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Review of *The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town* By Mary Pipher

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Sudan, struggling to create “home” in Lincoln, Nebraska. Significantly, although refugee experiences in one particular Midwestern city are highlighted, one can imagine that any community of similar size across the entire Great Plains region could be substituted for “Lincoln, Nebraska” as underlying challenges facing new immigrants (language barriers, skill development, education, employment, and adjusting to local customs while simultaneously maintaining cultural traditions, to name a few) remain consistent despite geographical placement.

Throughout the book, the reader is introduced to refugees from a multitude of countries, of varying ages, with unique life stories of challenge and triumph, with whom Pipher has worked. Some of these include a Kurdish family embracing a mother and six sisters; an elementary classroom comprised of refugee children from five different countries; adolescent students from countries as disparate from one another as Vietnam and the Ukraine; young adults from Kosovo, Vietnam, and Iraq; a group of six women of Vietnamese, Mexican, and El Salvadoran heritage attending a conversational Even Start program; and refugees from the Kakuma Refugee camp in Kenya.

The lessons of this book are at once global and personal. On a global level, Pipher shares her knowledge and experience building and maintaining relationships as a cultural broker with individuals from unique countries, backgrounds, family patterns, and living arrangements, while simultaneously interjecting subtle messages for greater understanding of *all* new refugees and immigrants, *regardless* of country of origin, background, family pattern, or living arrangement. On a personal level, it is impossible to read *The Middle of Everywhere* without considering one’s own immigrant history—the challenges and opportunities presented by America, the idealized country with streets paved in gold, that so fascinated (and effectively lured) blood kin from generations past.

In addition to gaining greater understanding of our global village’s occupants and their

The Middle of Everywhere: The World’s Refugees Come to Our Town. By Mary Pipher. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2002. Foreword, appendices, bibliography, afterword, index. xxvi + 390 pp. \$25.00.

“Identity,” writes Pipher, “is no longer based on territory. The world community is small and interconnected. We can learn from this to be kinder and more appreciative of life. And we can learn the importance of understanding the perspectives of all our neighbors in our global village.” Philosophically poignant, *The Middle of Everywhere* presents rich, descriptive narratives of hope, courage, tragedy and resilience through the life-stories of refugees and immigrants, from Bosnia to the

daily struggles for survival as new American residents, the reader secures much practical information, including suggestions about working with people for whom English is a new language and advice on how to become a “cultural broker.”

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