

Families and parent-child relationships

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In both Amy Tan's "A Pair of Tickets" and Sherman Alexie's "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona", there is the theme of parents who are somehow absent from their children's lives. Jing-Mei's mother is presented as being more important than her father in the book. Moreover, there are serious misunderstandings between the two. June (Jing-Mei) does all she can to reject her Chinese heritage, and, essentially, her mother's ways. Her mother, to her anger, insists that her Chinese side will always exist. Victor Joseph's story, on the other hand, starts with the loss of the father he has never been close to. Whereas Jing-Mei's mother is emotionally absent from her life, Victor's is physically absent. Victor is left with the task of making plans to go for his father's remains in order to bring them back to the reservation.

It is obvious that Jing-Mei and her mother are both severely influenced by the cultures in which they both grew up. Jing-Mei's mother was a foot-bound woman of ancient China; Jing-Mei, on the other hand, grew up to appreciate American culture more than Chinese culture. Jing-Mei's mother's relationship with her own daughter was also determined by the culture in which she grew up. In Chinese culture, speech is not emphasized on as much as non-verbal cues are. Whereas Jing-Mei wanted her mother to verbalize things she was feeling, her mother expected her to pick up on non-verbal cues. This breakdown in communication caused Jing-Mei to turn elsewhere for an understanding of how or what her self-identity would be.

Victor Joseph, on the other hand, was brought up with a basically absent father. After Victor's father abandoned the family, Victor spoke to him on very few occasions over the phone. However, the pain that Victor

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experienced upon learning of his death convinced him that he still cared for his father. However, Victor did not have the opportunity to form a relationship with him. Instead, Victor would develop a relationship with Thomas- who had promised Victor's father before his passing that he would take care of his son (Kennedy and Gioia 292). Thomas Builds-The-Fire would be the individual who helped Victor to reconcile with his role as a man and choose to move forward with his life instead of regressing into self-pity. Essentially, he served as a surrogate father. Thomas spoke of the loneliness of his life to Victor, and shared about being an orphan, among other hardships.

The journey to recover his father's remains and belongings would serve as the beginning of a healing period for Victor as he spoke with Thomas. Jing-Mei also had to go for a physical journey to her place of birth, China, before she could learn to accept her authentic culture. After her mother's death, Jing-Mei accompanied her father to China. It was on arrival there that she experienced feelings that convinced her that she was part of that culture. For both Jing-Mei and Victor, it would seem that they both discovered their true connections to their parents after their parents had passed on. Jing-Mei met her two sisters and experienced the thrill of hearing them refer to her mother when they looked at her. On hearing the meaning of her mother's name, "Long-Cherished Wish", it occurred to her that her mother had always hoped to win back her daughter. She probably felt that her mother's love and blessing was extending beyond the grave by finding such contentment in the discovery of her authentic Chinese character.

Victor also found a surrogate father in Thomas. Both Thomas and Victor had very different experiences growing up, but they were both of Native

American ethnicity and they experienced similar challenges with their culture and what it said about the relationships between children and parents. Victor had an erratic relationship with his own father, but Thomas had none. Thomas' story-telling was a mask that he used to cover up his loneliness all through the years of being alone. Victor, like Jing-Mei, was suddenly cut-off from a critical relationship just before he began to discover the true essence of being an adult in this world. Thomas, who had gone through the pain of dead parents before, was in the perfect position to step in and offer comfort. While Victor gained by getting a surrogate father, Thomas gained by getting a long life friend. It would seem that both Jing-Mei and Victor were finally reconciled to their parents after their passing.

Work Cited

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Kennedy, J. Charles, & Dana Gioia. *Backpack Literature* Fourth Edition. New York: Longman, 2011. Print.