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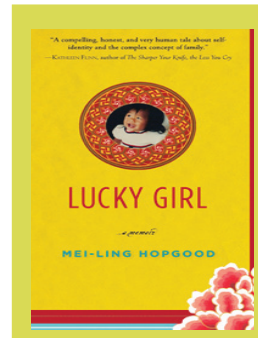
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Book Review

Lucky Girl

By Mei-Ling Hopgood

Reviewed by Shannon Riehle



Mei-Ling Hopgood has written a wonderful memoir, *Lucky Girl*, about her reunion with her birth family in Taiwan. With her clear prose and journalist's eye for detail, she creates a compelling story of how the relationship begins and how it develops over the years through visits and letters. The story begins with 23-year-old Hopgood on an airplane to Taiwan to meet her birth family for the first time. She has deliberately never wondered about them. As an international adoptee, it has never occurred to her that they could be found. "As a teenager," she writes, "I practically took pride in my ignorance. I mean, why dwell on the past? A choice was made for my good or theirs, or for both . . . I'm lucky, I've always told myself."

But Hopgood agrees, almost unintentionally, to be put in contact with them. A message from her birth family is quickly followed by faxes, letters, photographs and phone calls. Her birthparents and sisters are ecstatic to get word about her. They want to know all about her. They want her to visit as soon as possible. Within a few short months, she is on a plane to Taiwan.

Hopgood invites the reader into this amazing, sometimes overwhelming experience. Despite the barriers of language and culture, her first visit is a heady experience. There are sweet, funny scenes of her and her sisters comparing their figures and sharing family stories. You feel her parent's joy at having her back in their lives. "We were the lost and found, and the joy of recovery and discovery trumped regret, loss, or any other sad or shameful secrets that just weren't worth bringing up yet."

Yet. One of the strongest aspects of *Lucky Girl* is the way Hopgood captures the complexity of reunion. Her initial belief that her family was simply one of the many in China forced by culture and economics to relinquish their baby girls is challenged by her deepening understanding of her own particular family. As their relationships develop beyond first impressions, she learns some of the secrets and painful events that have shaped her birth family and the lives of her siblings. This evolution is inevitable, but it is not easy. Hopgood takes her readers along on a rollercoaster ride of joy and sorrow, disillusionment and acceptance.

Hopgood's experience as a journalist is evident in the way she weaves history lessons about Taiwan and China into her memoir. She also paints a vivid portrait of her adoptive parents and her Midwestern childhood, which are an important part of the story, though they are not its central focus. Her description of her American family is very affectionate, but she also offers a glimpse of the difficulties she had growing up in a place where she was one of very few Asians. Revealed later in the book, these details help the reader understand the young woman on the plane at the start of the story and the history she brings to these new relationships.

Lucky Girl is a thoroughly enjoyable and absorbing book. Anyone who has ever thought about reunion with birthparents, either their own or their children's, will appreciate Hopgood's skillful exploration of both the joy and the complexity of her own reunion experience.