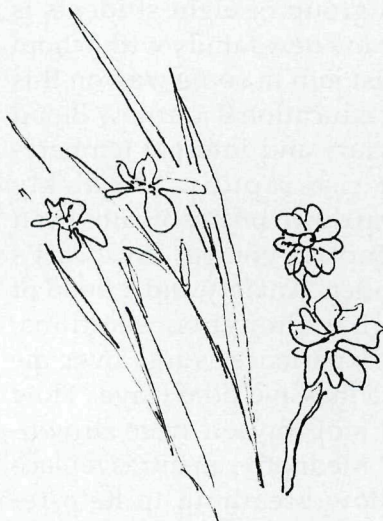


TIGER'S ROAR: EMBARKING ON THE VOYAGE OF A SOCIAL WORK DOCTORAL PROGRAM

This article is the author's narrative of her transition into a doctoral program of social work as a point of departure to illuminate recurring themes of seeking connection and dialogue with sojourners. Through the intense self-reflexive Korean "talk-story," the ongoing self re-construction with personal history is described. Strengths emerging from experiences of a loss of homeland from intercountry adoption and healing paths remain invisible without the compassionate commitment of sojourners. The gifts of this evolving talk-story emerge in the form of unanswerable questions for cultivation. As client, consumer, and practitioner in a doctoral program of social work, the author situates these questions as necessary for understanding the "helping professional" roles.

By
Elizabeth KimJin Traver

Elizabeth Kimjin Traver, MSW, is a doctoral student, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, Denver CO



Introduction

In my country of origin, Korea, tigers have always had a special place in the hearts of the people. "Having had to share our habitat with the most terrible animal from time immemorial, we spun myths and tales around the tiger that made it our friend, guardian, and mentor. We refuse to regard a being of such noble form and marvelous strength as a mere rapacious beast. We infuse into the tiger nobility, magnanimity surpassing human beings, and laughter" (*Tiger, Burning Bright*, 1992, p.7). Ancient Koreans believed that the tiger was the messenger of the Spirit of the Mountain and thus a bearer of good fortune—a spirit to be respected instead of feared.

Gus Lee's recent novel *Tiger's Tail* (1996) situates the metaphorical tiger as the American antagonist. His preface offers the fable, "Hungry men hunt the tiger, but brave men pull the tiger's tail. In Asia, the tiger is America." I have appropriated the tiger as an ideal type (Weberian sense) archetype for my life journey in America. I am

at once Korean and American. The tiger emerges from experiences of relinquishment by my Korean family at the age of 15 months and loss of homeland through adoption into an American family at the age of 22 months. What my life journey reveals is the emergence of sojourners without whom connection has been impossible. The loss of homeland, whether internally or externally imposed, is met pervasively and persistently in the socially constructed relationships of adoption and discrimination. Transforming loss of homeland into the skills of humanizing, inclusionary social work practice is the evolving challenge. The transition of adopting academic activity in a doctoral program is the current, temporary disjuncture where all life experiences collide. To make sense of this new territory, I



must roar the message of a Korean tiger while I dare to pull the tail (tale) of my American one. This "talk-story" is a process of integrating two tigers into a unified voice as it attempts to negotiate a Western defined path of a doctoral studies program in social work. The Asian talk-story is more than mere language and communication. Talk-story is more than generational relationship, presentation of self, and cultural lifestyle. Talk-story is life as humanly felt, experienced, understood, and expressed. Talk-story leaves more unanswerable questions than explanation. Those unanswerable questions are gifts. Those gifts dissolve temporal demarcations of existence and present abstract images from concrete words. These are for contemplation. Talk-story unravels, weaves, and flows themes of being and becoming among seas of cultural familiarity. These are for cultivation. I offer this talk-story to *Samshin Halmoni*--the Korean Taoist grandmother spirit--for blessing.

As Mary Chamberlain states in her introduction to *Writing Lives* (1988, p. ix), "the spoken word is forced into a literary strait-jacket not of its choosing and for which it was never intended." Talk-story struggles to exist in a Western world of reason and rationality. The tension between my Korean tiger and an American tiger is metaphor at a meta-level for the lived experiences of Korean adoptees' loss of homeland. Chamberlain calls for the motivation to change to be at the

heart of any writer. She claims, "writing exposes not only the self, but a self-view of the world, and the energy it requires is too charged to be confined to a single act of creativity. Creativity rarely confines itself to writing, but spills over into the very circumstances of lives; into politics, or education, into a desire to make the writer's world, and that of others, more humane" (p.ix). That is the mission of and hope for my tiger's roar.

Talk-Story of the Novice Doctoral Student

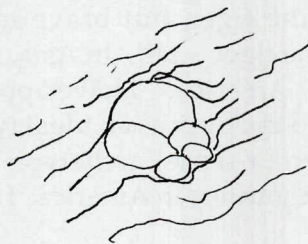
It is late summer in the Rocky Mountains. Engaging in my beloved pastime of river kayaking, I notice the prominence of smooth rocks and boulders as the water flows ebb. The tiger arouses in joy. I love these rocks. I can choose to dance and play around them or float along with the current, trusting years of experience and skills. These are familiar risks, dangers, and companions which are easily navigable. If I trust it, water is supportive in its flow. If I fight it, water will dominate and overpower me.

Other thoughts interrupt my river trip. I have wanted to travel the path of a doctoral program for ages. My Korean tiger hungers for education. A door has opened and soon I will em-

bark upon the new route of a doctoral program in social work--with unforeseeable rapids and obstacles to be negotiated as they appear. My internal battles will emerge full blown along this path which will ask of me to trust an unknown process. Self-doubt begins to seep into my sense of well being with questions of the Western temporal future. I allow these ruptures of self-efficacy and self-competence to flow through me as I complete my river journey. "*Dear granddaughter, have no fear. I am with you always. You are good and strong. Be brave.*"

Orientation day for the new class of doctoral students in social work. I walk into a sea of White male and female faces. This group of eight students is now my new family with whom I must join in some way on this new educational journey. Blood pressure and internal temperature rise rapidly. I quickly clamp down on my breaths in an attempt to control my heart's thunder. Anxiety and a flood of familiar thoughts, emotions, and experiences surge over me like a massive tidal wave. How do I stop myself from drowning? Meditative mantras replace shallow breathing to help restore my equilibrium.

Our doctoral program director enters. This gentle Native American's calm and quiet demeanor attempts to reduce the students' fears of the unknown. He launches into a summary of the emphasis, requirements, and expectations of this particular program. His words embody a Western scientific ra-



tionalist paradigm. In no uncertain terms, this doctoral program of social work intends to produce Western social scientific researchers capable of rigorous study. Hope for connection with his unique journey in academia fizzles. My spirit trembles with the beginnings of what I recognize. I want to run away. I feel the presence beside me of an American ghost which appears and reappears with each new educational journey.

"Flat Face, Jap, Chink, Gook, Nip." These are the terms of endearment bestowed upon me, growing up in a sixties segregated town in Illinois. These names from my childhood peers continue to haunt me in my nightmares. As the first Asian in a small farming community, I found my destiny was to negotiate with the sharply divided Black and White residents a new pattern of "race relations." My every attempt to reject this honored role was thwarted, especially by the ghost.

When I was five years old, the ghost was a mean-spirited witch who punished "bad" questions and wrong behavior with shame, humiliation, pathological labelling, "detention time," daily memos to my parents, psychological referrals, and public ostracization. My Korean tiger's roar was interpreted by those in positions of authority and power as deviance. Questions of "why" were not to be tolerated. For the witch, "Why" implied potential for non-conformity. My voice changed from a whisper where no one believed me to silence

where no one heard me. Why is the ghost angry with me? Why did the ghost knock the wind out of my tiger's roar?

When I was 12 years old, the ghost became a hyper-vigilant prison warden who rewarded "good" questions and good behavior with increased opportunities for demonstrating the correct set of skills. The prison warden befriended my confused parents who learned how to give rewards in response to my correct assimilation. My actions became my currency and necessary passport into the true and only world, made up of hypocrisy and fear. I learned that I must not have a voice. I learned that I did not want a face. All that remained was a thinking mind. I learned that to be alive meant being just a mind supported by a body to be shaped, formed, written upon, and programmed to perform expected proper functions with no reference to culture or gender and devoid of power and self. I discovered that learning was my means to survival. I am a very good learner.

In my freshman year of college, I learned that the true and only heaven lay accessible through manipulation of the American language. My witch and prison warden had been transformed into the sacred cow of Western science from which I would receive nurturance as I climbed the democratic hierarchy of educational success. It is here where I was formally introduced to and invited to participate in the dance of "Western civilization." I have not been able to exit or change this for-

mal dance.

My four year initiation into "higher" education was profound. Born into an Eastern culture and raised in a Western culture, I learned that my truth has been markedly polarized and politically disempowered from how truth has been defined and valued in America. My Asian identity and emerging sense of self have been challenged continuously in all interactions, personal and political: "You are not logical. Rewrite your thinking. That is not right or true! Your perception is distorted; your memory must be aborted. Schizophrenic child, this is who you are!" In a battle to survive (it is the Korean sense of self that battles to survive) the conscious negotiation of my Korean sense of self with Western ideologies fled underground.

Navigating a poisoned waterscape filled with submerged mines of ignorance, fear, and subtle intimidation, I met the first of many significant others, those mentors who through their commitment and continual "conscious use of self" became sojourners of the human soul. These sojourners nurture my tiger spirit, continue to speak to me of community, connection, and change, and serve as exemplars of how loss can become gain in a chaotic world of pain. My first sojourner, a Chicano Marxist sociologist, created space for me to fly beneath unassuming skies reflecting my own truth! If I listen carefully, I can still hear him whisper "everything is possible, believe in yourself Elizabeth."

Week one of the doctoral program. Happy Birthday, Elizabeth. When you were born, among the many gifts your Korean family gave you was a beautiful name—Kim Jin. You had a father who loved you beyond words. You remember delicate details: his warm watery eyes; his handsome porcelain chiseled face; the sound of his gentle, joy-filled voice; the smell of softly ironed white shirts; and a deeply ingrained



sadness that you could not fathom nor erase. He fed you. He held you close. He nurtured your mind, body, and tiger spirit. He held you among the moon and stars—and then gave you away to the world.

In Korea, birthdays are milestone events when individuals take time to stop and pay homage to their ancestors, the ones who gave them life. Whom will you honor today as those who give you life? Whom will you take time for to stop, remember, and give thanks? The dead ones whose fading memory no longer sustains you? After losing first your Korean family through relinquishment, your Korean culture through adoption, and your American family through death, the world continually asks you to re-create

family and identity for yourself. How can you do this alone in non-reciprocal relationships?

On this day I am forced to ask myself the painful question—who is my family now? Who will provide the support necessary to face the challenges of a doctoral program in social work? Will it be those friends who have survived the attrition forces of major life changes? Will it be my doctoral program peers who seem to perceive my silence in class as stereotypical Asian stoicism, passivity, and elitism? *America, you value freedom of speech; Asia, we value freedom of silence* [Chu, 1990]). Will it be the doctoral teaching staff who are limited by Western curriculum, personal economics, and university philosophy in their advocacy for creative, critical, and different thinking? How do I reach out in hopes of connection and belonging? How do I lend my tiger's roar to others?

Week two of the doctoral program. Welcome to Economics 101 and prepare yourself for a shock! It has just now come to my attention that the award of a full-time Graduate Research Assistantship has reduced the amount of financial aid loans I am eligible for and from which I initially based a realistic bud-

get for living. Re-evaluating my budget for full-time enrollment, I discover I have more subsistence needs than resources. Panic and confusion set in. A few quick breaths reboot my system to functional. How have other doctoral students managed?

"I have my spouse who supports me and makes it possible for me to study." "I have a full-time job which allows me to flex my work schedule so I can take classes." "I have my parents who are helping me financially for the next few years." "I have my ethnic community which provided me with financial support." My losses of homeland, community, and family punctuate the privilege these peers access in external resources. I inhale. Suddenly, I am bombarded with their questions intended as support. "Didn't you plan for this?" Yes, but life happens. "Aren't there minority scholarships in the program?" No. "Aren't you eligible for financial aid?" Yes, but it's not enough. "Don't you have family to help out?" No. "Can't you find extra work?" Not without withdrawing from full-time study. "Is this the right time in life for you to be in full-time study?" Perhaps the universe is sending me an answer.

Must one be economically privileged before making a commitment to a doctoral program? Does one acquire economic privilege as a result of completing a doctoral program? What exactly is valued 'being priced' in doctoral programs? Professors' time? Access to libraries and databases? Permis-



sion to participate in prescribed study? Enhanced status and prestige? Loss of income, competence, and independence? Who am I in this doctoral program? Am I client, consumer, creator, or promoter of inflexible, repressive social structures? Who am I to become along this desert river's journey? These existential questions transform abstract logic into concrete fear. Tiger stirs defensively in fear's presence.

Current attention to multi-culturism, rather than increasing understanding of difference, mystifies real class division. Recruitment issues for greater minority representation which revolve around financial resources and allocation seem to intensify the antagonism felt by members of the majority. "Every minority I've known has always had a free ride in education. That's America." Had my peers ever asked me directly, I would have freely told them that I have never in my history received any financial benefits for being Korean, working class, or academically exceptional.

C'est la vie capitaliste. A Korean fierce independence, not a Western rugged individualism, forces me to compensate for this unforeseeable crisis of inadequate support. I sell my vehicle for a "beater" Flintstone-mobile and squirrel away the proceeds for the hard winter ahead. I pray that I experience no major health needs, that the gravity furnace doesn't levitate, and that my small 75 year-old "fixer-upper" home will provide adequate shelter.

Up to this point, I have

prided myself on my ability to commit to and pursue my education with foresight and planning. Personal responsibility, self-esteem, and courage fade in the mirror of a non-reciprocal environment. The financial support question looms as a threatening dark cloud which hovers over this stretch of my river. There are no guarantees on the river or in life, only commitments. How do I maintain commitment to this path? Who is willing to offer a commitment of sustained support to me? How do I create a community of support which will sustain a commitment to this life's journey?

Week three of the doctoral program. I am unable to flow. There is no current, yet. There are swirls and eddies and deep undercurrents which keep me stuck in this stagnant pool of water. The extremely Westernized curriculum, lack of primary sources, outdated materials, and lack of diversity in both coursework and student population intensifies a dry, sterile, rigidly prescribed technical social work research program. I cannot afford to take an elective course in another department to keep my spirit alive. I wonder how my spirit will survive.

Korean roots dictate that I dare not disclose my pain to the doctoral program. "Dear granddaughter, hold to your heart always our ancient saying: you must not step on even the shadow of your teacher (*Handbook of Korea*, 1987, p.443)." *Samshin Halmoni*, how can I pull the tiger's tail when you place academia safely outside the realm of critique and self-reflec-

tion? I must trust my grandmother's spirit now, since I do not trust my path.

In both Korea and America, institutions do not exist to serve the needs of individuals. I must accept this as my present reality. This has always been my reality. I close my eyes and my body remembers. Face up, bound and paralyzed in a noisy sea of cribs, I scream infant roars of grief and confusion only to have my tears, cries, pain, and needs met with silence. I was invisible in this poverty-stricken orphanage in Seoul. I imported malnutrition,



starvation, and failure-to-thrive symptoms with me to America as permanent evidence of institutional agendas.

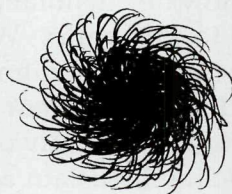
Overwhelmed with memories of loss, I reach out to my spiritual brother, a fellow Korean adoptee. His voice of understanding creates the safe space I need for being. Simply being. "I know this journey is painful. Have faith. Remember, out of the muck and mud in which the lotus plant grows emerges a beautiful blossom which is you. It is also the throne upon which Buddha sits. Allow the seed of the lotus plant

to germinate out of your heart. Be patient, be vulnerable, be strong, be who you are, an individual who has weathered much in her journey but who has in the future an incredible transformation journey to yet experience. Love, Fellow Sojourner." I exhale, exhale, exhale.

Week four of the doctoral program. Academic activity is now my current social work practice. I have been allowed entrance to access an elite position in pursuit of a doctoral degree. To reap the rewards of such a privileged position, I must write in the legitimated, academic, depersonalized voice of "objectivity." I peer into this dark and narrow tunnel to see no glimmer of hope, no space for expression of my full humanity. I feel stripped down and cored out, nothing more than a hollow skeleton which must grin and dance and tap along a treadmill void of individual meaning. My face is thin and withdrawn. My clothes hang on me two sizes too large. Inadvertently, my presentation of self has become metaphor for this journey's meaning. I have turned into the ghosts of my past. How do I transform myself to free myself from history?

Week five of the doctoral program. A peer announces before a mid-term statistics exam that a student has discontinued the program. All mouths drop open and my heart slams shut. Thank you, Buddha, for sadistic statistics which impose a convenient wall around this heart. Exam question number one hits me dead center, one way Chi Square, "goodness of fit" test.

What irony. We use this test every day we struggle through this program. I hear my peers' own questions echo deep within my mind. "Is this the right place for me? Is it failure to choose to leave this obedience training? How long can I endure? What could I have done to offer more support? Her fears were the same as mine. Her doubts mirrored my own. I've lost connec-



tion with another student. I've lost connection to my human self." I gaze into the eyes of my peers seeking mirrors to my soul.

*Kasa for Samshin Halmoni
My tiger stirs angrily.
She awakens reluctantly.
She growls and snaps at me to say:
kill the ghosts, NOW.
Recapture tiger spirit.
Where is self affirmation?
"Defeated?"
By who?
Where is tiger's roaring
compassion?
"Frozen with eyes sealed shut."
Where is tiger's roaring dance of
anger?
"Forgotten."
And yet I hear a growing roar of
outrage.
Why?
My tiger's roars are deafening.
My breathing suffocates me.
My heart is pounding loudly.
My tiger's roars are deafening.
I cannot see the river.
I cannot see the river.
Stop!*

Week six of the doctoral program. Our doctoral program director has required of our class a representative for the doctoral committee meetings. Discussion among my classmates reveals, for reasons of time and energy, that they have excluded themselves from fulfilling this role. I am by default the "elected" doctoral student representative, the chosen one. Thrust into the unwanted role of leadership, I decide to transform this moment into opportunity. May it benefit those I serve. I welcome this chance to form connections with my peers. May I embrace the meaningful tasks of facilitating communication, advocating for adult learners, and creating community with competence. I can see the river's bend.

Week seven of the doctoral program. During a class break, I had the chance to walk with another student. Sharing poignant memories from our past, we discovered the great significance our names hold in being connected to our world. "Several years ago I went to Europe and found an entire community of my surname. This is in striking contrast to my family's isolation in rural Nebraska where no one shared our surname; I was alone. Elizabeth, in this small village in Europe where I could not speak the language, I felt I had come home."

I vulnerably retold my story of discovery that I, too, have a "real" name which connects me to this world. A year ago, a Korean friend offered to translate my adoption papers which were written in Korean.

Searching for any clues to connections to a birth family, she noticed the name, KimJin or "Jinny," which had arrived with me to the orphanage. This information contradicted my adoptive parents who recited a ritualized adoption story lullaby of, "You were named Jeanine Kim in an orphanage by an American. The great stork ship of Korea brought you to us where we gave you your real name." Tears relieve the flood of grieving over losses imbedded in a name. KimJin is a very real connection I retain to my birth family, to Korea, and to my truth. "What's in a name" runs deep within connections to homeland. Thank you *Samshin Halmoni* for this moment of connection with my peer. We are not alone in our pain and recovery of loss of homeland.

Week eight of the doctoral program. My Anglo peers are angry with this school. They protest against assignments which demand that students identify for themselves their personal ideology and theoretical paradigm. They squirm uncomfortably with the requirement of identification. Absorbing these violent reactions, I struggle to join with these broken hearts who seem to have been challenged for the first time to take a stand for themselves. To thine own self be true. The call is for social workers to "know thyself" so that the potential for iatrogenesis diminishes. What is it about declaring identity that seems threatening? Floods of thoughts stream through my consciousness. Could it be that making an as-

sertion of self holds the potential for accountability and responsibility for one's choices, actions, and privileged positions? Could it be that identifying one's values, beliefs, and assumptions reiterates our human limitations? Could it be that reappropriating self requires acknowledgment of, and thus the need to heal from, old wounds of personal history?

Week nine of the doctoral program. In this doctoral program, competition for talking space feels antagonistic. When I speak without the intention of interruption, silence falls. Dialogue turns into soliloquy. I hear my heart thunder. I slow my breathing down. My peers offer no comment on my comments. My social work professors whose roles are to facilitate equal exchange in the classrooms harden into silent monolithic edifices, seemingly oblivious to classroom dynamics. I remain distinct and apart from the chorus of Anglo academia. What is this voice, this voice, this voice?

Echoes of kindergarten ring in memory. My babble of curiosity was muzzled. I became a conditioned experiment to be controlled. "Silence, Elizabeth! Raise your hand in class!" Acknowledgment and permission were prerequisites for visibility and voice. My eyes betrayed what my ears heard. Teachers dedicated to my Americanization reserved a freedom for Anglo children to speak without sanction. Talk-story, please change these painful spiraling repetitions of time.

It has been my karma to

be a "token" minority—the only Asian in class. "Elizabeth, YOU tell us about THE Asian experience." I shed this distasteful honor for I cannot speak for a multiplicity of experiences. I can only advocate for multiplicity. As the only Asian-American in a social work doctoral student population of 40, my position precariously straddles a razor's edge of marginality.

To speak of the persistence of societal racism invokes heated dissent from my peers. Their views would obliterate the concept from all discourse as the prescribed method of eliminating this social problem. My peers do not believe there is cause for discussion given prevalent U.S. laws institutionalizing non-racist equal opportunity. My identity and thus integrity of voice is challenged with every word. Strangled, I struggle just to breathe. Think.

The educator and policy analyst Byron Kunisawa (1994) claims that "we can't change systems as individuals; we can influence how systems affect other individuals." Kunisawa bases this claim on his historical research identifying the U.S. (and British) model for dealing with exclusion as more exclusion—the development of separate systems of service. The politically correct polemic of diversity with all its vagaries is addressed with our American systems' designs of omission. Our systems are unable to resolve social problems quickly; therefore, we have historically created a culture where problems become *normal*, tolerable. What was once unacceptable becomes

"fact of life." Gloria Yamato (1988) echoes Kunisawa's sentiments and writes that "racism is pervasive to the point that we take many of its manifestations for granted, believing 'that's life'...We become so numbed to racism that we don't even think twice about it, unless it is immediately life threatening." (pp.3-6) My heart sinks at the possibility of racism gone underground, especially in social work.

I hear the whispers of my American Indian soul brother. "Elizabeth, I forbid you to minimize your reality. Trust your disjointed self. Return to your integrity. Honor your kaleidoscope of pain. Refuse to remain silent. KimJin, remember who you are. I send you prayers of healing strength and rain." Dear sojourner, when will life not be so hard? "When you accept that life is hard."

Last week of the first trimester. We debrief and reflect upon the last 10 weeks. Our initiation into a doctoral program of social work has been lonely, isolating, and alienating. We have just engaged the struggle with the question: How do we create paths of meaning? We are burnt out and stripped bare, exhausted of all resources. It feels as if we've been through war.

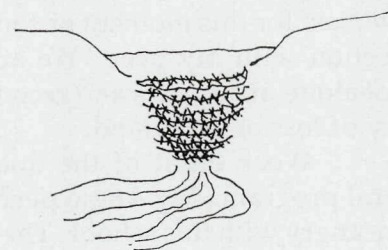
I long to share my talk-story with my peers. I long to acknowledge their discomfort when meeting others from culturally diverse backgrounds and thus learning "about ourselves in unexpected ways, perhaps uncomfortable ways" (Kayser, 1995a). My peers are uncomfortable to gaze inside mirrors

not of their own creation, the mirrors which "otherness" holds up. This clash of realities is an unwanted experience for those who have been sheltered among privileged dominant ideologies and experiences. How can my tiger's roar lift up and soothe their pain?

My most constant companion reminds me I do not talk-story without the intensely felt presence of the personal. This Slovenian American poet's twenty-four hour struggles with my uniqueness involves a well intentioned endeavor to extinguish in particular the tiger's roar of pain. He experiences freedom and safety to share his anger in moments where "skin differences" situate him as a White minority and impose the human unwanted feeling of exclusion. His resistance to giving empathy for an anger from a *life long lived* situation of difference and loss deflects my history of external responses which diminished and minimized intolerable de-humanizing social relationships. He holds up the majority's mirror in his attempts to alleviate such perceived suffering. Glaring eyes penetrate back to me asking "How do I release myself from this mirrored trap—It has been hard to hide my marginal status, or "stranger in a strange land," as conferred upon by members of the United States. It has been painful to be the one who is continually commanded through overt and covert non-verbal communication to include and accept others. Difference and loss deflects my history of external responses which diminished and mini-

mized intolerable, dehumanizing social relationships. He holds up the majority's mirror in his attempts to alleviate such perceived suffering. Glaring eyes penetrate back to me asking: How do I release myself from this mirrored trap—a finely meshed barbed wire dam stretched taut and deep across my river. Him as a White minority and imposes the human unwanted feeling of exclusions. When will I be free of this importunity from non-reciprocal relationships? How does one heal from embedded barbs of oppression?

This new path has been fraught with disappointment.



Overwhelmed and verging on self-doubt, I have asked of myself, what must I change? This is dangerous when asked in isolation. When thrust time after time into a remembered history where my memory and truth were iatrogenically evaluated as bad, wrong, and harmful to others, survival instincts forced me to distance myself in order to hold fast to what is meaningful. Talk-story has transformed this painful pattern. When I feel empty and void of self, when there seems nothing left of self to change, sojourners step in and remind me I have nothing in the world to lose. My heart expands and my sense of self

increases. "Dear granddaughter, what creates distance in others? What are the multiple wedges of separation? Could it possibly be pain?"

In pain my tiger roars "Don't touch my heart!" when in truth my tiger yearns for touch and comfort. I close my eyes and breathe in validation to the tiger's painful outrage. I exhale to expose outrageous wounds. The cleansing air of truth, both stings and heals. May these tiger's roars of ancient pain be given relief through reconnections: to self, to others, to meaning. May my tiger's ears be sharp to other's pain. The tiger's roar attempts no harm, only equal, humanizing sanction. The tiger's roar will not be silenced.

In *A Different Mirror*, Ronald Takaki (1993, p.16) borrows from the poet Adrienne Rich in asking, "What happens when someone in authority describes our society and you are not in it?" Takaki believes that such an experience can be disorienting—"a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing." Throughout my present "tour of duty" in a doctoral program of social work, I have sought mirrors looking for my human truth. I feel like an ethereal tiger ghost whose spirit is unwanted as it stalks along the secluded haunted ivory tower halls. Yet, there is hope for changing this life as lived. This talk-story will change again and again; the conflicts and crises will blur into clarity and kindness. The present will be reinterpreted so that the pain of

exclusion and loss of homeland yields to possibility.

Concluding Thoughts

I am keenly aware that as I choose to adopt the American definition of the role of professional social worker, I am caught between many different and at times opposing ideologies or "self-conscious systems of values" (Ephross & Reisch, 1982, p. 275). I have been blessed with sojourners of my s(e)oul who position themselves as political minorities and who have become expert interpreters of multilevel realities. My survival has depended upon these teachers, mentors, and guides who empower me to discover my own abilities for the continuing negotiation of different cultures and their respective value systems. My social work practice demands that I remain awake (conscious use of self) to ideological effects on my practice. I struggle to achieve harmony among my poetry, politics, work, and personal life. Ann Withorn (1984, p.82) states that not to accomplish this courts personal disaster and the danger of performing harmful work.

I also am unable to escape the realization that my own history and experiences impose myopic lenses of perception. Loss of homeland, whether through adoption or otherwise, creates situations of penetrating grief which color lifelong paths. Prejudice, discrimination, bigotry, racism, and all forms of repressive acts against others are insidious aspects of an environment which give one (of perhaps

an infinite number) clear messages of exclusion. For an international adoptee, the challenge is to not only reconstruct a complete human sense of self, but also to continually transcend institutionalized messages of exclusion at all levels of experience. This is profound. The experiences of relinquishment and adoption and racism are in continuous dialogue with each other. I refuse to be pathologized for the pain which this dialogue imposes upon me. I fully embrace my journeys of healing which require at times that I stand alone, excluded from others' understanding.

Not having been given the opportunity to command a language appropriate to my Korean sense of self, I continually reposition myself today in American society with the realization that I am a Korean who has chosen to intervene in (be present to) the role of social worker with people who choose American philosophies, American ways of knowing. Even the process of familiarizing myself (i.e., formal education) with knowledge foundations based on American ideologies has been tenuous, slow, and discouraging. I have been asked to "learn" using Western language, to perform within Western pedagogies, and to act promoting Western definitions of success. I am wedded to this reality. My tiger's roar of reality is healed with John Kayser's (1995b, p. 20) reintroduction of the social work value of a "community of learners" which must involve reciprocal relationships, positive valuing of differences,

and the willingness to be held accountable to self and other. Therein lies hope. May my heart remain accountable, compassionate, clear, and open to you.

Elena Featherston writes in the preface to *Skin Deep* (1994) of re/memembering as a form of resistance which is a life-affirming and self-defining act. For Featherston, "re/memembering is a cry of defiance in the face of that which would steal our past, predetermine our future, cut short our present, challenge our humanity, render our lives meaningless, and make us invisible" (p. vi). It is important that my memories are voiced before they are lost forever and with them an essential part of my history. It is my hope that my tiger's roar can add to a life lived through words instead of left as an echo into a silence of ancient frailty.

My life's work as a social worker attempts to articulate moments in a non-linear journey of re-memembering a little bit of Seoul through the tiger's roar (the social reconstruction of self)—a metaphor for a social work practice problem, an example of a healing path for international adoptees. Cynthia Ozick (1989, p. 283) believes that through metaphor, "those at the center can imagine what it is to be outside... we strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers." May it be so.

The gifts I have received from this evolving talk-story emerge in the form of unanswerable questions for cultivation. These questions dance around issues of identity and connec-

tion. As client, consumer, and practitioner in a doctoral program of social work, I embrace these questions as necessary for understanding our professional roles. These questions are what we impose upon and demand from our clients. I offer these gifts from a loss of homeland to my ever-expanding community of learners. Who are our families now? How do we reach out in hopes of connection and belonging? How do we lend our tigers' roars to others? Who are we in a doctoral program of social work? Who are we to become along our river journeys? How do we transform ourselves to free ourselves from history? How do we create paths of meaning? May these gifts enrich our evolving social work practice.

This tiger's roar ends with "mianhada," the Korean expression which embodies both the emotions of regret and gratitude. "I am uncomfortable and thank you for being kind." *Samshin Halmoni, mianhada.*

Author Note

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POETRY

By JANICE FINNEY

Without A Map

Lines are easily drawn
in sand; meridians as invisible
as meaning. What is meant
by departure? Unexpectedly
we're left without boundaries
by the South China Sea.
Privacy at stake, tempers swell
and the unrelenting sun
exaggerates the importance
of a moment's space.
Lickety-split time nicks in,
turns the horizon into a finish line
and we return to I, sitting alone
in an equipped kitchen,
discombobulated
by the faucet's surge.
The window is an open sea
to watch after—
noon wintertide rise, froth
from the Chicago snowfall,
while scanning meaning.

By Rote

My name is Heng Teng.
I am born in Cambodia
in 1942. In 1947,
there is a war when I am
little boy. We fight VietNam.
North VietNam. Ho Chi Minh.
In 1954, there is another war
and they sign Geneva Peace.
In 1969, there is another
war. Americans bomb. In 1975,
the communists take over
my country. In 1979 I escape
to Thailand. In 1981, I come
to America where you teach me
to put my feelings in simple words
and you treat me like I am simple.



Janice Finney is a poet and playwright living in Chicago. Her poetry has appeared in several small presses: *Korone*, *Poetry East*, *Sojourner*, *Oyex Review*, *Thorntree Press Anthology*, and *Emergence*. She worked with the Southeast Asian refugee community in Uptown Chicago for 15 years, and most recently worked for 3 years with Habitat for Humanity serving a large group of immigrant families.

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