Digging to America By Anne Tyler

MAIN CHARACTERS

Donaldsons

Bitsy - Jin-Ho and Xiu- Mei’s mother, Brad’s wife, very “American”, into healthy food, very opinionated and her talking style sometimes irritate Yazdans.

Brad - Jin-Ho and Xiu- Mei’s father, Bitsy’s husband, very tender and care for Bitsy.
Jin-Ho Dickinson- Donaldsons- 1st adopted daughter from Korea at 6 months old to Donaldsons.

Xiu -Mei Dickinson-Donaldsons- 2nd adopted daughter from China to Donaldsons. Compared to Jin-Ho, she is not healthy and often visits a doctor.

Yazdans

Ziba - Susan’s mother, Sami’s wife, immigrated with her family from Iran when she was in high school. Interior decorator. very assimilated into American culture and wants to raise Susan in American way.

Sami - Susan’s father, Ziba’s husband, he was born in United States and refused to speak Farsi (iranian Language) when he was four years old. Realtor. helps a lot around house and raising Susan.

Susan - Ziba and Sami’s adopted daughter from Korea at 6 months old. She was worried by their parents about her slow physical and cognitive development and compared to Jin-Ho often, but she grew up fine.

Maryam -Immigrant from Iran when she got married with an Iranian husband. Widow. Sami’s mother and grandmother of Susan. She feels she does not belong to America or Iran. She struggles to find her place In America. often feels difficulty in understanding Americans and their culture.
OVERVIEW

The story starts at the summer of 1997 when two families are waiting at the Baltimore airport expecting two newly adopted baby girls from Korea. Brad and Bitsy Donaldson have got their entire family over the airport. There are cousins, uncles, and aunts. Not only Brad and Bitsy, but also their both parents are all decked out with buttons that read ‘MOM”, “DAD”, ‘GRANDMA”, and “GRANDPA.” They bring a infant car seat, bassinet, and more what they thought important. Their relatives are armed with wrapped gifts and big balloons printed with It’s a Girl! and trailing spirals of pink ribbon. A half a dozen of them hold video cameras to record every moment.

The other family comprise of no more than three members, a youngish couple, foreign- looking, olive-skinned and attractive, Sami and Ziba Yazdan, and Sami’s reserved Iranian- born mother, Maryam. They quietly lingered on the sidelines and waited for the daughter at the waiting room.

This two family who share nothing except having an adopted baby from Korea on the same day in the same place become friends through “love” call to Yazdans from outgoing Bitsy, who impulsively insists on having an “arrival party” each year to celebrate the day two adopted girls arrived in America.
They are different in terms of parenting style. While Donalson’s daughter maintains her Korean name, Jin-Ho, and parents dress Jin-Ho in Korean clothes and keep her hair style as when she first arrived in America. Yazdans alter the Korean name, Sooki, into the American name, Susan, and allow Susan to wear Blue jeans and style her hair in an American way. (Fascinatingly, Jin-Ho solicits to be named as Jo at the time when she was in preschool and wishes for an American girl doll.)

Bitsy is often critical of the ways Ziba raises Susan. When Bitsy hears about Ziba works two days a week and leaves Susan with Maryam, she is freaked out and expresses how bad idea it is. Likewise, Bitsy does not agree with or support Ziba’s idea about registering Susan to preschool at her early age. Even though, however, Ziba is often upset by Bitsy’s disagreement about what Ziba does, and offended by Bitsy’s “ultra-American” outspoken and brush advice on just about everything, Ziba and Sami are both contended to have got American buddies close and are trying to follow what Donaldsons parenting styles- Ziba switches to cloth diapers, telephones her pediatrician about the vaccinations, and reads Korean books to Susan. Yazdans, Especially Maryam, keep more of their family life private and their personal space. For example, Maryam is very careful not to be a nuisance to Ziba and Sami Yazdans. Maryam refuses to eat dinner together or even have a cup of tea when Ziba asks Maryam to come join. On the other hand, Donaldsons are more “open”and keep the private things public as Bitsy throws a party to celebrate Jin-Ho’s toilet training. Moreover, Bitsy’s father, Dave, also thinks appropriate to propose to Maryam in front of whole families while Maryam is appalled by it.
When two families and their relatives gather at the annual “arrival party,” they watch the film Donaldsons took when Jin-Ho and Susan arrived at the Baltimore airport. This traditional event is basically filled with smiles and lots of food, but there is always a little tension on Yazdans. The conversation between Donaldsons and Yazdans often go what Maryam called “astonishing.” Donaldsons question about very personal stuff and/or what Yazdans do not want to share even after they get closer and closer and develop friendship. (There are occasionally miscommunication and misunderstanding even between Yazdans!)

While Ziba and Sami look fully assimilated in the American culture, refuse speaking native language, live in an “extra”bigger home, eat Lean Cuisines, and sometimes make fun of Iranians and their culture. But, they (unconsciously) are, too, living between Iranian and American cultures and bring their customs to American culture. For example, they change their daughter’s given Korean name into Susan, but they call her “Susie- June,” which is a Persian diminutive.
Maryam, Sami’s mother, as opposed to Ziba and Sami, has hard time to be fit in American culture. She was grew up in Iran (Tehran) and immigrated in the ruling days of the Shah, departing for the United States to tie a knot with a doctor by then recognized in Baltimore. She turns out to be a widow in her 40s. Although she adopted American nationality, she still feels foreignness and never felt at home anywhere and distant herself from American and Iranian cultures after she lived in America for decades. She does not say aloud, but she sometimes is critical and complains about American’s behaviors and customs. She says Americans threaten Maryam’s own personal boundaries. It is not that she hates the people of America however she does not want them to inflict or force themselves on her. For example, when she finds herself being courted by Bitsy’s recently windowed father, Dave, what she has been cherished and entrenched herself in are threatened - her tradition, identity, personal space, privacy, and “otherness.” Dave himself is not intrusive and not pushy as other Donaldsons, and Maryam comes to be closer to him awhile, but Maryam ends their relationship afterward.

Digging to America presents how hard to simply live in a new adopted country, assimilate into a new culture, learn new norms, rules and customs, maintain national heritage and mother culture, and accept the differences while defining who we are. It requires more than a simple piece of paper to convert a foreigner into a part of the American society (Tyler, 2006).
Would I recommend for YDPs?

- I highly recommend this book to everyone who is youth development professionals and also those who are interested in cultural study and immigrant youth.

- The writing style of the author is convincing and persuasive and it is easy to stick into her book promptly.

- The books’ topics such as immigration, assimilation, adoption, cultural adaptation, identity, cultural struggles in a new country, language barriers, etc are important to understand if we ever work effectively with youth population from different cultures and customs. Without out willingness to understand and respect cultural differences and immigrants’ struggles, our stereotypes are never dispelled and our opportunities to learn and work with youth are limited. So, again, I recommend this book!
Supplemental Book Recommendation

Girl in Translation By Jean Kwok

This is a fiction based on the author’s experience emigrated from Hong Kong To Brooklyn as a young girl with her mother. The author depicts the tensions, hardships, cultural barriers, language barriers, heartbreak, and all struggles immigrant girl and her mother face in a new immigrated country and gives us opportunity to learn what immigrants life looks like and what growing up between two cultures means. I recommend this book to book lovers and also youth development professionals who specialize immigrant youth and their families. As the number of immigrants from all over the world increased today, Youth development professionals must be ready to work with youths from different cultures and different customs.