

Dear Reader,

Have you ever walked into a restaurant and seen a school-aged girl sitting at the corner table doing her homework, or watching TV, or refilling salt and pepper shakers?

I was that girl.

I remember on an overcast day in late October, we said goodbye to scores of relatives and friends in Taiwan and boarded a plane bound for Los Angeles. My parents had taken their life savings and bought a fast-food restaurant. Days later as we settled into the apartment, I realized that my world, which had been filled with weekly trips to the night market and Saturdays at the beach, was now reduced to the seven-block radius encircling the restaurant, the school, and our home. We came to America for a bigger, better life, and yet our world suddenly seemed so small.

For the longest time, I didn't know what to make of my experience as an immigrant girl growing up in 1980s LA. And the prospect of sharing about my family's journey felt too intensely personal. But whenever I sat down to write, it was the landscape of my first year in America that bubbled to the surface. This is the story that wanted to be told, and eventually I complied because I realized: at its very core, a story is a gift from one person to another.

*In the Beautiful Country* is inspired by my family's

story—it's about our hopes and dreams, our trials and heartbreak, and the unexpected friends we encountered along the way.

I wrote this book as a gift to that girl and others like her, so they might see their experience reflected on the page. But mostly, I wrote this book for anyone who has ever struggled to find their place in this vast, beautiful world.

I hope you like my gift.

Yours,

Jane Kuo