

Dear reader:

It has been twenty-four years since I moved to America from South Korea, but I still vividly remember the pain, fear, and loneliness that I felt during my first year in this country. It took me a long time to appreciate my immigrant experience as an asset. This memoir is my attempt to understand how I was able to navigate one of the most turbulent times of my life and come through it with a new identity that I now love.

During the first few years in America, I believed I would always be seen as a foreigner who didn't belong here. Then I visited Korea for the first time in seven years since I had emigrated, and I was stunned by how much of an outsider I was in my own birth country too. I found myself questioning aspects of Korean culture the same way I had questioned American culture. I realized that spending my late teen years in America had profoundly and permanently changed me. I was neither Korean, nor American. I had become a Korean American. Through my memoir, I wanted to explore what it means to be part of both cultures and what it's like to live as an immigrant in American society.

This memoir is also a love letter to my mother, who has been an unwavering light that guided me during my formative years in Korea and America. Her strength sustained me even when everything else seemed confusing and hopeless. Talking over the past with her to fill in my missing memories helped finally answer questions that had confounded me my whole life.

I hope this story will give courage to young readers to know that things will get better if you just keep putting one foot in front of the other. I know I could have used that message all those years ago.

Sincerely,

Robin Ha