



## From the land of the Chosŏn\*

By Wanda Borland, May 31, 2021

I was born shortly after the Korean War ended, and for reasons unknown my brother and I became orphans — I was 4 and a half.

Six months later I was adopted into a Caucasian family and brought to the United States. When I was around 9 years old I became mute for a while. When I opened my mouth to speak only tears came out.

I believe that my body was expressing grief that I had no words for. Parents, family, siblings, language, ancestors, all gone and no one to explain why. I have no memory of the first five years of my life, and it's been a challenge to build a foundation over a black hole. My family moved to the Rogue Valley in 1961. What was it like to grow up Asian in the Rogue Valley in the 1960s and 70s? I was continually bombarded with questions that forced unwelcome intimacy with people I had never met. Over and over these white people felt entitled to ask me questions that seared me to the bone.

What are you!

Where are you from!

No, I mean where are you really from!

What's your name!

Where'd you get a name like that!

Growing up Asian in a white homogenous valley, it felt that being seen and being heard made me a target.

I witnessed horrible bullying in school and on the school bus. My Caucasian parents did not believe their three Asian kids experienced racism, so I knew I was on my own when I walked out the front door.

The external me was the target of racism, while the internal me soaked in the racial biases of the white culture I lived in. This resulted in the curiosity of my practicing racist attitudes towards myself for a good part of my life.

Before asking a person if they are grateful for being adopted, think about what it involves. It means the child has experienced the devastation of the primal wound, the separation from her mother.

For an Asian adoptee being raised by Caucasian parents, it also means the loss of culture, of knowing your roots, the sense of belonging to a people. It means the loss of knowing who you are as a birthright.

A few months ago, I needed to buy a new range. I decided where I wanted to make the purchase and called to ask a few questions. The salesperson was very helpful and friendly. He asked me to ask for him by name when I was ready to visit their store so I did.

I chose the various models I was interested in and I was the person asking all the questions. It was noteworthy that even though I was clearly the buyer, the salesperson directed the answers to my questions towards my friend, who is a white woman. He scarcely looked at me! It reminded me of how this happened all the time during the 27 years I was an IT Administrator. In meetings, I rarely received the respect and acknowledgment that eye contact conveys. How sad it is that this kind of racial bias is still alive today.

Who and what am I? Being firmly ensconced in the third of the third of my life I have become a hybrid, not yet fully baked. I am gratified that the current public discourse is full of racial-justice issues but the price has been dear to get here. Too many people of color have died violent deaths because of the scourge of racism. I love that people of color are moving into decision-making positions in corporations, on boards, and in local, regional and national politics. The Ashland mayor led the City Council recently to form a Social Equity and Racial Justice Commission.

It has taken me a lot of work to get to this place, and I am grateful for the people who have helped me along the way.

\*Chosŏn - The Joseon dynasty (also transcribed as Chosŏn) was a Korean dynastic kingdom that lasted for approximately five centuries. It is also a play on the English word "chosen". Which is how adoption is often explained to the adoptee. We "chose" you.

*Wanda Borland was an IT administrator for 27 years. She is now a freelance videographer.*