

점물림

PALIMPSEST

DOCUMENTS FROM A KOREAN ADOPTION

Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom

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Drawn & Quarterly

Many of the names in this album have been changed, and certain people are not named, in order to protect identities. For the same reason, some personal details have been altered. The people who appear with their real names have given their consent.

The album contains footnotes, marked by asterisks.
The footnotes are collected at the end of the book.

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This album is dedicated to all adoptees
–living and dead–
whose voices have been silenced

Palimpsest:

A very old text or document in which writing has been removed and covered or replaced by new writing.

Adoption:

The act of legally taking a child to be taken care of as your own.

–Cambridge Dictionary

Stockholm

September 21st, 1994

Dear Mr. Sjöblom,

You called me just over a week ago to ask if it was possible to find out more about your daughter Lisa from Korea. I promised to speak to Ms. Kang, who was here visiting us, and I have now done so.

Ms. Kang told me that the older the adoptees are, the harder it is to find information on them. There were no computers back then and it wasn't mandatory to register the social security numbers of the birth parents, etc.

When searching for a person who has relinquished their child to an organization for international adoption, the following is done:

- A telegram is sent to the address in the adoption file.
- If it is returned to SWS, they contact the "dong office," which is an office located on every block, to ask if they have any information about where the person you're searching for has moved to.
- If the "dong office" doesn't have any information, SWS contacts the "ku office," which is an office located in every city district. They keep registers of the people living there.
- If they don't have any information either, the police will be contacted for the social security number or date of birth of the person you're looking for. Sometimes the social security number and date of birth turn out to be false. The address might also be false, perhaps it is just the name of a mountain with a number added.

Naturally, if a woman has to relinquish her child, she wouldn't want anyone to know that she had even been pregnant. Even nowadays, it's very hard for single mothers to get by, and it was even worse some time ago. A single mother would have had little chance to stay with her family, and the possibility of getting married would have been non-existent.

Korea is a tough society. Economically, the country recovered rapidly after the war, but many people had to pay a high price for this. The social rules are very strict and those who don't fit in become outcasts.

I understand that this is a difficult answer for Lisa, but I'm afraid it's the only one I can give her. I've worked with SWS for fifteen years, and I visited Korea for the first time in 1971. I can guarantee that they've done everything in their power to help Lisa.

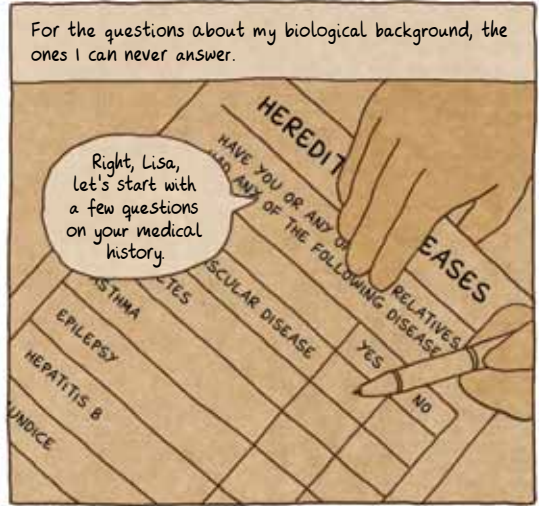
However, they still have Lisa's file, and if anyone comes to search for her, we will be notified, and they also will be told about Lisa's own inquiries. But chances are that Lisa's mother hadn't told anyone about Lisa's birth or adoption, and we can only hope that Lisa's mother today has a family, a husband, and children. A revelation of Lisa's existence would most likely break up that family and cause even more people pain.

I am convinced that Lisa's mother didn't have any other choice, either for herself or for Lisa, when she decided upon adoption. I'm also convinced that Lisa's mother has not forgotten her; it's just that we don't know where her mother is with her thoughts.

I hope Lisa can accept these facts and still embrace Korea as her first country, a wonderful, beautiful country that I hope you and she will some day be able to visit.

Kind Regards,
Margareta Blomkvist,
Adoptionscentrum*

PART 1 Scriptio Superior



During my first pregnancy, these questions reminded me that this body of mine is a mystery. An enigma.



That I'm a person who manifested out of thin air, a person without roots. Not born, but still here.



When I found out I was expecting my first child, it was as though my mythological mother entered my body and soul.



It felt as though I was carrying her, not my son.



It was then that I realized, much to my shock, that my life had started in another person's womb, another person's body.



Was my mother as shocked as I was?



When she understood the condition she was in?



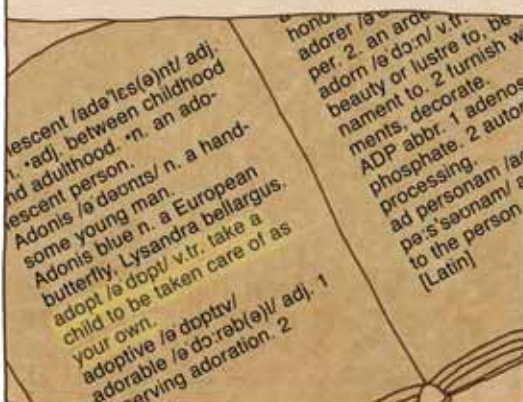
Was she scared? Was she lonely?



It's no wonder we adoptees forget that we were ever born. We're taught that our existence began the day we met our new families.



The word that describes how we become a part of our families hides the fact that we ever belonged to another one.



This is the origin story I grew up with. It was put up on my parents' fridge as a poem.*



Many of us actually believe that our lives started with a flight.



Our first families are eventually reduced to the margins...



to be completely erased in the end.



Many adoptees feel an inexplicable grief on their birthdays. They somehow remind us of a loss that no one will talk about.



We mourn in silence. We don't want to risk upsetting or hurting our adoptive parents, so when our losses are talked about as a positive, we keep quiet.



We become an empty vessel for other people to fill with their own story.



Eventually, we start retelling those myths we've been fed ourselves.



And after a while, our first families disappear completely from our own stories. And so do we.



During the pushing stage at the birth of my first child, it seemed that my body was possessed by my mother. She was me, and I was the child on my way out into the world. It is recommended that you use visualization techniques to help you through the demanding labor. Each contraction, however painful, brings you closer to your baby.

But what do you do when the contractions are pulling you away from it?



I was taken from my mother as a newborn. Was she even allowed to hold me?



An image of that separation has been stored in my body for all those years, and now it throws me into total darkness.



Night after night, I watched over my newborn son, ready to pick him up if he woke up feeling lonely.



Each cry tore me apart. I thought he sounded like an abandoned child.



I was tormented by nightmare visions, in which I die and Teddy is taken away to an orphanage...



to later be adopted and taught to forget that I'd ever been his mother.



I thought about the little child I once was. Who lived in Korea, who was Wool Rim.* Who was Korean, who spoke Korean. Who may have been abandoned, but was still part of something bigger...



who was put on a plane with a one-way ticket to Sweden, accompanied by an escort who didn't look like anyone she'd ever seen before...