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In Pursuit of Images and Shadows: A Daughter's First Steps in Search of Her Mothers' Past

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Project Abstract

In Pursuit of Images and Shadows: A Daughter's First Steps in Search of Her Mothers' Pasts

Outline of a memoir and cultural biography which will span a period of over one hundred years (1857-1994), featuring my adoptive mother and her family. Half Chinese, half Danish, my mother, Elsa Oiesen Bement (1900-1994), grew up in privileged milieux in Korea, China, the US and Europe. Photographs, family letters, stories handed down from generation to generation, and personal recollections, set in their respective social and historical contexts, will document the multi-generational, multi-cultural family saga. The book will also bear witness to a unique mother/daughter relationship and the daunting search for my Chinese birth mother.

How and why did I become absorbed in the endeavor, *A Pursuit of Images and Shadows*, the title of my prospective book? Last Fall, in the wake of my mother's recent death at the age of 94, and my unexpected divorce after a partnership of over thirty years, alone and bereft, I found myself at a crossroads, from both a personal and professional point of view. My children, Mei-Ling and Derek, respectively 23 and 18, though still very much part of my life, were quite autonomous, engaged in shaping a life of their own. Furthermore, satisfactory job opportunities in the Boston area for someone my age, without tenure, yet with thirty two years of teaching experience in Italian literature and film, had grown increasingly elusive and hard to secure. It was at this juncture that I made a conscious decision to embark upon a journey whose unconscious genesis dates back at least a decade.

The impetus for my original project was born out of grief, out of a deep emotional need to remain somehow connected to my mother, who from the moment she welcomed me into her life at the age of three months, until her death, fifty two years later, was my primary source of inspiration and moral strength. Though legally speaking she was my adoptive mother, I never have, nor do I to this day, think of her in such terms. An additional incentive stemmed from the faint hope that, despite previous failed attempts to uncover the mystery of my origins, I might finally succeed in determining the identity of my birth parents and thus come full circle.

The initial rationale for writing my (adoptive) mother's biography rested on the objective goal of pulling together all the threads of her life, threads which I held in the form of stories, related from earliest childhood and reinforced throughout my adolescence and adulthood; an extensive collection of priceless family photographs, dating back to the late eighteen hundreds; and well over a two hundred family letters of both private and official nature, mostly penned by Mother's father between 1906 and 1928, the year of his death.

My intent was to record an unusual life, to document a personal history. As my research has progressed, however, it has taken on a life of its own, leading me down winding paths, at times to unexpected discoveries, at others to a dead end. It has provided countless unforeseen links to the past which have forced me to blaze new trails, forge new connections in search of answers to often unfathomable questions. I am enthralled and somewhat intimidated by the realization that what appeared to be an enticing though rather straight forward memoir, is evolving into a cultural biography of considerable scope, a multigenerational saga that will span over 100 years, from approximately 1857 to 1994, and will track back and forth across continents and oceans, encompassing the strikingly different cultures that made up Mother's heritage.

My pursuit has already led me to other countries, lured by the prospect of uncovering more family secrets: a mid-March trip to Paris was extended to a fascinating and eminently productive journey to Copenhagen and then on to Bornholm, an island situated in the middle of the Baltic Sea. In the not so distant future, my insatiable thirst for more detailed and accurate information will undoubtedly carry me across to China, the land of my forebears.

Though my mother's life remains the primary focus of my investigation, I am now intensely aware that all the figures that revolved around her, both among her immediate family and closest friends, not to mention the historical periods and cultural milieux in which she moved, require an in depth study in their own right. The folders upon my desk seem to increase in number and girth faster than I can classify and assimilate their contents: immigration data, school records, reprints of musty old articles, personal recollections of the few surviving friends, translations of Danish articles and documents pertaining to family history, prodigious quantities of notes from books of political and cultural history, art history manuals, and biographies. The pile of relevant memoirs and as yet barely touched novels, stacked nearby, has long since surpassed the three foot mark. And finally, there is the residue of a once stunning collection of Chinese and Korean art, a great portion of which was donated to museums by my grandfather. The paintings, scrolls, porcelains, bronzes, silks, robes and carpets that have fallen into my hands, played an important role in the family saga and deserve a place of their own in the telling of the story. As they graced all the homes in which my mother and her family lived, they also provide a powerful connection and serve as crucial keys to my understanding of the past: even in black and white, they are easily recognizable in countless photographs taken in Korean, Chinese and New England homes between the latter part of the last century and the 1940s.

To understand why I have been so captivated by my mother's history, and how, in turn, her life experience has influenced and, to a great extent, determined who I am, I need to delve into her rather unique background. Elsa Dagmar Oiesen, the youngest of seven children of whom five survived, was born in Wonsan, Korea, in the year 1900. She was of mixed lineage, her own mother, Akwai Yang (1866-1942), being Chinese from an aristocratic background, whereas her father, James Frederick Oiesen (1857-1928), was Danish. Favorite son of Bornholm, a small but well known Baltic island, from humble origins, Oiesen had risen up through the ranks of the Chinese Customs to become Commissioner of Customs in various port cities of China, British Consul and Proconsul of Korea, Secretary General of Customs, and finally Danish Ambassador to Peking.

Having immigrated to the United States as a boy of thirteen along with the rest of his family, due to sudden drastic changes in his father's economic circumstances, young Oiesen had had to give up his dream of higher education and Medical School. He had instead been forced to

work as interpreter for an Immigration doctor, laying a further foundation for a prodigious ability in foreign languages of which he eventually spoke over twenty, flawlessly (as all educated Danish children, he was already well versed in five). In 1876, at age nineteen, following in the footsteps of a maternal uncle, he had set sail for China, armed with nothing more than his ticket and two hundred and fifty dollars, both courtesy of the head of all Chinese Customs, Sir Robert Hart, his future mentor and friend.

Akwai, in the face of stiff family opposition, had broken all taboos and traditions when in 1886, at age twenty, she had fled from home. Accompanied by a devoted handmaiden and carrying as sole possession a bag of jewels, she had run away to embark upon a successful and loving forty year long partnership with James Oiesen. She was disowned and disinherited by her family for choosing a "white barbarian," "a blue eyed devil;" she never saw, nor spoke to her own mother again. Oiesen, on the other hand, escaped the certain wrath of his own parents, (of his mother, in particular, who was a Lutheran of the strictest order), as he had laid them both to rest earlier that same year.

In 1889 Oiesen was sent by the Chinese Maritime Customs to Korea, which had turned to China for protection against the Japanese. He and his family remained in that country for over a decade. At the end of his tenure, having earned the love and respect of the Koreans for his enlightened administration, Oiesen is reputed to have declared in a farewell speech to the assembled Korean nobles and crowds of well-wishers, "The years spent in Korea where I have grown into a man, will always be the happiest of my life." He was knighted by the Emperor of Korea who also bestowed upon the Dane his favorite white stallion and had a memorial raised in his honor.

To give some idea of the extent of Oiesen's contributions, let it suffice to mention that he introduced agricultural reform by importing seed and up-to-date farming equipment from Denmark; improved medical care by bringing in missionary doctors trained in the West - (Oiesen himself ran a first aid center on his property where he tended to the sick and injured); promoted reforestation and dairy production -milk and butter- both formerly unknown, and organized all of Korea under a single banking system.

My mother spent her first years on a vast estate in Korea (1900-1903), until a shift in the political situation forced her entire family to return to China. Whereas her three older sisters, Nellie, Marie, Asta, and brother, Erik, always thought of Korea as their childhood home, remembering in detail the landscapes, change of seasons and daily activities, Mother retained only a few vivid images, kept alive by stories, photographs, the many artifacts that always adorned her family homes, and her father's deep attachment to the country.

During her early childhood in China, moving from Foochow (1903-1904), to Peking (1904-1908), Shanghai (1909-1911) and Tientsin (1911), Mother led a sheltered existence, at times in opulent, strictly Chinese settings, surrounded by endless courtyards and exotic gardens, at others in the more western environment of rambling mansions reserved or specially designed for prominent officials of the Chinese Customs. The last two years of her childhood were spent at the Sacré Coeur, a convent school in Shanghai run by nuns; here she studied the standard curriculum for a child her age, added French to her numerous languages (Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, English) and was instructed in all the refinements befitting a young person of her station. The reason for Mother's being placed in a boarding school was that in 1909 her father had been posted to Canton, in Southern China, considered unhealthy due to the extreme heat and humidity. Her parents were also unquestionably concerned about her education and her being brought up as an only child. These final years proved to be particularly enriching and memorable for the variety of experiences: the academic portion spent in the convent school, the vacations with her god-mother in the Foreign Concession of the Shanghai, or, the final year, subsequent to their move north, with her parents in Tientsin.

Some of the most colorful stories that held me mesmerized from as early as I can remember, revolve around the first eleven years of my mother's life. In retelling them, not only do I find myself traveling back into her past, as I attempt to incorporate her stories in their proper historical and cultural context; I am also acutely aware of discovering and reconnecting with my own heritage that until now, in view of my mainly European upbringing, has been less of a reality than a romantic fantasy.

In 1911 my mother set off on the interminable trip across the Pacific, accompanied by her father and his faithful retainer, Liu. She came to join her three older sisters and brother who had settled in the United States as a result of personal misfortune and the fierce resolve of a father, determined to provide as normal a life as possible for his affected daughters. Two of my mother's older sisters, my aunts Marie and Asta, while still living in Korea were stricken by childhood diseases, in one case scarlet fever, in the other, double mastoiditis. This occurred in the late 1800s, long before the advent of antibiotics. Though it was feared that they might not survive, their strong constitutions stood them in good stead; both children, however, as a consequence of the extremely high fevers, became permanently deaf.

Oiesen, an extraordinary linguist who spoke countless languages, so perfectly that no matter what the language, looks aside, he could have been mistaken for a native, was determined to release his daughters from their prison of silence. He wished them to communicate freely, to be able to lip-read and speak, versus being constrained by the restrictions of sign language. In 1900, his initial search for a suitable school for Marie led him to take the three eldest, Nellie, all

of ten, Erik, eight, and Marie, six, to Switzerland where they were placed in the care of a close family friend. Sadly, the Swiss experiment proved a total failure; though her siblings learned impeccable French, Marie, despite the tutelage of a private teacher, learned virtually nothing.

A second exhaustive search led the father to visit schools in Denmark, England, Germany and France; for a variety of reasons, not a single one met with his approval. While in France, he finally made the acquaintance of Helen Keller and Alexander Graham Bell, both of whom he knew by reputation and who would eventually become close family friends. The latter was at the 1901 International Exposition in Paris to receive an award for his most recent invention, the telephone. When approached by Oiesen, Dr. Bell is reported to have exclaimed, "My good man, [take] your daughter to Clarke School, the finest school in the world." Never one to waver over a decision, the Oiesen returned to Switzerland for his three children and promptly moved them to Northampton, Massachusetts. Marie, then age seven, was enrolled at the Clarke School for the Deaf, the place that would transform her life.

Oiesen himself went back to the Orient where the two youngest children had remained with their mother. Upon his return, over a year later, it was discovered that Asta, too, had become totally deaf; she had made virtually no progress in language acquisition since her older sister had left for Europe. Within a few years, at age nine, leaving behind her family, she would travel to the United States under the guardianship of two missionaries, to join Marie. The two sisters spent the rest of their childhood and their entire adolescence in Northampton under the tender care and strict discipline of Miss Yale, director of Clarke School. Upon graduation, they emerged as exceptionally well educated young women, one to become a gifted artist and part time dancer, the other a dedicated teacher of the deaf. Inspired by the same spirit of adventure as their parents', both traveled all over the world, including a trip to Spain where they were caught, unaware, in the midst of the Spanish civil war, and an enthralling journey through Russia. Superlative lip readers, they never considered themselves disabled. To this day, the Oiesen sisters hold almost legendary status at Clarke School.

And so it came to pass that my mother went to Northampton, to be educated abroad and to join her siblings, three of whom she had never met. She left behind her mother, amahs and her beloved China, the only world she had known up to that point. It is not hard to imagine the culture shock and daily hardships she must have faced, though she at least knew the language well, as her father had insisted on speaking English with his children.

Of the many stories pertaining to this period, I will mention but one. On her first morning at the Misses Whites' School for Girls in Concord, today no longer in existence, my mother, then age eleven, stood quietly by, watching as the other children scrambled into their clothes. When asked by Miss Flora, the director, what the trouble was, she flung herself into her

lap, sobbing, "I don't know what to do!" Until that day she had never dressed herself, nor been taught to tie her shoes on her own. Needless to say, she learned the ropes, and very fast at that!

My mother subsequently attended Tenacre and Dana Hall, both located in Wellesley, MA, coincidentally my home for the past 26 years; she then moved on to the University of Michigan. During the summers she taught swimming and diving at the Gulicks' Camp Aloha, in Maine. Her senior year in college, she became seriously ill. When finally transferred to the Massachusetts General Hospital, it was discovered that she had advanced tuberculosis of the peritonea. As had her sisters, she too survived the effects of a devastating illness, but she too was left scarred: in her case, unable to bear children. She never complained nor regretted her inability to conceive; in fact, she considered it a blessing, as do I, since it was due to her sterility that we were brought together.

Following the two and a half year cure for her TB, rigorously managed by the sanitarium that had been chosen by her father near Denver, Colorado, my mother was sent to Paris for over a year to perfect her French and continue her education, in a broad sense, under the tutelage of her godfather, Charles Crane, former American Ambassador to Shanghai and close family friend. Here, against the colorful background of the twenties, she immersed herself in another western culture, as different from her American experience as that, in turn, had been from her Chinese upbringing. She moved on the fringe of the artistic and literary circles of Joyce, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Picasso, and mixed with the Russian aristocrats who had fled revolutionary Russia in 1918. Considered quite striking, unusual in looks, she was asked to model evening dresses by Madame Tzchatovsky and other well known designers; she wore designer hats with equal style and, not surprisingly, caught the eye of Man Ray who enjoyed photographing her as an example of sultry elegance. The time in Paris, one of the most dazzling and exciting of her life, generated many unforgettable stories.

In early 1927, the whole Oiesen family, minus Erik, was reunited for the first time since the year 1900. The four daughters enjoyed an extended reunion with their parents, the latter having come to the States to spend an indefinite amount of time. Until then, over the years, despite the enormous distances and difficult traveling conditions, Oiesen had made a point of visiting his children on an annual basis. Akwai, on the other hand, made only the one trip. Enormous responsibilities -a full staff of over thirty and four adopted Chinese children- required her continuous presence in China (as was the custom in well-to-do Chinese families, children of less fortunate circumstances were adopted by the Oiesens, raised and educated alongside their own). In addition, Akwai's somewhat delicate health was seriously jeopardized by violent bouts of seasickness that left her weak and ailing for weeks at a time, even when exposed to the briefest of sea voyages.

The constant separations weighed heavily upon all concerned, but the most poignant and eloquent testimony of the hardships endured can be found in Oiesen's own words. In a letter addressed to Nellie, his eldest, who, from a very young age, was put in charge of her siblings, he wrote,

As for yourself, you need rest and leisure to build up and maintain your health and strength, to manage and safeguard the interests of your sisters as well as your own, to cultivate your friends and make a real home for all of you, where your friends [can] find you, where you [will] all have a permanent address to which letters can be sent with some hope and chance of reaching you. At present when I write- and for years past- I have always a sinking feeling of despair that I am writing in vain, as the letter may probably never reach you owing to change of address.

Finally together after so many years of living on separate continents, plans were made to buy a house for the parents. Both were hoping to settle permanently in the West to be near their children. As so often happens, though, the realization of a collective dream was thwarted by unforeseen events. The unexpected death of James Oiesen in 1928, due to a streptococcus infection, preceded a few months earlier by Erik's premature demise at the age of 37-the last of a series of misfortunes that marked his short life- generated sorrow and confusion. Following the loss of her life-long companion, though immensely torn and heavy-hearted, in 1929 Akwai decided to return to her native China, to her other children and numerous staff. Though she lived till 1942, mostly due to wartime conditions and the immense distances, my mother and her three sisters never saw nor spoke to their own mother again; a sad reality that has a familiar ring.

In 1933, my mother married my father, Lewis Dennison Bement, an American, born, raised and educated in New England. The scion of an affluent Framingham family, he attended Deerfield Academy and Amherst College. The two had met through mutual friends and found themselves in frequent contact in the tight social circles of Deerfield, Massachusetts, where they both lived at the time. After a year in New York, the newly weds moved to Paris which became their permanent home until the outbreak of World War II compelled them to return to the US.

In the early forties my parents purchased Whately Glen, a beautiful farm near Greenfield, Massachusetts. My mother was in store for quite a change from her intense social life in Paris. There, with the help of her Russian cook, she had hosted innumerable dinners and parties for my father's colleagues at the American Radiator Company; entertained their large, international group of friends, as well as being deeply involved in the war effort for the China Relief. Not unexpectedly, my mother adapted with relative ease to her new existence in rural surroundings as she took charge of three English refugee children sent by friends to escape the war, tended to the twenty odd English Setters and Scotties she bred, and fulfilled her obligations as a full time

teacher at the Bement School in Deerfield, founded and directed by my paternal grandmother, Grace Bement. Weekends were dedicated to jam sessions and a house full of guests as my father, a gifted jazz musician, invited fellow artists such as Benny Goodman, Bix Beiderbeck, Dave Brubeck, Tommy Dorsey and Louis Armstrong to share in his passion.

This was the setting that welcomed me when, age three months, I joined my doting parents, my three English siblings, enough animals to keep any child content, and an extended family in the form of Menty's (my grandmother's) boarders who took me on as their own. In fact, I owe my nickname, Buddha, to the children of Bement, name deemed appropriate considering my appearance: round, virtually bald, and placid to the point of inscrutability. In view of her own experience as one of five, plus the four adopted children which made nine, Mother made certain that although I was an only child in name, I never was de facto. (Having the adopted Chinese siblings undoubtedly played a role in her decision to adopt a child of her own).

By the time I was four, severe problems had arisen between my parents. Mother's soul searching led us first to Denmark and then Mexico where, not believing in divorce, she struggled to sort out her options: whether to remain with a husband who was unfaithful and had a drinking problem, or find the courage to strike out on her own. The inevitable came to pass, and urged by her own mother in-law, Mother reluctantly ended her marriage in 1948. She saw to it that I remained blissfully untouched by what I now know, having lived through a similar experience, must have been a devastating period of her life. She also made certain that my father and I saw as much of each other as possible, despite his subsequent two marriages and rather erratic life style. I still look back upon those encounters with tenderness and warmth.

In 1950, in part as an attempt to leave behind the ache and bewilderment over her personal affairs, in part due to some distressing instances of racial discrimination at school that had quite unsettled me, we moved to Europe: first to the South of France where we lived in the village of Ilse sur Sorgue for close to a year; then on to Italy, five years in Alassio on the Ligurian coast, a year in San Domenico where we rented a villa built by Lorenzo de' Medici for his children's tutor, Angelo Poliziano, and finally Florence, where we settled in a former Grace and Favor House, adjacent to the Pitti Palace.

A fervent defender of the public school system, whenever possible, Mother sent me to the local French and Italian public schools. There was only a period of three years when, for logistic reasons, I attended a Catholic school run by nuns. Those years were actually among my happiest, though I have wonderful memories of all but one of the nine schools I attended in Denmark , Mexico, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, France and Italy.

Primarily an educator, Mother drew on her multifold experiences as Camp counselor, expert swimmer and diver, summer stock actress along side of Henry Fonda and Joan Crawford, hostess of the Deerfield Inn, and teacher, to co-direct Camp Arden, a summer camp in Vermont, dedicated to the Arts and Drama (1950 to 1954). Her business partner, Doris Glaenzer, former professional singer and actress, as well as teacher (she too taught at the Bement School), was to become Mother's life-long friend, and a model and inspirational figure in my own upbringing. To this day, at age 90, she still remains an exemplary presence in my life as well as an invaluable source of stories and information relating to my mother's past.

Between the years 1952 and 1970, during the wintertime, Mother and Doris took in children, mostly American and British, whose ages remained commensurate with mine, and placed them in Italian schools., wherever we were living at the time. Indefatigable in their efforts to open up new horizons, they spent every weekend and vacation teaching the youngsters to savor the history, culture and artistic treasures of Italy and other nearby countries. These were fulfilling but also extremely strenuous and demanding years; had it not been for economic reasons, I feel certain that the Florentine segment of their business venture would have been brought to a close long before Mother reached the age of seventy. Dealing with increasingly rebellious teenagers year in and year out, definitely took its toll.

When Mother retired to the Tuscan countryside at 71, she continued, nonetheless, to be extremely active: giving of herself to others, cooking and hosting innumerable dinner parties, delighting in the role of grandmother, traveling back and forth between Italy and the US, as well as exploring other countries. For years her spirit of adventure remained intact and was an inspiration to all. At 86 she cruised along the Fjords aboard a postal boat, stopping off in Copenhagen to pay homage to her father's grave. A year later, despite the need of two canes, she browsed through the open markets of Istanbul. And at age 90, shortly after a double hip replacement, she submitted to being whisked off to Paros, an island south of Athens, to attend a traditional Greek wedding. Only at the end was she forced to give up her yearly visits to the US; but even then, when suffering from numerous ills brought on by age, she maintained her dignity and served as a formidable example of how to cope, graciously and courageously with the inevitable.

As I delve into the past to reconstruct my mother's life, to attempt to make sense out of who she was as a individual, quite separate from the figure of my parent, I am struck by her special blend of oriental wisdom and western pragmatism, her invincible spirit and resilience in the face of adversity and personal tragedies, her love of adventure, tempered but never subdued by a serenity and profound humanity that touched all who came to know her, and her ability to laugh at herself, in the face of even the worse calamities. In her final years she achieved true

peacefulness, an attribute which for most of her adult life she had invariably conveyed to the outside world, while often struggling against inner turmoil and anguish, alone and in silence.

I owe so much of who I am today to my mother's teachings and example. Despite being separated from her parents at a very early age, uprooted from her native China and obliged to grow up in foreign cultures which she eventually made her own, Mother kept alive a fierce love and attachment for her parents, a deep respect that extended to all her elders; and, until the very end of her life, she expressed untold pride and appreciation for her Chinese heritage. Yet, as a true citizen of world, she also possessed a unique ability to fit in and to relate to others, putting one and all at ease, no matter what the setting or the person. To this day, I am still inspired by her fighting spirit, her unshakable belief in tolerance, racial justice and equality, confirmed, time and again by concrete actions; and finally, I marvel at her success in ensuring that I, as her child, would always cherish my own Chinese heritage, the culture of both our mothers, and in turn pass on this love and many of the traditions to my own children.

Enthralling as my search into my adoptive mother's past may be, daunting in the degree of complexity it presents as I attempt to piece together the equivalent of a five thousand piece jig-saw puzzle, my quest would be incomplete were I not to persevere in my second search. Until I was in my forties, it never occurred to me to look for my birth parents. When I finally made a few tentative moves, it was chiefly for practical reasons, in hopes of discovering certain facts in my medical background-or so I led myself to believe.

From the time I could crawl, I had always known of my adoption; in fact, the story of how I was found and came to live with my parents was a favorite bedtime story. My adoptive mother had had reason to believe that my birth mother had died in childbirth. I assume that she came to this conclusion based on some comment by the social worker who dealt with my case. For years I believed that it was my father who had placed me with an adoption agency. My mother even suggested a name, misleading as it was, that gave rise to a ten year romance with a mythical father figure, and encouraged my search which led me to contact, among others, the Pearl Buck Foundation and numerous Chinese writers and historians. Yet it was only after her death that I found the time, energy and perhaps the courage, to actively resume my investigation.

Two years ago I located the Agency that had handled my adoption. I sent in the necessary documents to obtain non-identifying information, then sat back and waited for over four months for a response. When the Agency's letter finally arrived, I tore it open expecting to find confirmation of my father's identity and all the data I had been able to collect on his career as a writer and cultural figure. To my shock and amazement the letter spoke almost exclusively of my birth mother. The person who until then had only occasionally flitted though my mind, suddenly came alive and sprang off the page as I read a description of her physical appearance

and an account of her family background. To my surprise, I recently learned that not only was it my mother, not my father, who had placed me for adoption, but that, contrary to my belief, she had not died from childbirth. In fact , as of this day, she could still be alive. She would be 82 years old.

The main reason I wish to find my birth mother, aside from natural curiosity and a deep rooted need for connection, is to thank her for granting me the opportunity of an upbringing similar to one she herself would have provided, had she been able to keep me. Daughter of a wealthy and distinguished family, she was born and raised in China, but later sent to Europe for her university studies. When forced to give me up as a single mother, she set firm conditions for my adoption. My adoptive parents had to fulfill strict socio-economic, cultural and ethnic requirements. One specific condition was that at least one parent had to be of Chinese descent and continue to maintain close ties with his or her culture.

I believe that the upbringing, opportunities, and example my adoptive mother gave me must have surpassed even my birth mother's fondest dreams. I would so like to share my story with her. Perhaps the book I am writing will lead me to her, or her to me. Whether this wish becomes reality or not, I will persist in my search until I reach some resolution, be it that I am unable to find her, that she has died or, if alive, does not wish to meet me. In a sense, the final outcome is not crucial; it is the process in itself that I find both exhilarating and rewarding. Any eventual encounter would not change who I am or how I perceive myself; it would perhaps, however, add a richness, fullness and sense of completeness to my life that I can barely imagine.

In a nutshell, these are the highlights of the journey upon which I have embarked. Until recently, the tales I have carried within have assumed the form of an intimate dialogue, conducted strictly within the privacy of my thoughts, or tentatively set down on paper and shared exclusively with a select number of friends and colleagues. Now, I feel the time has come to bring my story into the open, to share the life experiences of an extraordinary family that, notwithstanding profound generational and cultural differences, should resonate and find a captive audience in all those willing to accompany me in my "pursuit of images and shadows".