

## Afterword: Locating Myself as an Adult Adoptee

In the last two years of high school, my daughter Liz spent most of her free time at friends' houses rather than at home. She stopped going on family vacations with us and hardly ever showed us anything she wrote at school. She spent her first college spring break—in a very successful year—visiting friends out of state rather than seeing us.

Is this just adolescent assertion of independence within the normal range? Does it reflect dissatisfaction with a home life that wasn't good enough? What does it bode for the future?

In contemporary America many parents worry about their relationships with their children. Has my upbringing as an adoptee made our relationship more difficult, or made me particularly anxious?

One of the themes of Jean Paton's pioneering book *The Adopted Break Silence* is that the popular image of adoptees as always children is a myth; adoptees do grow up, and the experiences of adult adoptees should be heard. While much previous literature has focused either on adoptees as children or, like George Eliot and other novelists, on adoptees near the point of marriage and/or career choice, recent psychology has begun to discuss dealing with adoption as a lifelong process.<sup>1</sup> And several recent novels enter this dialogue by imagining adoptees in middle or old age.

My study of adoption in literature has been most intense during my daughter's years as a teenager. It is probably for this reason that when I think of recent novels about adult adoptees, the ones that have meant the most to me have been novels in which some relationship between the adoptee and a younger person—usually a parental relationship—is crucial. However, in only one of these novels, *The Diviners*, is she a child of the adoptee by birth. In *A Gesture Life* it is the main character's adopted daughter; in *Jazz* it is a young woman who becomes a friend to both members of a childless couple (both of whom also have lost their

birth parents) after the death of her friend, the man's young lover. In *Mr. Ivess' Christmas* it is the regenerated murderer of the adoptee's son.

All of these are books about memories, in which the past is revealed in complicated and circuitous ways. The main characters learn little, if any, factual knowledge by the ends of the novel they did not have at the beginning, but by the end their significant memories have emerged. These are all books about coming to terms with losses, the first loss of parents and later losses that sometimes explicitly repeat that one and are sometimes made worse because of it. These novels present the loss of parents as more of a trauma with aftereffects than do most of the other works of literature I have discussed. (In nineteenth-century novels, the worst aftereffects come more clearly from the way characters such as Esther, Estella, and Pip are treated by their adoptive parents.) For the adult characters in the novels, the search for birth parents is either impossible or in the past; it doesn't solve their problems as some literature suggests it might. But they are seeking for something. Perhaps one could call it a way to lead their lives while accepting their past and future losses. I am tempted to call it redemption, though in only one novel is religion an explicit theme.

The first of these is *The Diviners*, the last novel by the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence.<sup>2</sup> As far as I know, this is the only work of literature discussed in this book except Albee's plays in which the author as well as a character is an adoptee. Margaret Laurence's mother died when she was four. Her mother's sister helped her father with his young daughter, and then married him. He died when Margaret was nine.<sup>3</sup>

The main character in her novel, Morag, was orphaned at four and adopted not by a relative but by Christy, the town ragpicker, and his wife, Prin. Morag fights against her class position in her society and against its male dominance, and eventually becomes a successful writer. In this autobiographical novel she looks back over her career as she tries to come to terms with her past, her friends, her future, and her teenage daughter, deliberately conceived out of wedlock with an Indian friend, breaking her ties with her white husband and making her daughter repeat her own past as a social outcast. Morag reevaluates her parents and ancestry in ways particularly interesting to other adoptees: she learns that Christy's stories about her birth father played up his heroism and played down Christy's own; she decides that her own land is not really Sutherland, in Scotland, the land of her birth father's ancestors, but the Canadian town Manawaka, the land of Christy's ancestors,

whom she has now taken for her own. At the end of the novel, she accepts the fact that her daughter is leaving town to visit the other side of her heritage—the land of Morag’s ex-lover’s family.

In Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*, three of the major characters have lost both birth parents and one has lost his father.<sup>4</sup> All of these characters were informally adopted, mostly within the family. The novel begins after fifty-year-old Joe has killed Dorcas, his much younger lover, and Violet, his wife, has broken up the funeral. As their stories are told, all these characters reveal psychologies of loss, search, and substitution. Joe’s memories of seeking out his mother when he was fourteen emerge when he talks with Dorcas, and even in the search that ends with his shooting her. Dorcas has responded to his retelling of his search by telling him her childhood memories of her mother’s death shortly after her father’s. Violet, also orphaned and raised by her grandmother, is preoccupied with her childlessness when Joe turns to Dorcas, and later becomes preoccupied with the dead Dorcas. This quest leads her to visit Alice, the aunt who raised Dorcas, who provides some of the mothering Violet has missed and helps her reconstruct her life as she says, “You got anything left to you to love, anything at all, do it” (112). Trying to learn about Dorcas, Violet meets another young woman, Felice, Dorcas’s friend, who gives Violet and Joe both a critical perspective on her friend and knowledge that makes Joe less of a murderer (Dorcas was shot in the shoulder; she wanted to die; she wouldn’t have died if the ambulance had arrived in time). At the end of the novel, the relationship Violet-Joe-Felice is a transformation and redemption of the triangle Violet-Joe-Dorcas. Instead of tearing the couple apart as Dorcas did, Felice helps their love and shows that they can now be open to the world.

The story of Joe and Violet and their two “substitute daughters” is interrupted by another story of loss and substitution, the story of Golden Gray, raised as a white boy by his white mother and her black maid, at the age of eighteen searching for his black father. On the same trip, he finds and helps a pregnant black woman, Wild, who makes a home for him and who, we eventually learn, is Joe’s mother. And Violet’s life, too, has been affected by Golden because her grandmother was the black maid who brought him up as an idealized white boy. Thinking partly of this influence, Violet says of Joe, “From the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he” (97). This view of human psychology is one of the key themes of the novel. It is balanced, perhaps, by Dorcas’s mysterious dying words. “There’s only one apple . . . Tell Joe”

(213). The image recalls the apple of Eden, with its choice interpreted as a choice of experience rather than a fall. Joe has earlier said to Dorcas, “You were the reason Adam ate the apple . . . Don’t ever think I fell in love. I rose in it” (133, 135). If love is always love of a substitute, the novel suggests, it is still love; this has obvious implications for how we see the substitution involved in adoption. So does the way Violet accepts substitution as part of the imaginative remaking of the world that she finally chooses: “What’s the world for if you can’t make it up the way you want it?” (208). In the final description of Joe and Violet together, Violet takes on images suggestive both of the lost Dorcas and of Wild, Joe’s lost mother, while Joe is described in language that echoes the description of Violet’s mother and father in their best moments.

Chang-Rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* is another novel in which the main character’s adoption is an influential event in his life. At the beginning, we meet him as Franklin or Doc Hata, owner of a medical supply store in a small New England town. We find out that he was born into a poor Korean family and adopted by a middle-class Japanese one, and learned very early to be ashamed of his origin and never to say his Korean birth name. This repressed past returns to set up what turns out to be his greatest trauma, which he is able to reveal only very late in the novel; while in the Japanese army, he fell in love for the first time—with a Korean “comfort woman,” who begged him to kill her to save her from gang rape by the other soldiers in his company. Unable to do this, he was forced to tend her dead body and that of her unborn child. By implication, this event heightens his lifelong problems with intimacy after he moves to the United States. Retrospectively it explains much of his distance from the two women in the book who care for him, as well as his difficulties with the daughter he adopts from Korea, his anxiety about her sexuality, and eventually his repetition of his earlier trauma by forcing her to have an abortion during which he assists.

Nevertheless, in spite of his past alienation from his daughter, they are eventually reconciled, about seven years after she has a son. Hata for the first time has experiences that he thinks of as like the family joys that most people feel. It is only after this regeneration that he is able to reveal to the reader the full story of his past traumas.

At the end of the novel, however, he does not settle down in the company of his reformed daughter and grandson. His last plans are to sell his house, make provisions for them and for a dying, motherless

child whose father owns the medical supply store formerly owned by Franklin, and travel, “maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores.”<sup>5</sup> Wherever he is, he will go on a walk and “come almost home.”

In Oscar Hijuelos’s *Mr. Ives’ Christmas*, Edward Ives, a foundling adopted by another foundling, looks Latino and feels a sense of affinity to the Spanish people of New York City, where he lives, and takes on a strong Catholic religious belief under the nurturance of his adoptive father.<sup>6</sup> Like the older Ives, he goes into newspaper work. He becomes a cartoonist, marries, and has children and a reasonably happy life until his sixteen-year-old son is shot by a fourteen-year-old Puerto Rican teenager. At this point it seems his life is destroyed. But he is moved by the grief of the murderer’s grandmother, takes her to support group meetings, and at the pleas of her and a priest begins to write to his son’s murderer, Gomez. This is difficult for him to do, but it actually has an effect on Gomez, who learns to read and write better and is ultimately released from jail. While still resentful of Gomez, Ives meets with him and receives his gratitude.

In each of these novels, adoptees are divided between different ethnic identities, and in each of them, an adoptee moves toward more affiliation with the one less socially valued, although with one exception that affiliation is less drastic than in *Daniel Deronda*. Golden Gray, the exception, becomes black, like his birth father and the maid who helped raise him; Hata acknowledges his Korean ancestry and also the African-American side of his adopted daughter, who herself prefers racially mixed society, and at the end of the novel he is about to travel to Asia; Morag eventually identifies with her adopted father’s people, and with Canada, where she grew up, rather than her birth parents’ ancestry, unlike the previous characters, but in this way she is giving up identification with the more poetic Highlanders in favor of someone who is socially despised.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Ives has no way of finding his ethnic identity, but he learns Spanish and makes most of his friends among Latinos.

In each novel adoptees have an intense desire for, and eventually, a relationship with someone in the next generation—in Morag’s case her birth child, Pique, in Hata’s an adopted daughter and her son, in Joe’s and Violet’s case their friend Felice—whose independence they can ultimately acknowledge along with that relationship. The novels explore Morag’s desire for “someone of her own blood” (193), Violet’s move from not wanting a child to sleeping with dolls to thinking of Dorcas as

her lost child, and the adoption to which, we eventually realize, Hata was driven by reasons he never understood. Mr. Ives's desire for a child is communicated largely through his pregnant fiancée's perspective. Anxious as she is about the limitations a child will place on her life, "her thoughts always returned to Ives and how he had been a foundling, and how much it must have hurt him even to consider giving up the child to make her happy" (50). Mr. Ives's relationship with his son is short-circuited by death; his most emotional relationship with the next generation seems to be with Gomez, who is in a bizarre way a kind of substitute for his son.

Is there a connection in these novels between the emphasis on ethnicity and ethnic difference and the emphasis on two generations of parental relationships? On the one hand, the facts that the central adoptions in *A Gesture Life* and *Mr. Ives' Christmas* are across ethnic lines—as well as that Golden Gray is raised as white—emphasize, to different degrees, contrast and stress in the parent-child relationships. On the other hand, it also locates those relationships as part of a larger community and a larger history. In each case, the author is from the group identified with the "double identity" character's heredity. In both *A Gesture Life* and *Jazz*, the oppression of one racial group by another and its psychological effects, including internalized racism, is a major theme; in *Mr. Ives' Christmas* the Catholic religion is a bridge across cultures, passed on to Mr. Ives by his Anglo father, shared with the Latinos whom he resembles, and helping him to forgive his son's murderer. *The Diviners* concerns itself even more with ethnic difference with regard to nonadoptive issues: the Métis identity of Morag's lover and the consequent identity difficulties of their daughter.

Each of the novels explores how later intimate relationships recall earlier ones—with elements of searching, loss, rejection, and substitution. *Jazz* and *A Gesture Life*, especially, explore the echoes of the relation to birth parents in later life—the sense of loss and the search in *Jazz*, the embarrassment over their sexuality and low social level in *A Gesture Life*. Each novel involves forgiveness: Mr. Ives forgives Gomez, Violet and Joe forgive each other, so do Hata and his daughter, and Morag and Pique. All four novels also emphasize the relationship of the adoptee to a community, though they are also always in a sense outsiders within that community. In *A Gesture Life*, Hata leaves his community at the end, and for the first time he may actually return to places he lived in earlier.

One of the controversial issues among people who write about adoption is the question of how much trauma is inevitable in adoptee experience. Is the loss of a birth mother, whether through death or relinquishment, always painful and therefore a primal wound that affects the adoptee throughout life? I have serious doubts about this as a general claim, since the loss may be softened if it takes place early enough and is followed quickly by adoption in a loving and understanding family, but in all of these novels, trauma is clearly involved. The adoptee loses parents as a child old enough to remember and grieve, or to forcibly change identity and distance himself from birth parents, like Hata, or stays in an orphanage for years, like Ives, or is raised by adoptive parents with a sense of being an outsider and having a possible birth mother who is scorned by all, like Joe. In all of these novels we see the effects of these events as long lasting, even if hidden most of the time; but the characters all manage to integrate them in some ways into a life that is not defined by victimhood. Their experiences of loss and adoption are exaggerations of the experience of many adoptees who were adopted in a less traumatic way; for example, I moved directly from my birth mother to my adoptive parents when I was about a month old. Nevertheless, I find a kind of hope in the development of these characters.

For in these adult adoptee novels I find many of my own issues. Like Morag, Ives, Violet, and Hata, I longed for a child. Like Morag and Hata, I must deal with her increasing distance as she grows up, hoping that we will be able to forge a new and better relationship in her adulthood. Though I never reexperienced a frustrated search for a birth parent as explicitly as Joe in my current relationships, I have sometimes wondered about whether any relational difficulties I have in some way reenact, for example, my feelings of being rejected by my birth father. Two aspects of my own life I find uniquely among these novels in *Mr. Ives' Christmas*, in exaggerated form. Ives finds it very hard to throw away anything that ever mattered to him; the narrator calls his tendency to save objects "a practice that had something to do with his foundling beginning" (5), though I know other adoptees who are not hoarders at all.<sup>8</sup> And Ives has a strong faith in God's love, conveyed to him by his adoptive father, which remains important to him all his life even though the loss of his son challenges him enormously. These are the first two aspects of Ives that the narrator introduces, as if they are connected; Ives cannot throw away his Catholic faith, as he cannot throw away his

old letters, drawings, and correspondence. His memory of the absolute sense of loss in the foundling home returns to him at his son's death and motivates his investment in all the objects that have taken on meaning for him, including, perhaps, the sacramental, ritual objects of Catholic tradition.

None of these novels gives the adoptee a simple solution. *The Diviners* turns away from giving Morag a clear identity with ancestors in Scotland, and she doesn't tell Christy that she thinks of him as her father until just before he dies. Motherhood is not simple for her either, and the authorship that is so much her own identity is presented as a gift that may well leave her as she grows older. *Jazz* tells and retells Joe's search for his birth mother, and the ambiguity of its results, which leave him still looking for a sign from her. At the end Joe and Violet are happy together, but this happiness is the product of much struggle, suffering, forgiveness, and compromise. Hata apparently gives up the family happiness he seems at last to have found, and denies the idea that his trip is a pilgrimage: "I won't attempt to find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead" (356). Ives does find comfort in his imagination of a creator, and his dreams of his dead son, but the novel conveys the wrenching pain he experiences all the way to that point.

I see my renewed appreciation of my adoptive mother as parallel to Morag's of her adoptive father, and I identify with most of these characters in their ability to endure loss and reconstruct relationships. When Hata, finally reconciled with his daughter and grandson, decides to move away and travel instead, I mentally gasp and wish for reassurance that he is coming back to them; but in this book, more bitter than the others, it is not there, and once more I learn more about myself by seeing how I would have chosen differently.

These novels present hope after loss, but they deny the adoptee many of the simple "happily ever afters" of resolution. I turn to them, as to many of the other works discussed in this book, because I want to see adoption imagined in complexity and diversity. I look for the way imaginary lives are like mine, and the way they are different. I look for those touched by adoption in fiction, in the thought that others will be able to understand their own lives better by seeing the way their lives are both like and unlike the fictions I discuss.

Some of the literature I discuss shows possible difficulties in adoptive family life, and I hope that my analyses will help people who experience those difficulties feel less alone and will help others avoid some pitfalls.

But I also hope that people who belong to or observe good adoptive families will be able to read my literary analyses with less cognitive dissonance than they read criticism that takes for granted the ideology of blood in *Oedipus* and *Winter's Tale*, believes that the repression in the *American Dream* family is inevitable in adoption, and misses the emphasis on the importance of nurture in Dickens, Eliot, and Kingsolver. And I hope that analyses of the myths of reunion in earlier literature will help adoptive parents feel less threatened by the idea of their children having information about their heredity, eventually meeting their birth parents, or even growing up in open adoptions. I hope my analyses contribute to undoing the invisibility of birth parents in literature that does not mythologize them as the only parents. I hope that people in other forms of families can use insights from the literature of adoption about accepting difference in the family. And I hope that this book will also contribute to thought about other nonstandard forms of kinship. Gay marriage or partnership, for example, stands in obvious similarity to adoption as a form of kinship that does not involve a direct link between sex and procreation, and poses the question about what defines marriage, just as adoption poses the question of what defines parenthood.

Since this book began by locating my history in relation to adoption, I want to end it partly by discussing some aspects of where I now am as an adoptee. I want to look at some of the ways being adopted has affected my current close family relationships, and the way they, in turn, relate to the ways I think about being adopted. I also want to consider two aspects of identity most entangled with adoption, ethnicity and religion—both of which might seem to provide multiple possibilities for me since my adoptive and birth parents were such a diverse lot. I grew up with my adoptive parents' ethnicity and my adoptive mother's religion ascribed to me, but as an adult have been in a position to choose from many ethnicities what to identify with, and to decide which religion is my own.

As I write, putting much emphasis on my own ethnicity seems somewhat artificial, since I don't think in ethnic terms very often. Now that I know all my ethnicities, perhaps, I can take them more for granted. But since many adoptees do think in those terms, and since ethnicity appears significant in other chapters, let me take stock. If anyone asked me about my ethnic identity and gave me enough space, I would list all

my possible ones, birth and adoptive, since all have influenced me. Norwegian, German, English, like Geraldine. Irish, German, English, like Dorothy. Czech, like Frank. Jewish, probably Ashkenazi, probably from the former Soviet Union, like Murray. Though I have no Czech or Irish “blood,” Czech and Irish culture influenced the atmosphere in which I grew up, probably in many ways that I will never know. For my fiftieth birthday, I went to Prague with my husband, daughter, and “birth niece,” two years older than my daughter. I stopped by Rocycany, the small town my adoptive grandparents came from, and thought of them as I saw the Catholic church probably of my grandmother’s childhood next to the science museum my grandfather might well have valued.

James Baldwin once wrote about his relation to white culture, “I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West. . . . I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt . . . a special attitude. . . . I was an interloper; this was not my heritage. At the same time, I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use—I had certainly been unfitted for the jungle or the tribe. I would have to appropriate these white centuries. I would have to make them mine—I would have to accept my special attitude, my special place in this scheme; otherwise I would have no place in any scheme.”<sup>9</sup> Baldwin’s position as the outsider to tradition in some ways applies to me more as a woman than ethnically, and much of my writing before this was an attempt to appropriate my literary past as a woman. Appropriating the ethnic identities I was raised among was not as complicated for me as is the process Baldwin describes. As I discussed in the introduction, ethnicity was not an issue with much content in my adoptive family. There was enough overlap between my birth and ethnic identities that crossing them was not nearly so difficult for me as it was for Baldwin, or for people adopted transracially. And unlike Baldwin, at a time when black history was just being discovered by Americans, I can find out about Norwegian and Jewish history, even if not about the history of my birth father’s family. I could construct a relation to an ethnic past as Stuart Hall discusses his son doing in adapting African traditions in his sculpting: “Our relationship to that past is quite a complex one, we can’t pluck it out of where it was and simply restore it to our selves. . . . We tell ourselves the stories of the parts of our roots in order to come into contact, creatively, with it.”<sup>10</sup>

But in my own particular situation, I cannot, emotionally, recon-

struct myself as a member of an ethnic Norwegian or ethnic Jewish community. Theoretically it would be a possible choice for me to join an ethnic organization connected with any of my adopted or inherited affiliations. Pittsburgh has many such groups. But psychologically joining any of them would be, for me, a leap not worth making, since I don't have happy memories of cultural practices to be revived or, at present, a strong wish to learn new ones based on ethnic allegiance in particular; if I were joining a new singing group, for example, I probably wouldn't select one that focuses on the music of one of my ethnicities, though an adopted friend of mine is doing this partly as a link to her otherwise unknown Latin American ancestry. I am not really at home in any group defined by ethnicity, though I can enjoy many different kinds of "ethnic" music.

I teach English literature, and there is English ancestry in both my adopted and birth families, and I am now part of a denomination associated with English tradition, but I don't feel ethnically English. I could appear so, at least on paper, if I took my husband's last name, Carrier, but keeping my own appeals not just to my feminist consciousness, my wish to be identified with the writing and other achievements done before my marriage, but also to my sense of solidarity with the particular kind of outsider identification with which the name Novy marks me, no matter how little I know about Czech history. When I write about Shakespeare, I am interested in Shakespeare's relation to outsiders within the plays, and to international readers and audiences today. The question "Who are your people?" came to me in a dream, and I had no answer.

On the other hand, I like the idea of having connections with the complex history of all these traditions, finding my own heroes and heroines to celebrate in each and learning how all my parents were influenced by each. And also finding heroes and heroines in other traditions, such as struggles for women's rights, civil rights, workers' rights, religious freedom. Though as a white person I am not clearly identified by ethnicity, I still resonate to the creative multiplicity in some ethnic writers. My fantasy is to be like Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, who "copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. [I feel this need to tolerate contradictions and ambiguity with regard to religion and other issues more strongly than ethnicity at present.] She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural per-

sonality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned.”<sup>11</sup>

Nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. With the resonance of these words, I move from ethnicity to more individual issues. Once Geraldine and I were rejected by my birth father. But he was just a nineteen-year-old boy—the first time, anyway. Once I was, you could say, abandoned by Geraldine. But she didn’t abandon me. She arranged for me to be taken care of by Dorothy and Frank, who she thought could give me a family life she could not. Perhaps adoptees who have lived all their lives in an environment where single parents are accepted have more difficulty dealing with their birth mothers than I do. I remember how strong and terrifying the stigma on unwed pregnancy was in my childhood. It is easy for me to understand why Geraldine felt she couldn’t keep me.

I keep up with Geraldine, and visit her occasionally. Though I see us as so different, on one recent visit she said, “You’re like me. Neither one of us is explosive.” I didn’t argue with her. If she wants to see us as similar, why deprive her of that? And perhaps she is right about this particular issue. Neither one of us seeks out conflict at this point. She has osteoporosis, anemia, and a tendency to macular degeneration, but not cancer or heart disease, and I can consider this information (which closed records would have denied me) in making health decisions. Time has led me to a greater appreciation of my brothers, especially Gordon, the second oldest, who is much better than I am at sending e-mail messages and newspaper clippings. I also remember that another one, Galen, overseas in the military when he found out about me, tried to initiate a correspondence to which I didn’t respond very well. And Geraldine recalled, during my last visit, the youngest one, Ben, excitedly saying, “I have a sister!” when she told him about me.

As I returned to writing this book, I made a last attempt to communicate with Murray. I had the press send him a copy of my anthology on adoption in literature. Since nothing in the package would indicate that I had ordered it, this seemed to me a fairly cautious gesture; I expected that, as after most letters I sent, I would probably hear nothing, but he might be curious enough to read some of it. A few weeks later, the press sent me a credit for the book. By process of eliminating the other people I had books sent to at that time, I infer that he returned it to the press. I didn’t expect such a drastic rejection—but I’m not astonished. I

assume he wants his respectable image preserved and may even fear that I would be entitled to inherit money from him if he acknowledged me—I didn't think possessing my book would be that much evidence against him to others, but perhaps it would. I'll have to write him off. I've had bad luck with fathers, but I think of the end of Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, where Juno says that if her grandchild won't have a father, "It'll have what's far better—it'll have two mothers."<sup>12</sup> As I have had.

I still keep up with some members of my adoptive family. My mother's brother's wife, my aunt, died a few years ago at ninety-one. I was the closest surviving relative. In her last years, I came to realize how she and my Uncle Dan had influenced my childhood. She was another Dorothy, like my mother, and I sometimes wondered if that name had unconsciously helped draw my uncle to her, but they had much else in common. They were the happiest couple I knew in my extended adoptive family, and the members of it who were the most present in my childhood. We saw them on holidays, and I remember Dan quoting poetry, giving me books, playing records, and taking us to the opera. Poignantly, they had lost a baby less than a year before I was adopted, and, reading Dan's letters after Dorothy's death, I saw him staying with my parents and taking care of me as an infant as she went to recuperate in her own difficult family. They never had another child.

Given the fact of my presence reminding them it was possible, one could say that they chose not to adopt. But one could also say that they chose, in a less drastic way, to adopt me as their niece. (My mother's other brother and his wife were not nearly as close to us.) Reclaiming my memories of Dan and finding out more helps make up for the bleakness of my memories of my father and the rejections of my birth father. My bond with my aunt—besides the fact that she seemed to be an independent woman with a career, who showed that you could be a wife without cooking—was that we both loved to learn and to read. She was always taking courses that I could talk about with her at family events.

Now my family on my adoptive mother's side consists of two cousins. First, Joann (the daughter of my mother's much older half-brother), about ten years older than me, who lives in Michigan, and has five grown children. She and I cooperated in the care of our aunt, and she was always close to my mother. I hope I will make time to see more of her in the future. I have another cousin, Julie, who has lived in Atlanta for years; I had an enlightening phone conversation with her

after my aunt's death, when she told me that she had also been struck by the contrast between Dorothy and Dan, as a happy couple, and her own parents, who had more difficulties.

On the other side of my adoptive family, after one of my father's sisters died I eventually discovered that the other one's daughter—June, another older cousin—was an adoptee. Another cover-up in the family; I had no idea of this earlier. We had a pleasant day of reunion in Dayton, after a number of exchanges of greeting cards, and talked about many issues, though not much about adoption. I heard a little of what I might have guessed about that side of the family's perspective on my mother: "She was so involved in her Catholic religion." June died a few years after that.

I sometimes have the fantasy that Murray has an open-minded grown daughter who would like to meet me. And I sometimes wonder about getting in contact with Geraldine's younger sister, the one who became a Unitarian, another kind of outsider in their family.

Which leads me to religion once more. The Christian tradition, with which I still affiliate, does not see religion as involving heredity in the same way that the Jewish tradition does. But the American system has officially placed considerable effort in matching adopted children by religion, as if it were something that should be inherited, and growing up with parents of different religions still presents some kinds of definitional problems, even if not the tension that it did in my family and many others of the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> Although I clearly affiliated with my mother's Catholicism, I am sure that the Protestants in my family—not just my father, but also my aunts—had some impact on me. I was always interested in the ecumenical movement and in dialogue between different religions.

But dialogue with the religions in your birth family is complicated. I have attended church with Geraldine and some of my brothers, and have usually been quite uncomfortable, to a large extent because of their churches' links with what I see as extremely conservative politics. And to some extent because the emotional evangelical style is such a different language from the religious languages I know. (Black evangelical style seems more attractive to me than white evangelical style; I had a moment of insight that helped me appreciate Geraldine while attending a performance of Langston Hughes's *Black Nativity*.)

When I moved near the Jewish Community Center, to a mostly Jewish street, and expected my daughter to go to a largely Jewish public high school nearby, I had some fantasies of regaining some of the Jewish part of my identity. (Squirrel Hill, where we live, is still recognizable as the most Jewish neighborhood in Pittsburgh.) She went to after-school programs and summer camps at the JCC, where she learned something about Jewish traditions while she also went to CCD, Catholic religious education classes. (I have the recollection of her drawing a picture of a child decorated with two sets of initials, JCC and CCD.) We went as far as attending a family Purim festival, but it didn't work for us. And, much later, she didn't like Taylor Allderdice High School and insisted on transferring to a private school, where she was, she said, the fifth most Jewish student in her class (in other words, the Jewish population was tiny; she was, comparably, described as the blackest white student). I have told her that she and I are partly Jewish (as well as other ethnicities), and she has read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *Number the Stars*. At present I go to every Bar or Bat Mitzvah I can—which means three in the last ten years—and subscribe to *Tikkun*, a journal associated to the Jewish renewal movement, which relates Jewish tradition to both spirituality and social justice and has many non-Jewish readers and writers. I can't claim that either my heredity or my behavior makes me a Jew, but my life has been affected, in a particularly intimate way, by the complex historical relationship between Christians and Jews.

I now belong to a religious group associated, as far as I know, with no one in my birth or adoptive family: the Episcopal Church. This change came not because of my discoveries about my birth parents but because of the strictness of the current institutional Catholic Church, the transfer of my previous remarkable pastor and the dissolution of his parish, and my recognition that the small rule-stretching Catholic parishes I like are all vulnerable to closing. The Episcopal Church liturgy and tradition keeps—or has returned to—much from Roman Catholicism, and there are many former Catholics in my current parish. Our pastor is a woman, and significant members of the parish are African-American or openly gay; these are advantages as far as I am concerned. The upper-class associations that *Episcopalian* suggests are not positive associations to me, and indeed my parish has more of a middle-class atmosphere. It is something like an extended family and

provides my daughter with a community in which people know her, and even chose her as the youth representative on the vestry, the church governing board.

Becoming an Episcopalian gives me a different relation to some of the religious poets I teach, like John Donne and George Herbert, who were Episcopal priests, and learning more about the Reformation, good background to my writing on Shakespeare as well, gives me more perspective on the conflicts between Catholic and Protestant in my adoptive family. Much as I resist the suggestion that my birth mother contributed to my joining this parish (they are at opposite ends of the Protestant spectrum), I have found that my family connection with evangelical fundamentalism isn't so unique in this church. It also included some people with Jewish backgrounds, including at least one other adoptee who discovered Jewish ancestry late in life. It is an open parish with a strong commitment to interreligious dialogue, located near us in Squirrel Hill. But I still read the *National Catholic Reporter*, and I am still on the mailing list for Catholic reform groups like the Association of Pittsburgh Priests. And I would prefer more time spent preaching explicitly on social issues and less on details of the biblical passages for the week. I very much enjoy singing in the choir, but I am still uncomfortable about some of the remaining "establishment" aspects of my parish. To paraphrase Anzaldúa, perhaps I move between seeing the Catholic Church from an Episcopalian viewpoint and seeing an Episcopal parish from a Catholic viewpoint. And I try to see some Christian behavior from a Jewish point of view.

People need community. Ethnicity and religion can help provide this but are not the only sources of it. I find some of it through my parish, some through my university, some through people whose writing interests are close to mine, some through political action and other support groups. Some has come through my neighborhood, some through my daughter's schools and her soccer teams and even a bit through walking our dog. Like Franklin Hata, I am a good citizen. But perhaps I am also like Franklin in settling for distant relationships in a community too much of the time.

The year after I met Geraldine, I met the man who would eventually become my husband. The most relevant aspect of our meeting, in the context of this book, is that I found out very soon that David has a much younger sister, who was adopted into the family while a toddler.

(In the 1990s, Lisa's older birth siblings found her.) But while this and other aspects of his family background made connections between David and me, our relationship continues because, among other reasons, I enjoy his quirky playfulness and sense of humor, his appreciation of beauty, his drive to learn, his willingness to admit mistakes, his resourcefulness. He is a philosopher turned art historian and art critic, and his major community is the art world. The sociologically curious reader might be interested to know that David is a nonreligious ex-Catholic born to a Catholic mother whose mother immigrated from Austria, and a Protestant-raised, nonreligious father. As I was beginning this book, we asked his parents, Louise and Walter, questions about their family past, and they spent several years of their seventies putting together a history that traced Walter's family back to Lawson Carrier, who was born in Vermont in 1813, and followed the path of westward migration and farm life. Though the genealogy is full of English- or Scottish-sounding names, one of Lawson's six children claimed to be French. There are mysteries in nonadoptive families as well!

The most important aspect of my life as an adoptee that I want to update further from my introductory chapter is my relationship with my daughter, Liz, with whom I am linked by both birth and nurture. Liz looks a lot like me. But we are very different. As I have said before, the athletic involvement unknown to me, my husband, or any other members of our families we know may be the very core of her identity now. Not for her first few years of life, but when we moved to our present street, and she learned from neighbors how to play kickball and ride a bike, and joined a soccer team, everything changed. Liz was the starting goalie for her last three years of high school. In her senior year, when the high school season was over, she played on three other soccer teams. And she is now the starting goalie on her college team, and was women's soccer rookie of the year in her first year.

In my childhood environment, I did not even know that there were extremely athletic girls. When I played sports, whether for required physical education classes or elsewhere, it was almost always difficult work for me. I was never even much of a spectator of sports after my relationship with my father got worse and we stopped watching the Cleveland Indians together. I was not the sort of parent who looked forward to watching my child's athletics as a central part of child rearing.

How does this contrast between Liz and me influence my attitude

about adoption? It demystifies heredity. That is, it shows that similar heredity, even similar appearance, does not necessarily mean that people will be similar, or that their relationship will be smooth. Some adoptees think that it is only because they were adopted that they felt different from their parents. If I didn't already know how different I am from Geraldine, this difference from Liz would be enough to show me otherwise.

And it also emphasizes environment. I know a few adoptees who, on hearing about Liz, speculated about whether she had got her athletic ability from her birth father. It wasn't mentioned in the article about him that is the basis of most of my information. I don't think there were many champion soccer players in his immigrant Jewish community in the 1930s and 1940s. Murray may have had athletic potential, but it didn't show up in me. So I conclude that my difference from Liz exemplifies to a large extent the importance of environment: the specific environment of Marlborough Road, where there happened to be athletic families with children near her age when she was young, and the general environment of Pittsburgh, and the United States, and perhaps the world, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Perhaps it is because she watched sports on television in the early years on the Sunday afternoons we thought we had to work. But it is also her own individuality—she liked watching those games, she tries harder at sports than many young soccer players.

Learning to appreciate what soccer means to Liz is, for me, like learning to appreciate a foreign culture. Though I love to watch her play because she looks so happy and does it so well (since she is a goalie, it is obvious even to someone who doesn't understand the game when she is making a difficult save), I am an improbable soccer mom—the sort who at halftime would like to find out what else I have in common with the other parents besides being a parent of an athletic teenager.

Still, in spite of how different we are, I can see that the fact that I gave birth to Liz has made some things easier for me. When she cried a lot as an infant, I did not have to worry that she was crying because she had left her birth family. When she gets cranky after not eating for a long time, I understand because I am the same way. When she procrastinates, I remember that I used to, and nevertheless became a responsible adult. I enjoy the fact that she resembles me somewhat, even as I appreciate the ways we are different.

So, on the one hand, I now know what it is like to live with a genetic

relative, in the advantages it can give. On the other hand, I can see that the “blood” link does not necessarily assure harmony or understanding. Even in families where parents and children share a lot of interests, parents still have to come to terms with their children’s being separate people. Even the Shakespeare professors whose children write Shakespeare dissertations have to deal with the fact that eventually those children disagree with them about the plays. Though Liz does seem to have developed politics similar to mine—which she conducts, as might be expected, in a more confrontational way—I think that my adoptive mother passed on to me more of her cultural interests than I have to my daughter, and as many of her values.

Is my parenting of Liz influenced by my own upbringing, including the way in which Dorothy responded to my being adopted? Inevitably. Will I always want more closeness to Liz than she does to me? Probably, but many other parents deal with a similar disparity. I am reminded of Margaret Moorman noting how her attitude toward her young daughter is influenced by her earlier experience as a birth mother, and comparing herself to adoptive parents who have difficulty accepting their children’s independence.<sup>14</sup> As a parent I share experiences with many people beyond adoptees.

When I read novels about adoptive parents learning to respect a child’s different culture, such as Barbara Kingsolver’s *Pigs in Heaven*, I identify with the parent as well as the child. Parent-child difference occurs in all families, not just in adoptive families, and maybe one of the reasons why many readers from all kinds of families relate to literature about adoption is that they find it portraying forms of issues that they face in their own lives even if they are not involved with adoption. Having experienced both kinds of kinship, I feel more comfortable now discussing this common ground. There is a certain cultural privilege in speaking as a mother by birth and nurture about family relationships that I can use here, while if I had remained without a child, or adopted one, this book might have ended differently (or perhaps never been written).

I don’t think all adoptees are more like each other than like non-adoptees, and I do not claim that all adoptees have the same psychology. The warmth, love, and openness of the adoptive family, the parents’ similarity to the adoptee or the accessibility of others who are similar in interests and appearance, the inborn degree of sensitivity of

the adoptee, the frequency and openness of adoption in the environment, the attitude toward and kinds of contact with the birth parents, the age at adoption and preceding history, the subsequent life history, all have their effects. Adoptees all grow up in families consciously constructed in a way different from most—but what that means varies enormously, and today they live in a world where there are many other kinds of difference from the traditional family, which may be combined with adoption or not—resulting from death, divorce, single parenthood, or gay partnership. My gut-level sense of difference growing up as a closeted adoptee has had its disadvantages, but people whose sense of difference is based on more material oppression may well feel that focusing on the adoptive difference too exclusively is a luxury.

Like other people, I live in the tension between difference and similarity. I read partly to understand imagined people who are unlike me, with a hope that this will also help with real people unlike me. “Can you work with people different from yourself?” a colleague of mine running for an office was once asked. His response was, “What other choice is there?”—an answer especially meaningful to an adoptee.

My mother’s acquaintance who wore pillows during her pretended pregnancy tried to hide the difference of adoption, as did I once upon a time. Members of the adoption triangle can pretend that we live in ordinary kinship. Or we can acknowledge that we are different in this way, and then look, as I have tried to in these pages, both for the issues that we face because of this specific kind of kinship, and the issues that we face because of other aspects of our humanity.