

Natalie Press

Where I'm From

Whenever asked about where I'm from, I always have two answers. I'm from the LA Valley, in a little pocket of Northridge called Sherwood Forest. I am also from China, in a city called Guangzhou.

I was adopted at nine months old by two white parents. I grew up in the "valley" and didn't interact with my Chinese heritage very often unless it was going to Chinatown for my family's annual Chinese New Year dinner. I have always been aware of my differences from my Asian friends, like when they would bring dumplings to school and I would bring my peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I found myself pondering the unanswerable questions about my adoption: what my life could have been like if I had lived there, what my biological parents looked like, if I had any siblings, why I was given up. I struggled alone with these unanswerable questions and ignored the confusing feelings I felt growing up looking different from my family.

I became used to pushing down all my feelings about my adoption until one evening I had a conversation with my cousin who was also adopted from China. It began with us catching up and talking about her college in New York and my high school classes. Soon enough, it was one in the morning, and we were about to hang up, when I suddenly got the courage to ask her about her adoption. It was a leap of faith. Even though I had known her for my entire life, it took us sixteen years to finally talk about our shared experience. That night, we ended up trading adoption stories and the similar questions/insecurities we have about our life until four in the morning. She made me feel so understood and validated all of my confusing feelings I had kept to myself for so long. I realized that I could be proud of my unique Asian identity. It isn't something to hide, but something to celebrate.

My adoption isn't the first thing I bring up in a conversation, but I understand it makes me who I am today. I am proud of my heritage and where I've come from. I do not live in China, nor do I know any Chinese besides my Chinese name and the phrase "my name is Natalie" – which I severely butcher. I will never know what my life could have been like in China. I will never know who my birth parents are.

Instead, I have white parents and a black brother and I'm not from the traditional family, but my experiences as an adoptee have allowed me to understand the world through their experiences as well as my own.