

The background is a complex, abstract composition of layered, textured brushstrokes in various colors including deep red, purple, blue, pink, and white. A vertical white stripe runs down the left side. In the lower right, a black silhouette of a person stands with one leg raised, looking towards the left. The overall effect is one of depth and layered complexity.

issue no. 6

THROUGH  
THICK & THIN

at the core

VULNERABILITY + DESIGN PUBLICATION

# Editor's Letter /

I must admit, as I write this letter, the majority of this issue was crafted over a year ago in 2021. I should've figured out by this point that the pandemic has this particular obsession with derailing plans.

The last years of my life since publishing Issue 5 in 2020 have been busy, but most of all, messy. One day I was in a classroom discussing articles, and the next I was stuck in a tiny studio apartment struggling to turn on my mic. Soon after, I graduated college. No caps, no gowns, no grad celebrations. Just screenshots and glitchy recordings of names read coldly. I thought I'd have a chance to breathe now that I was finished with school. Instead, self-doubt, pressure to pay bills, and an unsettling lack of structure flooded in.

However, I was lucky that summer was rolling around and I'd have one event that I knew would ground me during all the turmoil—Catalyst Culture Camp. The adoptee summer program I've gone to almost every year since 2001. It is a place I have watched myself grow up in, and a place where I was surrounded by a second family who grew up with me. From insensible babies who don't remember the first years as campers, to full-fledged adults taking time off of work to return as counselors and workshop speakers.

Unfortunately though, camp got postponed that year, but in an attempt to reconnect with my camp family, I started planning Issue 6. I reached out to my peers, collected all the materials, and started the layout. And then things just derailed again.



Now as I revisit this issue and write this letter in 2022, tomorrow I leave for camp for the last time. The final year has come, and it will be time to say goodbye to the space and the people who have provided stability and comfort for my entire life. Although I may not be close with every single camper or family, we share an unmistakable bond. It is a special, rare occurrence to see so many families experience life from their corner of the world. I know that this connection will live on past camp, but it would be naive to say it'll ever be in the same way.

This current issue of ATC, **Through Thick & Thin**, suddenly seemed most fitting to be released at the end of camp, which by the time you're reading this will have been in the past. My hopes for this issue is that it ties together the years that were lost during the pandemic and yet guide us through the unclear future. I also hope that non-adoptees can gain some insight into the individualism within the adoptee community and although we are unique, find comfort and relatability. Lastly, in homage to one of my features, I hope we are able to address the biggest question of, "Whatever Next?"

# ADDIE BARA

## **Do you think that being an adoptee influenced your decision to become an artist?**

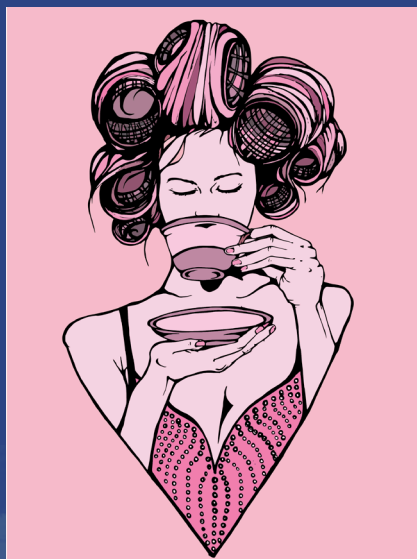
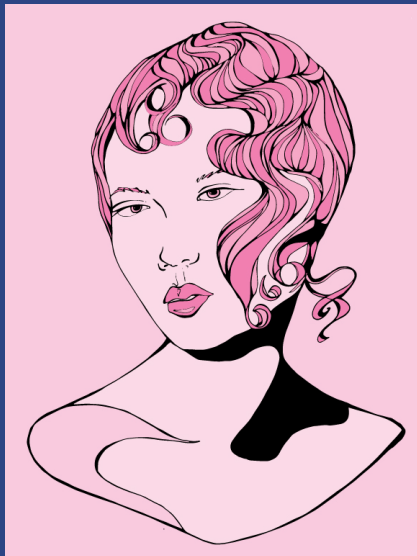
Art has been a creative outlet that has allowed me to explore different types of styles, mediums, and processes. It has always served as a separate space for me to create and relax. I've never really incorporated my art to anything adoption related until recently when I decided to begin a passion project with two other adoptee friends called Whatever Next? I've always believed that effective communication must be anchored to visual elements, which is where I now tie in my illustrations into Whatever Next? content. I love being able to combine my passion for the adoptee community with my creative skills in illustration and graphic design.

## **Do you think your adoptee experiences shape your artistic practice or work? Why/why not? How?**

I feel that growing up with a lack of Asian representation in the media has drawn me to illustrate more Asian faces. I often defaulted to drawing white models in fashion magazines before. The Western type of beauty standard that I feel many Asian adoptees are left to internalize, influenced the types of faces that I chose to draw. Whatever Next is now my creative outlet to express thoughts and ideas surrounding adoption. I feel grateful to have my friends and co-founders, Hannah and Josephine, to have open discussions with and to watch Whatever Next grow. It has challenged me not only creatively but also in discovering how I truly feel about being an adoptee.



**Whatever Next?**  
Pencil, Sharpie to Digital



Pink Series  
Pencil, Sharpie to Digital

**If you could give young adoptees any advice, what would you say?**

I would say to make connections with other adoptees and to travel. I feel that exposing myself to a more diverse environment and meeting people while traveling gave me more confidence in my own background and story. It broadened my view of the world and gave me different perspectives to look life through. It's easy to feel isolated as an adoptee so it's important to find people to connect with.

**What do you wish non-adoptees knew about the adoptee experience?**

One thing that I wish non-adoptees knew about the adoptee experience is that every story is different and there is such diversity within the many communities that exist. I would tell them to take common adoption narratives found in the media with a grain of salt. Read adoptee literature and be wary that some questions that people often ask adoptees can be invasive. I think that the more people listen to adoptee stories, the easier it becomes to talk about for everyone involved. I am still learning myself as it is an ever-lasting journey.





**Sunchild**  
Inked Woodblock

# Anna Grace

*Everywhere I run,  
The sun follows me.  
No matter where I come from,  
People talk about my light, The light is me.  
How it seems to follow my words,  
and trace my personality.*

*No one asks  
If the light hurts.  
No one asks  
If I am burning inside,  
Even as I curse.  
Everyone sees the light.  
Yet no one can feel the strokes of heat  
That course through my veins at night.*

*My light is my greatest  
weakness.  
This, I can attest  
For in the wake of the blinding,  
brilliant, white light,  
Is the absence of color  
and ultimately  
My unabsolved smite.*

*It is sprinkled through my clothes,  
in my hair,  
caressing my skin.  
But I am left red and angry,  
With no known kin.*

*I burn and run, and run and burn.  
And burn and burn and burn, because  
No matter where I run,  
The sun follows me,  
No matter where I come from.*

It is 2021 and I am finishing up my first semester in my final year of undergrad. Post-Covid-19, school is almost back to the way it was while simultaneously being an entirely new space to navigate through. I also turned 21 this year; legally able to drink and supposedly able to pay rent. I feel as though I am on the precipice of where youth and abandon meet wisdom and humility. Aside from learning how to struggle in a more “adult” way, I have found myself in the process of deconstructing my childhood in order to move forward in my adulthood.

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The sun follows me.  
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People talk about my light, The light is me.  
How it seems to follow my words,  
and trace my personality.*

Two summers ago, I “came out of the fog” regarding my adoption. By this I mean I no longer saw my adoption as the positive and mainstream narrative that permeates American culture. Phrases such as “you’re so lucky” or “you have so much more opportunity now” or “your mom is so lucky to have you” became my triggers. I haven’t gone a day since without experiencing feelings of extreme loss and grief. I feel like I am in constant mourning for my homeland, my native language, my heritage and culture.

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If the light hurts.  
No one asks  
If I am burning inside,  
Even as I curse.  
Everyone sees the light.  
Yet no one can feel the strokes of heat  
That course through my veins at night.*

I was born in Hanoi, Vietnam; Hoa Binh province, on July 31st, 2000. I have no medical family history. I primarily speak English and only know how to count, say “Happy New Year” and “thank you” in Vietnamese. I was adopted when I was 5 months old and grew up in a small, white town in the Midwest and spent my teenage years in a much larger and partially urban city. I am an only child and was raised by a single mother. This year, my biological mother is supposedly 57 and my adoptive mother turned 72.

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A huge part of my grief is linked to maternal loss. As my adoptive mother ages, I can feel my spirit preparing for another great loss. My reality is born out of the loss of my motherland, my biological mother, and the mother that raised me. However, allowing this grief in my life often forces me to question who I am, what I am doing here, the oppressive forces that led to my adoption, and where I consider home.

I want to be clear that I only speak from my own experiences of being a transracial adoptee and that I only want to speak my truth that I've subconsciously suppressed for years. My hope for those reading this article alongside viewing my artwork is that they will be able to gain a new perspective of a narrative that isn't usually at the forefront of identity politics and social justice rhetoric.

*It is sprinkled through my clothes,  
in my hair,  
caressing my skin.  
But I am left red and angry,  
With no known kin.*

When I was younger, I had a favorite shirt with cats on it. It was hot pink. I remember I would ask my mom for the same shirt (and matching embroidered jeans) every year consecutively and religiously for probably about three years. She would then go out and buy a larger size of the same shirt each year. Consequently, I have several pictures of myself wearing my favorite shirt(s) in different stages of my youth. For my final woodblock print assignment in my printmaking class, I decided to draw inspiration from my childhood pictures. Shockingly, the picture I chose featured my favorite childhood shirt.

The premise of my final printmaking assignment was to create a self-portrait or a portrait of someone who holds significance in your life in a woodblock print medium. I based my portrait off of a photo of my childhood self running through a parking lot. The picture speaks for itself. In it I am smiling, my body is in a state of exhilaration, my hair is flying behind me. When I started the project, the image called out to me for so many reasons. I appreciated how the movement of my body captured the unique energy that is privy to children. My face emitted a joy that matched the pace of my captured run.

*I burn and run, and run and burn.  
And burn and burn and burn, because  
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In the final print, I decided to omit my facial expression. What would have been the features of my face are reduced to uneven lines and rough marks created by drilling into the wood over and over again. The body is still in motion, the hair is still scattered behind as if it carried the wind with it. Until the day of my Final Critique, I had no idea what this print meant to me or how it related to my struggle over the years for reconciling my notions of home and reclaiming my lost identity. I honestly still have no definitive answer. I think it can represent a lot of aspects in my journey of grief. On the one hand, choosing to omit my face could be associated with not knowing where I come from. On the other, representing my relentless desire as an adult to remember and incorporate the joy I once felt as a child, despite my reality of loss and sorrow, into my daily rituals. Or maybe I was trying to articulate that the sense of self I was privileged to as a child is no longer practical in my understanding of who I am now and how I fit into the world as an adult. Even though the

blank face is open to interpretation, I do think that my obsession with a singular shirt is related to my attachment trauma caused by my adoption. My empathic nature leaves me vulnerable in my relationships and my struggle with attachment makes me fear loss to an unimaginable degree. I think I wanted the same shirt year after year to feel a sense of stability. I found solace in the repetition of wearing the same piece of clothing and a strange sense of comfort in knowing that even though others assumed it was literally the same shirt, it was actually a few sizes larger each year.

I think the shirt symbolizes how I perceive my growth and sense of self as an adoptee. Ideally, I'd like to exist in this world having a general sense of where I come from and how that impacts who I am today. I'd like to "wear the same shirt" but a couple sizes bigger than the year before. Ultimately, I'd like to have other people's assumptions about me transform and be in a consistent alignment with how I see and understand myself as a woman, an Asian American, a Vietnamese American, and as a transracial adoptee.



Culture Camp 2017, Midwest at St. Olaf

“ I have found myself in the process of deconstructing my childhood in order to move forward in my adulthood.



# JACK TORELLA

## **Do you think that being an adoptee influenced your decision to become an artist?**

100%. It took quite some time to figure out and identify that that's what I wanted for myself. I've always gravitated towards creativity and imagination. A lot of people ask me why I became a filmmaker or what film compelled me to become a part of the industry and I'll always tell them Jurassic Park was my inspiration. Dinosaurs were my favorite obsession when I was young, and I would come home after school and watch that film everyday. On top of that, I thought it was real-I thought that there was an island with a park full of dinosaurs and I wanted to go there and see it for myself someday. I thought that the characters were real people, only to find out later that it was Jeff Goldblum, Laura Dern, and Sam Neill playing fictional roles. Movie magic, am I right?

What really drove me to become an artist and a creator was the fear of being forgotten or living as another cog within the machine we call society. I didn't want the fact that I was an adoptee to go to waste. I wanted to make the most of the life and opportunities that I was allowed. My time within the world of motion pictures is still very new in comparison to many others who are on the same journey, but I feel that what sets me apart from the rest is why and whom I am doing this for. I do this because I want to reach the level of artistry and authorship that will be remembered for centuries. I do this because I've been told so much in life that I can't or that I should do something else that suits me, when really it suits them. I do this for all my family,

here in the states and in Viet Nam to make them even more proud of having me be a part of their lives. And I do this for all the adoptees around the world, domestic and international so they know that anyone can. Regardless of where you're from or what your situation may be, keep fighting for YOU and you'll wind up inspiring others along the way.





Mexico City, Mexico  
2020



The Berkshires, MA  
2020

### Do you think your adoptee experiences shape your artistic practice or work? Why/why not? How?

I'm sure they do to a certain degree. I am not always conscious or aware as to whether or not a specific piece of work is shaped or influenced by my experiences as an adoptee. I think it really depends on if I am creating for myself or for someone else. At the current moment, I could say that when I get work to hop on set and pull focus, there's probably no consideration within myself at the fact that I am an adoptee. To me, it's just work and I'm getting paid to show up and

perform and most times it is fun. A lot of people outside of film don't really understand that working in this business is oftentimes incredibly hard work and not as glamorous as they'd like to imagine. I actually just came back from a three week job in the Bahamas and I have no problem saying that it was arguably one of the hardest jobs of my career (however, my instagram showed otherwise, but I was really dying on the inside).

In contrast, whenever I shoot Still, that's likely my opportunity for me to consider my experiences building up to each shot. Again, it depends on the subject matter and in fact, I don't like taking too many shots because I want to find the perfect framing, composition, and light. That's what makes shooting Still special for me-finding the perfect way to capture something, however I like it. If it's over shot or there's too much coverage, then I think that's wasteful and unimaginative. Whether or not you're shooting digital (I shoot on a Leica Q2), treat your shots like film-so only pull the trigger when it's worth it. The way I like to shoot is closest to documentary style, so



Talladega, AL  
2019

when I travel I'm switching between landscapes, street photography, and portraits. My whole idea of storytelling is being able to give my subject matter a voice where they normally cannot be heard. At times it is hard for me to categorize my own work, especially since I am my biggest critic and I frequently wind up hating my own work somewhere down the line. But that probably means I'm growing and developing and my style is constantly evolving. Most importantly, I shoot for myself, and no one else. It does not give me the same gratification shooting Stills for someone else, as it does working on my own personal projects. Eventually, when I'm ready to become a Director of Photography in motion picture, I'd like to go into that with a similar concept of treating each and every frame as if it were a Still photo and it could be seen and used as such. Someday, I want to be able to reach a point in my career where I'll effortlessly be able to paint with light.

**If you could give young adoptees any advice, what would you say?**

Patience and gratitude is the name of the game. Whether you're 16 or 26, you do not need to have the answers to all of your problems today. In other words, discovering your identity and who you are and what you want to be is a process that needs to be trusted and respected. It will sort itself out in time, but you ultimately control your life. So if you're having problems at home with family or are struggling to get into the school you want or nail that perfect job, just know that other people in the world wish they had your life. I wake up everyday grateful for the life I have. It's still a journey and a process, but that's the adventure-the fact that each day can be different and unique.

The fire under my ass didn't get lit until I was 16, and that was the year I met my birth mother in Viet Nam, which was 11 years ago on July 11. After meeting her and coming home from that, I was determined to make sure I'd put myself in a position that would allow me to see her again throughout my life. I finally had found my purpose and went on to go to film school at Temple University. I never believed in myself that I'd ever go to college because I was never the best student in grade school and my older siblings were

the academic power houses of the family. I felt like a complete failure and disappointment. I was constantly distracted with my mind on other things and I struggled immensely to stay focused and get decent grades. Eventually, I put in the work that was necessary to set me up for success because I knew what the rewards would be. I grew up very quickly after that experience and it has shaped the way I am to this day.



Sa Pa, Viet Nam  
2016



Sa Pa, Viet Nam  
2016



Yangon, Myanmar  
2016

### What do you wish non-adoptees knew about the adoptee experience?

What you see on the surface does not define us. We are not all cut from the same cloth. I think it would be super helpful for non-adoptees to be open minded and patient with us. Please know that we want to be accepted and not treated differently just because of our situations. Our circumstances are private and personal matters, which are often complicated. It's already a lot for us to carry and process the trauma of being adopted, and explaining how and why we are here is by no measure easy for us. When the time is right and when we are ready, we'll be able to share our stories.



Sa Pa, Viet Nam  
2016



Sa Pa, Viet Nam  
2016



Bagan, Myanmar  
2016

# Ibby Day

## BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Whenever someone asks what the most rewarding experience of Culture Camp has been, I have an incredibly selfish answer—watching myself become comfortable with who I am.

At camp, it's a tradition of sorts to be asked a question about my sexuality or gender expression, and how I am confident in both. I'm always humbled when families ask me these types of questions, confide in me about their own experiences, or just thank me for my candor. These are the most rewarding moments because not only do I get the honor of being a part of another adoptee's life, but I feel immense gratitude that my truest self is welcomed and something people feel they can learn from.

But what's often not communicated in these conversations is all the years when my identities were my biggest enemies. I glaze over the mirror talks telling myself that I'd grow out of this phase, the tears of heartache hidden amongst shower droplets, and the dark nights of solitude questioning if there would be a day where I wouldn't feel alone. And in all honesty, some days I didn't think the day would come.

I kept my secret locked tightly away because I worried that my relationships would change. That I'd be an outcast and end up more alone than I already was. More than anything I agonized that

I'd be outed to my parents and my innocent feelings would be overcomplicated and overanalyzed before I understood them myself. For five years I kept to myself, suppressed my identity, and developed a fake version of myself that was presented to the world. I've gained a lot of confidence in who I really am since then, but even so, I've found there are still remnants of this alternate version I built.

I've found traces of this version in recent years now that I'm coming to terms with how my sexual identity and gender expression cross over into my identity as an adoptee.

People will ask if I want to find my birth parents, and I usually give them a very direct no so the conversation is closed instantly. I've found myself tightening the lock once again because I think I'm scared to admit the real reason I don't want to search for them. Because the truth is, I do want to search, and I do want answers, but my feelings to protect who I've become outweigh that desire.

When I visited Vietnam in 2017, my gender expression confused several locals. I was told I was handsome, and one woman even pitched the idea of being a match for her daughter, all unknowing of the truth. I usually don't have the heart to tell people I'm actually a girl, but also am gay. I think when gender roles and stigma are still present in a country like Vietnam, the fears of not belonging come racing in, and stack onto the existing feelings I have about not feeling Vietnamese or American.

What I really fear most though is what my birth mother might feel about me if she met me. Would she be confused that her little girl looked like me? Would she suddenly feel grateful that she gave me up? Would she feel disappointed? And, would I be able to accept whatever the outcome was?

I don't know the answers. All I know is that I don't want to open the possibility that I'd have to prove myself all over again, both to her, but especially to myself. At the end of the day, I think the greater truth is that I still am not fully comfortable with who I am and I'm still on that journey. But this time around, I've got people on the journey with me, and the conviction to know that day will absolutely come.

# KAIA FORDE



**Emulating Jingna Zhang**  
Photography Series

## **Do you think that being an adoptee influenced your decision to become an artist?**

I wouldn't say that being an adoptee prompted me to become an artist, but it was one of the biggest reasons to continue as an artist. My entire life I've always been a visual learner/creator and methodical thinker. When I was a freshman in college trying to figure out what I wanted to pursue as a career, graphic design seemed to click with me. As I learned more about design and what makes a "good" design, I realized it's not just about visual problem solving. A good design tells a story, evokes emotion, and starts conversations. I wouldn't be the designer and creator I am today if it wasn't for all I've experienced as a Vietnamese adoptee.

## **Do you think your adoptee experiences shape your artistic practice or work? Why/why not? How?**

Absolutely. Much of my design and photography work stems from my experiences as an adoptee. I grew up in a very small town in Minnesota where I was one of the only two Asian Americans. In a community that is predominantly white and conservative, I wasn't always accepted or respected because of my skin color and background. I've encountered, and still encounter, discrimination, racism, ignorance, and hate. I've learned to channel the negative experiences into positive, insightful, and raw visual storytelling.

**If you could give young adoptees any advice, what would you say?**

You're entitled to the same amount of respect, equality, love, care, and self-expression as someone who isn't an adoptee. There are so many emotions that come along with being adopted, and you're entitled to feel all of them. Though your background and story might be different from others around you, you're deserving of the same respect and expressiveness as everyone else.

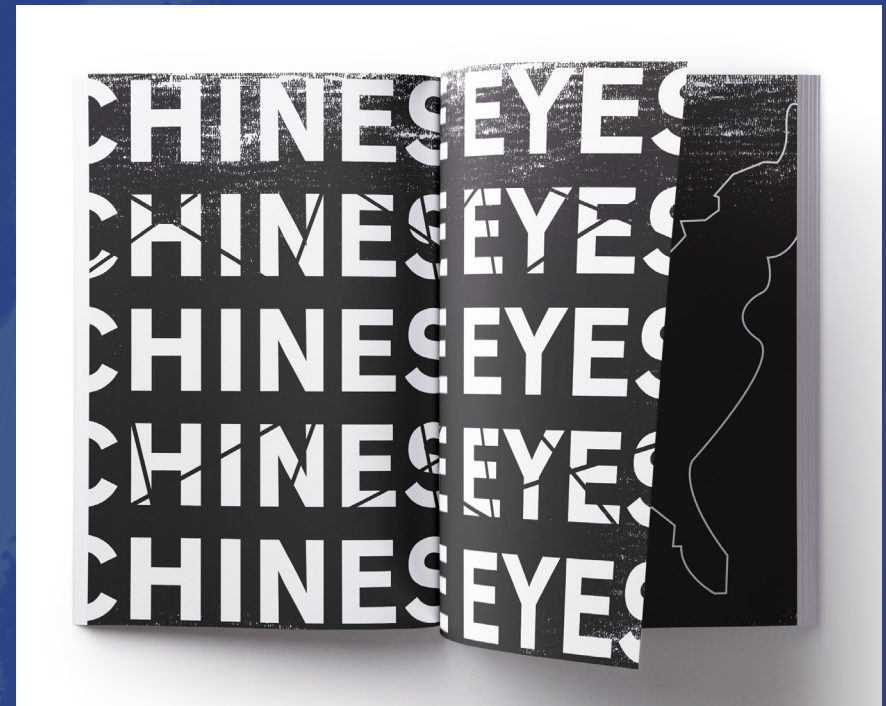
**What do you wish non-adoptees knew about the adoptee experience?**

One thing I'd want non-adoptees to know is that every adoptee has a different and unique story. Though experiences can overlap from one adoptee to another, how one copes with and feels about them is never truly the same. Don't make assumptions about an adoptee and their experiences; let them tell their own story if and when they choose to.



**Emulating Ezra Stroller**  
Photography Series

**Family is Not Defined by Blood**  
Zine Series



“

I hope that I can help future generations through their own experiences.

Culture Camp 2022, MegaCamp at Lake Lawn Resort



Josh Hendel

## ADOPTEE RECONCILIATION

### Prologue

One of the greatest privileges I have gotten out of being an adoptee is being able to connect and form friendships with other transracial adoptees from Asia. They have been amazing friends and people that I can depend on. Today I wanted to write about them because they have had a profound impact on my life and how I view my adoption. This is because we aren't alone on our journey and hearing their stories has helped me address adoption within my own life.

### Adoptee Reconciliation

Whenever I have an opportunity to have conversations with my friends who are also transracial Asian adoptees, we hardly ever talk about adoption. Usually, we will talk about TV or anime shows that we had seen or joke about a recent funny experience or confess to a new romantic interest in our lives. However, when talking about these topics, there sometimes will be unspoken thoughts that linger to unspoken questions. Sometimes it is at the tail ends of these



conversations that will we discuss adoption. Maybe the funny experience we had was related to a racist Asian joke taken at our expense or maybe the romantic interest didn't work out because of trust issues/insecurities related to being adopted. In any case, I would say a large majority of the other adoptees I know have faced some hardship in their lives due to being adopted. This is because there seems to be a disconnect between how we view ourselves and how the world views us. So how do we reconcile this difference within ourselves? The process usually happens for older adoptees because we can begin to create our own identity that isn't connected to our parents/peers. This reconciliation of our identities can happen in both big and small ways. Hearing some stories of my friends and what they have done to find peace within their lives has inspired me to take parallel changes within my life. This is a collection of some of our stories.

### **Calli**

From the earliest days that I can remember to the present moment, I have always identified myself as Josh Hendel. It is not the name that I have chosen, but it is the name that I couldn't imagine being anything else. So, when one of my friends mentioned that she was legally changing her name to better reflect her Asian identity, I was surprised, to say the least. She is now known as Calli Jing and was formerly named Calli Astroth. Calli is an intelligent independent spunky person that is not afraid to break a few eggs to make an omelet. She is also hilarious and not afraid to roast you in any situation. While she doesn't subscribe to the idea of gender norms, she gets unusually excited about baking and finding ways to look cute. I think my favorite quality about our friendship is that we can have deep conversations about the world and understand that our lives aren't just black and white experiences, but a lot of gray nuanced realities. Although it doesn't come naturally to her, she tries her best to an empathic person, and she genuinely cares about the people close to her.

I know a few adoptees who have changed their names, and many of them have described the experience as mentally and physically liberating. It's not that we are ashamed of the name our parents have given us, but

often as we have grown older, sometimes it doesn't reflect how we see ourselves. Similarly, Calli told me that she never really felt any attachment to her last name. The best way to describe this feeling is the experience of going to a clothing store to buy a sweater. However, at the store instead of wearing something that fits you, you are forced to wear something too small and suffocating. Maybe the sweater that you are given is too itchy or doesn't fit your style. People will also comment on your sweater saying it doesn't match your appearance or ask why you are wearing this kind of sweater. This is probably the best explanation to explain this feeling of disassociation with our name. I can't count the number of times people have asked me about my last name because it doesn't match stereotypical Vietnamese ethnic last names such as Nguyen or Tran. From my perspective, what I admire most about Calli's decision to change her last name was the reclamation of agency over her life. She has expressed to me that she felt a weird disconnected dissonance with her former last name and by associating with it she felt that a part of herself was being suppressed. After she changed her last name to one typically associated with the Chinese language, she felt she was finally able to choose who she wanted to be.

I have thought about changing my name, but I believe I wouldn't want to change my name because I don't want to offend my family and I have come to accept the name that I have. While it's never been said, there is a certain social expectation that guys should carry on their family's name. Additionally, because I am adopted there is no blood connection and my last name is the only formally recognized bond that connects me and my family. Therefore, I don't want to sever this part of the connection that exists between me and the people who raised me. Lastly, the other reason why I don't want to change my name is that I am proud of the name I have even though it doesn't entirely reflect my identity. Of course, there will be people who think that my name sounds weird or that my ethnicity wasn't the person they were expecting, but these are the comments of strangers who

don't understand that adoptees aren't given the privilege of having a name that fits with society's expectation. So in conclusion, while I wouldn't change my name for those two reasons, I am happy for my friend that she had a strong enough aspiration to embrace a new identity and I am excited to continue to be her friend no matter who she decides to be. Finally, I will say that I won't recommend every transracial adoptee change their name, but it can be a liberating journey for those that choose to take this path. The most important aspect though is that it is this our own choice to make.

### **Charlotte**

I have been fortunate to have met many adoptees over the years with whom I have formed amazing connections. But of all the adoptees, the one who has most inspired me is someone named Charlotte Cotter. She was one of the co-founders of an organization called China's Children International, which is an organization founded to help build a community for Chinese adoptees. The organization has already touched thousands of young Chinese adoptees through several programs run by CCI including yearbook, organizing speaking events, helping connect adoptees with their birth parents, social media outreach, mentor programs, and many more initiatives. Charlotte and I have collaborated on several initiatives together to help the adoptee community, the most recent one we have been working on is a Chinese table for Chinese adoptees to come to learn Chinese.

Charlotte is a person who is always doing a hundred different things, and I mean that in a literal sense. She is a logical and intelligent driven individual who cares a lot about others. Her humor is a bit dry, but it's only because she is taking what you say very seriously. Her best quality is unwavering commitment to help others and finish anything she has started. Her only fault is that she sometimes overextends herself in too many different directions. While I have never met her in person, it would be an honor to meet her in real life someday. Charlotte first became interested in creating CCI in high school when she read a

story of another Chinese adoptee and she realized that being adopted was larger than herself and that there is this larger social demographic of adoptees. Her goal was to create a community that was by Chinese adoptees for Chinese adoptees. She was worked with the organization for over 7 years and during that time she has met some amazing individuals. Her favorite part is working with the leadership cohort of the organization because there are so many talented adoptees who also want to volunteer and help the community. This group includes business professionals, graphic designers, political rights activists, and social workers. She expressed to me it is empowering to be a part of a group of highly talented people working towards something great than themselves. For her, the hardest part is that there is a lot of burnout in the volunteer community and that she feels she is feeling ready to be end soon. While she isn't sure when she is ready to end the group, she hopes to see another organization come up and take the reins. She is proud that the organization has served a particular purpose and that the foundations have been created for future adoptees as well as many friendships and connections.

The reason why I wanted to write about Charlotte is that I also have a strong desire to help the adoptee community. She has inspired me in many ways, and I hope to also want to make an impact on the adoptee community someday as well. I think there are two reasons why I am interested in helping the community. For me, the first reason is that I want to be able to use the talents that I have been given to help others. By using my abilities for others, I believe that I can reach my full potential. The other reason why I want to help adoptees is that I lost a close friend of mine who was also adopted due to suicide. I know they're many adoptees within the community who face daily battles with mental health issues and having positive self-worth due to being adopted. I have had many similar feelings growing up and I understand how depressing these kinds of struggles are. Therefore, I want to use the skills and experience I have learned in the business world to help other adoptees find peace with their adoption.

## Hanna

The last person I wanted to talk about is an incredible individual who has inspired me in many ways. Hanna has described the journey to search for her birth parents as climbing a mountain that only you can climb. She became interested in searching for her birth family because of her desire to see what her birth mom looked like and if she resembled her. While what she found was bittersweet, she is glad to decide to embark on the path to return to her birthland and learn more about herself. Hanna is an easy person to chat with and spending hours talking with her seems like it's a few minutes. While she sometimes doesn't have confidence in herself, she is a person who is not afraid of the unknown and takes her own path. She has a fascinating way of viewing the world and a funny humor to match it. Although I sometimes question her taste in certain movies, I have a strong admiration for her resolve and resilience and her ability to be honest with her feelings. She is another person who I haven't met in person yet, but I hope to someday grab a drink with.

Hanna moved to Vietnam in 2018 and has been enjoying her journey ever since. When she first started searching for her birth family, she didn't know what to expect. After about 6 months of searching, she was finally able to find some answers, even though it wasn't what she was hoping for. She was able to connect with her birth mom's side of the family, and in doing so discovered that her birth mom had passed some years before. She was incredibly hurt to find her birth mom had passed and that her birth father didn't want to have a relationship with her. However, her story doesn't end here and isn't only about tragedy. From her birth family, she discovered she had a half-sister who was also adopted to France. Through a combination of luck and patience, she was able to meet her in 2019 before the global pandemic. Hanna said it felt incredible to find someone who not only had a similar adoption experience to her but also someone who shared her own blood. Overall, she has described her journey to find her birth family as extremely humbling and grateful she was able to find answers. This path for her created closure and overall helped her develop as a person in a deep and profound way.

Hanna's story has truly inspired me to want to search for my own birth parents and look for answers I have always had but was too scared to find. As an adoptee, looking for one's birth parents is a difficult journey that not everyone wants to walk down. It's like taking a jump into a dark blue pool that you have no idea how deep or far it goes. It is emotional for adoptees because the answers we find might be painful or disappointing. I know it will be a difficult path and there is a chance I will experience more loss in my life in addition to the loss I have already experienced. But the reason why I am currently searching for my birth parents is that I don't want to have any regrets about not searching. Additionally, I have gotten to a point in my life that I am confident in myself and I am not afraid of the impact the journey will have on who I want to be in the future. Because no matter what I find, I still will always be the boy that likes American football, hanging out with friends and family, and continuing to work hard to make a better future for myself.

In conclusion, for an adoption story, I wanted to talk about the amazing people I have met along the way. I have received a huge amount of inspiration from other adoptees and this has helped me explore my own feelings towards adoption. While I have experienced a lot of hurt due to being adopted, I also have the privilege to meet some incredible people who are on the same journey as me. Lastly, I want to say that I hope to continue the friendships I have made through the adoption community and I hope that I can help future generations through their own experiences.

