

## Prologue

My sixteen-year-old son observed me daily for months as I sat in my office writing this book. One day I could feel his presence behind me, watching me intently, but I kept on writing. Finally, he broke the silence: “So, like, what’s so great about writing books, anyway?”

I realize that he is trying to understand why his father spends so much time on something as seemingly unexciting as writing and I need to explain to him why I do this. I know that a glib answer is insufficient; they never are with him. So I paused for a moment to ponder the question. What was he asking me? Why bother writing? Why is it so important to me? Who cares? Who will read it? What difference will it make in their lives? Why was I writing this book, anyway?

I turned to face him and said, “Well, I feel it’s important for me to pass on what I’ve experienced, what I’ve learned in my life, and to use my gifts, my talents. I can write, so I think it’s something I should do. I don’t know who will read it, but for those who do, I hope it helps them in some way in their lives. It’s my way of contributing something to the world. I listen and gather people’s stories. Then I write them down in a way that I hope will communicate something to others, so that seeing these stories will give readers something of value. I tell myself that this isn’t going to be done unless I do it, just because of who I am. It’s a way of making my mark, leaving something behind . . . not that I’m planning on going anywhere right now.”

My son seemed to ponder my answer, shrugged his shoulders, and walked away without a word. I went back to writing, with a clearer purpose to my endeavor. My son had forced me to reflect on what I was doing and I had a better understanding of why I was writing this book. Did he understand what I was trying to say? Perhaps not, but maybe someday he will understand why his father spent so much of his precious time writing this book. Given my life circumstances and experiences this was a way to find meaning.

Writing the stories in this book has been a labor of love: leaving my wife in a warm bed in the early morning darkness and chill, petting the dogs, checking the kids, making chai, and sitting down to write, then writing until the rest of the family started to stir and I needed to attend to the daily mundane realities as mindfully as I could. I often questioned what I was doing and when I didn't, people in my life like my son challenged me to be clear about my purpose. I know that good writing connects people to one another and to other living creatures. It enables readers to see the world from a different perspective. My writing is simple—I ask questions, listen, observe, and share what I have learned with others.

As the child of a native Japanese woman and an Irish American father, a salient feature of my life has been this ethnic heritage and the circumstances into which I was born in post-World War II Tokyo. My life, between Japan and the United States, has been marked heavily by my connections to these diverse roots. I have found meaning in my life through learning to accept and appreciate these roots, to balance their influences and blend them into a synergistic whole. While others may see me as “half,” I know that I am whole. This whole me is greater than the sum of its parts and connects me to something beyond my self, to communities of others and to a collective self.

I have lived an idealistic life in which making meaning of these life circumstances has been a central focus of my existence. I have been fortunate that my career has included extensive opportunities to do research, reading the work of scholars who have studied about people of mixed heritage in the United States, and to meet and interview mixed ancestry individuals myself. I received institutional support to study in Asia, and subsequent jobs allowed me to pursue these stud-

ies as part of my work—to research, counsel, and write. I feel it is my responsibility to give back what I have learned, and here is what I have produced from my study and exploration.

*When Half Is Whole* tells of my encounters with some amazing people. Over the past thirty years I have sought contact with persons of mixed ancestry in Asia and America, listened to their stories, and read their poems and prose, receiving them as gifts to share. These encounters with others have stimulated encounters with my self, and their stories and my stories have become interwoven. I offer them to you.

I tell stories because I have found that there is nothing more important in life than connecting with others. And one way that we connect with others is through sharing our narratives. We each have stories that are universally human, similar to those of other people, and yet also unique, individual. All stories are capable of touching other human beings, helping them to remember and to tell their own stories in their own way.

These stories have been gathered from individuals whose lives blend Asian and American in their families of origin. Among the people they identify as parents, biological or adoptive, are people with roots in Asia and people with roots in some other part of the world. The themes of the storytellers' lives involve balancing, connecting, and finding meaning in these roots. The stories here show how these individuals have engaged in the process of becoming not “half” this or “half” that but whole.

The stories are ordinary in some ways, extraordinary in others. The people in them have all dedicated their lives to making meaning of their mixed roots. In searching for their roots, they discover connections that bring them into contact with communities. Their journeys have engaged them in healing themselves and healing others, a process of transition toward meaning, balance, wholeness, and connectedness, within individuals and between individuals and their environments. Their personal healing releases healing energy to entire communities. They recover surrendered identities and become spokespersons for identities as found in multiple, flexible, and diverse ways.

The stories begin where I began my life, in Occupied Japan, and end where I now live, between California and Tokyo. They explore the

topic of the increasingly transnational and multiethnic nature of identities in a globalized world through the lives of mixed ancestry Asian Americans. The narratives take place on both sides of the Pacific, showing how lives are influenced by legal, political, and social forces and how people assert themselves in ways that overcome victimization, claim agency, and bring cultural change. The stories reveal how identities are constructed beyond existing categories and boundaries of nation, race, and ethnicity.

I present these narratives as a way of combating a pervasive feature of life for many people—being “Othered,” seen as different, marginalized, and isolated. I believe that this dehumanizing “us versus them” consciousness can be overcome through the telling and receiving of stories that reveal the fullness and richness of individual lives. Narratives humanize by showing commonalities in universal struggles and uniqueness in particular struggles.

Each chapter is framed around an individual’s story, my account of their lives as written from interviews and autobiographical writing. The writing is reflexive, integrating self-reflections; the search is both personal and professional, forcing me to delve into the past, confront harsh realities, and imagine ideal developments. Those whom I encounter come from vastly different backgrounds, with contrasting perspectives on what it means to be Asian and American, but also shared understandings. The lens is focused on a diverse group of individuals in a variety of places where we met, from Tokyo to Boston, San Francisco to Okinawa, Korea to Massachusetts.

The individuals chosen are activists, advocates, scholars, and teachers who challenge boundaries and borders. They are artists, performers, filmmakers, and writers whose lives are an expression of their identities. These are people whose stories express the wide range of diverse experiences of lives in which cultural, national, and racial worlds come together, sometimes colliding violently and sometimes blending smoothly and synergistically.

All the stories have an Asian connection, including Japanese, Okinawan, Korean, Chinese, and Filipino. They explore various borderlands, such as Chinese/Jewish, Japanese/black, Korean/Iranian, and Filipino/Mexican. They illuminate the liminal spaces where sexuality

and gender meet race and culture. The stories have common threads yet are highly diverse. Mixing of people from different shores is often violent; the stories begin by highlighting the circumstances in postwar Japan. Many stories are of migration and tell of the individuals and families who came to America from the 1950s on. Transnational stories are also about returns and roots journeys to the United States or to Asia and back again. Finding community is a common struggle, and these narratives tell us of these challenges in being out of place and finding home. Complications of international and interracial families are clearly revealed through the stories of marriage, adoption, and nationality. The stories tell how identities are formed amidst the volatile environment of military bases, adding complexity to the concept of multiple identities. They tell of personal identity struggles as mixed heritage persons challenge the borders of existing ethnic communities and group identities and consciousness.

*When Half Is Whole* goes beyond the borders of traditional academic fields by examining the intersection of the United States and Asia through the stories of transnational and multiethnic Asian Americans. The many persons of mixed American and Asian ancestry who are now part of the U.S. landscape make up part of this account, while others have never left Asia; some have gone from here to there and back and forth between America and Asia. These stories examine how identities are formed within a context of politics and economies that transcend domestic systems and become transnational issues between states.

*When Half Is Whole* is based in research done over the past thirty years in Asia and the United States, examining historical material and highlighting emerging trends and movements. The stories reveal how identities develop amidst major evolutions in Asian countries and Asian American communities due to intermarriage between Asians or Asian Americans and others. The stories address the growing concerns of a population of mixed Asian American families and individuals, as interracially married couples abound and mixed Asians now constitute nearly 20 percent of the Asian American population. *When Half Is Whole* looks at how younger mixed Asians construct new identities in increasingly multicultural Asian social contexts and transform older stereotyped images of mixed race. The stories show the

emergence of multiethnic organizations and the burgeoning of online communities that have transformed this issue, connecting previously isolated people in cyberspace and sometimes in person.

The subject of this book is timely in the sense that we are caught more deeply than ever in global cultural transitions and transformations. *When Half Is Whole* is grounded in an understanding that a transnational approach is required for comprehending the complexity of historical and contemporary issues. The stories that I present bring greater understanding to how identities today are flexible, inclusive, and multiple, and challenge the meaning of national and racial categories and boundaries. These lives demonstrate how the tensions in the borderlands and margins contain powerful currents that can illuminate and alter the mainstreams.

There was a time I realized that I could write this book for the rest of my life, or I could finish it. I decided on the latter, and here it is. I give it up to the world, no longer holding on to it with love and fear. Love, for it represents our lives and gifts I have received from others and now return. Fear, because I am afraid that it is incomplete. But it is my offering, my way of connecting to others and to life itself. These are just a few of the many stories that need to be told. Please read them and tell your own stories in your own way.