



Lucky Girl: A Memoir

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In a true story of family ties, journalist Mei-Ling Hopgood, one of the first wave of Asian adoptees to arrive in America, comes face to face with her past when her Chinese birth family suddenly requests a reunion after more than two decades.

In 1974, a baby girl from Taiwan arrived in America, the newly adopted child of a loving couple in Michigan. Mei-Ling Hopgood had an all-American upbringing, never really identifying with her Asian roots or harboring a desire to uncover her ancestry. She believed that she was lucky to have escaped a life that was surely one of poverty and misery, to grow up comfortable with her doting parents and brothers.

Then, when she's in her twenties, her birth family comes calling. Not the rural peasants she expected, they are a boisterous, loving, bossy, complicated middle-class family who hound her daily life by phone, fax, and letter, in a language she doesn't understand until she returns to Taiwan to meet them. As her sisters and parents pull her into their lives, claiming her as one of their own, the devastating secrets that still haunt this family begin to emerge. Spanning cultures and continents, *Lucky Girl* brings home a tale of joy and regret, hilarity, deep sadness, and great discovery as the author untangles the unlikely strands that formed her destiny.

Lucky Girl: A Memoir Details

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Kate says

This memoir is different from many of the others I have read recently. A lot of authors lately either construct a contrived set of circumstances to chronicle, or they get super-revelatory, sharing scandalous or just plain embarrassing anecdotes, thoughts, etc.

Quite the opposite, this book details a young American woman discovering her birth family in China and developing relationships with her birth parents and her siblings. So, there is something of substance for her to share with readers. Although I respect her discretion and restrained writing style, especially given the touchy subject matter, I actually would've liked to hear in more detail what her thoughts & feelings were towards the parents that gave her up. She vaguely alludes to "mixed feelings," but her particular circumstances undoubtedly stirred up feelings of much greater depth than those words imply.

Nonetheless, I feel that I am better off for having read this book. I would definitely recommend it. It is a good combo of an engrossing narrative and enlightening information. The author did a great job of providing background info: geographic, cultural, etc. It was fascinating to find out more about why she was given up, and as well as other choices her birth parents made--at least one of which literally took my breath away momentarily.

It is regrettable that the communication barriers (parent-child) one might expect in such an emotionally-charged situation are magnified due to LANGUAGE barriers, and that does potentially take away from what the readers can come to understand. However, on the whole, this really was fascinating, and I think I will carry a little piece of it with me for a long time. And when a book can do that, it is definitely worth reading.

Lauren says

I'm having a hard time really getting absorbed in this story. I want to be interested but the tempo of the sentences or the structure is a bit off putting. I'm not very far in and will continue pugging away but so far, it is work.

After the first 30 pages I really enjoyed this book. There are a couple times when I had trouble following who the author was talking about and there are some editing issues that hopefully were dealt with prior to publishing but the story was very engaging.

Although the story was emotional at parts I did not find that the writing style made me feel emotionally involved as the reader. I could understand but I wasn't crying along with the individuals. I liked the short sections and the use of journal entries and letters that helped to flesh out the story.

I would recommend this book to people who are interested in culture studies and memoirs. I found the exploration of heritage and difference in families (hers, her birth family and her other adopted sister) and their interactions with each other insightful.

Pamela says

Bravo to the author of this memoir. I won a pre-release copy of "Lucky Girl" at just the right time. I had just finished "Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China" by Jung Chang. With my brain still processing the history and communism of China, and the rich culture of Asia steeped in tradition, this was a very compelling read.

This book is one adopted person's story of finding her birth-parents and natural family. Born in Taiwan and raised in the United States, Mei-Ling Hopgood gives a first-person account of her somewhat "accidental" reconnection with the family she was originally born to. Interlaced with discovery of family secrets, personal and familial tragedies and the quest for personal identity, this is a wonderful memoir.

I am grateful for the honesty of the author's writing. Obviously, every adopted person has a story or history. The story of Mei-Ling has a somewhat bittersweet ending...but the knowledge of knowing far exceeds the disappointment of an enduring happy ending. Not all personal stories can end with "...and they lived happily ever after."

I am impressed with the author's ability to look objectively on herself, her sisters, her mothers and the toxic role of her birth-father in her personal story. This is a story of a strong, independent, American-raised woman who has been cherished and loved by the parents she was lucky to be adopted by. The contrasting lives of the women in her birth family is gut-wrenching and tragic. This is the story of women, of sisters, of mother-daughter relationships and the influence of the men who love them....or not.

Deirdre Skaggs says

Lucky Girl, by Mei-Ling Hopgood, was an exploration into the Chinese culture. The writing at times seemed a bit scattered, but scattered or not, it was written well and with nearly palpable feeling.

Mei-Ling was given up for adoption just after she was born. As the sixth of seven girls (her younger sister was also given up for adoption) born into a culture that favors male heirs, Mei-Ling was adopted out to a middle-class Michigan couple who loved her as their own. The Hopgoods also eventually adopted two boys from Korea to help complete their multicultural family.

Mei-Ling grows up knowing she is adopted and sometimes struggling to find her identity in a sea of white, but always enjoying her American lifestyle. In her early 20s, she takes the opportunity to travel and meet her biological family, and chaos ensues. Her sisters welcome her into the brood and she learns more about the Chinese culture than she has ever known before. Hopgood speaks of her struggles in the simple things, like communicating, which is ironic because people in the United States assume she can speak Mandarin because of the way she looks.

Through many visits with her family, she learns the details of her past and the family secrets her sisters have tried to keep from her. In the end, she realizes just how lucky of a girl she is for having been adopted by her parents.

I enjoyed this book, even though it wasn't something I would have picked up for myself. If memoirs interest you, this one is definitely worth reading.

P.S. I received an advance reading copy of this book through a Goodreads First Reads book giveaway.

Jeanette says

This is an easy read level of direct experience for Mei-Ling Hopgood. It's her birth family/adopted family story. And also eventually the facts for/ of her two Korean adopted brothers from the American Hopgood family of Taylor, Michigan. From the time she was 8 months old these Hopgoods were her adoptive parents.

It's interesting and also refreshing. Not only within the story of her first meetings in Taiwan with her birth family members when she was 23 but all the subsequent interplay with the birth siblings, one of whom was raised in Switzerland (she was another sister who was adopted out). She is honest in relating detail and also within self-definition. Noting her reactions, her emotions upon the forgiving and yet rejoicing of and for all the information she owns.

Her birth Mother and Father had such a dynamic! Mei-Ling is smart, intuitive and an honest voice. It's fact filled and a contextually wide report that is more attune to journalism than it is to a memoir. No whine, no self-victimization.

She's captured the cultural barriers and bridges that encompassed her life's path very well. She sounds intrepid in her style and capacity for adventure in the present, as well. She now lives in Argentina. This is just her honest and straight from the shoulder told adoption story. And a revisiting and discovering another angle of her origins and how the entire played out to her own evaluations of self-worth and style. Answers to the why from other ends, as well.

Shigi says

I won "Lucky Girl" from one of Goodreads' giveaways. It's an interesting read, detailing both how journalist Mei-Ling Hopgood's adoption as an infant came about and the aftermath as she grew up in a happy American family and what transpired after she reconnected with her Taiwanese birth family who gave her up for adoption. Many things in the book will ring true for Asian Americans, adopted or not, growing up in an American society as they did for me. Of course, Mei-Ling's experiences are uniquely her own and she details them with a touch of humor that keeps the story refreshing.

The author also makes good use of her journalistic style to lay out facts objectively and when she does delve into her personal feelings on various aspects of her adoption, the tone of the work always seems to maintain a bit of distance between Mei-Ling herself and the events happening to her. This is, of course, a work written long after many events have transpired, and the author has obviously given a great deal of thought to how to she views her biological family now which is reflected in the text. The work therefore lacks a sense of immediacy, but it also benefits from a bit more balanced a telling. The author's ability to organize each

chapter of the novel like an article, playing to her writing strengths, also manages to provide the reader with a hefty chunk of story without overwhelming him or her with too many facts at once. Her writing is very pleasant and easy to read and the book itself is a quick read.

Overall, I recommend it to those interested in reading the story of someone attempting to get in touch with their cultural and familial roots and learning who they are in the process.

Kathy (Bermudaonion) says

Mei-Ling was born in Taiwan and at seven months old, she was adopted by a loving American couple, Rollie and Chris Hopgood. The Hopgoods also adopted two boys from Korea. The three children grew up as all-American kids and Mei-Ling was never really curious about her birth family or her life in Taiwan before her adoption.

One day, after Mei-Ling had finished college and was working as a journalist, her adopted mother called her and told her that Sister Maureen, the nun who had facilitated her adoption wanted to see her. Mei-Ling decided to meet with Sister Maureen and when it was suggested that Mei-Ling could probably find her birth parents, Mei-Ling declined. Several months later, Mei-Ling asked Sister Maureen to write to the hospital where she was born. This started communication and eventually visits between Mei-Ling and her birth family.

Mei-Ling Hopgood's memoir, *Lucky Girl* does give her background, but mostly focuses on her contact and relationship with her birth family after she was an adult. And, what a family it is! I don't want to give too much away, but her birth father is a domineering man with archaic ideas and her mother is a submissive woman. A lot of this is a result of their age and culture, but it was all quite a shock for Mei-Ling. Mei-Ling was thrilled to discover that she has seven sisters (only Mei-Ling and one other sister were given up for adoption, though). Mei-Ling struggles to understand her mother and the choices she made, but her meetings with her birth family only reinforces what she already knew – that she is a lucky girl.

I really enjoyed *Lucky Girl* – it's a beautiful tale of self-discovery without a hint of self-pity. Mei-Ling readily admits that there were times when she felt different when she was growing up because there weren't many Asians where she lived, but she's also quick to point out that the Hopgoods were wonderful parents who encouraged and loved her and helped her become the strong woman she is today. When she says, "Giving our children even a fraction of the love and generosity that my mom and dad shared is the best legacy that I can think of leaving," she is of course speaking of her adopted parents. After reading her book, I think she will leave a fine legacy.

Vikki Ortiz says

I started reading *Lucky Girl* on a flight out of town for vacation. I was so captivated by the story from the first chapters, I was almost disappointed when I arrived at my destination and had to stop reading! Hopgood tells an amazing tale made believable and real through her skilled journalistic observations and note taking. The historic background and research adds a depth to the book that takes us beyond mere journal entries. She brings us along on her journey in which we are asked us to consider a world where women expect little for themselves, family is defined by your ability to literally deliver what society approves, and sadness/regret is

barely ever communicated directly. By juxtaposing this with her own warm, gregarious and happy upbringing in Michigan, Hopgood reminds us how lucky we all are, but also shows us the price of having such wealth -- heartbreak when you lose it. I finished the book while on my flight home from vacation, and while I won't spoil the end, I'll say that the tears were flowing so hard, the stranger next to me wanted to know what I was reading. I recommended it to her, as I do to everyone looking for a wonderfully eye-opening, heartwarming memoir.

Catherine says

Free book from GoodReads giveaways.

Mei-Ling Hopgood spent the first twenty-some years of her life with her adoptive parents in a loving home in a Michigan suburb. Through a couple of casual contacts with the nun who arranged her adoption, Mei-Ling's birth parents in Taiwan sent word that they wished to make contact with her.

Hopgood takes the reader with her as she learns of the circumstances that led to her adoption, the many members of her birth family, and her own self-discovery. The writing is conversational and journalistic (which makes sense since she makes her living as a journalist) but doesn't shy away from the honest truth. I very much enjoyed reading about Hopgood's physical and emotional journeys.

Pamela says

As an adoptive parent of a child from China, I am very glad I bought this book, as I think my kids will benefit from reading it when they are older. It was very refreshing to me to read about someone who did not view their adoption as a great tragedy or a hole that will never be filled. I accept that some people feel this way. I accept my own children might feel this way. But sometimes when I read adult adoptee writings or even adoption literature, it sounds as if ALL adoptees will or should feel this way. Mei Ling Hopgood has a very balanced view of her life, her adoptive family and her birth family. Her recount of her journey to meet her birth family seems very considered and balanced. She at first basks in the glow of early discovery and seeing only the surface, but eventually, the family secrets and flaws come to light and she learns to accept them, good points and bad points.

I highly recommend this book.

Larry Bassett says

Lucky Girl is a must-read if you are a parent, sibling, or other close relative of an adopted Asian girl. Others may find it less compelling. I give it an extra star since I have an adopted Chinese daughter.

Mei-Ling Hopgood came to the United States when she was 8 months old, given up by her biological parents and adopted by a Caucasian couple in Michigan. She spent her growing up years trying to be a white American in spite of her Asian background and appearance. She left Taiwan, China behind, creating her own imagined story of how she came to be in her loving family in America. In her early twenties she is contacted by her birth family, Ma, Ba and adult biological sisters, and finds herself with two families and a history that

she had never known or imagined.

Mei-Ling was reunited with her Chinese family in 1997; this book was published in 2009. Hopgood is a journalist. She knows how to write. It took her a dozen years to bring her book to completion, years that included the joy and the pain of discovering a lost history. The blurb on the cover reads: "A compelling, honest, and very human tale about self-identity and the complex concept of family."

This book came alive for me as I recalled my own experience as the father of a Chinese daughter adopted when she was 3 1/2 years old. Those first several years of Fu Ping's life are mostly a mystery to us. We have created our own story of how we think Mei Mei came to be abandoned in Aksu in far western China at the age of three months. She came to us with a repaired cleft lip, an unrepairs cleft palate and weak legs that could barely run. When she was found, she was severely malnourished, we assume because her parents could not successfully feed her with the cleft that made sucking impossible. At the age of three and a half she was still very tiny, even by Chinese standards. Her size 24 month clothing is too big for her. She is under twenty pounds but a voracious eater. She eats absolutely every morsel of food given to her. She remembers when the next meal was not a certainty.

At the beginning *Lucky Girl* reads a little like I imagine an international pen pal letter. The sentences are not complex and the details are sometimes more mundane than you might expect in a published work. Mei-Ling attributes her focus on detail to her career as a journalist.

Irene [a younger sister of Mei-Ling who had also been given away for adoption] grew up in a pretty four-bedroom home that her father designed with a pitched roof on a winding street called Dersbachstrasse, not far from Lake Zug [Switzerland]. The front yard was often garnished with brilliant red geraniums. They had a swing set, a tree that the kids loved to climb, and a huge garden in the backyard where they grew their own vegetables and fruits, including beans, potatoes, cucumbers, berries, and figs. From the back of the house, they had a marvelous lake view. Her childhood was happy and simple. Her mom loved to cook and made almost everything from scratch. Their neighborhood was full of kids their age, and they usually went on vacation during the summer (to the beach, usually Italy) and winter (skiing at a small resort). Often their many aunts, uncles, and cousins came along. They also hiked in their mountains with their extended family.

But as the story becomes more complex, so does the writing. Mei-Ling keeps a journal so is good at recalling and retelling events.

Although the book is called "a memoir," Mei-Ling is not really a memoir kind of person. I think it would be more accurate to subtitle the book "a reminiscence." The writing is more causal and personal than formal. I enjoyed getting to know Mei-Ling Hopgood; it seems right to call her Mei-Ling rather than Ms. Hopgood. The book is relatively short and easy to read. That does not mean that it gives you nothing to think about. International adoption is a controversial topic in itself. And in *Lucky Girl* we find Mei-Ling is one of eight daughters and one son. A sister three years younger had also been given away. A third sister had been offered for adoption but was kept when no adoption arrangements could be made. What was going on with her birth parents? They would not have given away boys. After a childhood and young adulthood distancing herself from her Chinese roots, at the age of 23 she finds she has a large family. And they want her to come and see them!

The book is about Mei-Ling's journey to meet and become a part of her lost family. And don't miss the section about "meeting Ma's bathroom needs" in Chapter 15! Maybe more than you want to know. The book is sprinkled with surprising little tidbits. ("She also had an awesome Japanese-style toilet with a seat that warmed up with the touch of a button.")

The woman doesn't know that I am the sixth daughter of a farmer and his wife. I could have grown up in the sweltering humidity of Taitung, eating rice porridge for breakfast, learning Chinese script, and toiling in the sun under my father's watchful eye, or I could have been given to an alcoholic uncle who had no wife and no children and who desperately wanted his own family. I could have been engulfed by the secrets of my own house, burning incense in honor of my ancestors. I could have gone to college in Taiwan, studied English on the side, and scrambled to build a life in a small apartment in the cramped city of Taipei.

Instead, she was sent to Michigan as an infant who would have no recollections of Taiwan but was destined to come to love her Asian heritage and to love her complex Taiwanese family.

Kate says

As soon as Mei-Ling Hopgood recounts the hectic, excited first phone call she gets from her Chinese biological family, in the first chapters (really an extension of the prologue), my heart was won. In chapter 2 Hopgood beautifully imagines her parents' young lives in Kinmen Island in the Taiwan Straits, suffering Mao's constant real and propaganda-filled bombs. Hopgood also shares the letters to her adoptive parents from the young nun who kept her and worked for months to push her adoption through, a nice touch that both simplifies and enhances the narrative (and makes you happy for Hopgood's luck to have so many loving parental figures!). When she agrees to reunite with her Chinese family, Hopgood is entirely welcomed by them, though she always feels closer to her English-speaking sisters than to her biological parents. She also explores her development from disliking, to ignoring, to accepting, then embracing her Chinese identity.

Ultimately, though, the writing is uneven and fairly repetitive. The biographical and geographical descriptions are lovely, which makes sense given Hopgood's training as a journalist, but her memoir style is not as clean. Also, she so frequently promises to reveal the family's dark secrets that you start to wonder if she doesn't trust the story to be interesting enough on its own (it is, and the revelations, though troubling, aren't as dramatic or surprising as her relentless foreshadowing suggests).

Joanna Eng says

I appreciated what Hopgood had to say and think transracial/international adoption is an important topic to write about. I could also relate to some of the way she felt when visiting a "home country" that wasn't really her home.

However, I was a little disappointed with this book. I thought the style and structure were a little simplistic. It was a little too much like "This happened; and then this happened; and then this happened; and then I felt

like this...."

I also found it strange that Hopgood was more than willing to criticize her Chinese/Taiwanese birth family and Chinese/Taiwanese society and values, but seemed unwilling to turn a critical eye to her American adoptive family and American society and values.

Kristen says

I picked up this book because I really enjoyed Mei-Ling Hopgood's book, How Eskimos Keep Their Children Warm and I wanted to read her first book. This one did not disappoint.

It's the autobiographical story of a Chinese American woman, adopted as an infant by a white family living in Detroit, whose birth family in Taiwan contacts her and arranges for her to come meet them in person. Her journey bridges distance, time, language and cultural barriers, and a wide range of emotions as she meets the siblings that her birth parents raised (view spoiler). She grapples with her relationship with her birth parents as she learns more and more about them and develops remarkable relationships with her sisters, all without ever glossing over how much she loves her parents. I felt myself thinking over and over how lucky she was to have been raised as a Hopgood. Her relationship with her parents is very special and they were unbelievably supportive of her journey as she met and developed relationships with her birth family. I could feel their security come across in the telling of the story -- they knew she knew who her parents were and they were nothing but enthusiastic when it came to her exploring her roots. That takes amazing strength and confidence, and probably explains a great deal of why the author appears so balanced (or maybe grounded) in the book.

I liked the fact that she appears never to have longed for information about her birth parents, and yet that when the information was available she was able to turn around so quickly and embrace the opportunity. I also really enjoyed reading about the internal conflicts she had when coming to terms with her own ethnic identity as a college student. I found her tone respectful, even when she was describing some pretty shocking secrets revealed by her sisters about her birth parents. She approached this emotional and intensely personal subject matter as a journalist and was therefore able to tell a really great story.

Kennedy says

I won this thru the goodreads first read program, but it's certainly a book I would have picked up on my own.

For me, the most interesting part of the story was the Chinese culture that puts such a priority on male children as opposed to females. The author was born to a family that, unluckily for them, kept having baby girls. The father becomes obsessed with having a boy. The author and a younger sister were given up for adoption because they were girls and while the family could keep a boy, they wouldn't keep a girl.

Both Hopgood's birth mother and father are very hard to sympathize with, though their actions need to be looked at through the lens of Chinese culture.

The book also raised issues about adoption and whether one should explore his or her birth family or whether it's best left in the past.

