



Korean Focus Northwest

Supporting families with children of Korean heritage

Letter from the Board

Welcome to 2009! We are looking forward to a great year. We have made some recent changes. Most noticeably, Lauren Soliday and Allie Fee have stepped down from their leadership roles. We are thankful for all that they have done, and will continue to do as board members-at-large, for Korean Focus NW.

Our new leadership includes Jen Astion as Secretary, Cindy Callahan as Events Coordinator, Mary Edwards as Membership Facilitator and Newsletter Editor, and myself as Chair. We have set out a number of goals for 2009. First, we plan to maintain our existing event schedule – so we look forward to seeing you at Lunar New Year, Children’s Day, the Bay View Camping Trip, and Chusok! Second, we plan to improve our communications amongst our membership in a variety of ways. Mary is dedicated to getting our newsletter out four times this year. Jen is updating our website and exploring new electronic means of communication – such as a Korean Focus NW Facebook page (please friend us if you are on Facebook!) Third, we are taking some time to consider exactly what we (that includes you too) want KFNW to be. So far everyone seems to be on board with a threefold approach to preparing for our kids’ futures by providing social connections for adoptees and their families, education for adoptive parents, and increasing our Korean-American community outreach. If you would like to be part of these discussions or have insights you would like to share, please do not hesitate to let me know. This year our Board will be meeting at 7 pm (location TBD) on April 2, July 9, and October 1. We welcome new faces – and would be happy if you could join us.

Like always, KFNW is driven by its volunteers. Right now, we need volunteers to serve as Treasurer and to serve as Vice Chair. If you are willing to take on a formal role, please let us know. Also, we are seeking people who might be willing to organize a one-time event such as a Parents’ Night Out or a cooking class (we have leads on instructors if you do not.) We would love to see more ‘spontaneous’ events planned this year. But we do need your help to do it.

I hope you, like me, are looking forward to 2009. Happy New Year!

Leslie Frank

Did You Renew Your Membership?

Don’t forget to renew your \$20 membership in Korean Focus NW for 2009. Visit the Web site to pay or mail your check to:

KFNW c/o M. Edwards, 2924 277th Terrace SE, Fall City, WA 98024

KFNW Events Calendar: 2009

January 26	Happy New Year!
February 8	Lunar New Year dinner at Shilla restaurant in Seattle
April 2	KFNW Board Meeting (location TBD)
May 2 or 3	Children’s Day – timing and location will be communicated closer to event
August 27-30	Bay View camping trip
July 9	KFNW Board Meeting (location TBD)
Fall	Chusok
October 1	KFNW Board Meeting (location TBD)

The 2009 KFNW Board

Leslie Frank, Chairperson
Mary Edwards, Membership/Editor
Lauren Soliday, Member-at-Large
Julie Heise, Member-at-Large
Ruth Griffith, Member-at-Large

Jen Astion, Secretary
Cindy Callahan, Events
Allie Fee, Member-at-Large
Kristin Glenn, Member-at-Large



White Privilege, White Parents and a Starting Point for Talking with your Kids about Race

By Sara Docan-Morgan, PhD

As an adult Korean adoptee, a professor of Communication, and a researcher of adoption, I have become accustomed to adoptive parents asking me different versions of the question, “What should I do?” when it comes to talking with their Korean children about race. Anyone who has asked me this question will know that I hesitate in answering it in any direct or definitive way. Why? Because, as parents (adoptive or otherwise), you know your children the best. You know their moods, their sensitivities, and the way their minds work. Thus, you are the expert in how to approach your child(ren) about race!

At the same time, my personal experiences and my research findings tell me that, sometimes, some adoptive parents could benefit from the perspectives of someone who has “been in the trenches” of growing up as a Korean adoptee in an all-White family and who has talked to a number of adoptees about their experiences with race. So, in this article I am going to offer a “starting point” for talking with your children about race. It involves a concept that you may or may not be familiar with: White privilege. But whether this is the first or fiftieth time you have thought about White privilege, I would encourage you to try to read this article with fresh eyes and a sense that your awareness of your own White privilege is something that is not learned and understood in a single instance, but rather examined, explored, and understood over the course of a lifetime.

Peggy McIntosh is the director of the Wellesley Centers for Women, and in 1988, she wrote a paper that has become foundational to an understanding of White privilege. McIntosh argues that the experience of being White in America is like having an “invisible knapsack of unearned assets” that one can “cash in” at any time. McIntosh provides many examples of these assets. Let’s take a look at just a few:

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
3. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
4. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
5. I will feel welcomed and “normal” in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

I have shown a number of adoptive parents this list, and their reactions often reflect surprise and frustration. They are surprised because they hadn’t really given these privileges in their “invisible knapsacks” much thought before. And then, they are frustrated because they realize that these privileges are not made available to their beloved Korean children. In addition, consider the following privileges that you and other non-adopted or non-transracially adopted individuals might experience:

1. I can go through life without being subject to constant questions, such as, “Where are you from?” “What are you?” or “Have you met your ‘real’ parents?”
2. I can go through life without having to respond to comments such as, “Your English is really good,” or to instances where people mistake me for a foreign exchange student when I’m with my family.
3. If I have trouble with being racially teased at school, I can assume that my siblings or parents experienced similar things and can identify with me racially.
4. I am not told how grateful or thankful I should be for my family.
5. I don’t have to worry about not being a “real” or authentic member of my ethnic group.

The purpose of presenting these lists of privileges is not to make you, or any person, “feel bad.” Instead, this list allows you to examine the lived experience of your children in a new way. By thinking about White privilege, you, as parents, might understand your children’s lives as racial minorities just a little bit better.

Some of you might be thinking, “This information is interesting, but it doesn’t really apply to us. We live in a diverse area, and my son/daughter never talks about race with me, so it’s not really a problem for us.” This statement might be true, but my research suggests that it might not be true. In my research on adult Korean adoptees’ experiences with family communication about race, I have found that the adoptees I interviewed tended to not talk with their parents about race, even when the adoptees were thinking about it or experiencing racially-based teasing at school. These adoptees were trying very hard, in their words, to “fit in” or “blend in” with what one female adoptee called “the White environment” surrounding them.

It would be easy for White parents who haven’t given any thought to White privilege, to assume that everything is fine and that their children never think about race or notice the “invisible knapsack” of privileges that their parents carry that they do not. Bringing awareness to the White privilege that you, as adoptive parents, possess is the first step to empathizing with your children and creating meaningful dialogue about race.

Letter from Korea

By Eric Yonggil Suh

Happy New Year, all!

I'm very excited to get such a great opportunity to introduce Korea through this special quarterly newsletter. I hope you also have fun with my small talk!

Today I'd like to have a simple look back at Koreans' very merry Christmas holidays and a happy New Year Day. Christianity or Catholic is not the Korean's state religion (From a recent research, I found 26% of Korean is Buddhist, while 18% is Christian and 7% is Catholic. Statistically the Buddhism is the 'major' religion in the country, but it doesn't mean Buddhism is Korea's state religion. We don't have any state religion.); however Christmas is one of the most long-awaited and desired holidays to the majority of Korean, thanks to its own festive and romantic moods.



Everyone understands well Korea was not an exception from the global financial crunch last year. But we didn't fail to enjoy this annual gala day, shaking off heavy hearts and depression from the recession. Compared with the previous year, Christmas decoration in the city came later thanks to gloomy economic situation, but myriads of magnificent midget bulbs, a lot of colorful balls, and tens of thousands of sophisticated Christmas ornaments were enough for making us happy and festive.

I was told it's a tradition to American that they generally enjoy their Christmas holidays with their family members, but in Korea, Christmas is the day for lovers rather than family. So it is not difficult for us to find lots of lovers at restaurants, midtown, shopping arcades, or theaters. Yes, Christmas is the very day of LOVE!

At the time when we awake from a Christmas sweet dream, we greet New Year's Day with the best wishes for another year. But I feel this solar New Year's Day is still just one 'day off' to most Korean. We have been conventionally familiar with the lunar calendar, and tend to regard the Lunar New Year's Day as the very beginning of the year emotionally. Around Lunar New Year holiday, it's easy to meet Korean who head to one's hometown to perform the New Year's ancestor-memorial service, and to spend the holiday with their parents and family-hood.

As American have turkeys for their Thanks Giving Day, we, Korean, also have a very special dish for the Lunar New Year's Day; so-called "Tok-guk" or the Korean rice cake soup. Tok-guk is a bowl of chicken soup or beef soup with oval-shaped white thin Korean rice cake. Lots of global friends understand Kimchi or Bulgogi as Korean's most delicious food, but please don't miss any chance of tasting this another yummy dish, when you come to Korea. A bowl of Tok-guk means one year, so you should eat 20 bowls of it, if you are 20!

In return for your time with me, I want to wrap my first chat with two information. If you have friends from Korea, on January 26th, the very lunar New Year's Day this year, why don't you remember and try this – "Sae Hae Bok Ma-ni Ba-du-se-yo" (shown below in Hangul) that means "I wish you good health, good luck and big fortune!" I believe this surprising greetings can make your friends happy and mollified from their possible homesickness.

새해 복 많이 받으세요!

Our special contributor from Korea, Eric Yonggil Suh, is a friend and former colleague of board member Mary Edwards. Eric lives in Seoul and works in public relations and marketing for RealNetworks. He grew up in Seosan, Daejeon, and lives in Seoul with his wife, Dalyun Yoon.

The "Facebook" of KFNW

Have you succumbed to the Facebook phenomenon yet? If you are a member of Facebook, please search for us as "Korean Focus NW" in Groups and become a Friend! We'll keep our listing of events and other information on the page, and please feel free to add your photos and comments as well. You'll find that there are other Korea-related Groups on Facebook as well, so have some fun and look around at this massive social networking site (you may even find a long lost high school buddy).

Help Wanted: Board Treasurer and Vice Chair

Want to get more involved in KFNW? We are seeking a Treasurer and Vice-Chair for the board The treasurer role involves making occasional deposits, writing checks, and attending board meetings quarterly. The time required would include about an hour per month and a few more for the Children's Day and Chosuk events.

Family Focus: The Bachars– an Open Korean Adoption

Each quarter, we will focus on one KFNW family. This quarter, we talked with Zohreh Bachar of Sammamish. Zohreh and her husband Brian have two children adopted from Korea, Zoe is almost five, and Kamron is 2-1/2. What makes the Bachar's story quite unique is that their daughter Zoe has an open adoption.

When Brian and Zohreh were considering adoption, they decided to adopt from Korea for reasons familiar to many of us – the stability of the program, the excellent health and foster care of the children, and the certainty of a successful placement. Domestic adoption felt too risky for them, and the Bachars had friends who were dealing with a particularly difficult open adoption situation concerning a birth father.

When they got the call for Zoe's referral and went to the WACAP offices to see the file with its heart-stealing picture, they assumed it would be a standard, closed Korean adoption. So it was after the moment when their hearts had attached to that little face in the picture that they were told, "Here on the form, the birth mother indicates that she wants an open adoption."

It was unexpected. Zohreh and Brian were a bit skeptical, but also in love with the baby girl in the file. For reassurance, they spoke with a few Korean friends. Most felt that in light of conservative Korean culture and the geographical distance, the "openness" of a Korean adoption would not approach that of one in the states. Still, the one fear that nagged at Zohreh was the possibility that the birth mother could change her mind upon meeting her and Brian, and decide to keep the baby. On her behalf, WACAP spoke to the birth mother's counselor in Korea and was assured that the birth mother was sure of her choice, and that her sad circumstances made it impossible for her to raise a child.

Once in Korea, the Bachars worked with the agency to confirm the rules of the open adoption. The rules are quite strict to protect the birth mother and her future life, as well as the adoptive family:

1. There is no exchange of any identification
2. All contact is to be mediated by the agency
3. No picture of the birth mother allowed to be taken

Zohreh and Brian were able to meet with the birth mother and discuss how they planned to parent the child. Knowing that education and family are so fundamental in Korea, Zohreh described her and her husband's family and their education levels and professional careers. They expressed their dedication to education and making the best life for Zoe. The birth mother explained some of her reasons for

placing Zoe for international adoption and expressed her hopes and dreams for the child.

When the Bachars returned home with Zoe, they began sending pictures and letters to the agency for the birth mother. Zohreh included detailed daily schedules because the birth mother said she would like to be able to picture what Zoe was doing throughout the day. As time went on, the birth mother expressed how difficult it was to travel over an hour by bus to get to the agency to pick up the letters. Since then, Zohreh set up a private web site with a password for the birth mother. Zohreh posts pictures and the birth mother can go to the site any time and see pictures that are updated frequently.

In many ways, web site is an ideal solution. It eliminates the burden of travel for the birth mom and also keeps her from having to store physical items like pictures. For many Korean birth mothers, their pregnancy and adoption story will be a closely held secret and any evidence of it could be harmful in their future lives. Perhaps this need for secrecy will change as adoption becomes more accepted in Korea; but for now, care must be taken to protect these women.

Brian and Zohreh adopted their son Kamron in 2006 through a standard closed adoption. Zohreh struggles with the huge discrepancy between her children's adoption stories. She hopes that Kamron will not suffer because he has so little information about his birth parents, while Zoe has ongoing communication and will know many little things about her birth mother. They send pictures and letters to the agency for Kamron's birth family and include questions for them to encourage interaction if they so desire. One comfort for Kamron will be contact and friendships with other Korean adoptees who more than likely share his adoption situation – whereas Zoe is one of the few with an open arrangement.

Organizations like this one and the Eastside playgroup will help the Bachars keep Korean culture alive in their family life. Zohreh also loves to cook and keeps her kids' Korean palates satisfied with meals cooked at home and eating out at restaurants. They plan to travel with their kids to Korea when they are older, and to continue an active, life-long relationship with the heritage of their children.



One of the most wonderful things about the contact with Zoe's birth mother is the sense of peace and confidence it has given everyone about their decisions. By providing regular communication and a "real-time" window into Zoe's life, Zohreh and Brian reassured the birth mother about her own choice. In letters, she has told the Bachars that knowing all the details of Zoe's life has made a huge difference to her, and she gave them the ultimate honor by saying, "I know I made the right decision."

Searching the Census

By Leslie Frank

Interested in exploring the experience of Korean-Americans in the U.S? All you need is a library card and a computer to get started. Every 10 years, the federal government has counted the U.S. population and recorded the result in censuses. After 72 years, that information is released to the public. Our public libraries now offer us free access to census “schedules” from 1790 to 1930.

Many of you already know that Koreans did not migrate to the United States in great numbers until the twentieth century. Many of the first immigrants arrived first in Hawaii where they worked on sugarcane plantations. Some moved on to the U.S. mainland, most settling in California. By 1905, their migration had slowed to a trickle. Korea was now a protectorate of Japan, and the Japanese had promised the U.S. it would send no more migrants. Until the 1920s, only Korean picture brides came to the US. Then, with the passage of restrictive immigration legislation, migration to the U.S. by Koreans stopped. (It would resume on a grander scale in the 1950s as a consequence of the Korean War.)

So did any of these early migrants make their way to Washington? Did they live in family groups or mostly as single men? Did they live in ‘Koreatowns’ or were they mixed in with the general population? What did they do for a living? You can seek the answers at your public library’s website. Look for the **Heritage Quest** database through the Databases (King County) or Research Tools (Snohomish County) page. Be ready to offer you library card number when prompted. Then select “Search Census.” Then select “Advanced Search.” Limit to state “Washington” and birthplace “Asia.” Look through the results to find who was born in Korea: find the name of the person born in Korea (if it doesn’t show up on the first page, press next page before giving up – the census gives the same number to two pages), pan to the side to see where they were born. The census records different information for each decade, but generally it offers a name, the person’s relationship to the head of the household, their sex, race, age, marital status, country of birth (own, dad’s, mom’s), and what type of work they did at the time. The census might also record if they speak English, own a radio, rent a house, or when they arrived in the US.

Comb through the records and see what patterns you discern in the experiences of Washington Korean-Americans of the early twentieth century!

ARIS: Helping Adoptive Families

Adoption Referral & Information Service (ARIS) is a resource for pre-adoptive and post-adoptive families and the professionals that work with them. *ARIS* was begun by owner-operator and adoptive mother, Yolanda Comparan in response to the hundreds of calls a year she received from families seeking resources while working at a large adoption services agency.

ARIS provides referrals to trained, experienced and compassionate adoption and family resource professionals. Qualified referrals are made to help those that want to adopt and to those that need resources after adoption or placement. Services are free to inquirers and fee-based to professionals and agencies that are invited to become members.

ARIS is able to make referrals to counselors, educational experts, adoption agencies, home study providers, attorneys, support groups, trainers for families and professionals and much more. Many resources are listed on the site, more added regularly, and even more available by calling the toll free number.

Yolanda is asking for parents and professional to send their “finds.” If you and your family have had good to great services from an experienced professional or agency, please email her their contact information. She will do a screening of them and hope to make their information available for the benefit of others.

Visit *ARIS* at www.adoptionreferralservice.com or call their toll free number, 888-777-1538. Yolanda can be reached directly via email, Yolanda@adoptionreferralservice.com. You can also join *ARIS*’ email list and learn of the newest resource in books, sites, professionals, classes, research and services.

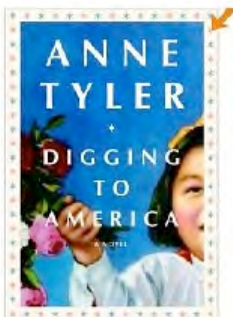
Have a Little Writer in the House?

We are seeking kids to contribute to the newsletter – maybe your child would like to write an article (or poem, drawing, etc.) about a Korean event, book, movie or cultural experience they have had. Please contact [Mary Edwards](mailto:MaryEdwards@adoptionreferralservice.com) with ideas and suggestions for contributions.

BOOK REVIEW

Digging to America, by Anne Tyler

Now in paperback, the novel **Digging to America** was published in 2006 and tells the story of two families who meet by chance at the Baltimore airport as they await the arrival of their Korean daughters. One couple, Bitsy and Brad, is a fairly typical white American family, while the other, Sami and Ziba, is a couple who are first-generation Americans with families from Iran.



While they probably would not have crossed paths without adoption, the foursome develop a friendship – sharing birthdays and Korean holidays with their daughters and extended families. The book does not solely focus on adoption or Korea per se, but covers a broad range of issues that can come up in any family. While Sami, Ziba and Sami's mother Maryam's relative newness to America is a factor, the most powerful driver of the plot seems to be personality along with the regular events of daily life. The plot plays around with the idea of belonging, and although Sami and Ziba have Iranian heritage, many times they seem to identify more with Bitsy and Brad than the grandmother Maryam. But is it really culture, or just differing human personalities that causes this rift?

Anne Tyler married into a Persian family so she confidently captures descriptions of the food, family events and even the dialect of English as a second-language to Persian. Bitsy and Brad are a semi-hippie couple, and Bitsy is a very strong, and in my eyes, imposing personality. I did not like how, albeit with love, she tended to insert herself and her opinions a bit too strongly. All of these personalities live and love, fight and make up and go through the events of life. The fact that their very loved daughters are adopted from Korea is honored, but not a central theme of the novel. I enjoyed the book and I think it raises many questions about culture, belonging, and what “family” truly means.

– Review by Mary Edwards

Seen Any Good Movies?

Read A Good Book?

Tried a New Restaurant?

Please contribute to our group with reviews and recommendations for Korea-related books, movies, events, food, restaurants for adults and kids. Please email [Mary Edwards](mailto:MaryEdwards@koreanfocusnw.org) with your contributions and we'll add them to our quarterly newsletter.



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