional skills to help us process all we've learned at the conference. Be sure to pick up a copy of their book—*Vital: A Torch for Your Social Justice Journey*—in the conference store.





# My Adoption Story

*by Aerial A. Ashlee*

I have never had a birth story—the family folklore that’s told and retold every year on or around your birthday. I didn’t grow up hearing how many hours were suffered in labor or what funny food combinations were craved during pregnancy. As an adoptee, these stories were never a part of my childhood. I did, however, have an adoption story. This was the story my mom told me about how I went from being born in Seoul, South Korea to being raised in Minnesota, USA.

The story I was told was that my biological parents met while in college. They were young, well-educated, and while they cared for one another, they quarreled often. At some point, this resulted in their breaking up, after which my biological mom found

out that she was pregnant. It was (and still is today) very difficult to be an unwed mother in Korea. In fact, I recall being told that having a child out of wedlock would not only be disgraceful for my biological mother, but also that there would be a notation on all of my identification for the rest of my life, indicating that I was a bastard child. Thus, to avoid this cultural and public shaming, I was given up for adoption. According to my adoption story, my biological mother kept me as a secret, even from my biological father, and carried the weight of the pregnancy and adoption plan on her own.

As one might imagine, this adoption story impacted me deeply. Growing up, I was very dedicated to my studies and I attribute part of my career discernment

in higher education to the fact that college was one of the only pieces of information I ever knew about my biological parents. Additionally, given what I was told about my biological mother dealing with the pregnancy on her own, I assumed my biological father did not know about me and perhaps didn't even know that he had fathered a child. Lastly, while shame was and still is a very real aspect of children born out of wedlock in Korea, as a young person, I had difficulty separating social norms and personal implications. Relatedly, I have often found myself sensitive to the colloquial use of the word "bastard," and for many years worried that there was a negative stigma related to my adoption.

In the summer of 2015, I traveled to Korea for the first time since I left as an infant 30 years prior. On this emotional journey to my birth country, I learned more about my adoption story, including some new elements of my birth story. During a file review at my adoption agency, I found out that I was born at 7:15 A.M. on April 15, 1985. I also found out that my biological father was present for my birth.

This experience as an adult has empowered me to take hold of and self-author my adoption story. There is still much I do not know, but since claiming my own narrative and framing my adoption through my own lens, I've found resiliency, strength, and pride.

---

*Learn more about Aerial Ashlee on page 35 or purchase pick up her book in the conference store.*



*Get Involved  
with*

**KAAN**

This is KAAN's 19th 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.

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/KAAN2017eval](https://survey-monkey.com/s/KAAN2017eval) by July 15.

# Together We RISE

## Negotiating Difficult Conversations in Adoption

You are going to hear plenty of perspectives and wisdom this weekend from our speakers. Here are a few additional thoughts from them on our conference theme.

### FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

#### I choose to speak about adoption and adoption-related issues because ...

- We did not have this voice as children.
- I want help ease the struggle of other adoptees by helping their loved ones understand the unique issues adoptees face throughout their lives.
- After all this time, it seems the things I want to say are still needed in my community
- For me, the adoptee voice is often dismissed or silenced.
- I want to help adoptees feel that they are not alone in their feelings.
- Too many adoptees are dying.
- I have knowledge and experience that needs to be shared and utilized by and for the adoptee/adoptive community.
- When I was a child, I did not feel as though I had the resources to articulate or understand the political, cultural, physical, and emotional impact that adoption has on children and families. It was not until I attended college that I was able to seek and create networks within the adoption community through education and research, conferences, mentoring groups, and my current professional work. This was when I finally felt understood and also felt like I understood why I felt the way I felt. I want to support other adoptees in their development as well, and I love being around others who feel similarly.
- My wife is adopted and I believe that the racism she experiences impacts me, as a white person, too.
- I hope my voice allows others not to feel isolated.
- I care deeply about my wife and all that she has been through related to adoption. During years of a relationship and now marriage with my KAD I have learned strategies to make us stronger that I want to share with others.
- I hope my voice and experiences can support other adoptees or anyone among the adoption community.
- I believe we can learn from the experiences of others. I have learned so much from adult adoptees, and I am a better parent to my son as a result. I hope my story is an encouragement to others. When we know better, we should do better.
- Our voices need to be heard, and we are not alone. When I was growing up, all of the dialogue (books, articles, resources) were written from the perspectives of parents of adoptees and social workers. As I have gotten older and connected in my professional life, I have found so many incredible academics, mental health professionals, social workers and educators who have centered their careers on sharing their stories and listening to other adult adoptees share their own. Personally, I have worked with a







number of students who are transracial and transnational adoptees, and it has been encouraging to know we are not alone in our identity stories. The struggles and challenges we face unpacking our loss, rejection, shame and grief need to be less isolated so we can continue to support healing in our community.

- I want to advocate for my children's rights.
- My kids are worth it.
- It is part of my responsibility as an adoptive parent to work to make things better for my children.

## **I think the greatest challenge of the adoption community is ...**

- Breaking the mainstream narrative.
- Treading too lightly on the tough issues forcing adoptees to be educators before they are ready
- Recognizing the diversity of experiences and thoughts about adoption within the community.
- Not enough listening to adoptees.
- Pride. We often don't express what we need or want to because we are worried about what others will think of us.
- This one is tough. I think we struggle with mainstream representation and support. I also think that it is hard to find the adoptee community. There are people around you and also this great conference, and also it can be hard to try to find a community that is nearby.
- An American society that has been constructed around race and whiteness.
- ...that it is a broken venture from the start. The premise of adoption starts with the heartbreaking reality that a young woman could not keep her child.
- Understanding and avoiding judgement of others. The savior narrative is real and acknowledgement by outsiders of the identity challenges and personal development difficulties associated with adoption is critical.
- Everyone has a unique experience and perspective on adoption.
- Unacknowledged grief. I did not feel like I could express my sadness when it came to adoption. I didn't feel like it was fair to my parents, so I kept a lot of things to myself. To this day, I have difficulty on holidays like my birthday and mother's day. I came from a family where we often celebrated Korean culture, but did not acknowledge the loss I experienced related to my adoption story. As an adult, new feelings come up. My friends share generational photos of their families and not similarities between their grandmother's baby photos and their babies. These are stories that I won't be able to share in the same ways, and the grief and loss resurfaces.
- White adoptive parents learning their their narratives are not the most important ones.
- The binary views (e.g., adoption is good/bad, if adoptees are angry something is wrong with them, if adoptees are curious about their birth family/culture they do not love their adoptive families, etc.) that hurt, invalidate and inhibit the community's experience from being what it needs to be--whole, authentic, REAL.
- Understanding what issues belong to you and which belong to someone else.
- People not taking the time to listen and consider other perspectives.





*Excerpts from ...*

# PARENTING IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

**The Adoptive Parent's Guide to  
Navigating the Teen Years**

*by Katie Naftzger*

Adoption and teenhood are inextricably intertwined. Physical changes include growth spurts, weight gain and acne along with facial hair and voice changes for boys and periods for girls. When teens look more mature and sexually developed, they're viewed differently, an experience which can be a mixed bag. In addition, sexual stereotypes and expectations come into play in the form of pressure and identity confusion. Some adoptees already feel like a stranger to themselves because they look and feel so different from their adoptive family. When they morph into this more mature being, they can feel even more lost and out of place. Jessica was an eighth grader, adopted from Guatemala, who had been struggling to find her place in her new more developed body.

"Maybe I wasn't wearing the right bra or something, but my friend and I were running on our track at school Saturday morning. There was this old guy and he was also running on the track. But then, when my friend and I were running, we noticed that he stopped on the side to get some water. It seemed like he was staring at us. I told my friend, 'let's go' and we just left because it was kind of weirding us out."

That man might have been leering at them or just taking a water break. But Jessica hadn't had to think about herself as a sexual being before. And, even if that's not what was happening then, it's a reality that she will have to contend with.

Even if they're not sexually active the idea of sex is evocative for adopted teens in two ways. For many adopted teens, their child by birth if they have one at some point will be their first known biological relative. There can be a longing to offer a newborn

all of the continuity and care that they felt deprived of.

They can also now identify with their birth parents in a way that they couldn't before, which is that they are now physically equipped to conceive and give birth to a child. Many birth or biological parents were teenagers at the time of relinquishment. For adoptees to know that they could do the same may scare but also intrigue them. Sometimes adopted teens aren't even aware that they long to feel an emotional connection or intimacy with their birth mother which fuels the desire to have a baby by birth.

Thinking becomes more complex in the teen years. Teens become able think beyond "black and white." With this developmental shift, they're able to contemplate the "what ifs" and other intangible questions and possibilities. Adoptees are already haunted by those unanswerable questions but the teen years bring them to another level.

When adopted teens haven't developed their cognitive complexity, it's important to adjust expectations accordingly.

Samantha was a Russian adoptee, a freshman in high school. Samantha's adoptive parents were frustrated and confused. "I keep telling her that she needs to figure out what she's doing this summer. I don't want her just sitting around texting and complaining all day like she did last summer. That was a disaster," her parents lamented when they came in for a consultation.

I had had a session with Sam the previous week.

"I just don't think about things like that," she answered, when I asked her about whether she thinks about the future.

Although Samantha was a teen, she hadn't yet learned to think abstractly. Although she experienced many feelings, facts were easier for her to understand. Given that, it made sense why her parents were hitting their heads against the wall waiting for her to initiate a summer plan, or any plan for that matter. Instead, I recommended that they offer her three options for the summer that she could choose from. If Samantha didn't or couldn't make the choice, her parents would make the decision.

As teens expand and develop their thinking they may also have the perception that they are the center of not just their world but everyone's. Their angst is that no one has ever gone through what they have, no one can understand and no one has it worse than they do. For adopted teens though, there's some truth in those feelings. Being an adoptee can be challenging and different in ways that are hard for others to understand or put into words.

In adoption and teenhood, establishing an identity is an important but daunting task, and at times elusive. Generally, teens are emotionally porous. They're influenced by family along with peers and culture. Adopted teens, however, are influenced by their adoptive family and by any other families and caretakers they've had on this journey. Those families are alive and well in their psyche as they look towards young adulthood, whether they're known or imagined.

Generally, teens are challenged to become independent and self-sufficient, which means that they can support themselves emotionally and financially. That's a slippery process. One minute they seem more mature than you thought possible and the next they're melting down in ways that you haven't seen in years. Adopted teens feel pulled in opposite directions. On one hand, they know that it's time to grow up. On the other hand, to distance from the care that they endured so much to get feels counterintuitive. To try to depend less on their adoptive parents is difficult because they feel more lost and alone, but is comforting because it suggests that they can take care of themselves.

## MINEFIELDS

It seems simple, but it's not. Adoptive parents often find themselves talking with their teen in ways that prevent the empathic connection.

**1. "But sweetie..."** When your teen feels stupid, ugly or just unloved, you want them to see the truth. "You're

gorgeous. Can't you see that?" Or, "But sweetie, there are so many people in your life who love you." "But sweetie, all your teachers say that you're smart. You just need to apply yourself." It is an attempt to get your adopted teen to see the positives.

This might surprise you, but sometimes when adopted teens hear "but sweetie," they worry that it's too painful for you to tolerate their suffering. For fear of hurting you more, they may attempt to hide their true feelings from you. You can tell them that they don't have to protect you until the cows come home but the "but sweetie" sends another message, which says, "Yes, your emotional pain is too much to bear which is why I keep trying to argue against it."

There's another way that "but sweetie" is problematic. When you continue to disagree with them and try to get them to see the error of their ways, they can end up feeling more inadequate. Instead of feeling reassured, they might instead feel, "Why is this so easy for my parents to see and so hard for me? What's wrong with me?"

**2. "We love you and will never abandon you."** Sometimes an adopted teen I'm working with might say, "If my mom says she loves me one more time, I don't know what I'll do," or "I know they'll always be there for me but it doesn't help..." Adults put love on a pedestal. We respect, admire and believe in it. But telling your adopted teen how much you love them during times of despair can actually lead them to feel even more guilty knowing that your unconditional love and dedication isn't enough to heal their emotional pain.

There's something else, too. I brought up earlier that the adoption narrative creates a certain dichotomy between you and your teen's birth parent. To the extent that some of the despair might be entangled in feelings about their birth parent, emphasizing the ways that you're different can lead your teen to feel even more fragmented and confused.

**3. "I went through the same thing and look at me now."** Sometimes adoptive parents will share their own story of what they went through. Often, their message is "See, there's still hope!" Unfortunately, that's not often how they internalize it. Often, what they hear is "There, there, you'll see what I'm saying when you're older and less short-sighted and naïve. It's all going to turn out okay." As a result, the adopted teen often feels patronized and invalidated. And, they often just feel like you don't get it. They want you to be with them not ahead of them.



4. *"If...then."* *"If you would have studied more, then you wouldn't have failed math."* Parents don't always realize why they often criticize, blame or judge. Sometimes it's out of anger or frustration on your part. Adopted teens may be sensitive to criticism, when they feel that they're not measuring up to where you believe they should be. The "I told you so," in that message, however unintended, can make them feel inadequate and humiliated. In these conversations, the goal is not for you to be smarter or wiser.

5. *"You poor thing!"* There's a fine line between empathy and pity. Empathy means that you can understand what they're going through. Pity means that you feel sorry for them, as if to suggest that there's something wrong with them. It also suggests that they're the victim of their circumstance, which can be immobilizing.

6. *"But this isn't you!"* When parents say this, adopted teens often feel that you can't accept who they really are. When the insinuation for the teen is that they used to be different, that also can exacerbate feelings of guilt and shame. In attending to your adopted teen's feelings, you're also challenged to face your own.

When things aren't going well with their parents, I often get an earful, a rant with specifics, including what the parent did, said, why it was so outrageous and how this makes them respect them even less.

But when that empathic connection was made and the relationship has improved, the adopted teen often has much less to say.

For example: I remember Justin, adopted from India, junior in high school. He told me plainly that he didn't respect his parents and even looked down on them.

"They don't really feel like my parents. They have no idea what I'm going through. They don't understand anything." I led with empathy. I didn't try to convince him how much his parents really did love him, or remind him of how much they had done for him. If I had, he would have likely become further entrenched in his position that they weren't really his parents. Instead I would say, "I could imagine that it might be disappointing to feel like they don't get you." When Justin could see that I wasn't going to doubt him, he began to relax a little. It was like he had been holding his breath and then could finally breathe out.

Two months later, in my session with Justin, we were talking about his break-up with a girl he was really torn up about.

"Have you talked with your parents about it at all?" I asked.

I expected him to say what he typically says: "No, they don't know anything about my life."

But he didn't. He said, "Yeah, I talked to my mom about it last night."

"Oh, really?" —trying not to seem surprised. "What did you tell her about it?"

He said, "Pretty much everything."

"How was that?"

"It was helpful."

"Oh, I'm glad."

## CHANGING THE CONVERSATION: FINDING EMPATHY

You may wonder what's left to say after sidestepping all of those minefields. A lot.

Here are some things that you can do to get more empathically connected:

1. *Don't ask, share.* Instead of asking your teen about their thoughts and feelings, share yours instead. When adopted teens are questioned, they can feel intruded upon, pressured and examined. For example, instead of asking them if they're thinking about their birth parent on their birthday, you could instead say that you think about their birth parent on their birthday. This cultivates a different kind of atmosphere, an open invitation to talk.

Luke, adopted 11th grader, had a close friend who was seriously injured in a car accident while driving under the influence. A month later, Luke's mom felt that Luke still seemed upset but wasn't sure how to broach the subject.

I suggested that she say to Luke, "I'm still upset about what happened with Cory. I just keep thinking about it," which she did.

Luke said, "How could he not care about himself enough to make safe decisions?" His mom was surprised, understandably so. After all, Luke had barely said two words to her for the past six months.

2. *Allow them to save face.* Sometimes teens will downplay or minimize a serious problem in order to

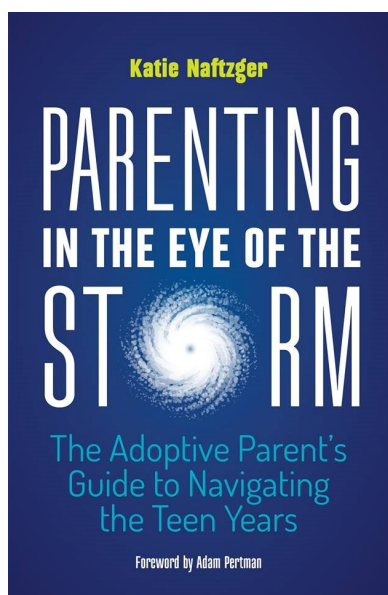
save face. They can feel embarrassed or even humiliated to feel so vulnerable and to feel “mothered” just intensifies those feelings. For example, it might be clear to you that they’re devastated that their girlfriend broke up with them or that their best friend badmouthed them, but if they tell you that it’s not a big deal, that may be why. Best to leave room for that.

**3. Stay within emotional range.** It’s helpful if possible to stay within range of your adopted teen’s emotions and level of intensity. That means that if your teen is upset, you should be somewhat upset. If your teen is anxious, then don’t be too calm, cool and collected. If your young teen comes home upset that her crush doesn’t feel the same way, it’s better to say, “Oh no! I’m so sorry! That’s so sad,” as opposed to “Sweetie, there are plenty of fish in the sea.”

Sometimes when adopted teens tell their parents about a particular struggle or disappointment, the parent ends up panicking while the teen is nonchalant about it. The opposite can also happen where the teen is beside themselves and the parent ends up a little bit too calm and put together. Staying within emotional range can help to thwart those polarizing tendencies.

For example, Rhonda, adopted tenth grader, told her mom, Beth, that she failed her math test. Her mom said, “You’re kidding!”

Rhonda replied, “Nope!”



*“How could you let this happen?! I thought you were doing better this quarter!”*

*“Mom, it’s really not a big thing. Why do you always have to freak out about everything? It’s just one test.”*

If Beth were able to stay more in emotional range, it might have gone more like this:

Rhonda: “Failed my math test.”<sup>SEP</sup> Beth: “Really? That’s surprising. Were you expecting that?”

Rhonda: “Not exactly. I sort of studied, but I didn’t think I would fail.”

Beth: “You’re probably a little disappointed.”

Rhonda: “Not really. Well, a little, I guess.”

Beth: “What do you need to do to get your grade back up? You know you need to pass to stay on the swim team.”

Rhonda: “She said that I could do extra credit if I show that I’m making an effort.”

Beth: “So, you’ll start working on that tonight?”

Rhonda: “Yeah.”

**4. Speak thoughtfully about their peers.** When you speak judgmentally or critically about your adopted teens’ peers, your teen may take it to heart. They’re not just taking it personally because they care about their friend. They’re taking it personally because they worry that the way that you feel about their peers is also the way that you feel about them. They’re not always aware of it, but it’s true. It’s important to speak about their peers in the same nonjudgmental way that you’d talk with your teen. When you say, “Well, Donna isn’t taking her life seriously and she’ll never make it with that attitude,” it hurts your teen’s feelings.

**5. Give them some time.** These things take time. When you’re in the throes of these emotional conversations, there is often a sense of urgency. Many adopted teens talk with me about feeling guilty that they’re not getting better fast enough. Although it’s important to be engaged and involved, it’s also important to clearly convey that they’ll have the time they need to work through their struggles. You’ll be there for them no matter how long it takes. There is no time limit. You’re not running out of time. They can take the time that they need.

**6. Lead with understanding.** When we convey understanding, we are saying that we know where they’re coming from. That should come before reassurance. For example, your teen could say something like, “Why don’t you just leave me behind? Everyone else does.” Although you might be inclined to say something like, “I would never do that because I’m your parent and that’s never going to change,” it would be more comforting for the teen if you were to say, “You’ve been through a lot already and I can understand why you would want to prepare yourself for the worst.”

---

For more, attend Katie Naftzger’s conference session, purchase her book, or visit [www.adoptiontherapyma.com](http://www.adoptiontherapyma.com).

# My \ 'Sərch\ for **MEANING**

by Sarah Gallenberg Maloney



After sharing 'My Story' with classmates and colleagues in one of my M.A. classes, I decided to disclose my story with more people. Parts are still difficult for me, so please read with an open heart and mind. I do not wish to harm my family or friends, but tell my experience as openly and honestly as possible. This is the unabridged, raw and deeply emotional version.

As a little girl, my parents often told me this story in regards to my adoption. (While on my three-month leave/suffering from a fit of homesickness, my dad wrote out the story and emailed it to me. I'm keeping his version for authenticity purposes.)

## **The Story of Sarah**

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there was a little girl. And she was a pretty girl, with big, bright eyes, chubby cheeks and a smile ... well, it was just about the best smile ever. And her name was Lee Hee Joo, which meant "shining jewel" and she was, about the best ever. But, Lee Hee Joo's mommy didn't have enough money to buy food and clothes for her, so talked to some people who found a family for her. She got on an airplane, flew for what seemed like forever, and ended up in a place called Minnesota.

(and then it used to end, "and she lived happily ever after. The new version continues...)

As a five month old, I "hopped" (more accurate "was carried onto") a plane and sailed over the Atlantic,

sent to America with dreams of a new life full

of endless opportunities... Or at least that's the American Dream version. I grew up in a White, upper-middle class, town (Rochester, MN) and sent to good private, Catholic schools. Although no one treated me differently, I knew that the composition of our family differed from others. At the time, I never comprehended the magnitude and helpfulness of having these support systems in my life. My best friend and I used to pretend we were twin sisters when we walked around in public. I had a great childhood, filled with days playing street hockey in the cul du sac and biking around our development. Family and friends recognized the importance of teaching us about our Korean heritage; they read us stories about Korea and adoption, learned how to cook Korean food, allowing us a space to be proud of our Korean heritage. We celebrated my "airplane day" each year (some call it arrival day, others gotcha day), which I found a helpful practice. (I know not everyone finds relief in this holiday. Some see it as another marker of the relinquishing, like birthdays or Mother's Day.) For me, birthdays were the hardest day of the year, but my airplane day was one day we could celebrate our family, grateful to have one another, regardless of the circumstances. I spent summers at Korean culture camps, and when the camps in northern Minnesota became popular enough to fill, forcing us to sign up for wait lists, my parents compiled resources in my hometown and



started a Korean Culture Camp in Rochester, allowing hundreds of Korean adoptees the possibility of discovering more about what it means to be adopted. This was my family; I went to these camps surrounded by other Koreans/adoptees for a week, just playing and learning about the culture abroad with which I had absolutely little in common, other than my physical traits. I found sanctuary there.

Still, I continued to make myself fit into White society without really knowing it.

I suffered through the family tree projects, documenting my adoptive parent (AP) family heritage. Of course, I thought about my biological family during these projects. However, I respected my extended adoptive family, and I believed they deserved the preservation and study that came. I gave presentations about Korea, while making jokes about "Asians" with my friends; after all, I wasn't/aren't "really Asian." My Korean heritage could be explored for a week in the summer and in the safety of our home; the other 50+ weeks of the year, I worked hard to cover up my Asian features with make-up and wore name brand clothes. I used to thank God that I had the creases in my eyelids aka double eyelids...

Then, the summer after I finished the 7th grade, I received the chance of a lifetime; my family went on a three week vacation to South Korea. I remember being in the airport, with several other families and their adoptees not fully able to grasp the significance of this journey to our birth country. Looking back on the trip, I have select memories: waking up on the airplane at 6a.m. smelling the weird plane food, visiting what seemed like hundreds of boring museums and temples, shopping (Korea has amazing shopping), and eating strange foods. However, the greatest feeling of pride came from being surrounded by millions of people who I actually resembled. I looked around wondering if the passing women were my birth mother or if I had brothers and sisters in uniform at the area high schools. While on vacation, I saw the adoption agency I went through, met my foster mother and learned about

my mannerisms as a bad, and we played with orphans waiting to be adopted. They allowed me to look at my adoption file, filled with pictures and my birth mother's fingerprints. While we were there, I knew that I was not ready to meet my birth family. At that point, my concerns focused on getting ready for high school and that transitional process. However, we decided that it was best to keep the search open, going behind my back with the agency to do work to find her.

About two months after we got back from Korea, my parents set me down and told me that they found my birth mother. They gave me a few pictures of her and her new family. We kept the process moving forward; I decided that since she knew I had found her, I should probably work on meeting her. Unfortunately, I discovered my birth mother did not reciprocate the feelings. As of today, I am still unsure about her life status (i.e. if she married to my birth father, if she married at all, if her husband knows about me, etc.) and experiencing this rejection, again, opened new wounds. I resented my birth mother and my adoptive parents for a long time. I felt more alone than I had before I started searching; I wanted to be the one making the decisions.

By the time high school rolled around, I dismissed most, if not all, of my Korean heritage. I took down the pictures, dolls, fans, and hid my Hanboks in the back of my closet. Once a year, I assisted with the cultural fair that took place at our school and represented Korea. (It was the one time a year where being different was "cool.") My mom and I stayed up late and cooked food for students to sample and printed photos and the Korean alphabet to put on display.

During my time in high school, I started looking for love and positive affirmations in all the wrong places. Reflecting back on those years, I realize that my identity crisis turned me into a very attention-seeking person. I wanted people to notice me, which ended in me searching in for something in other people. I made many bad decisions; I stopped going

to my extracurricular activities, skipped classes, drove recklessly, and did all sorts of other things. One thing led to another, and I ended up becoming pregnant my junior year of high school. I felt incredibly lonely and isolated, and I spent the majority of the summer before senior year in my basement. I stopped talking to my friends, dancing (which I had been doing since I was three), used my boyfriend of the time as a crutch, and sunk into depression.

My parents placed me in therapy and slowly, I put my life back in order. With my counselor, I decided to make an adoption plan for my baby. I don't know if I really understood everything that was happening, but I think deep down I knew I was still a kid myself. Somehow through the adoption plan process, I learned to grow in my own adoption story, recognizing the complexity of adoption. An adoption plan was the hardest, most life-changing, painful, confusing and sad process, but it also came with hope and love. Through my own pregnancy, I began to relate to my birth mother. I felt less angry and more a part of her than I had ever before. We shared a new common ground other than our physical features. I still did not know her circumstances, but I knew the emotions surrounding the relinquishing of a child. Somehow, I survived high school a stronger, better-developed person.

In graduate school, my adoption story evolved into a struggle with my understanding my racial identity. I spent a lot of those years very angry. I battled with what it means to be Korean-American and a woman of color and how to deal with microaggressions in my life. I began exploring social justice education and uncovering identity based injustices and inequities, culminating with my thesis researching experiences of other adoptees in higher education.

Fast forward to today... I have found a partner who is a true partner in the meaning of the word, and we were married in a beautiful ceremony on a college campus where we both met working as SA professionals. He is a part of my birth daughter Chloe's life, and he knows the pain and struggles that bub-

ble up for me. There were still moments where I would be thinking about my birth family far away and wishing they were involved in my life as I started this new chapter. As I get close to celebrating my 30th birthday, I still struggle with the "who am I" questions on a daily basis. As a child, the two most important questions I asked and still hear in the back of my mind, "Why me?" and "Who do you look like?" I don't think I'll ever lose this until if/when I reunite with my family. I don't know my medical history and cannot tell a doctor if a history of heart disease exists, which is unfortunate for my birth daughter as well. For Christmas, I gave my brother and I DNA kits through 23andMe. I discovered that there is a chance I have a great-grandparent who is Japanese and a great-great grandparent who is Chinese. I hope to explore the histories of both these countries and cultures and their relationship with Korea in the future. I also received some information about my genetics and who gave me certain traits. Although it's not a complete picture, it has contributed to my healing. My partner and I discuss visiting Korea to continue my search and discuss what family means to us now and in the future. In my professional role, I spend a lot of time reflecting on my racial identity development and helping students have language to dialogue with one another.

The dictionary defines the word \ 'sərch\ as a transitive verb meaning "to look or inquire carefully 2: to make painstaking investigation or examination." That is precisely what I am doing, and sometimes it is painstaking. My own struggles lie with my Korean-American identity as it exists within the parameters of the United States, but also how it exists within the parameters of my family and my work. I am a middle-woman, not fully Korean and not White-American, yet raised by White parents in a predominantly White community and work at a PWI. My search and my journey is ever evolving, but filled with hope, love and promise of tomorrow.

---

*To connect with Sarah Gallenberg Maloney, visit [linkedin.com/in/sarahgallenberg](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarahgallenberg).*

## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

# BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

### Adoptee Memoirs

- *Trail of Crumbs* by Kin Sunee
- *A Single Square Picture* by Katy Robinson
- *The Language of Blood and Fugitive Visions* by Jane Jeong Trenka
- *Dust of the Streets* by Thomas Clement

### Teen Books for Adoptees

- *The Flamingo Rising* by Larry Baker
- *See No Color* by Shannon Gibney
- *Kimchi and Calamari* by Rose Kent
- Harry Potter series

### Children's Books for Adoptees

- *When You Were Born in Korea* by Brian Boyd
- *Through Moon and Stars and Night Skies* by Ann Turner
- *A Mother for Choco* by Keiko Kasza
- *See No Color* by Shannon Gibney
- *Horace* by Holly Keller

### Advice for Adoptive Parents

- *Parenting in the Eye of the Storm* by Katie Naftzger
- *Beyond Good Intentions* by Cheri Register

- *VITAL: A Torch for Your Social Justice Journey* by Aerial A. Ashlee and Kyle C. Ashlee
- *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child* by Patty Cogen

### Korean Culture (traditional/modern)

- *Still Life with Rice* by Helie Lee
- *The Korean Mind: Understanding Contemporary Korean Culture* by Boye Lafayette de Mente

### Korean History and Politics

- *Korea: The Impossible Country* by Daniel Tudor
- *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* by Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin
- *A Korean History for International Readers*
- *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* by Sook Nyul Choi

### Korean Language

- Dom & Hyo
- TalkToMeInKorean.com
- *Integrated Korean Beginning 1* (second edition)

### Adoptee Art/Poetry

- *Flip the Script: Adult Adoptee Anthology* edited by Diane

Rene Christian, Rosita Gonzalez and Amanda Transue Woolston

- *Gardening Secrets of the Dead and This Many Miles from Desire* by Lee Herrick.

### Coffee Table Books (Photography)

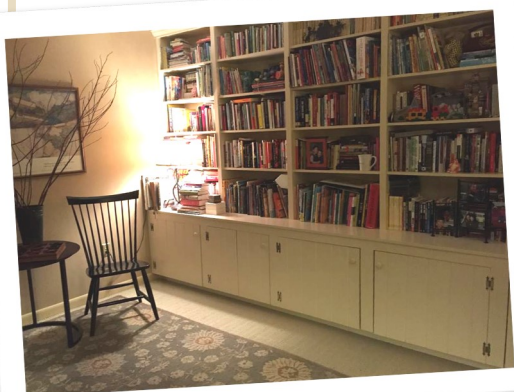
- *Korea, Land of the Morning Calm* by Lee Chong-Sik and Mike Langford

### Korean Cooking

- *Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking*
- *Koreatown* by Deuki Hong and Matt Rodbard
- *Cook Korean!* by Robin Ha
- *A Korean Mother's Cookbook* by Chang Sun-Young
- *Quick and Easy Korean* by Cecilia Hae-Jin Lee

### Other Recommendations

- *Invisible Asians* by Kim Park Nelson
- *Primal Wound* by Nancy Verrier
- *Free Food for Millionaires* by Me Jin Lee
- *The Hundred Year Flood* by Matthew Saleses
- *Re Jane* by Patricia Park



For many more excellent choices, check out our searchable reading database at <http://kaanet.org/resources.html>.



*Whitney and Lee Fritz met at KAAN and married several years later. This year, they once again return as conference speakers and offered to share with us several posts from their blog "We the Lees." To read more, go to [wethelees.wordpress.com](http://wethelees.wordpress.com).*

## THE LUCKY ONE

*First published on "We the Lees" on 3/13/17*

Dramatic tears.

Hugs all around.

Curtain closes.

End scene.

I think this is how people often envision birth family reunions. I probably used to think the same way. But now, 7 years into my own reunion, I know how things are so not like that at all. In those 7 years, my

family had just about one hour that (barely) resembled anything like that, when we first met in the conference room in Holt Post-Adoption Services in Seoul with our translator. The fact that is lost on many is this:

There is an entire life to be lived after that initial reunion.

This was completely lost on me until I found myself with my family at their home each weekend after that first conference room meeting. We had a lot of awkward moments. We got on each other's nerves. We didn't have a shared language, or, even more



significantly, a shared culture or set of norms. They didn't understand why I did things the way I did, and I thought they were crazy people for the way they went about their daily routines. I was so ill-prepared for the challenges we would face and kept thinking, "Where is the instruction book on this?"

Further, I found myself in a vicious cycle of feeling frustrated and weary of the reunion complications, then chastising myself because I should be more grateful for the opportunity and stop whining. In everything I'd read online, I was one of the "lucky ones." One of the adoptees that got a chance at reunion. So why didn't I feel so lucky?

Along with the rest of the world, and I suspect, many of our blog readers, I have been captivated by the new NBC series, *This Is Us*. If you haven't watched it yet, I would recommend it. The storyline is complicated but one particular component has been so affecting to me: that of the adult adoptee, Randall, and his reunion with his birth father, William. Besides the obvious draw of my similar situation (and exceptional performances by the actors), I couldn't put my finger on why I felt so completely captivated by these characters. But then it dawned on me. For the first time, I wasn't seeing a typical Hollywood reunion being acted out in front of me (spoiler alert: those types of reunions really don't exist!). I was seeing all of the messiness and uncer-

tainties and complications of a birth family reunion and it felt so affirming, because I thought I was the only one to go through that.

I cried when I watched Randall fall into panic attacks when he couldn't keep everything together, no matter how hard he tried. I laughed so much when he met his extended birth family and shouted, "You get a cousin, and you get a cousin! Everybody gets a cousin!" because I know exactly how that feels. I wept uncontrollably as he was forced to grapple with the second loss of a birth parent, and his adoptive sister acknowledged, "I am so sorry that you have to go through this twice."

Because these are the real life versions of how birth family reunions work, the parts that are unseen. Some days you don't feel like the "lucky one" and the weight of that pressure threatens to suffocate you, but you can't share that with anyone, because how ungrateful could you be?

These stories need to be told because they have been hidden for so long, leaving others also feeling all alone, even though, in reality, we are all experiencing the same things. *This Is Us* is not perfect, and it doesn't get everything right, but the introduction of this conversation is something I am so grateful for.

## PREPARING FOR BIRTH FAMILY SEARCH

*First published on "We the Lees" on 5/9/16*

*Through [our] blog, we have been able to meet and chat with a lot of different people from all over the world. We hear from adoptees, spouses, parents, siblings, and everyone in between. All of these various groups and people, of course, bring a lot of different ideas, but the really common thread throughout tends to be deep interest in Whitney's birth family search and reunion. As with our Advice to Adoptive Parents, we have a lot of things we would really like to say when people ask questions, but we normally hold back because they might seem too harsh or a bit too much for a first interaction. But we do think that there are really key things to understand and consider before an adoptee considers entering into the search process. Whitney really wishes someone had talked with her about them before she took a dive head-first into reunion. So we have decided to share here...*

### **Thoughts to consider before your birth family search:**

***Your search must be your own idea and of your own volition.*** This may sound obvious, but its importance cannot be overstated. An adoptee should enter into the birth family search process only if he/she desires it for him/herself. The urging of a spouse or parent or sibling may, yes, be their way of demonstrating support. But this decision should not be taken lightly and it certainly should never be based upon satisfying their curiosity about whether or not you have siblings or what your grandmother looks like. Your family and friends will not be the ones

dealing with the complex emotions that come along with a birth family search and/or reunion. No matter how much they love you, they can never understand what the process feels like, unless they have gone through it themselves. You must weigh the risks and benefits for yourself before deciding what you want to do. This is not selfish. This is your right. Be 100% sure you are beginning to search only because you want to.

***Understand that, once opened, the door cannot be shut.*** We will repeat this a million times and shout it from the rooftops. It is imperative to understand that once you have set out on this journey, there is no turning back. You cannot undo a reunion. You cannot anticipate the amount of time it will take to locate your birth family. It is possible that the results will come back as quickly as Whitney's did – just 48 hours. She did not have time to change her mind once she initiated search. Before you send in your paperwork, understand that this is a once-and-for-all decision. Be 100% sure that this is what you want.

***Be realistic.*** This is a tough one because it is much too easy for adoptees to dream about their perfect birth family. Some have grown up their whole lives fantasizing about what their family could be like. Whitney thought her brother would be Rain or a dude from one of the K-Pop groups! In fact, your birth parents and siblings are just people, too. So even though they may be different from your adoptive family, they will still have quirks that are really annoying. Maybe some character flaws. It's possible they are not even a family unit. And you will certainly have a lot of really tough hurdles to overcome, even the most basic things like language and cultural differences, which are hugely important. It can be difficult, but it is really important to get yourself off Cloud Nine, bring yourself back down to earth, and understand how unlikely it is that your fantasy will be a reality.

***First, understand; then, manage your expectations.*** This is so difficult because it requires that you be

candid and real with yourself. Whitney knows about this all too well. She struggled a lot with feeling like she always had to put on a happy face, even if that was not how she was truly feeling inside. But one of the most important things will be to identify your expectations going into the search process. What are you truly hoping to gain through your search and possible reunion? These may be things you feel bad about or things you have never before put into words. Maybe you have not had the relationship you hoped for with your adoptive siblings so your honest expectation (despite what you might say) is that your birth siblings will be awesome and you will become best friends and they will fill that void for the relationship you have been longing for. Perhaps this is true of a parent relationship. Whitney has discussed her dizzying relationship with Omma. She had a hard time understanding what Omma expected of her and how to normally interact with her. Through cultural differences, a strong language barrier, and a lot of personality clashes, it was almost enough to send her over the edge on many occasions. If Whitney's main ideal had been to seek out a perfect mother/daughter relationship, she might not have survived the pains of reunion. Search yourself, understand what you are seeking, and manage your expectations.

***Prepare for the best.*** This is a difficult idea to tackle because it is often believed that a "best case scenario" in BFS is a reunion with subsequent regular contact, visits, relationship-building, etc. While this is true in some cases, even the "best" situation can be so complicated and exhausting, causing you to deal with a wide range of strong emotions. You must be prepared to deal with the addition of a whole new family to your life, complete with a whole new set of expectations, ideas, and norms. How will this fit in with your life as it is now? Your adoptive family relationships? Know that even the "best case scenario" brings with it a whole new can of worms to deal with.

**Prepare for the worst.** This is really difficult because nobody wants to imagine “the worst,” but to be honest, this is many adoptees’ reality. You must prepare yourself. How will you react if you find out the story you have believed your entire life is not actually your story? What if your birth family is unable to be located? Or worse, what if they are located but they just don’t want to have anything to do with you? Many adoptees see this as a type of “second rejection” which, of course, brings a lot of tough feelings to sort through. Know that this is a huge possibility. Don’t even think about searching if you don’t think you could handle a situation like this.

**Learn the culture.** This cannot be overstated. Speaking from experience, the humor in cultural differences is very short-lived when you are trying to navigate a foreign place, particularly your “motherland.” It becomes less and less funny when you are trying to live life with some type of normalcy but keep drawing unwanted attention to yourself by being ignorant of cultural norms. Patience will run out quickly on the part of all parties! Do yourself a favor and learn what is acceptable and what is not. You will regret it later if you ignore this advice.

**Learn as much of the language as possible.** Going along with the cultural note above, this is really important! Nobody expects you to be fluent, but it will really help you later on if you can learn some language basics now. Basic Korean hangul (written language) can be learned in a single concentrated day. Don’t make excuses about how it is unfair for you to have to learn the language because you were sent away from that home country. That thinking will accomplish very little and serve to frustrate you to no end. Suck it up, get a book, and start studying!

**Get over yourself.** This goes along with the previous point. There are a lot of adoptees who have experienced a lot of hard things. Make peace with your situation and move on. Do not be the one who

is always crying “Woe is me!” because it makes yourself and everyone around you miserable. Don’t use your life experiences as an excuse. In birth family search and reunion, you need to see the big picture and focus beyond yourself to see all of the parties involved. How does this huge life-altering experience affect your adoptive family? Birth siblings? Birth parents? It is not your job to take care of everyone else’s feelings, but it is not your right to act selfishly, either. Consider how the situation affects everyone.

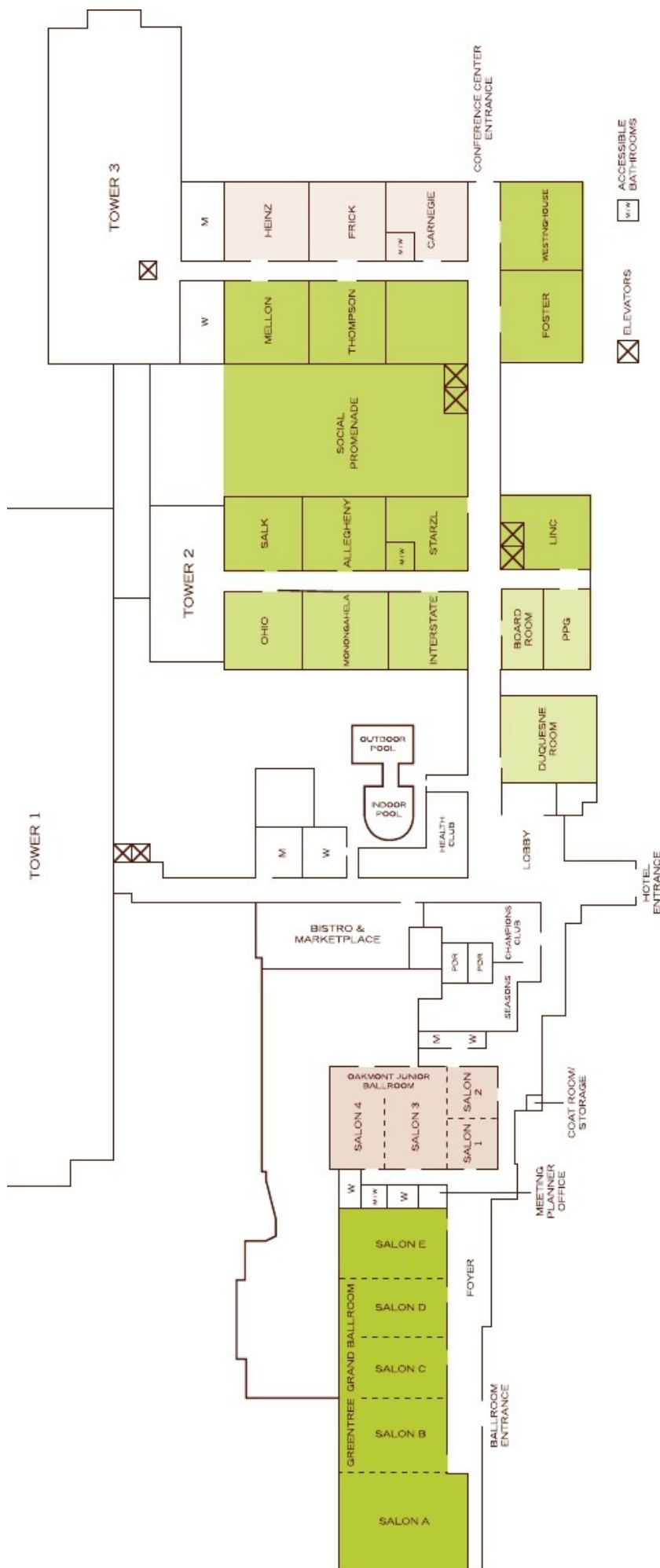
**Do not try to do it alone.** Search and reunion is a huge, defining moment in the life of an adoptee. Even the strongest of us needs support. It can be a very difficult time; it can be a very happy time. Either way, you need someone to share it with. Seek out the support of family and friends. Find people who have gone through the experience and can give advice. Get a professional counselor who will challenge you and ask the hard questions others cannot. You are not weak for seeking help. You are being wise.

---

*Lee and Whitney’s blog can be found at [wethelees.wordpress.com](http://wethelees.wordpress.com).*



*Speakers/bloggers Lee and Whitney Fritz, left, with some of Whitney’s Korean family.*



## 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 23

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

Registration, Exhibit Hall, Bookstore

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

♦ Newcomer Orientation

♦ *Newcomer Orientation*

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

♦ The Global Diaspora

♦ Korean Language Class

♦ Youth/Childcare Activities

♦ *Beyond Partisan Politics: Tackling Life as a POC Post Election*

**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**

Screening of *AKA Seoul* followed by Q&A with filmmaker Dan Matthews

Intergenerational Film/ Screening of *Kubo and the Two Strings*

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 weekend. Please feel free to take advantage of it as needed. See the matrix insert for the location.



# schedule

## SATURDAY, JUNE 24

### 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 — *Panel on Asian Masculinity/*  
*Benjamin Kim Oser, Alex Myung, Noah Sinangil*

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

- ◆ Post-Keynote Masculinity Roundtable Discussion
- ◆ *Connecting to Self Through Mindfulness*
- ◆ *Parenting as an Adoptee*
- ◆ The Motherhood 2.0
- ◆ DadSpace

### 10:15-11:45AM

- ◆ Well-being in Reunion
- ◆ Growing Up Together: Me & Mom
- ◆ Race Basics (Convo #1)
- ◆ *Dealing with Loss of Parents*

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

Keynote — “Real Family,” *Adoptee Birth Search, and Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing/Kim Park Nelson*

### 1:30PM Book Signing

Meet at bookstore

### 2:00-3:15PM

- ◆ *I Don't Talk to My APs*
- ◆ Patterns in Adoptee Parenting: A Study
- ◆ Reframing Race (Convo #2)
- ◆ LGBTQ Adoptees & Allies Forum

### 3:30-4:45PM

- ◆ Spouse of Adoptee Toolkit
- ◆ *Transracial Adoptees & Racial Justice*
- ◆ Mental Health and Survival (*Adoptee-only discussion open for others to listen until final Q&A*)
- ◆ Adoptee Social Complexities

### 4:45-5:15PM

- ◆ Support Forums (*see matrix*)

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

5:30 Pre-Dinner Social with cash bar

6:00 Meal, Recognitions, Raffle

Adoptee Group Photo

Performances — *Chasing Lovely, DANakaDAN*

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

## SUNDAY, JUNE 25

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

### 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

- ◆ Challenging Racism
- ◆ *Adoptee Truths*
- ◆ Genuine Allyship
- ◆ Equipping Adoptees for the Real World
- ◆ *Exploring My Identity in HS & College (adoptees 16-20+)*

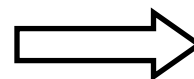
### 9:45-10:45AM

- ◆ The Gaze and Its Privilege
- ◆ *Search & Reunion*
- ◆ Taking Hold of the Teen Years
- ◆ Being Difficult
- ◆ *Dealing with Microaggressions in HS & College (adoptees 16-20+)*

### 11:00-12:15PM

- ◆ Closing Coffeehouse — *Where Do We Go From Here?* facilitated by Aerial A Ashlee and Kyle C. Ashlee

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

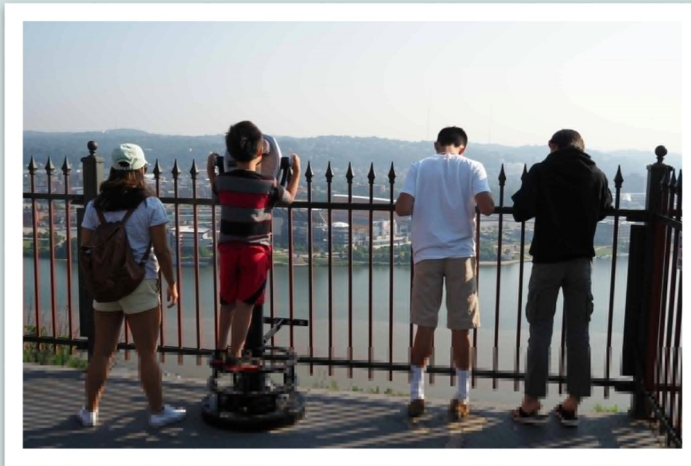


Detailed session descriptions begin on page 27 and speaker bios on page 34.

# YOUTH & CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

## 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 Sara Campbell.

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 Screening of *Kubo & the Two Strings* (*parents accompany children 6 & 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 (*please be prompt*)
- 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*)

# sessionnotes

JUNE ♦ 23

**fri 1:00-4:45pm**

## **Registration & Exhibit Hall**

*Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, MSW, Ellen Heitzig, Susanne Switzer, MS, Brenda Burlbaugh*

Sign in, pick up conference materials, and browse our store and exhibit/vendor tables. Presenter books may still be arriving during this time but will be available all weekend.

**fri 1:30-2:30pm**

## **Newcomer Orientation**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

KAAN is often described as a family reunion. And, like in most families, you can expect to experience a full spectrum of emotions, epiphanies, and energy throughout the weekend. This orientation session provides a space to meet other people who are new to the conference as well as hear advice on how to make the most of your time here.

## **Newcomer Orientation**

*Stephen David Johnson, (정응기) BSW, MA*

Similar to the concurrent adoptee-only newcomer orientation, this session is open to all participants who wish to connect with others to prepare for the conference. We highly recommend that first-time attendees take part in one of these sessions.

## **Youth Activities**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Stop by to meet other conference youth in a series of drop-in activities organized by Connect-a-Kid.

## **Childcare Block #1 (ends 3:45pm)**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Parents who enroll their child/ren in this program may drop them off for play and activity during all four time blocks but are required to volunteer during one of the slots. Adoptees who wish to volunteer are encour-

aged to complete the Adoptee Mentor Application Form on our website.

**fri 2:45-3:45pm**

## **The Global Diaspora**

*Grace Newton, Shaaren Pine, Mariette Williams, MS, fac. by Rosita González, MS*

How do race, birthplace, and policies affect adoptees throughout their lives? What key factors drive adoptions in different sending countries?

In this session, four transnational adoptees from four different countries discuss the common threads that connect adoptees as well as the nuances of specific sending countries and individual experiences that complicate and differentiate their narratives. The audience for this panel includes adoptees seeking solidarity across cultural ties and partners/parents of adult adoptees who wish to better understand these transnational perspectives.

## **Korean Language Class**

*Grace Euna Ko*

Have you considered learning Korean? Join this informal session to discuss your personal goals and concerns with a Korean language professional. Korean has the most logical and scientific alphabet system in the world and getting started might be easier than you think. The session leader will guide participants with multiple ways to get started and make progress quickly.

## **Beyond Partisan Politics: Tackling Life as a POC Post Election**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Kimberly McKee PhD*

The wake of the 2016 election continues to ripple through the electorate and broader American society. Calls for a Muslim registry immediately following the election conjured up images of Japanese internment. There has been a spike of anti-South Asian violence alongside anti-Muslim violence similar to rates in violence following the September 11th attacks. For many transracial adoptees of color, this election and its outcome

meant grappling with the explicit and implicit racism of family members, friends, and colleagues. Prioritizing self-care and self-preservation in a time where misogyny, transphobia, and racism (among other prejudices) find themselves embraced remains challenging. Yet the fight continues. We will discuss how we navigate this particular moment and the resources we find most helpful.

## **Youth Activities**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Meet other conference youth in a series of activities organized by Connect-a-Kid.

## **Childcare Block #1 (con'd)**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Parents who enroll their child/ren in this program may drop them off for play and activity during all four time blocks but are required to volunteer during one of the slots.

**fri 4:00-4:30pm**

## **Conference Kickoff**

Meet KAAAN's leadership and get the scoop on conference details.

**fri @ 5:00pm**

## **Adult Adoptee Dinner**

*(optional; add. \$\$, open to all registered adult adoptees)*

*Aeriel A. Ashlee, M.Ed; Ellen Heitzig*  
Register online for this delicious Korean buffet dinner at Korea Garden, 414 Semple St, Pittsburgh. Meat and vegetarian options will be offered. Cost is \$25 (gratuity included; cash bar additional). Group departs promptly at 5:00PM for the restaurant and will return in time for evening activities.

## **Community Dinner Meetup**

*(optional; add. \$\$, open to all)*

We have reserved a section of the hotel restaurant for conference participants to gather for dinner. This is a casual affair; come as you are able and order/pay right off of the menu.

## fri 7:00-8:00pm

### Registration

Sign in and pick up conference materials.

## fri 8:00-9:30pm

### ADOPTEE SHOWCASE:

#### Screening of *AKA SEOUL* followed by Q&A w/ Filmmaker

*Dan Matthews*

*AKA SEOUL* is a follow up to the documentary series *AKA DAN*, which chronicled the 2013 journey of alternative rapper and Korean adoptee Dan Matthews as he reconnected with his biological family, including a twin brother he never knew about. Three years later, audiences will follow Matthews and four other Korean adoptees from diverse backgrounds as they visit Korea during the summer of 2016 and shed light on other aspects of the adoptee journey. Film subjects include:

- Dan, an alternative rapper from Los Angeles, California. Three years after first meeting his biological family, he returns to Korea to introduce his adoptive and biological mothers for the first time.
- Siri, a Swedish adoptee experiences Korean culture for the very first time.
- Peter, an artist and professor from Boston seeks to discover his artistic muse.
- Chelsea, a woman from Minnesota who was rejected by her adoptive parents because of her sexuality, reclaims her identity in Korea.
- Min, a transgender man from the San Francisco Bay Area, experiences Korea for the first time as a man.

Post screening, Dan Matthews will share additional insights and answer audience questions.

This event is open to adults and teens at their parents' discretion.

### INTERGENERATIONAL FILM: Screening of *Kubo and the Two Strings*

*Hosted by Connect-a-Kid*

This animated, Asian-inspired action-adventure film has won awards and includes healthy adoption themes. Sara Campbell, MSW, will be available

to discuss any questions after the film.

\*\*\*\*\*

## JUNE ♦ 24

### sat @ 6:15am

#### Recreational Jog

*Stephen David Johnson, (정응기) BSW, MA*

Meet in the lobby.

### sat 7:00-8:30am

#### Continental Breakfast

Continental breakfast; please wear conference name tag.

### sat @ 7:30am

#### Breakfast Meetup for First-time Participants

*Katie Jae Naftzer, LICSW Stephen David Johnson, (정응기) BSW, MA*

Grab some breakfast and join us at a specially marked table.

#### Youth Breakfast Meetup & Field Trip Drop-off

*Connect-a-Kid*

Eat with other conference youth at a special table in the ballroom prior to heading out for the day's activities.

**Parents must stop by table to sign in their youth.** Group will travel with adoptee mentors to fun area sites, including the Pittsburgh Zoo.

#### Registration & Exhibit Hall

Sign in, pick up conference materials, and browse our store and exhibit/vendor tables.

### sat @ 8:00am

#### OPENING KEYNOTE PANEL:

#### The Complexity of Asian American Masculinities

*Benjamin Kim Oser, MA, Noah Sinangil, Alex Myung Wager*

Historically, Asian American men have been relegated to racially subordinated masculinity. They were not the kind of men who were sexual, threatening, or powerful. And even when they had power or were perceived to be powerful, Orientalism positioned them as an amusing foe or as a foible on the verge of demise.

More recently, we have seen greater multi-dimensional depictions of Asian American masculinity in twenty-first century television and film. The use of YouTube by Asian Americans also contributed to these dynamic representations. This panel will discuss why representation matters in a nuanced conversation concerning the multiplicity of Asian American manhood.

### sat 8:45-10:00am

#### The Complexity of Asian American Masculinities Part #2 (Post-Keynote Roundtable)

*Benjamin Kim Oser, MA, Noah Sinangil, Alex Myung Wager*

A continuation of our breakfast keynote, with time for roundtable discussion with the panel.

#### Connecting to Self Through Mindfulness

**\* ADOPTEES ONLY \***

*Nicole K. Sheppard, MA*

Adoptees will participate in a group mindfulness activity, and together they will share and process their unique experiences. Through this exploration, the concept of mindfulness will be introduced and information will be provided explaining how developing a mindfulness practice can be a useful tool for adoptees in connecting more deeply to their own personal experience, as well as strengthening their connections to others.

#### Parenting as an Adoptee

**\* ADOPTEES ONLY \***

*JaeRan Kim PhD, LICSW, Heewon Lee, BA*

Becoming a parent is often a profound experience for adoptees. In this session, the presenters (both Korean adoptee parents) will facilitate a discussion around the findings of a national research study of Korean adoptee parents. The discussion will center on two questions: What are the unique experiences of being a Korean adoptee parent? And, how has being a parent influenced your thoughts and understanding about adoption? This session offers insights into the relationships adoptees have with extended family including adoptive and birth parents, partners and



spouses, and biological and adopted children.

## **Motherhood 2.0: Adoptees as Mothers**

*Shaaren Pine, Mariette Williams, MS, Rosita González, MS*

From pregnancy to the teen years, adoptee mothers from India, Haiti and South Korea discuss the fears, foibles and triumphs of motherhood. One thing adoptee mothers continue to learn: that our challenges as adoptees are replicated in our children. Join us for a robust, diverse, and powerful discussion on motherhood as adoptees.

## **DadSpace**

*David Amarel, PhD, Matt Schroeder*

Join us for a discussion of adoption-related issues from the unique perspective of the father. In this session, we explore and discuss the roles that both birth and adoptive fathers play in the lives of our children. The presenters will share personal experiences and insights, and facilitate a conversation that will help us be the best fathers we can be.

## **Childcare Block #2 (ends 11:45am)**

*Connect-a-Kid*

## **sat 10:15-11:45am**

### **Well-being in Reunion**

*Lee Fritz, Whitney Fritz, MBA*

This session will discuss the oft-overlooked difficulties in birth family reunion and the importance of self-care and mental-health maintenance. The group will look at what that means for adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth families. Personal lessons from the presenters' own birth family reunion will be shared and discussed. This session is open to all members of the adoptee community.

## **Growing Up Together: Me & Mom**

*Ariel A. Ashlee, M.Ed, Leanne G. Lemire*

In this session, a transracial, Asian-American adoptee and her white adoptive mother will share how they have journeyed together and grown in their relationship over the past 30 years. They will share lessons learned along the way related to adoption trauma, birth family search, and un-

packing racism and privilege. The presenters will discuss their evolving relationship from daughter/mother to co-adulting and most recently person of color/white ally. This session is intended for adult adoptees and adoptive parents who want to think more about what it means to cultivate relationships with one another into adulthood.

## **Race Basics: Conversations on Race Part #1**

*Erica Gehringer, Susan Harris O'Connor MSW, JaeRan Kim PhD, MSW, LISW, Ellen Heitzig*

This is part one to a two-part session. Talking about race is crucial for transracially adoptive families, especially when speaking with people of color and their white parents. However, the thought of initiating these conversations is often a daunting and difficult task. Intended for beginner audiences, this panel aims to introduce some race-related terms, topics, and scenarios that participants will encounter at (and outside of) the conference.

## **Dealing with the Loss of Parent/s**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Kerry Bondy, MS, PA-C, Mark Hagland, MS, Bevin Hale, M.Ed, Alyson Yost BSN, RN-BC, CHPN*

Join this panel to hear how several adult adoptees have dealt with the event of a terminal diagnosis or loss of their adoptive parent(s). How is this loss different for adult adoptees who have already experienced the loss of birth parents? Hear each personal story and how each adoptee has coped with the grieving process. Discussion and questions encouraged.

## **Childcare Block #2 (con'd)**

*Connect-a-Kid*

## **sat @ 12:00pm**

### **LUNCHEON & MIDDAY KEYNOTE: "Real Family," Adoptee Birth Search, and Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing**

*Kim Park Nelson, PhD*

Kim Park Nelson will discuss birth search as a core part of collective adoptee cultures and focus on the recent phenomenon of birth search

through commercial DNA testing companies such as 23andMe. She will explore issues and problems around using direct-to-consumer genetic testing as a birth search methodology, as well as the significance of test results for adoptees.

**Post-Keynote Book Signing:** Conference authors will be available in the ballroom after the keynote. Bring your copies of their work to be autographed.

## **sat 2:00-3:15pm**

### **I Don't Talk to My APs**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Bethany L. Kenstowicz, MPA, JD*

Most adoptees have heard it at some point in their lives. You should be thankful. Appreciative. Grateful. But what happens when you and your adoptive parents don't get along, or even choose to part ways? Come listen to one adoptee's story about why she no longer contacts her adoptive parents, how she handles the stigma, and what the decision has meant for her life.

## **Patterns in Adoptee Parenting: A Case Study**

*Heewon Lee, BA, JaeRan Kim PhD, MSW, LISW Xiang Zhou, MA*

Recognizing that adoption affects adopted individuals throughout the lifespan, a study of Korean adoptees who are parents was conducted. Several important themes emerged from the participants centered around reflections of their ethnic, racial, and adoption identities and how being a Korean adoptee affects their approach to parenting. This session also offers insights into the relationships adoptees have with extended family including adoptive and birth parents, partners and spouses, and biological and adopted children.

## **Reframing & Retraining: Conversations on Race Part #2**

*Erica Gehringer, Kimberly McKee PhD, Susan Harris O'Connor MSW, Benjamin Kim Oser, MA*

This is part two of a two-part session. Many mainstream conceptions and narratives of race focus on white people's feelings and experiences. Intended for intermediate and ad-

vanced audiences, this session aims to challenge these narratives by recentering our conversations around people of color, the people most negatively and directly affected by race-relations in the United States. Comprised of adoptees from different professional angles, we will discuss behavioral, educational, and media techniques that can be used to "flip the script" and "retrain" ourselves to not allow the conversation to derail back to a white audience.

### **LGBTQ Adoptees & Allies**

*Nicki Koniak, Tynishia Walker, LLMSW, Kate Zielaskowski, MS*

This panel of self-identified LGBTQ adoptees will share their unique experiences and create a safe space to facilitate discussion. Join us as we investigate what it means to have intersecting identities and/or support others as allies. **Co-sponsored by the Ellie Conant Memorial Fund.**

**Childcare Block #3 (ends 4:45pm)**  
*Connect-a-Kid*

### **sat 3:30-4:45pm**

#### **Adoptee Spouse Toolkit: Relationship Building Strategies**

*Andre S. Kenstowicz, MA*

This session addresses some of the most frequent conflict escalators in adoptee romantic relationships: Abandonment, Identity, and Change. Attendees will gain practical strategies to recognize, normalize and adapt adoptee and partner behaviors for stronger relationships. The session begins with a lecture-style overview and concludes with a hands-on activity where small groups address a given relationship conflict through implementing the toolkit.

#### **Transracial Adoptees & Racial Justice: Where Do We Fit In?**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Aeriel A. Ashlee, M.Ed, Amanda Assalone, PhD, Sarah Gallenberg Maloney, MA*

Racism exists at the foundation of our nation, but what does this mean for transracial adoptees? How do we contribute to racial justice movements like #BlackLivesMatter? How do we make sense of our positionality as people of color raised in and by white families? As adoptees, do we benefit from white

privilege? How do we navigate imposter feelings when we are among communities of color? This session will provide a space for transracial adoptees who are interested in anti-racism to unpack some of the complexities of our identities and talk about how we can approach racial justice together.

### **Mental Health & Survival**

#### **ADOPTEE DISCUSSION**

**(Non-Adoptees invited to observe this session)**

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

Adopted teens are four times more likely to attempt suicide. This is a difficult topic to discuss, but it's an important issue in our community. The presenter will highlight some important statistics, discuss adoption themes that have surfaced in her work, and suggest how adoptive parents can begin conversations about these issues. Additionally, we will discuss proactive ways to intervene, what to look for and how to respond. There will also be time for sensitive, thoughtful discussion. Adoptees may share if comfortable. Others are invited to observe and ask questions at the end.

#### **The Social Complexities of Being an Adoptee**

*Becca Zielaskowski, BBA, Kate Zielaskowski, MS*

Being an adoptee involves navigating a variety of different social groups. Many transracial adoptees start this life-long process in their white adoptive families and continue throughout their lives with their peers, colleagues, and partners. We will discuss how transracial adoptees explore and enter social groups outside of their own, both individually and with their partners. The discussion will focus on how navigating these groups impact both the adoptee and their partners.

**Childcare Block #3 (con'd)**  
*Connect-a-Kid*

### **sat 4:45-5:15pm**

#### **Affinity/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 and siblings of adoptees.

### **sat @ 5:30pm**

#### **Pre-Dinner Social & Raffle**

Mingle and get good seats for the night's festivities. Cash bar available as well as light appetizers. Purchase your raffle tickets during this time as well.

### **sat 6:00-9:30pm**

#### **Saturday Gala**

*Stacy Schroeder, Kim McKee, Michael Stanley, Chasing Lovely, DANaKaDAN*

Enjoy dinner, cash bar, and conversation with your tablemates before we begin our evening program and festivities. Program will include recognition ceremony, adoptee group picture, raffle drawing, a concert by Chasing lovely and after-party with alternative hip hop artist DANaKaDAN.

#### **Youth Pool Party**

Youth will be dismissed for a chaperoned pool party at approximately 7:45PM. All non-swimmers and children under seven must be accompanied by a parent. Pool party ends at 9:30PM.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **JUNE ♦ 25**

### **sun 7:00-8:30am**

#### **Breakfast**

Continental Breakfast ... please wear your name tag.

### **sun 8:30-9:30am**

#### **Exhibit Hall**

#### **Challenging Racism: What Can Transracial Adoptees Do?**

*Susan Harris O'Connor, MSW, Mark Hagland, MS*

Transracial adoptees are not always provided with the tools or models to confront racism throughout their lives. We often encounter racist statements and racial aggressions in various forms and spaces. Do you struggle with asserting yourself to outsiders, friends, and family members when they voice a derogatory statement? Come join this session for dia-

logue and practical strategies to help adult transracial adoptees and other people of color learn how to address and manage experiences with prejudice and racism.

### **Adoptee Truths**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Bethany L. Kenstowicz, MPA, JD*  
Have you ever tried the food of your people and pretended to like it? Squished your eyes together to make them look rounder? Has anyone ever asked you something about your adoption that made you cringe? Presented in the form of short confessions, embarrassing moments, and burning questions, this session invites adoptees to listen and share their unspoken truths in an understanding and nonjudgmental setting.

### **Genuine Allyship**

*Jen Hilzinger, Joy Lieberthal Rho, LCSW*  
The current climate of our nation has left many wondering what to do ... wanting to act but uncertain what is appropriate, overwhelmed by varying opinions and afraid of a misstep. Learn some of the basics of being a good ally and how to keep growing in your understanding. Time will be given for discussion.

### **Equipping Adoptees for the Real World**

*Amy Partain, Nicole K. Sheppard, MA, Carolyn Hathaway*  
What are some of the most important tools adoptive parents can give their adoptee children? How can we prepare our children to face some of the most common struggles faced by transracial adoptees? Our three panelists will share their personal journeys and facilitate a discussion on how to best equip transracial adoptees for the real world.

### **Exploring My Identity**

**\* ADOPTEEES AGES 16-20 ONLY \***

*Benjamin Kim Oser, MA, Kate Firestone*  
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 your peers and older adoptees to talk about how to find and define yourself at this time in your life.

### **Youth & Childcare Program Medley (Childcare Block #4)**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Youth can choose from a variety of options, including small group discussions, games, and other activities.

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

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

*Martha Crawford*

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.

**sun 9:45-10:45am**

### **The Gaze and Its Privilege**

*Martha Crawford, LCSW, Joy Lieberthal Rho, LCSW*

The gaze originates from the idea that a viewer with a privileged stance objectifies those without the status of privilege to return the gaze. When the privileged viewer recognizes the power differential, it can disturb and create feelings of shame. To date, the language of adoption, race and identity can reflect a burden for the privileged to challenge their gaze as well as the burden of the gazed to create a sense of self within such limiting ver-

nacular. What happens when adoptive parents are faced with the dilemma of owning their privileged stance in the transcultural/transracial adoption community, and how does the adopted person negotiate this cultural power differential?

### **Navigating Birth Family Search & Reunion**

**\* ADOPTEEES ONLY \***

*Bevin Hale, M.Ed, Stephen David Johnson, BSW, MA, Sara Smith, CCH, Alyson Yost BSN, RN-BC, CHPN*

The decision to begin a search for birth family information can be difficult and filled with emotion. Join us to hear a panel of adult adoptees who have been involved in searching for their birth family. Each story is very unique. Some have reunited, some continue to search, and another is considering starting the search for the first time. DNA testing will also be discussed. There will be time for a question and answer session at the end.

### **Taking Hold of the Teen Years**

*Katie Jae Naftzger LICSW*

When the teen years arrive, many adoptive parents feel like they're starting from scratch. When children become teenagers, their needs change. The ways that adoptive parents used to parent may no longer be as effective. The presenter will outline four tasks for adoptive parents striving to successfully transition their teens into adulthood. These tasks include the process of unrescuing, setting adoption-sensitive limits, having empathic conversations and envisioning the future. In this workshop, we will explore what needs to change from childhood to teenhood and the ways that adoption overlaps in the process.

### **Being Difficult**

*David Amarel, PhD, Kimberly McKee, PhD, Susan Harris O'Connor, MSW*

Discourse about adoption is difficult. At least, it should be. Confronting challenging, non-binary issues around adoption, and transracial adoption in particular, is critical for growth: in systems and

policy, in education, interpersonal-ly, and psychologically. In this panel, we will discuss the process and impact of difficult conversations about race, identity, and adoption from four different perspectives: systemic, academic, psychotherapeutic, and personal identity development. Our panelists, adoptees and an adoptive parent, are experts in these areas. Presentation and discussion will interweave examples and best practices from these four approaches.

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

**\* ADOPTEE AGES 16-20 ONLY \***

*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.

### **Youth & Childcare Program Medley (Childcare Block #4)**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Youth can choose from a variety of options, including small group discussions, games, and other activities.

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

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

*Taylor and Chloe Turner with Kat Turner*

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.

**sun 11:00am-12:15pm**

**CLOSING COFFEEHOUSE:**

**Where Do We Go From Here? Takeaways & Tasks from #KAAN2017**

*Aeriel A. Ashlee, M.Ed, Kyle C, Ashlee*

Join "The Social Justice Couple" as they lead a review of key insights from the conference and explore how new knowledge and tools might translate into action and support in our daily lives, helping us to negotiate difficult conversations and situations.

### **Youth & Childcare Block #4 Closing Party**

*Connect-a-Kid*

Gather with friends and mentors for games and yummy treats.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **CALL FOR PROPOSALS (CFP)**

**#KAAN2018**

**Caring for our Community: Mental Health, Self-care, & Advocacy**

**Minneapolis, MN**

**June 29-31, 2018**

**\*\* 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 #KAAN2018. The CFP will be posted on our website by mid-August.





Keep your families connected to the adoption community with Connect-A-Kid.

- Empowering our youth among the adoption community
- Fostering lifelong friendships
- Providing support to our children and the entire family

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

LEARN MORE  
[www.connectakid.org](http://www.connectakid.org)

CONTACT US  
[info@connectakid.org](mailto:info@connectakid.org)

# FUN FACT!

## FROM OUR SPEAKERS & STAFF

We asked our speakers to share some fun or unusual facts about themselves. Here's what they said ...

- We live a "zero waste" lifestyle, which means we try to create as little trash as possible. We make our own bread and soymilk and keep reusable to-go containers in our car for leftovers. (*Chasing Lovely*)
- Since moving to the Pacific Northwest, I have experimented with cooking Korean food, such as soondubu, japchae, and bulgogi. (*Bethany Kenstowicz*)
- I'm usually the shortest adult in the room. (*Sara Smith*)
- I am working my way through baking every challenge from the three seasons of the Great British Bake Off! (*JaeRan Kim*)
- Met my husband at KAAN 2012. (*Whitney Fritz*)
- I am a high school journalism teacher. (*Mariette Williamson*)
- I love to cook and have recently gotten into baking rustic sourdough bread! (*Kyle Ashlee*)
- I'm about to move from Michigan to Seattle this coming year to pursue my Masters of Social Work at the University of Washington ! (*Erica Gehringer*)
- I have recently gotten into vinyl albums and it has changed how I listen to and enjoy music! (*Ariel Ashlee*)
- I'm tryophobic. (*Alex Myung*)
- I first went to KAAN Conference to present Korean language in 2011. Since it was held in Atlanta where I lived, I brought my daughter. She was 10 years old. This year, I am going with my daughter Eunice again. She is 16 now. People sometimes get confused for our names: Grace as daughter and Eunice as mom. (*Grace Ko*)
- I ran my first (and likely last) marathon in 2016! (*Stephen Johnson*)
- I have an amazing oldest sister. ;) (*Carolyn Hathaway*)
- Lived in Spanish-speaking countries for two years, a Pittsburgh native, moved to Tacoma, WA last year. (*Andre Kenstowicz*)



Nicole Sheppard and daughter

- 
- I took my first swimming lesson when I was 30 years old. The date was Sept. 11, 2001. (*Amy Partain*)
  - I'm an avid exerciser with hopes to complete the Spartan Trifecta and become a boxing instructor this summer. (*Sarah Gallenberg Maloney*)
  - In 6th grade, I was voted president of my Girl Scout troop. (*Nicole Sheppard*)
  - Had my big screen debut (and finale) as a stunt double in the 1987 cult classic horror movie, "Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn." (*Jen Hilzinger*)



# speaker**bios**

**Amarel, David**

David Amarel, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in private practice based in New York City. He is also an adoptive parent and teen-wrangler to a son and daughter, both born in Korea. Professionally, David specializes in couples therapy and trauma work. At home, he excels at raking and creating culinary magic from leftovers. David is currently writing a novel about PTSD and the power of surprising connections.

**Ashlee, Aerial A.**

Aerial A. Ashlee, M.Ed., is a scholar and activist who is passionate about racial justice. She earned her B.A. in Strategic Communication from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and her M.Ed. in Counseling & College Student Personnel from the University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently pursuing her doctoral studies in Educational Leadership at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Aerial's research interests include Asian-American transracial adoptees' racialized experiences in college and women of color in academia. Her critical lens coupled with her story-centered facilitation style make her a highly-dynamic educator, speaker, and facilitator.



Kyle C. Ashlee

**Ashlee, Kyle C.**

Kyle Ashlee is a doctoral student in the Student Affairs in Higher Education Program at Miami University. He is the Co-Founder of Ashlee Consulting and co-author of the book, *VITAL: A Torch For Your Social Justice Journey*. Kyle's research interests relate to developing capacity in white

college students to effectively engage in racial dialogue. His work around race and whiteness is centered in vulnerable storysharing as a means to facilitate personal accountability and healing.

**Assalone, Amanda**

Amanda E. Assalone, PhD, is the Postdoctoral Research and Policy Analyst at the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) in Atlanta, Georgia. Prior to joining SEF, Amanda completed her doctoral studies in higher education at the University of North Texas and her research focused on improving post-secondary access and outreach initiatives for underrepresented students. Her dissertation investigated the college pathways of Asian-American community college students and explored how family, culture, and model minority stereotypes influenced their college aspirations, perceptions, and experiences. She also has extensive experience working in community college outreach, academic advising, educational programming, and high school counseling. Amanda was adopted from Seoul, Korea through Dillon International at three months and grew up in Tulsa, OK.

**Bondy, Kerry**

Kerry Bondy, MS, PA-C, is a Korean-born adult adoptee who has participated in KAAN since 2002 as an attendee, volunteer, and speaker. She values the community found at KAAN as well as the experience of attending adoptee gatherings in Korea and throughout the US. She currently works as a Physician Assistant at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center. In both her personal and professional life, she is dedicated to helping others confront life's challenges.

**Burdan, Michael**

A KAAN regular with an MS.Ed in Counseling and an MA in organizational management, Michael is a Korean adoptee living outside DC. Currently doing grants management at the George Washington University, he is

always interested in engaging with the adoptee community.

**Burlbaugh, Brenda**

Brenda Burlbaugh is from Annapolis, MD, and has two sons adopted from Korea, ages five and six. She is the owner of an online retailer of motivational and inspirational gifts ([courageinstone.com](http://courageinstone.com)). Brenda enjoys traveling, cooking (well, mostly eating), fine wine, jogging, reading, and napping. This is her fourth KAAN 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 KAAN conferences and is a former member of KAAN's Advisory Council. Sara is also the Partnership Specialist at Connect-a-Kid and this year's coordinator of KAAN's youth and childcare conference programs. She continues to teach, demonstrate, and display a positive aspect of the adoption triad.

**Chasing Lovely**

Hailing from Nashville, folk-pop sister duo Chasing Lovely combine haunting harmonies, powerful melo-



Chloe & Taylor Turner of Chasing Lovely

dies and insightful lyrics to create one of the most captivating acoustic per-

formances. Chloe and Taylor spent the past three years touring across the continental United States, and it shows—both in their showmanship and undeniable bond as sisters. In the spring of 2016, they opened several dates for the "Hapa Tour" for fellow Asian-American artists Meiko and Marié Digby. On their latest EP "Unbridled" (released in early 2016),



*Stephen David Johnson*

they had the privilege of working alongside producers and musicians who have worked with Mumford & Sons, Joy Williams, and Ben Rector. Their mission is to provoke thought, promote understanding, and capture both glimmers of light and darkness as they share the deeply moving human experience through song.

#### **Crawford, Martha M.**

Martha Crawford, LCSW, is an adoptive parent, a psychotherapist, and a member of the Executive Officers committee of Sejong Cultural Education Inc. She is the author of the blog, *What a Shrink Thinks*, and a long-time member of the KAAN community.

#### **Firestone, Kate**

Kate Firestone is a Korean American adoptee, born in Seoul and adopted at three months of age. She is currently working on her PhD in Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University. Her studies focus on the ways adoptees, as a diasporic group, make meaning and culture, particularly through the use

of multimedia in digital spaces. She is a founding member of MSU's Asian Pacific American Graduate Student Alliance, and is excited to attend her third KAAN conference this year as a volunteer with the youth program.

#### **Fritz, Lee**

Lee Fritz was born in Busan, South Korea, and adopted at four months of age. He grew up in Harrisburg, PA, and lived there all of his life until he married Whitney in 2013 and relocated to Nashville, TN. 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 Fritz, MBA, is a Korean adoptee who was given the unexpected opportunity to reunite with her birth family in 2010. Seven years later, she maintains close relationships and regular contact with them and has experienced all of the ups and downs of navigating the complexities and dynamics of birth family reunion. 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 potentially look like. She is quick to emphasize that she is not an adoption expert and that her experience is just that—her own individual experience.

#### **Gehringer, Erica**

Erica Gehringer is a Korean-American adoptee and Adoption Home Study Specialist. Her main goal in life is to support and advocate for people with marginalized identities, the folks who are very often left out of (positive) mainstream conversations and spotlights.

#### **Gonzalez, Rosita**

Rosita González, MS, blogs at *Mother-made.us*. Her writings have appeared in several anthologies, *xojane.com* and The Goodman Project. In 2014, she and her Lost Daughters' sisters started a social media campaign

(#FliptheScript) to raise awareness of the adult adoptee narrative. As an artist, she creates ceramics that express the fluidity of life as an adoptee. Her best days were spent during her five months as a Seoul resident. She is currently writing her memoir and working at Apple in Madison, WI.

#### **Hagland, Mark**

Mark Hagland is an adult Korean adoptee. He was born in South Korea in 1960 and adopted in infancy by parents of Norwegian-American and German-American descent. Mark was raised in Milwaukee, WI, and attended the University of Wisconsin (B.A.) and Northwestern University (M.S., Journalism). He has spent about 17 years in public spaces discussing and presenting on topics related to transracial adoption, including 15 years of participation in the annual KAAN Conference. He currently lives and works in Chicago.



*Andre S. Kenstowicz*

#### **Hathaway, Carolyn**

Carolyn Hathaway has supported KAAN in a variety of ways in the past seven years including AV, website support, and moral support for the director. She lives near Philadelphia with her husband and two children. Hearing the wide variety of voices and viewpoints at KAAN has helped



make her a better parent and she is pleased to support this group.

#### **Hale, Bevin**

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



*Grace Euna Ko*

---

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

Ellen 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 previously served as the social worker for Sejong Cultural Experience Inc. and traveled on the annual Korea trip each year. In this position, she worked with adolescents and has facilitated biological family reunions.

#### **Hilzinger, Jen**

Jen Hilzinger and her husband have three children—two who were adopted from China and South Korea, and one born to them. Their children are 22, 19, and 10 years old. Jen has participated in KAAN Conferences for twelve years in many capacities. She

is a former Advisory Council member for KAAN.

#### **Johnson, Stephen David 정은기**

Stephen D. Johnson is a reunited adoptee, activist, and long-time contributor and beneficiary of KAAN. He studied social work at Baylor University and international development at Eastern University's School of Leadership and Development. Stephen is also currently a member of the KAAN Advisory Council. He and his partner currently live in Austin, TX.

#### **Kenstowicz, Andre S.**

Born and raised in Pittsburgh (PA), Andre S. Kenstowicz, MA, recently moved to Tacoma, WA with his wife Bethany, a Korean adoptee. Andre has lived abroad in Costa Rica and Spain for a total of two years and is fluent in Spanish. He and Bethany enjoy exploring Korean language, food, and culture in Washington State, which boasts a large Korean community. Next year, Andre and Bethany plan to honeymoon in Korea.

#### **Kenstowicz, Bethany L.**

Bethany L. Kenstowicz, Master of Public Administration, is a Korean adoptee who seeks to encourage other first-generation college, graduate, and law school students throughout their own journey of identity and independence. She currently lives in Tacoma, WA, with her husband and fellow fan of Korean food, Andre Kenstowicz. Bethany is currently planning her first trip back to Korea.

#### **Kidman, Michelle**

Michelle Kidman was adopted from Korea in 1986 at the age of nine along with two biological brothers, ages 5 and 7, to the same family in central PA. Her hobbies include taking pictures and spending time her family. Last year was her first KAAN conference and it was an experience. She works for First National Bank as a personal banking representative. She resides in Duncannon, PA with her husband, one child, three step children & six step grandchildren.

#### **Kim, JaeRan**

JaeRan Kim, PhD, LISW, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington Tacoma. JaeRan has over fifteen years of experience working



*Bethany L. Kenstowicz*

---

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.

#### **Ko, Grace Euna**

Grace E. Ko is a distinguished Korean teacher who came to the field of teaching with a longtime journalist background. As a Korean Instructor at Kennesaw State University, she currently teaches three courses per semester. She also teaches the e-Mentor Online Korean classes ([ementoronline.org](http://ementoronline.org)) as part of the Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP). On the weekends, she teaches at her church's Korean language school. Grace has served weekend Korean schools in the US for ten years. Outside of teaching, she is the most experienced Korean evaluator at ALTA Language Services, Inc., a US-based company specializing in language testing. Grace also taught at the Atlanta International Language Institute for seven years before joining Kennesaw State University.

#### **Koniak, Nicki**

Nicki Koniak is a deaf, transgender, Korean adoptee, who is currently a student at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. (one of the only

deaf, liberal universities in the world), pursuing his B.S. in Biology. He is also a LGBTQA+ activist, more specifically for the transgender community. In his free time, he enjoys photography, music, reading, and being a huge comic nerd.

#### **Lee, Heewon**

Heewon Lee, BA, is pursuing an education in genetics and public health. She is a research assistant at the University of Minnesota and is studying ovarian cancer and the effects of chemotherapy. Heewon is also involved in parenting research and is a facilitator using *Incredible Years*, an evidence-based parenting curriculum.

#### **Lemire, Leanne**

Leanne Lemire is a Minnesota native of French-Canadian descent. She is semi-retired as a writer and an artist. She is also the proud mother of an Asian American transracial adoptee.



*Conference photographers Michelle Kidman and Allen Majors*

#### **Majors, Allen**

Allen Majors is a "first wave" adoptee who was adopted in 1961 to a farm in rural Illinois. He has been active in the adoptee community since 2008 and has served on the boards of Korean Adoptees of Chicago (KATCh) and the Korean Cultural Center (Champaign-Urbana, IL). He believes it is important to use photographs to document the adoptee community around the world and to share his view of Korea through images. Allen is employed as a labor advocate for public education employees.

#### **Maloney, Sarah Gallenberg**

Sarah Gallenberg Maloney, MA, serves as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Regis College in Weston, MA. Some of her responsibilities involve campus-wide strategic planning for diversity and inclusion efforts, implementing workshops and trainings around identity and social justice, and teaching courses about race, justice, and Catholic social teaching. She has been involved with the NASPA Multiracial Knowledge Community to advance voices of transracial adoptees and wrote a chapter for their iBook on her story as an adoptee. Sarah has also been an informal consultant for Camp Moon Hwa, a Korean culture camp in Rochester, MN established and founded through the work and service of her parents. Academic accomplishments include an M.A. in Leadership in Student Affairs from the University of St. Thomas and a B.A. in English and Communication from St. Louis University.

#### **Matthews, Dan**

DanakaDan is an alternative rap artist based in Los Angeles, CA. As a Korean adoptee, he produces content that chronicles his experience with self-identity, addiction, and adoption. This has included a full length album "Stuntman" and a documentary series detailing the very personal journey of meeting his biological family, including an identical twin brother he never knew (who also raps). His music is high energy and eclectic, drawing inspiration from indie rock artists to house and trap. With millions of views online, he's had opportunities to travel and perform around the world in locations like Singapore, Korea, and Malaysia amassing fans in every region. He is currently working on his second full length album.

#### **McKee, Kimberly**

Kimberly McKee, PhD, is the director of the Kutsche Office of Local History and an assistant professor in the Liberal Studies Department at Grand Valley State University. Her research interrogates the institutional practice of international adoption in its examination of American adoptions of South Korean children. She also analyzes representations of Asian Americans in popular culture and the use of social media in communities of color. McKee serves as the Assistant Director of KAAN. She previously wrote for *Gazillion Voices*

and is a current contributor to *The Lost Daughters*.



*Kimberly McKee*

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

Katie Naftzger, LICSW, has been involved in KAAN for several years. As a Korean adoptee, she maintains a private psychotherapy practice in Newton, MA, where she works with adoptive families and provides consultations. Katie's upcoming book focuses on a path for adoptive parents through the teen years.

#### **Nestleroth, Amanda**

Amanda Nestleroth is a Korean adoptee who was adopted in 1983 along with an older sister. She is the co-founder of KAAP, the Korean Adoptee Association of Philadelphia. Amanda hopes her experience of reuniting and maintaining contact with her birth family may offer a perspective for others during their family search. Amanda enjoys spending time with and mentoring younger adoptees, including several nieces and nephews.

#### **Newton, Grace**

Grace Newton is a recent graduate from Macalester College. She has interned for Land of Gazillion Adoptees (LGA) and served as editor for the college section of the *Gazillion Strong* magazine. She has spoken on panels for Families with Children from Asia, KAAN, MAASU, Macalester College, and has presented research at the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs. When she isn't discussing issues of race and adoption in person, she writes about them on her blog, [redthreadbroken.wordpress.com](http://redthreadbroken.wordpress.com).

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

Susan Harris O'Connor, MSW, is a national solo performance artist of her groundbreaking autobiographical nar-



natives compiled in *The Harris Narratives: An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee*. Since 1996, they have been performed over 100 times as keynote addresses, lectures, and featured performances at places such as Harvard Medical Conference series, Smith College Summer Lecture series, Yale Law, and Massachusetts General Hospital. Published by the *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism and Adoption and Fostering*, Susan received the 2014 Outstanding Practitioner in Adoption Award from St. John's University and the 2016 President's Award from American Adoption Congress. Susan contributed as an editor of the An-Ya Project's seminal book, *Black Anthology: Adult Adoptees Claim Their Space* (2016). She is a former board member of the American Adoption Congress.

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

Benjamin Kim Oser, MA, was adopted at three months from Seoul. He has been involved with athletics since the age of five and 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 for the University of Delaware Athletic Department, 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.

#### **Park Nelson, Kim**

Kim Park Nelson, PhD, is an educator, researcher, and associate professor in the American Multicultural Studies program at Minnesota State University, Moorhead. She is the author of *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences and Racial Exceptionalism*. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota, where she also developed and taught the first college-level course exclusively focused on Korean transnational adoption. In 2007, Park Nelson was the lead organizer of the First International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies, held in conjunction with the International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) Gath-

ering of Korean Adoptees in Seoul. She is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture (ASAC). Her work has appeared in multiple anthologies and scholarly journals. She has been interviewed on the topic of international adoption by Public Radio International and public radio affiliates in Minnesota, Wisconsin and California, and by a variety of local and national publications including the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. She currently lives in Minneapolis.



*Amy Partain*

#### **Partain, Amy**

Amy Partain is the mother to an eleven-year-old Korean adoptee. Adoptive parenting changed her in ways she never imagined when she and her husband, Kyle, started this journey in 2006, and she loves continuing to learn and grow as a parent and a person. She is currently a communications and web site professional for a small private school in Colorado. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, traveling, photography and crafting.

#### **Pine, Shaaren**

Shaaren Pine is an Indian adoptee, mother, writer, author, crafter, and business owner. You can find some of her work in *The Washington Post*, *Upworthy*, and *Masala Mommas*. She is involved with various adoptee organizations (Lost Sarees,

Adoptions Links, DC, and the Adoptee Rights Campaign). She has lived in Washington, DC, since 1997.

#### **Rho, Joy Lieberthal**

Joy Lieberthal Rho, LCSW, is a social worker and private clinician in New York. She has held a variety of positions in policy, practice, and advocacy for the adoptee community for the last 20 years. Currently, she is in private practice, a counselor at the Juilliard School, is the Vice President of Programming for Sejong Cultural Education and supervises a team at the Korean American Family Service Center. Joy was adopted from Korea and has been in reunion with her birth-mother for 22 years.

#### **Rupright, Rachel Hye Youn**

Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, MSW, is a Korean adoptee raised near Binghamton, NY. She currently serves as one of KAAAN's registrars and is a member of the KAAAN Advisory Council. She lives and works in Albany, NY.



*Rachel Hye Youn Rupright*

#### **Schroeder, Matthew**

Matt Schroeder is the proud father of two Korean adoptees and has been attending KAAAN for many years. He has participated in the Dadspace forum as both a discussion leader and participant and has found the insights he has gained from adoptees and other dads to be

very valuable. Matt and his wife, Stacy, live in Mechanicsburg, PA, with their children, Nick and Allison, (when they are not off at school) and their dog Cleo (who runs the house).

#### **Schroeder, Stacy**

Stacy Schroeder is the president and executive director of KAAN and lives with her husband and children in PA. Most of her career has been in leadership and event planning for nonprofits. She also co-authored a book and looks forward to a time that allows for more writing. For now, she is pleased to use her skills to support KAAN.



*Stacy Schroeder*

#### **Sheppard, Nicole K.**

Nicole Sheppard, MA, is a mental health therapist with Mental Health Systems, based in the Twin Cities. She has experience in mindfulness and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), individual and group therapy, and career counseling. Nicole initiated and was the lead therapist of a no-cost, mindfulness-based, therapy group for adult Korean adoptees to process grief and loss in adoption; and the principal investigator of a grant-funded study examining the effects of this therapy. With the Korean Adoptees Ministry (KAM) Center, Nicole is the Project Manager of a Minnesota Department of Health-funded mental health and suicide assessment of the adult Korean adoptee community. She grew up in Minneapolis and lived in Seoul, Korea (2002-2010) working in global Korean adoptee community development and advocacy at Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L) as the

vice secretary general and annual summer conference director.

#### **Sinangil, Noah**

Noah Sinangil was adopted from Seoul 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 maintained a strong interest in Korean culture. Noah began attending Camp Sejong, a culture camp for Korean-Americans, at the age of nine and has been a counselor there for the past three years. He currently attends Rowan University, where he is majoring in Biomedical Engineering.

#### **Slutter, Brian**

Brian Slutter is a Korean adult adoptee. He lives in Michigan with his partner, Sara, who is also an Korean adult adoptee. He is involved with the Michigan Korean Adoptee group. This is also his second KAAN conference. Brian has enjoyed meeting new adoptees and is looking forward to being more involved in the adoption community.

#### **Smith, Sara**

Sara Smith, CCH, is a Korean adoptee, adoptive parent to a Korean-born daughter and bio parent to two sons. In 2015, Sara also discovered she had a biological brother through DNA testing. She currently 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 is a professional financial advisor and KAAN's treasurer. He splits his time between New York City and Philadelphia.

#### **Stevens, Spencer**

Spencer Stevens is a Korean-Adoptee, born in Seoul and raised in the suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri. In pursuit of higher education, he enlisted into the US Air Force with the great fortune of serving six years as a Korean Cryptologic Language Analyst, spending two years learning Korean in Monterey, California. After being stationed in Maryland, Spencer pursued networking and community building within the international adoption community in the Greater Washington DC metropolitan. There,



*Michael Stanley*

he has served on the board for Adoption Links, DC, where he later connected with Connect-A-Kid in 2015 as Social Media Manager. Aside from community involvement, Spencer is pursuing a career in the federal government and actively training and competing in the ice sport of curling.

#### **Switzer, Suzanne**

Suzanne Switzer, MS, has been involved with the adoption community since her pre-teens and part of the KAAN family since 2008. She grew up in Denver, CO, and made her first trip back to South Korea at age seven, accompanied by her American parents. At that time, an informal birth search was requested and seven years later, Suzanne found her biological parents, extended family, older brother, and identical twin sister. Since then, Suzanne has remained in contact with her Korean family and has made multiple trips back to visit. Suzanne is an avid speaker and participant at a variety of national adoption and adoptee conferences, culture camps, and transracial parenting groups. Suzanne recently returned from living in South Korea, working with Global Overseas Adoptee's Link (GOA'L), International Korean Adoptee Service Inc. (InKAS), and various Korean orphanages, while also teaching English, between 2011 and 2015. Currently, Suzanne is the Program Director for Parker Personal



Care Homes, a company that assists families and children with developmental disabilities. She also has an extensive background working in child welfare and the foster care system.

#### **Wager, Alex Myung**

Alex Myung Wager 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. Alex recently finished his first independently animated short film, "Arrival," and has spent the last year screening it at various film festivals internationally.

#### **Walker, Tynishia**

Tynishia Walker, LLMSW, is a queer, multiracial-black, transracially adopted social justice educator working at the University of Michigan's LGBTQ Resource Center. She uses her social work education to advocate for LGBTQ inclusion and hopes to one day work at the inter-



Speakers Erica Gehringer and Tynishia Walker with dog Elmo

section of adoption and identity development focused on racial, sexuality, and gender identities.

#### **Williams, Mariette**

Mariette Williams, MS, is a transracial adoptee born in Jeremie, Haiti. She was adopted at the age of three and grew up near Vancouver, B.C. In 2015, she reunited with her birth mother and several members of her birth family. She has been featured in *The Atlantic*, *For Harriet*, and *Canada Adopts*, and she has curated a collection of adoption stories on her website ([mariettewilliams.com](http://mariettewilliams.com)). She is a columnist for the *Lost Daughters* collective and a contributing author to *Black Anthology: Adult Adoptees Claim Their Space*.

#### **Yost, Alyson**

Alyson Yost, BSN, RN-BC, CHPN, was adopted at four months old from Busan, South Korea. She returned back to Korea in 2010 with G.O.A.L.'s First Trip Home, and she is currently involved in local adoptee groups in central Pennsylvania. Alyson has worked as a Registered Nurse at Hershey Medical Center for the past 10 years. She resides in Harrisburg, PA, with her husband and two children (Emma and Carter).

#### **Zhou, Xiang**

Xiang Zhou, MA, is a fourth-year doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at the University of Minnesota. Xiang's research focuses on ethnic-racial identities and its impact on mental health under a transnational framework. He is also currently developing a manualized treatment to retain and engage ethnic and racial minority families in parenting programs.

#### **Zielaskowski, Becca**

Becca Zielaskowski, BBA, is currently working on her master's degree in Public Health at the CUNY School of Public Health. She lives in the Bronx and is married to a Korean adoptee. This is her second KAAAN conference.

#### **Zielaskowski, Kate**

Kate Zielaskowski, MS, is an adult adoptee who was adopted from Seoul as an infant. She earned master's degrees in social psychology

and experimental psychology and is currently a research coordinator at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York. She lives in the Bronx with her wife and two dogs.



Alyson Yost



... to all our speakers and staff 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 present at #KAAAN2018, see page 16 or visit [www.KAAANet.org](http://www.KAAANet.org). Proposal forms will be posted in August 2017.

# Lessons Learned *Through* RESEARCH

## *An Interview with Amanda Assalone*

*Interview conducted by Annabelle Estera, current Convention Programs co-chair and former Communications co-chair of the Asian Pacific American Network.*

*<https://apanacpa.wordpress.com/2016/09/28/lessons-learned-through-research-an-interview-with-amanda-assalone/>*



True or false ...

Nearly half (47.3%) of all Asian American students in the United States attend community colleges.

Though the model minority myth would have us believe there was no way this could be the case, the statistic is in fact true (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2015; Teranishi, 2010). Although there is a growing literature on Asian American students in higher education, very few have studied this population of students. In 2014, Amanda Assalone defended her dissertation, *Exploring the College Pathways of Asian American Community College Students and the Model Minority Myth*, making further inroads into understanding these students and their contexts, and offering recommendations for policy and practice.

Below, Annabelle Estera of the Asian Pacific American Network interviews Amanda Assalone about her study.

**Can you give us a brief overview of the study and some of the major findings?**

I interviewed 28 Asian American community college students from the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex about their pathways to the community college and how family, culture, and their perceptions of the model minority myth influenced their educational expectations and experiences at the com-

munity college. The figure (*next page*) includes student demographics.

The article in the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* presents major findings that address how stereotypes stemming from the model minority myth impact Asian American community college students. Several of the participants felt that

their peers and instructors initially thought there was something wrong with them for attending a community college due to the assumption that Asians only attend community colleges if they are international students and/or need to improve their English language skills. The participants discussed the intense pressure from their peers to tutor them in math and share their math assignments. They also felt like their instructors held them to higher standards for being Asian American. Many participants felt inadequate because they were not high-performing students and felt the need to overcompensate in other ways to make up for it. The majority of the participants felt isolated throughout their college experience and had little to no knowledge of resources and programs that specifically supported Asian American students.

All of the participants described experiences dealing with racial microaggressions related to the model minority stereotypes but only a few understood the racist history of the model minority myth and how it not only discredits other racial/ethnic minority groups, but also pits Asian Americans against them. Most of the participants had mixed feelings about the stereotypes, but some embraced the stereotypes and admitted to using the stereotypes to their advantage.

The research process is never straightforward and must continually be negotiated. Can you talk about what areas of the research process you really had to

navigate and what it was like talking with your participants?

I sent out a mass email seeking participants for my study and received a large response from Asian American students who wanted to be interviewed. The favorable reception from the students was encouraging and stressed the reality that Asian Americans want to be included in critical conversations. However, this forced me to think further about the boundaries of my study, and ultimately I had to exclude many students. The criteria for the participant selection included: (1) community college students who self-identified as Asian American, and (2) community college students who were at least eighteen years of age. I wanted to focus on community college students who were pursuing a higher education credential for the first time, and I had to turn away several high school students who were concurrently enrolled at the community college, as well as those who had already received bachelor's or graduate degrees. Several Asian international students were excluded as well, but I interviewed a few participants who had started out as international students at the community college, but had recently become naturalized U.S. citizens. One participant discussed the serious challenges that Asian international students face at community colleges and tried to convince me to switch my research focus to international students. The biggest takeaway from the participant recruitment process for this study was realizing first-hand the enormous diversity and complexity

that exists among Asian American community college students and understanding the significance of researching a population that is often ignored.

My interview was the first time that many of the participants were asked to reflect and talk about their Asian American identity and explain how it influenced their educational experiences at the community college. Several of the students became emotional during the interview and shifted the conversation beyond their education and ethnic identity, and opened up about personal struggles and tragedies. For example, some students talked about their families fleeing war-torn villages in Southeast Asia and the aftermath of growing up as transient refugees in the U.S. They discussed personal struggles with poverty, depression, and addiction; serious issues that are not commonly

Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Male	16	57%
Female	12	43%
Participated in Pilot Study	8	29%
Received High School Diploma/GED in US	25	89%
First Generation College Students	19	68%
Foreign-born Citizens (1st generation)	10	36%
Immigrated to US before 13 (1.5 generation)	7	25%
Native-born Citizens (2nd generation)	18	64%
Had One Foreign-born Parent	28	100%
South Asian	4	14%
East Asian	7	25%
Southeast Asian	17	61%

associated with Asian American college students. I am also a former school counselor and it was challenging at times to act as an qualitative researcher, rather than a concerned counselor. I still think about how the interviews impacted the participants' overall well being.

**Though the goal of research generally not to tell your own story (with certain exceptions, such as autoethnographies), research can have a profound effect on those who undertake it. How did doing this study affect you personally?**

As a transracial Korean adoptee who was raised in a predominately white community in Oklahoma, I rarely interacted with other Asian/Americans and I knew very little about the ethnic subgroups and history of Asia. This study was the first time that I had personally interacted with a large group of Asian American students and I started the study feeling like an outsider. In an effort to connect with the students and encourage them to open up about their experiences, I waited until after the interview to share my background. This decision was important because individuals tend to respond in different ways when I disclose that I'm a Korean adoptee and in some instances, there might be an uncomfortable disconnect between myself and other Asian/Americans. This was something I had to learn to navigate throughout the study.

Overall, this study enhanced my Asian American identity and inspired me to utilize my individuality in a manner that contributes more to the community than serving as the compliant token Asian or designated person of color. Ultimately, I ended up making considerable changes in my life, both personally and professionally, so that I could collaborate with individuals who support this work, and are committed to improving the postsecondary access and success of underrepresented students and students of color.

**You're now working with the Southern Education Foundation. Does your study inform how you approach your work there? If so, how?**

Since joining the Southern Education Foundation (SEF), I've noticed that education policy spaces tend to be very data-driven, especially when showing how students of color perform across the education sectors. Typically, the data are strictly quantitative and often show Asian Americans as a monolithic group doing exceptionally well, or excludes Asian Americans from the data altogether. Prior to my study, I would have overlooked this but now I find

myself seriously contemplating how the data could be misinterpreted and misused in greater society. I'm familiar with being in spaces where people use the data to theorize around the idea that all Asian Americans do exceptionally well in school, but now I am more apt to point out that numbers do not tell the entire story. I know from my study that many Asian American students have serious academic challenges and struggles that are often dismissed or ignored, and we need more qualitative research and disaggregated data that provide a more realistic representation of this student population, which consists of nearly fifty ethnic subgroups.

I approach my work at SEF with the same principle that it's important to understand the entire picture before making judgements. A major part of my work at SEF involves supporting Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), specifically Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Many are quick to dismiss MSIs as being less than or second rate to Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) for superficial reasons, and neglect to acknowledge that MSIs continue to be successful at educating and empowering students of color and low-income students. I've observed and talked with students and faculty at various MSIs and I'm inspired by the positive energy, authenticity, and engagement that I've experienced at these colleges. I encourage people to spend quality time at MSIs before forming misguided opinions.

---

#### References:

National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE). 2015. The impact of scholarships for Asian Americans and Pacific Islander community college students: Findings from an experimental design study. Washington, DC: Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund.

Teranishi, R. (2010). Asians in the ivory tower: Dilemmas of racial inequality in American higher education. New York: Teachers College Press.



KAAN,  
Congratulations on  
19 years of  
serving the community.

Best wishes for a  
productive and meaningful  
conference.



BOX 341, CAMP HILL, PA 17001  
[www.ta-ri.org](http://www.ta-ri.org)

*Celebrating Korean-American Culture and Community in South Central PA*



**Did you know that KAAN is an ENTIRELY volunteer-run organization?**

Our volunteer staff and speakers, as well as our generous donors, allow us to offer high-quality resources at an affordable price. We'd like to offer a heartfelt thanks to all whose contributions have made a difference in this year's programming and services.



We offer a very special thank you to **Korean Adoption Services (KAS)** and to the **Korean Consulate in New York** for their generous support.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the people who shouldered the work of bringing this event to fruition:

- Our speakers and presenters (pages 35-41)
- Our youth/childcare planning team and adoptee mentors, especially Sara Campbell (pages 4, 26)
- Our volunteer staff and leadership, especially Stacy Schroeder, Kimberly McKee, Michael Stanley, Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, Ellen Heitzig, Katie Naftzger, Stephen Johnson, and Carolyn Hathaway (page 4)

# 2017 Gifts to Date

We deeply appreciate the support of these contributing individuals, organizations, and businesses.

Please consider joining their ranks by making a tax-deductible gift to KAAN today.



## \$10,000+

Korean Adoption Services  
Matt/Stacy Schroeder

## \$1000-4999

Ta-ri

## \$500-999

## \$100-499

David Amarel/ Martha Crawford  
Gregory/ Barbara Ann Burdan  
Eric/Carolyn Hathaway  
Jon K Shin  
John Van Ooyen

## \$99 or less

Max Gates/ Ellen Kotlus  
GoodShop  
Shaaren Pine

## Gifts in Kind

Airy Hill Farm Bed & Breakfast  
Aeriel Ashlee & Kyle Ashlee/ Ashlee Consulting  
Mimi Khúc & Lawrence-Minh Bùi Davis/ Asian Amer Literary Review  
Tammy Chu/ Resilience  
Connect-a-Kid  
Erica Gehringer  
Mark Hagland  
Stephen Johnson  
Kimberly McKee  
Korea Box  
Deann Borshay Liem/ Mu Films  
Katie Naftzger  
Amanda Nestleroth  
Mark/Hazel Nestleroth  
Susan Harris O'Connor  
Amy Partain  
Rachel Hye Youn Rupright  
Stacy Schroeder  
Snack Fever  
Angela & Brian Tucker/ Closure

*Current as of 5/31/17. Please excuse any accidental omissions.*



*Our 20th Annual Conference*

**CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY:  
Mental Health, Self-Care, & Advocacy**

**Minneapolis, MN**

**June 29-July 1, 2018**



*#KAAN2018 Call for Proposals @ [www.KAANet.org](http://www.KAANet.org) starting mid-August 2017*