



Crossing the Blue Willow Bridge: A Journey to My Daughter's Birthplace in China

Nancy McCabe

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Even before Nancy McCabe and her daughter, Sophie, left for China, it was clear that, as the mother of an adopted child from China, McCabe would be seeing the country as a tourist while her daughter, who was seeing the place for the first time in her memory, was “going home.” Part travelogue, part memoir, *Crossing the Blue Willow Bridge* immerses readers in an absorbing and intimate exploration of place and its influence on the meaning of family.

A sequel to *Meeting Sophie*, which tells McCabe’s story of adopting Sophie as a single woman, *Crossing the Blue Willow Bridge* picks up a decade later with a much different Sophie—a ten-year-old with braces who wears black nail polish, sneaks eyeliner, wears clothing decorated with skulls, and has mixed feelings about being one of the few non-white children in the little Pennsylvania town where they live. Since she was young, Sophie had felt a closeness to the country of her birth and held it in an idealized light. At ten, she began referring to herself as Asian instead of Asian-American. It was McCabe’s hope that visiting China would “help her become comfortable with both sides of the hyphen, figure out how to be both Chinese and American, together.”

As an adoptive parent of a foreign-born child, McCabe knows that homeland visits are an important rite of passage to help children make sense of the multiple strands of their heritage, create their own hybrid traditions, and find their particular place in the world. Yet McCabe, still reeling from her mother’s recent death, wonders how she can give any part of Sophie back to her homeland. She hopes that Sophie will find affirmation and connection in China, even as she sees firsthand some of the realities of China—overpopulation, pollution, and an oppressive government—but also worries about what that will mean for their relationship.

Throughout their journey on a tour for adopted children, mother and daughter experience China very differently. New tensions and challenges emerge, illuminating how closely intertwined place is with sense of self. As the pair learn to understand each other, they lay the groundwork for visiting Sophie’s orphanage and birth village, life-changing experiences for them both.

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