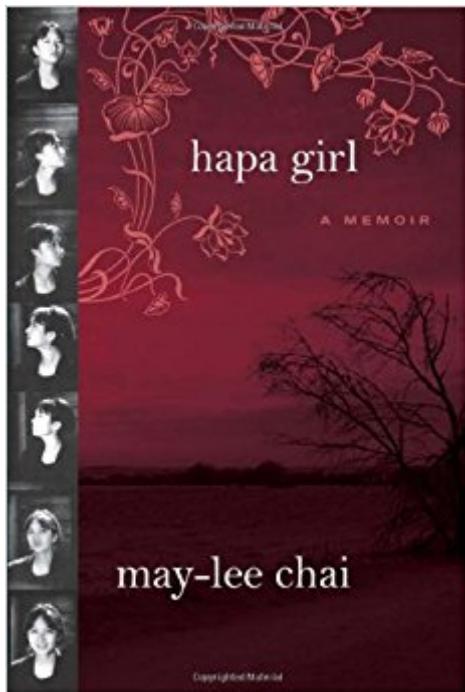


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# Hapa Girl: A Memoir



## Synopsis

In the mid-1960s, Winberg Chai, a young academic and the son of Chinese immigrants, married an Irish-American artist. In *Hapa Girl* ("hapa" is Hawaiian for "mixed") their daughter tells the story of this loving family as they moved from Southern California to New York to a South Dakota farm by the 1980s. In their new Midwestern home, the family finds itself the object of unwelcome attention, which swiftly escalates to violence. The Chais are suddenly socially isolated and barely able to cope with the tension that arises from daily incidents of racial animosity, including random acts of cruelty. May-lee Chai's memoir ends in China, where she arrives just in time to witness a riot and demonstrations. Here she realizes that the rural Americans' "fears of change, of economic uncertainty, of racial anxiety, of the unknowable future compared to the known past were the same as China's. And I realized finally that it had not been my fault."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A heavy dose of bitterness keeps Chai's memoir of growing up in South Dakota with a Chinese-American father and a Caucasian mother from registering deeply. The Chai family, used to liberal, progressive California and New York City, suffered terribly when Chai's father took a post at a rural university: prejudice ran deeply in the little town where they settled. Shots were fired close to their house, their pets were killed and the author and her brother were the victims of racist verbal assaults. The author still seems angry, and her frustration comes across like angst teenage impudence. She's angry that her naïve father made the rash decision to move at all ("My father had the more pressing issue of his destiny to attend to"). Years later, still trapped in South Dakota,

she mentions, "I... couldn't believe my father had made us leave our home to live in this place." And she's angry that she had to attend what she calls "Stephen King High." But it's not all gloom: Chai's mother, a canny woman who smiled in the face of prejudice and amassed her own group of friends, is the book's star. Her courage, recounted by her daughter, saves this otherwise one-note memoir. Illustrations. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Chai, daughter of a Chinese American father and Irish American mother, traces the family's move from New York, where her father taught Asian studies, to South Dakota in 1979 when she was 12. There they are met first with stares, then bigoted remarks, and finally violence, which escalates over time. The Chais finally realize they have landed in a "perfect storm" of racism and paranoia: still rampant anti-Japanese feelings, the fear that jobs were being lost to Asia, and the always strained relations between Native Americans and whites, exacerbated by Native demonstrations. Her father hopes to relocate but soon realizes he has been blacklisted by his administration. By then May-Lee has given up on trying to fit in; she is "merely trying to survive." Her junior year abroad in Nanjing enables her to put her South Dakota experience in perspective, for there she observes the same fear of change, economic uncertainty, and racial anxiety that led to the bigotry her family has faced. Deborah DonovanCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Powerful memoir of the author's parents--her-Chinese American Dad and Caucasian blonde Mom, as they move from New York to South Dakota and experience shattering racism, a personal Heart of Darkness that is at times funny but also painful. Extremely readable, this is one of those books you motor through at one sitting, going, Wow, wow, wow.

This book was very easy to read. I really enjoyed the story, a view on a tender life that many have experinced. I am glad I read this book.

Not only is this book beautifully and compellingly written, it makes poignant and sharp commentary about the positioning of multiracial peoples in the United States. May-lee Chai's powerful testimonial about living as a mixed race girl in 1980s South Dakota is a narrative we don't often hear but one we need to hear a lot more of. Her experience there was far from the fairytale we're often spoon-fed by the media today about multiraciality being "beyond race," post-racial and a symbol of a race

carefree future. The fear, pain, confusion, sadness Chai experienced are vital stories that need to part of the larger race conversation. In addition, this book is just superbly penned. Chai's writing style is artistic, compelling, gorgeous. It's hard to stop reading; it's hard to stop learning; it's simply put - hard to put down. You need to read this book, it will expand your thinking and open your mind...

This is a memoir about perseverance and courage, of familial love. Hard to put down except when I read about conflicts and racism the author and family encountered. (Hits too close to home.) The book reveals the ethnic dynamics in a small town in SD a few decades ago: a nice family life turned inside out; challenges already existed in local community fueled the disdain for a mixed-race family. Chai's voice is passionate and incisive. Her description of the settings, relationships around her, and her view of the world is distinct, vivid. I admire the author's mother, especially. Her positivity and resilience is love and beauty. We can all learn from this book.

I have read all of Chai's books and found each one carefully crafted. Chai is articulate, and her commanding voice has an authority that sweeps the reader up and over the plains of rural Wyoming, a place of natural beauty and also a warped, ungenerous and unwelcoming social milieu which becomes Hapa Girl's crucible. Chai's rendering of a Chinese-American family's struggle to be recognized, respected and ultimately accepted is heart-rendingly believable, in many instances heartbreakingly sad, but finally redemptive. It's the sort of narrative that challenges the reader (could I manage these circumstances if I were the protagonist?) and ultimately shows us not that suffering is ennobling, but that there are survivors who have come through suffering's gauntlet and emerged with wise conviction and a formidable dignity. Five stars for this book and its talented, smart and wise author!

I really found Hapa Girl to be an extremely moving memoir. I related to so many of the issues this book describes. And I entirely disagree with the reviewer who said this was \*bitter.\* I thought the writing was funny and uplifting despite the many sad episodes that the family had to endure. Perhaps the reviewer has never had to personally face prejudice. But if you've been judged by your appearance or faced bigotry and violence, or even if you simply oppose bigotry, I think this memoir will resonate with you! I thought the writing was wonderful and will recommend this to my friends and family. This is a story about love ultimately triumphing over evil!\*Another one of my favorite book from this author is The Girl from Purple Mountain: Love, Honor, War, and One Family's Journey

## from China to America

I found Hapa Girl to be a compelling story told by an engaging writer. The book just flew by, to the point where I wished it were a little longer. I liked that she told her personal story in the context of her family's history and of American history. Although I've read books about biracial families, immigrants, and small-town racial bigotry before, this story is still unusual and fresh. While she is a talented story teller, my only criticism is that the memoir's narrative arc is inconsistent, and the emphasis seemed to shift throughout the book. I think a longer version to fill in some of the blanks would remedy that.

I could not put this book down... it was alive and witty and just plain filled with love of this girls family her mother played a very important part in this girls life , maylee since has lost her mother to breast cancer . the story was so wonderful depicting how a family with different racial backgrounds . Maylee is outspoken and make the book come alife to me . thanks you for the wonderful story of part of my family.. always aunt susan

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