



*Extract from: Subscriber Bulletin No 50 August 2009*

## **Intercountry Adoptees Tell Their Stories**

**(Eds.) Heather Ahn-Reading and Rita J Simon, Lexington Books, 2007**

At £25, this is a pricy book to buy for one's own bookshelves, but it came recommended to me by a fellow adoptive parent. I bit the bullet and bought it, and haven't regretted it. I think also for organisations such as the Intercountry Adoption Centre, and for adoption workers and therapists with clients who have been transracially and/or transnationally adopted it's also a useful acquisition.

As an adoptive parent whose internationally adopted children are growing up fast and approaching the teens years, it's my duty as their mother to hear what older adoptees say of adoption, and how they fared in their families, and how they feel about being 'divorced' from birth country.

This book offers a compilation of narratives which offer just that, and more. It offers poignant, yet positive stories (even when the adoptee voice is despairing) of what these older adoptees (teens and upward) are making of their lives now, looked at through the lens of adoption.

My generation of international adoptive parents, those of us not yet parenting teens, tend to feel we're 'doing better' than previous generations. Race, and the transracial family, as a factor in international adoption is 'on the table' – but it's not seen as an elephant, rather something we can deal with. We feel strongly we'd champion our children if they were discriminated against racially or bullied because of how they and our family look. And there's no doubt we'd try. But would we be second-guessing what our children think?

What the voices of the adoptees gathered in this book by Ahn-Reading and Simon offer is the chance to hear the adoptee perspective. From positive, to negative, to despair, to success, to puzzlement about identity.... and as sense of loss of birthright, we adoptive parents learn that no-one person will react to being adopted from abroad in the same way, but that each person has a voice that needs heeded. By ranging through this book – it's too dense to read all at once - each reader has the chance to hear to the varied responses to the challenge of adoption. And while hearing these voices matters, then listening attentively to them is the key. If parents, adoption workers and therapists are to know what our adopted teen, or our adopted client, may want to say to us, then we have to lay aside our preconceptions and hear with ears wide open. The narratives in the book offer us, the reader, what perhaps the families of the voices in the book never got to hear. Raw emotion about being adopted.

That this book is American, that the adoptees are Korean, Vietnamese, Hispanic/Latin and White American does not mean its application won't work here in the UK. Surely, the

issues of identity, culture, race and adoption parenting are valid concerns here in the UK?  
The book works for me.

© *Review by Sheena Macrae*

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