

Quotes from *Growing Up Asian In Australia.*

Introduction – *Alice Pung*

- Most teen fiction gave me the idea that I needed extensive plastic surgery.
- Growing up is a funny time. During no other period will we experience so many ‘firsts’: first day at school, first friend, first love, first fear, first heartbreak, first loss, first epiphany.
- Asian-Australians have often been written about by outsiders, as outsiders. Here, they tell their own stories.
- Because the stories deal so insightfully with the challenges of coming to terms with multiple identities, they move beyond crude labels such as ‘bananas’ and ‘coconut’s. We are not fruit, we are people.

The Relative Advantages of Learning My Language – *Amy Choi*

- Though I was raised speaking Chinese, it wasn’t long before I lost my language skills. I spoke English all day at school, listened to English all night on TV.
- I didn’t see the point of speaking Chinese. We lived in Australia.
- I have often wondered how aware my mum is of the connection between Granddad’s death and my every-improving Chinese.
- I am constantly adding new words to my Chinese vocabulary, and memorising phrases I can throw into a conversation at will. It is an organic way of relearning a language.
- I am simply trying to ensure that the next time an elderly relative wants me to listen to them, I am not only willing, I am able.

The Beat of a Different Drum – *Simon Tong*

- Why would an Australian woman, three times my age, someone I had never met before, call me her love?
- Crossing the classroom threshold was like stumbling through a portal into a foreign country. I was robbed of speech, hearing and literacy.
- Each lesson was like a foreign movie without subtitles.
- I told myself I would be fine if I just sat quietly in a corner in class like I did in Hong Kong.
- Even the thick air, superheated, utterly bereft of moisture, felt alien on my skin.
- I was the new animal at the zoo, fenced in by concentric throngs of teenage boys.
- Robbed of speech again, but this time both inside and outside the classroom, I was stripped of my dignity and personality as well. My ethnicity made me conspicuous, but my reticence made me invisible.
- If I couldn’t express myself, who was my self?
- My relationship with English became a lot friendlier once I started to learn not just its grammar and vocabulary, but also to listen to its music.

Pigs from Home – *Hop Dac*

- I was brought up in the belief that any good Vietnamese family was a self-sustaining one.
- Our nameless pigs lived with the chickens, ducks and geese in their corrugated-iron houses in the animal enclosure.
- Right there was the divide between the old world and the new.
- Now, I live on the other side of the country, in Footscray, where alongside the traditional beef noodle soup, 'pho', there is a spicy noodle soup called 'bun bo hue' that is also very popular. I have it with pig's blood and it reminds me of home.

Exotic Rissole – *Tanveer Ahmed*

- I admired his crew cut and was riveted by his rat's tail, which he sported with great confidence. I wished I had a rat's tail, but my parents were horrified, believing it would be my first step towards juvenile justice.
- My chances of meeting a girl were zip while my father was channeling 1970s rural Bangladeshi fashion through me, Lynchy said.
- It was embarrassing to be good at studies and I tried to hide my scholastic abilities as much as possible.
- My parents fought a lot too, but they seemed to have no problems staying together.
- Aussies were definitely different, I thought to myself.
- I saw Daryl a few more times that year, but we became more distant as our worlds grew apart.

Are You Different? – *Mia Francis*

- My son didn't come to me in the 'normal' way. I collected him fully-clothed, toilet-trained and with a blue and white plastic guitar strung around his neck.
- Ricky is eighteen now and a very fine young person he has grown to be. I have raised him as my own son, my own flesh and blood, but I have raised him as an Australian.
- That's not because I didn't want to honour his Asian heritage, but because if I had tried to raise him in his own culture it would have been a falsehood.
- To know a culture you have to live it, and we didn't live in the Phillipines – we lived in suburban Adelaide.
- Unfortunately, the world is full of people eager to judge and express what a terrible thing it is to take a child from their culture and country. But tell me, what culture is there in desperate poverty, hunger, sickness and child labour?
- We had only had him for eighteen months and already it was time for him to go out into the world.
- Perhaps further down the track he came to realise we were both different. We stood out – fair-haired, light-skinned parents with a dark-skinned Asian child.
- His best friend is a gentle blond-haired boy called Daniel whom Ricky and other members of 'the gang' have given the status of 'honorary Asian'.
- Ricky wants to find his people; he needs to know his roots.

Tourism – *Benjamin Law*

- There were clear designated activities, and auditory and visual stimuli that transcended barriers of race, language and age.
- Once through the gates, we kids would do our best to distinguish ourselves from the actual Asian tourists.
- Mum would sabotage all our efforts to set ourselves apart.
- In the carts in front of us, mothers and fathers sat alongside each other with their children jammed in the middle. Obese as they were, they even held hands.
- I'd watch them intently: like an outsider, like a tourist.
- I wondered what they thought of our family, and whether they questioned why the Chinese family's parents sat so far away from one another. Maybe it was a cultural thing.

My First Kiss – *Lian Low*

- When I was growing up, I never saw people share mouth-to-mouth kisses.
- Maybe it's every other little girl's dream to grow up and have breasts so that they can fill out their frocks. Not me. I envied my father's flat chest and how he could go topless without being self-conscious.
- Becoming more 'womanly', I suddenly lost footing in my tomboy world.
- The dynamics of my friendships with my male playmates changed. I retreated into my own private attic, literally and symbolically.
- Although English was the language I spoke in, dreamt in and created my reality in, I felt a foreigner whenever I opened my mouth. Whenever I spoke, my accent betrayed my origins.
- My attempts to blend in failed as soon as I opened my mouth.
- Creativity and my personal growth have gone hand in hand. Thanks to my writing and performing, the big private turning points in my life have become very memorable public events.
- Writing and performance have been outlets. They have let me be myself, express myself and explore my multiple identities: Asian, woman, queer, migrant, Chinese-Malaysian-Australian.

A Call to Arms – *Michelle Law*

- I tried to explain that I was just born that way, and that most Chinese girls don't have much hair on their arms, save for a fine fuzz.
- Now that I thought about it, everything up to that point in my life seemed so incredibly abnormal compared to everyone else I knew.
- At lunchtimes, my friends chose from a selection of neat and colourful packaged foods, an apple, or a vegemite sandwich cut into little soldiers. I had soymilk, cheong-fun and flavoured seaweed.
- The differences did not stop there.
- My siblings and I seemed to be working alone together, teetering between our Chinese heritage and our incredibly Australian upbringing. I had never felt alienated by Australian culture, but I was certainly aware of not fitting in.
- I could completely lose myself in a giant swarm of people [in Hong Kong]; the anonymity, which was something I had never dreamed I might value, made me feel euphoric.

- The 'stand out from the crowd' mentality had hitherto been deeply ingrained in my mind, but for the first time I was happy just to disappear... to be invisible.
- The locals could probably smell my foreignness and in some bizarre, ironic twist I began to feel self-conscious about being Australian.
- I felt ashamed that I did not know more about my heritage, and even more ashamed at being embarrassed of my Australian upbringing, something that has significantly shaped my identity.
- To this day I am to some extent confused... am I more Asian or Australian?

The Courage of Soldiers – *Pauline Nguyen*

- Pauline's father: 'You are like cars with no direction, and I am your steering wheel, leading you in the right direction'.
- My father feared that his children would lose the old culture. At home, we spoke Vietnamese to our parents and English to each other. We practiced all the formal traditions and lived the pious Vietnamese way.
- My father had hoped that the two very different cultures could blend into one well-adjusted whole.
- My father placed tremendous pressure on us from an early age – an average result was a failure in his eyes.
- Fear dominated every day of my childhood. Fear and the dog shit covering the yard were the smells of my youth.
- He had never attempted to get to know or understand his children.
- Poor Leroy: how confused he must have felt to be abandoned by his sister.
- Leaving my three brave brothers was the most painful part of running away – leaving them to face the consequences and pick up the pieces once I had gone.