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Call Me Okaasan: Adventures in Multicultural Mothering

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**Call Me Okaasan:
Adventures in Multicultural Mothering**

Suzanne Kamata, ed.
Oregon: Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing, 2009.

Reviewed by Ferzana Chase

Call Me Okaasan : Adventures in Multicultural Mothering includes twenty-one thought-provoking essays on the mothering experiences of women bridging

multiple cultures while raising their children in mixed race unions. Emotions run close to the surface of these essays which describe the wonder and challenges of raising children in different cultures and countries and the lessons learnt in the process.

Some of the essays emphasize the enriching potential of mothering in a multicultural context. Bilingualism not only involves two languages but the understanding of two world views. Violeta Garca-Mendoza writes of the gift of bilingualism and biculturalism as the “magic of being able to go and come back constantly between place and time” (41). For Saffia Far, having her babies delivered in Kyrgyzstan made her appreciate her own health and enjoy her pregnancy away from the “obsessive commercialism of the West” (36). Katherine Barrett’s temporary stay in South Africa gave her an enhanced awareness and sensitivity for other mothers for whom mothering in the midst of violence and poverty was everyday reality. Leza Lowitz’s piece reminds us of how beautiful it can be when two cultures wholeheartedly embrace a child and how a multiracial child can, in turn, overcome the limitations of culture to accept the best of all worlds.

Immigrant mothers struggle with their children’s inability to understand their world views. Some fear their children’s loss of language; others obsess over food and music. At the heart of the collection lies the maternal desire to fill the child’s life with the language, food, and culture that shaped the mother’s life but which now seem far removed from the child’s everyday experience.

When children are raised in multiple cultures there is also a fear that they may not fully adapt to any one culture. Some mothers are anxious to help their children meet the challenge of trying to straddle multiple cultures and learn multiple languages. As the collection shows, however, many of the mothers—not their children—cleave to the past and are bound by their own fears. The mothers themselves need to see the beauty in their present lives and their children often serve as their guides.