Samantha Lyons:

My name's Samantha Kim Lyons. I'm 41 and I live in a suburb of Southern California. It's halfway between Santa Barbara and UCLA.

Adapted Podcast:

And tell me a little bit about your, your life. Are you married?

Samantha Lyons:

Yes. So I'm married. My husband and I actually met when we were 19 and we were students at UC Berkeley. But we didn't get together until probably over a decade later. So he's my age. He's 41. He's actually half Korean and half Chinese. And he was raised by his Korean mom who's an immigrant. She came from South Korea, I think, in her early twenties. And my daughter is half Dutch and half Korean. So she was born in the Netherlands and her dad and I met actually when he did study abroad from the Netherlands to Berkeley. And then we connected later on. So yeah.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay. I'm a little confused. You mean you met your current husband when you were

Samantha Lyons:

So I met my current husband at in college, but we got married in 2014 and I met my daughter's dad in college. We were together in 2010, but we're no longer together. So my husband is our daughter's stepdad.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay. I know initially you'd said you'd wanted to come on the podcast in a way to kind of leave something for your daughter. as an adopt yourself, how is parenting for you?

Samantha Lyons:

I guess I don't feel like it's strange because for example, my mom who adopted me, she has always been very loving and gave me a really good childhood. So she, it, I never once felt like it. She was my adoptive parent. So with my daughter, they're like best friends. I mean, my mom only lives 10 minutes away from me and she's always been involved since my daughter was a baby. So they're very close. And I guess with parenting everything, I mean, no one really teaches you how to be a parent. people thought, oh, maybe you'll be a parent, a good parent cuz you've been a teacher for so long. But it's totally different. Yeah, you just kind of learn as you go through things, but you're constantly getting challenged. <laugh>, it was kind of funny cuz since I'm adopted, my mom didn't have to give birth physically, so, and my mom actually came from a family of 10 kids.

So if anything, she grew up seeing a lot of kids, so you would think she would've had more kids or maybe even her own biological kids. so not being able to like ask someone, oh, how, how did labor go? You can't ask that. But I guess just, yeah, figuring it out on my own. Plus I also gave birth in the Netherlands because I lived there for two years so I didn't even have family nearby and I was, and their first language is Dutch, so I'm like in a hospital with people that of course they do know English there really well. But it was just so unusual in so many different ways that I don't know if I'm really answering your your question, but there was some things where there is no answer and you just kind of have to figure it out for yourself.

Adapted Podcast:

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But did you have a, did you think about your, your biological family when you gave birth to your child?

Samantha Lyons:

Not really. I mean if anything I feel like maybe I've been kind of like ignorant or not caring enough about my biological family because I've never met them. So if you don't really, if people are so, if everything's so unknown and you feel like maybe you'll never have an answer, you kind of never really, or at least for me, I've never really like let that define me. So I guess I just haven't really thought about that at all. Like I just thought, oh I need to like exercise and like eat right and try to not have a C-section basically.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay. I mean so what, at what year or at what age were you adopted?

Samantha Lyons:

I believe I was adopted at eight months old. But then again I guess the orphanage could have given me a a made up birthday. So, but I'm assuming based on, I have a lot of pictures that I was pretty young because I looked like a pretty small baby and I couldn't even walk when my parents first adopted me. So they assumed I was about eight months. What I thought was kind of cool was, oh here's my first relative that's actually is related to me by blood. So that was kind of exciting like wow, I never had anyone and now I do, but then you don't really think about it that often. It's just kind of like a thought that goes through your mind. You're like, oh that's kind of cool. You know, like to finally have someone that you actually could be, that you actually are related to by blood. But that's a whole nother thing. I mean blood versus actual real relationships. What is that really mean? Because you can be related but it doesn't mean it's even healthy. So.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay. So you would say you probably haven't thought too much about your biological family in Korea or any?

Samantha Lyons:

Not really. So that's actually why I applied to that Mosaic tour because I thought, I've actually emailed Holt but they've never given me any re real response. They just say they can't find any records. So if that's the email I've gotten twice now I feel like maybe I'll the, maybe that response will never change. So then I applied to that Mosaic tour because I thought maybe they'll have more connections to find biological family members.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay, so that is something you are interested in.

Samantha Lyons:

So it's not like I'm totally uninterested. I guess sometimes I feel bad, like I told my husband, I'm like, should I be more interested because am I being like, I don't know, am I ignoring that side of me? Am I pushing it away? But I don't feel like I did that either because I'm the type where, you know, like I'm very open about my feelings and if I really wanna know something I'll really try to pursue it. So I don't feel like I've been blocking out my feelings all these years and now suddenly I'm having feelings and I need to like open that box. Cuz I've had, I've gone through so many things in my life that haven't been good. So it's not like I would try to do that so I'm not, I guess maybe like covid and hitting, you know, middle age you kind of think, oh maybe I should like focus on other areas of my life now because before you're just so focused on trying to pay your bills and trying to, I was a single mom, you know, so I was trying, I was, I just had to focus my energy on almost like hustling <laugh>.

So now I can maybe take a step back from that cause I don't have to worry as much and now I can maybe even focus on myself and try to find more, find out more about myself

Adapted Podcast:

If you, if you don't mind sharing what do you know about your records or that whatever you came with?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, so I just have a few letters in English written by the 25 year old social worker at the whole orphanage saying like what types of things I like to eat and how I kind of interacted with the other kids and they, they would send these, they sent a bunch of pictures. So in one picture I'm in this crib with ano with a little boy and they said, oh he went to France. And I'm like oh that makes sense. France was another one of those countries where a lot of kids were adopted too. There's pictures of like, I'm outside like in these grasses kind of standing holding onto like a fence. there's like a man in some of the pictures I assume maybe he worked there too. There's pictures of like cribs with babies in them. there's pictures of me like taking a bath, <laugh>.

they sent some clothes with me. They sent like some baby clothes that looked pretty normal looking just like what kids would wear I guess in the eighties. And they also sent like the, that Korean, I guess it's like the <inaudible>, the outfit that they would put the babies in when it's like maybe the 100 day or I'm not sure, I guess it would've had to been the 100 day cause I wouldn't have even been 12 months yet. So they sent a picture, they sent that outfit and they sent pictures of me in that outfit surrounded by like fruits and stuff like that or different, those tri, those symbolic items. I mean just based off what the lady wrote, it seemed like she liked me. I don't know if I was a favorite or she pretended every baby was a favorite in her letters, but it seemed like she liked me.

And then I know because of my parents' age, my dad was, when my mom and dad married, they're 22 years apart. So when they applied through Holt they actually were denied because my dad when, when I came to Hawaii, my mom was 31 and my dad was 53 so they weren't even qualified at all. And I was placed with another family that did qualify but then a week later they called Holt and said we're getting a divorce. And since I was already in Hawaii, the agency called my parents and said, well even though you're not really supposed to you can come pick up your baby and you guys can actually adopt me. So I think that's the main story, but that's all I really know.

Adapted Podcast:

Oh so I see. So you were adopted by another couple and then Yes. <laugh> they divorced and then Holt just contacted your parents and said they could take the baby?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, because when my parents applied with Holt there was always like that contact person, you know, probably in all these different states. So whatev, whoever the contact person in Hawaii was, that's the person they were always in contact with to even apply. But then when he said no, then they kind of, they actually gave up hope. They were like okay, it's fine, we'll just not have kids. Cuz my dad already had two kids from a previous marriage and my mom, cuz she grew up in such a big family, she's like okay, I had to babysit all my siblings kids for so long <laugh> that maybe it's fine. So they were kind of okay not having a kid and then that whole thing happened and then for me to get switched kind of quickly like that I thought was interesting. I don't know if you could even do stuff like that now, but this was like in 1981. So,

Adapted Podcast:

Well in your adoption agency was Holt in the US

Samantha Lyons:

Yes.

Adapted Podcast:

And then Holt in Korea I would imagine?

Samantha Lyons:

I think so, yeah, because that's what it seemed like from the letters that lady wrote and the address and everything she put.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay. And I understand you said that you, your eventual family be, you know, is a, a loving family, but have you ever, has it ever occurred to you that that might have not been i that might have not been proper?

Samantha Lyons:

you mean with because of his age?

Adapted Podcast:

No, because that kind of, you know, the one family fell through so then the agency just oh, gave you to another family. I

Samantha Lyons:

Don't know. I thought about it but I don't think that, I mean you have to get paperwork and you have to like I have like all these documents <laugh>, I should probably look through 'em. My mom actually just, she's like, are you here? but yeah, I mean I would assume that you, you can't just do whatever you want. So, but who knows could things have been pushed through because of you have this kid that would have no parents and if there's no one wanting to adopt at that point, would you then make the kid fly back? So I don't know if things were maybe flex, like <laugh> manipulated even to make it so that I could stay. I don't really know because I know like you have to work with a lawyer and it's not like that easy to do things. And I know it's ex, even back then my mom said it was expensive. Like it was I think in US dollars back then it was over 30 grand. So I have no idea. But I know that people were probably making profits, so who knows?

Adapted Podcast:

Mm-hmm <affirmative> And what and and in that paperwork that you initially got, there was nothing about like did you come with an, you know, I'm assuming a name and a birthday and any information about your biological family? Yeah, so

Samantha Lyons:

There, there was nothing about the family. It said my birthday was [inaudible] but again I know that that could not even be my real birthday. It could just be whatever they wrote down to make you just exist. and then I know it had a Korean name, it was [inaudible] that could just be the name that they gave you because they needed to call you something.

Adapted Podcast:

So you've never really felt confident that that could be your real birthday or your, your real name?

Samantha Lyons:

Not really. I mean if you just look at the bigger picture and historical times and so many factors, I think there could be a lot of made up things <laugh>, not that I'm a Holocaust denier but just you know, like the Korean government clearly thought of society as a certain way and if you didn't fit that mold even now but maybe even more so back then, they're gonna do what they're gonna do to make things look a certain way. So if that meant that they were gonna ship 200,000 healthy children out of their own country because they didn't wanna pay for social services or they wanted to make it look like you couldn't ever be an unwed mother, sadly they did that and I think a lot of people probably know about it just like comfort women. But no one ever really talks or thinks about those things cuz they're unpleasant.

Adapted Podcast:

And tell us, you know, your parents having that age difference, was that unusual for the times?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, so it was really unusual. my mom is third generation Japanese and she grew up in Hawaii. You know, even my grandma was born in, they've been there for a very long time and so they're a very Japanese family. And so for her to marry a white man from the Midwest, not only because he was older but because he wasn't Japanese was like kind of a shock for my mom's family because he was the only Caucasian person to ever marry into that family. I don't even think <laugh> even now there may be like someone who's hopa but not even like, it's not even common now and there's been so many generations since. So at first I know her family was really skeptical and they were like, what is like what are you even doing? But then they met him and my mom was like, just meet him and get to know him as a person.

And they were like, oh my gosh, we love him. Like he's so nice. Like he had been in Hawaii since his like early thirties. He didn't ever feel like he fit in in the Midwest. He actually was in the army at the end of World War ii so he had spent time in Europe. So he, I feel like he was more worldly because he had seen other parts of the world and he had always just been interested in different cultures. but yeah it was kind of unusual. And then also because he looked so much older and my mom and I are both Asian, sometimes people thought did he adopt are my mom and I sisters and did he adopt both of us <laugh>? So that was kind of weird. it didn't happen often but like it occasionally did and or they always thought oh that's your grandpa because he's so much older.

What else was Oh yeah, also my mom was the breadwinner. So people thought, oh this like young beautiful Asian woman is with this old white man and he must be rich and that's why they're together. But my mom was the breadwinner my whole life. My dad had a government job. <laugh> never made much. So that always bothered me because people just, they always just look at you, you know, physically and they just think so many things and I think that's unhealthy. And so because of that, like I try to really get to know people and I like nothing really surprises me anymore when I like I'm just open to anything someone says because I know what it's like for o for people to look at you and think oh all these things. But it's not, it's not true you know,

Adapted Podcast:

For people to make assumptions you probably, nothing shocks you anymore probably

Samantha Lyons:

Right <laugh> and plus I think when you're adopted you've already grown up with something different than a lot of people. So I think in a way it's made all of us, I think more empathetic to everyone else because like we know what it's like to have something different about us but that's also can be a good thing. Like that can be your strength. And so I think you can use that like in a positive way.

Adapted Podcast:

And what did your mother do for a living?

Samantha Lyons:

Well when, by the time she re, so she retired when she was 55 and at, when she retired she was like the regional, almost like vice president for for state farm insurance for the state of California. You know, when she was younger she actually worked full-time at King's Bakery. So people that know those kings Hawaiian rolls in Hawaii that used to be a coffee shop. So she worked there full-time and she went to college that she paid for herself and she even had to drop out of college for a year to just work and make more money And later she went on to selling calculators, which is kind of funny cuz now you can buy a calculator at like Dollar Tree <laugh>. But back then calculators were really expensive so she sold them, she was a salesperson and then later on she started like basically at the bottom of State Farm insurance and then I think she was promoted, I wanna say eight times so that by the time she retired she was like really high up.

Adapted Podcast:

Do you identify with your mother and like her, her drive and it sounds like she was a driven person and also a bit of a, a hustler maybe?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, definitely. Or, so my mom's dad was a taxi cab driver and my mo and that's my grandpa that I never met cuz he passed away from heart disease when before I was born. And then my mom's mother took care of 10 kids and she also cleaned offices at night and my mom even as a kid had to go with my grandma to help clean. So when you're raised in poverty and you see your parents working so hard, then you're going to work hard yourself <laugh> I think. so the fact that she didn't have anyone that went to college and she paid for everything herself and then she even adopted me I think shows a lot to her character that she is a hustler and I think that's made me work hard myself because I'm kind of stubborn so like I have to do everything on my own and I have to like, I always have to have a job and I started working in high school and I actually didn't need to cuz my mom and dad provided me with a better life than they had. So I actually grew up probably more upper middle class. but, but that didn't matter to me because I knew where they both came from and I didn't ever take it for granted. And so I always just had to do things on my own,

Adapted Podcast:

You know. When you heard, you know, on on your mother's side that everyone seemed to have been, you know, of Japanese descent, right? Like that it was kind of scandalous at the time that your mother had been dating a white man or someone non-Japanese, did you ever like think about that or even since that they had made that distinction but that for you, you know, how did you feel accepted even being Korean? Yeah,

Samantha Lyons:

So I'd say I, if I look back objectively, I do feel like they accepted me but they would make comments too. So like Japanese people I feel like <laugh>, I mean any, any group right? They're very like proud like oh this is made in Japan or like, oh you should buy this brand of soy sauce because it's made in Japan and it tastes better. But then it was kind of funny because I feel like the creative influence just because of like pop culture and things is really strong. So I feel like in the end they all wanted to be Korean cuz they're like, oh my gosh, like I love Korean men on like the dramas and like I love eating Korean food and like I love visiting Korea when I stop in Japan and I don't know. So I do feel like they had a really strong sense of Japanese pride, especially in Hawaii because there's the, the the dominant, so basically in Hawaii there's a lot of different races but the dominant races there are Japanese and white and those two groups I'd say are the wealthiest. So they did always kind of have this sense of not being better but of kind of, if you wanna really look at it being kind of that top class within Hawaii. So yeah, the fact that I was Korean, I don't feel like it really like mattered. But then I do think they still thought Japanese was like number one and then probably Korean and Chinese is like below them and then probably like Vietnamese and Filipino is like at the bottom. So I mean it's sad but that's, I think it's still like that even today.

Adapted Podcast:

Yeah, like I wonder what kind of comments do you remember that might have, they might not have even sort of thought of you in that way, but they would make comments about Korean people that you might have said, wait, I'm Korean so

Samantha Lyons:

I don't ever, I don't remember any negative comments about Korean people other than positive ones about Korean soap opera stars and having to watch like every Korean drama cuz they just love them. But I would say by always commenting that Japanese like items or food things or whatnot were the best, it was like a reminder that you're not in that group. So it's more like what they didn't say but what they said about Japanese things or people. which is kind of ironic cuz if you look at it, the history, why did, why are there Japanese people in Hawaii? They had to leave Japan because there weren't any job opportunities and they had to be farmers. So it's not like you were arriving in Hawaii as like a business person. I mean there probably were too cuz there are also a lot of rich Japanese business people and the flight is, it's not super long, it's, you know, Hawaii's kind of in this kind of interesting location where you're right between east and west but it's not like a lot of Japanese people there came from wealthy families and that's why they're in Hawaii <laugh>.

So it's just, it's just always interesting when people act a certain way and you're like, yeah, but then how were you really there to begin with? So

Adapted Podcast:

And how's your Japanese?

Samantha Lyons:

it's not that great because my mom's third generation, the like the top five siblings know more. And then the last five my mom's like, I raised myself like I was the ninth kid, like no one's going to teach me anything cuz everyone's tired <laugh>. So I actually learned j Japanese from living in Japan. So I lived there for 12 months and I worked in three schools and I just taught myself Japanese so I'm, I probably can speak it at a basic level, but I haven't been there since 2007. So when you don't practice you'd lose it. But probably if I were to stay there for a few months I could probably somewhat get back into it, but I, it would be difficult.

Adapted Podcast:

Yeah, I can, yeah, I can imagine. did you find yourself, do you remember when you were growing up that you wished you were Japanese just to fit in more with your family or that was never

Samantha Lyons:

No, because like my dad was white. My mom's Japanese, my dad's kids from his previous marriage are like half bill or half Portuguese, half Japanese. All my friends at school were literally like, cuz you know, Hawaii's military base, so you have families from all over the world that are, they're kind of there temporarily, but they're still there. And then you have people that live there. So like if you look at my class pictures, we literally had every race represented. So I never felt like I wanted, I needed to be something else. I always knew that I was Korean, even if it meant that sometimes you just felt like you were born there because it's not like I know Korean or had a Korean mother, but I had like a lot of Korean friends, you have a lot of friends that are actually mixed, like it's very common there.

So it was kind of nice, like I don't think a lot of kids actually felt like they wanted to be something else because you always were represented and like all my teachers and principals, you know, everyone that's around you, they're all different Asian races as well. So you just kind of, I didn't realize it at the time until I moved to California to a very white suburb. But I think that really strengthened my sense of identity because for the first nine years of my life I was around Asian people, all different Asian people and I saw Asian people in positions of power and so, and my mom was the breadwinner, so I never felt like I was suppressed in any way. I think if I didn't grow up that way, I would maybe have noticed things sooner or like maybe I would feel differently.

Adapted Podcast:

Okay. And like just kind of like, one thing that I wondered about is when did you kind of learn about, I mean, do you learn about Asian history in, in Hawaii and the public schools? And did you, I mean if you, if you went to public school and then when did you sort of learn about the history?

Samantha Lyons:

So I actually went, my parents sent me to private school in Hawaii is a Catholic school, which is kind of funny because we're not Catholic, but that's kind of what you do in Hawaii. If you do have money, you send your kids to private school and oftentimes they're religious even though like no one actually really is. But in school we, we learned a lot about Hawaiian history actually, like native Hawaiians and how much discrimination they faced and how even to this day there's like a fight over land and different things like that. I'd say I learned more about Asian history in college. So when I went to Berkeley my second year, I was supposed to live with a bunch of friends and we had put a le like down payment or what, not a down payment, but just like a payment first and last month's rent on an apartment.

But then over the summer we realized it was way too small and so two of us had to back out and so my roommate and I from freshman year actually backed out and we called the housing department and said we can't live in this apartment. It's way too small for six people. So do you have anything, even though we weren't really supposed to live in the dorms the second year. And so they said, okay, we have two spots. One spot is in the Chicano theme program and one spot is in the Asian theme program. And so then my friend who's Chinese and grew up in West Covina, which is this suburb of southern California, she's like, okay, well most of my school was Latino, so I'll go into the Chicano theme program. I'm, I'm like, okay, <laugh>. So then it put me into the Asian theme program.

And so that was kind of interesting because I had basically had a nine year break from like living with a lot of Asian people cause we had moved to Southern California. So then I went back into almost like as an adult or a young adult living in this environment that was more closely related to my childhood. And that was a pretty cool experience because for a full school year you were living on a whole floor with people of different from, you know, different Asian groups and then you have to take a class like on your floor and read all these books on Asian American history. And some of the articles and books we read were about the, his, you know, history between the Japanese and Koreans. So I'd say I learned the most about it from college, but I I love to read. So I, I read, I learn, you know, you can learn, teach yourself now.

Adapted Podcast:

And so I, I would imagine was it, was it uncomfortable sometimes learning about the sort of, the more you know, there's the brutal colonization of Korea and other things like that. And, and also in your time in Korea, you must have also seen the kind of, or maybe felt the discrimination that maybe Koreans in Japan

Samantha Lyons:

Feel. Yeah. So that was, yeah, so I guess that's two different things. So the first one is learning about the brutality. I think cuz so I'm a teacher, I'm a high school teacher and we have to teach our students a lot about slavery and the Holocaust and different events. And I've also traveled a lot. So I've been to Auschwitz and I've, I've, you know, been to Anne Frank's house. So I think because I've already in my early twenties experienced and learned so much about mass murder, <laugh> and gas chambers and horrific things that have been done, done to humans. I'm not, it's not like it's so jarring. It's not that I'm not affected, but it's not like so jarring for me to learn about things that have happened between Korea and Japan or even between Japan and China. You know, like there's a lot of different places that the Japanese wrecked havoc on. and then in terms of being,

Adapted Podcast:

I just mean the, let me sorry, sorry Samantha. I just mean in, and also in terms of, you know, you, you have family members who are Japanese or Japanese descent and although they are immigrants to Americans second, third generation, I, I wondered if any of that made you kind of uncomfortable.

Samantha Lyons:

Not really. A lot of 'em actually have served in the US Army. a lot of 'em were in the Vietnam War where they even got Agent Orange and other diseases that killed them <laugh> from serving in America. So I feel like if anything, they're more American and they lost their lives for the US versus being Japanese when it was so removed from so many years before. So I would say I wouldn't, I don't think that that's really been the main theme of that. but was interesting. So when I lived in Japan for 12 months and I worked in public schools and I sat with all the teachers in the rooms it was like they wanted me to be Japanese so bad. It was kind of weird. They're like, you don't look Korean. And I was like, well what does that even mean?

But it's kind of hard too cuz it's not like I'm fluent in Japanese so maybe I'm not even understanding everything they're saying. but it was like they didn't want, they wanted me to be Japanese for some reason. It was like, cuz they really liked me and they wanted me to hang out with 'em all the time. But it was like they didn't want me to be Korean because there's still that stigma of Japanese and Korea because of the history. But then I felt like towards the end no one even cared. And they're just like, okay, you're just from America. I was like, yeah, <laugh>. But yeah, it was just interesting and like because of Jaap, you know, so not everyone in Japan has traveled to Korea. So I felt like, you know, the Japanese diets is very plain, it's more it's just bland.

It's really good and I love it, but it's not gonna be like Korean where it's like, let's put sauce on every single item and make up even more spicy red sauces to put on anything and then now let's throw cheese on it and torch it <laugh>. So I feel like their food is just, it's just different. Plus it's an island country, so when every you're an island, you're more, you're gonna be more isolated and you're going to think a certain way. So they were like, oh I can't stand garlic. And I'm just like, have you even had garlic? And they're like, no, just the smell is so overwhelming for me. So it's like they didn't even, they didn't really wanna try it. But then some Koreans who had traveled to Korea, they're like, oh I love Korean food, I love being able to eat garlic. I wish there were more restaurants here that used it. You know, so it's just interesting like when you, I guess you know how much you're kind of getting out or not how you think.

Adapted Podcast:

You said lately you have been sort of you went to your first Korean adoptee event, you know, do you feel like you're just at a time in your life where you have time to kind of explore that part of yourself?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, so I've always been interested, but I guess I never knew like, if you even wanted to find people, what would you do? Because it's not like my parents sent me to like, I guess there's like camps that you can go to when you're little. I didn't even know about that. Maybe my parents didn't know either or cuz I don't think they would've withheld something like that for me. Cuz they always like, let me do whatever. so anyways, I read a lot. So I have for example, like a subscriptions a subscription to the New York Times app and I'm just, I'm always reading, I read The Atlantic, I read a bunch of different things. So anyways, I always read articles if they pop up on New York Times about Korean adoptees. And then for some reason, like over the summer there were more articles than usual.

So it was like one, oh you should try this restaurant and blah, blah blah. And it had opened in LA and then there was like, oh, and these new books got recently published so I ordered them on Amazon. and then I was telling my husband like, yeah, I just think it'd be cool to like explore more. But then my husband, because I don't have social media, he, but he has a, he's on Facebook for cycling cuz they do rides like every weekend. And so he found a, a Facebook group for Korean adoptees and he is like, Sam, you should check this out. I think they're having an event in la. And I was like, wow, that'd be so cool. So then I had to like create a Facebook account <laugh> just to like be able to join the group and then see I guess the day and time.

But I, I really don't like the internet. So anyways, so that's how I found out about this whole thing. And then that's when I went to the first event. But I really liked it. Like it was really cool seeing so many people that have, you know, that look like you but who went through something. Maybe not all of our stories are the exact same, but the fact that we all were born and went in the same place and then came, well I know some went to Sweden or whatever, but, but you know what I mean I was shocked like <laugh> when I, I was kind of overwhelming cuz since it was my first event to show up to, to a place where I don't know a single person and to see like 70 people there was kind of, I like, I mean I actually had tears in my eyes because I was like, wow, this is really overwhelming.

Like, and I guess part of me almost felt sad like that, you know, like it makes you think wow all these, all these families and mothers, like, I know that it was really hard for them, but the fact that they all, I guess you could say abandoned or gave up their child, now that I am a mom of an 11 year old it was, I guess all those things combined just kind of hit you at once and then I was like, whoa, this is pretty emotional. And then you don't really know what to do with yourself because you don't really know anyone. So I mean I just sat with, I think, you know, at a, a table with two women that were adopted, one had her spouse and yeah, it's just interesting. So then after going to that one, another one kind of came up last month, I think it was at this Korean restaurant in LA and it was a bunch of people from Sweden that I guess were visiting.

So I thought that was cool, especially for me. I've lived in six countries so I just like meeting people from other countries regardless of whether <laugh> what your background is. so that was pretty cool. So then that was the second one I've done. I, I thought that one was a little nicer only because it was a smaller group so I felt like you could really have real conversations with people versus the other one was cool, but then it just felt like you're just eating and it was so noisy and then okay, goodbye. And then I got into a car and left and I don't even think I knew more than like the names of two people, but then this one, it was like I was sitting at a table with, there were 10 people at each table and that that was the whole group and you really felt like you could get to know people and have longer conversations.

Adapted Podcast:

So you had grown up in a pretty diverse, at least in Hawaii it was pretty diverse and Asians represented and your own family is you know, many Asian family members. did you feel there was something different about Korean adoptees that you bonded in a way that was different?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, it's kind of hard to put into words, but it's almost like this mutual understanding of knowing that you had just had that same type of experience that no one else has. So it's like you just kind of feel automatically closer, just like how you'd feel with anything that you'd have a similar, like a deeper similarity with someone. Like when I played soccer for 13 years, you know, you just feel like all of your teammates love soccer just as much as you and we're always gonna have fun and travel and try to win. you just feel like a natural gravitation because you have something in common. So that's how it felt like when I went to those events that you just had this kind of natural connection and I thought that was cool cuz you don't always get those, you know, you can, I worked at the same place for seven years and you know, everyone's really nice, but it's not like we're hanging out being best friends. I have my own friends, so, but I kind of felt like at the, at the Korean events that you could actually be friends with some of these people outside of just the event and that maybe you could have a closer connection

Adapted Podcast:

Overall. So there's been two events so far.

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah.

Adapted Podcast:

You know, you mentioned that you felt that there was this connection and that a similar background. You know, the majority of us I think have been adopted by white parents. I think it's something like maybe over 90% somewhere in that range. Did you feel like there was something that was, you know, you could, that your experience was a little bit different than others?

Samantha Lyons:

A little. So my dad's white and I grew up with his white side of the family as well in Hawaii because they had all moved there. One of my brothers I actually lived with in Hawaii till I moved here. So I grew up living with my white older brother. We had of course different bedrooms, but we shared a bathroom and even to this day, we're really close. He still lives in Hawaii. Oddly enough, his wife and my mom worked at the same place in King's Bakery. But anyways, that's another thing. I guess I feel when I hear stories that kids weren't accepted or they felt so different or they had to grow up in these neighborhoods where no one ever looked like them. I feel bad. Like I feel I, I wish that they didn't, I wish that they could have had more similarities. you know, none of us chose our lives <laugh>, like you're literally just born and whatever happens is what happens, but it doesn't mean that you can't care and wish that things could have been different.

not that that really makes a difference, but I guess having had a really positive experience with someone who looked like me, where no one ever questioned if I was, if we were related because everyone thought we were on the outside, everyone always thought we were biologically related. I think, I don't know if it made a difference, but I, I never had to like wonder, I, I guess I never, it took out some, probably some things for me that maybe other people had to be more aware of. I guess from this, you know, kind of almost the WhatsApp chat and, and different things. I feel like a lot of people as they've gotten older, have explored their Korean side if maybe they hadn't, if they weren't able to as much when they were younger. And I think that's really important. I mean, I'm trying to do that myself as well.

but I think that's the nice thing too about becoming an adult is that you do, you have more control over your life when you're a kid. You're literally just there and you're so dependent on adults for so many things, but when you grow up and you become more independent, you can do those things for yourself. And I feel like it's, it's kind of cool to see so many people visiting Korea or maybe trying to find family members. I mean, if I found a family member I would be in, if I, you know, if I end up going to Korea, I would be like shocked outta my mind. Like I would be so excited even if it could be kind of scary to find out what really happened or to maybe that person could reject me. but I think it's cool that yeah, people are really trying to embrace like maybe the unknown and I think yeah, if that's important to people then they should.

Adapted Podcast:

And what's it like your, with your, your husband now, he's part his background is Korean and Chinese.

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, so his mom is Korean and his dad's Chinese, but they were never together. So he was raised with his older brother who's three years older and his younger brother who's four years younger by a Korean mom his whole life. So it was the three little boys and his mom basically until he went to college. And so the mom has siblings and the mom's mom had come from Korea to Oxnard, California, which is kind of this farming community south of Santa Barbara. and then of course, you know, so the grandma came and then she had her kids and then those kids have kids, which one of them is my husband. So he grew up with aunts and uncles and cousins and the grandma and they're all Korean, so all of the foods they ate and all of a lot of their traditions and the language.

I feel like you're gonna lose something whenever you move to another country. and you'll gain things too. But I feel like overall they're kind of a kind of an a Korean immigrant success story where, you know, his mom didn't go to college but her three sons, you know, have done so well. And I don't feel like she was overly strict based on what I've seen. I think she really encouraged them to study. and then his other cousins have all, you know, they all have gone to like UCLA and they have some, one of 'em, she has her own business. like they're all very successful and a lot of them still speak Korean, I feel like with my husband. because the mom also wanted them to learn English. He like understands a lot of Korean and he can speak more like basic Korean, but I wouldn't say he's like a high level Korean speaker.

Adapted Podcast:

is he like second generation or 1.5?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, so he's second generation. Okay.

Adapted Podcast:

And do you feel like in some ways you guys have something in, in common, like in that sense even though you weren't just being a Korean adoptee and he's second gen Korean American?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, I think we have a lot in common, just in general. Like when I moved to California, he grew up like 20 minutes away from me. We went to the same college. We have Asian mothers. we're both Korean. Yeah, I feel like we just have a lot in common in general. But I think he's really kind of helped me learn about my Korean side because clearly I wouldn't have learned it from my mom and dad because <laugh> like my dad wouldn't have known. And then my mom only knows like Japanese stuff, plus you're growing up in like Hawaii. And so I'd say it's kind of weird. I know this isn't the same thing at all, but like I feel like when Barack Obama married his wife, he probably learned more about his African American side because he was raised by his single white mother and his white grandparents in Hawaii, but then he married Michelle Obama. So I feel like for myself, not that I'm comparing myself to him at all, but I learned more about my Korean side from my husband because of be from marrying him.

Adapted Podcast:

I was gonna ask you that. Do you feel like you've developed more sort of Korean pride because of, you know, becoming part of this family?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, and also because my husband, until he went to college, he had grown up in LA and lived in different parts of la of LA his whole life. And even after college he moved back to West LA and he's lived in different areas so he knows every single place literally to eat a Korean type of food. He would know where to go for that and he knows like Korean clubs and bars and I like the food and he, he's visited Korea a few times with his friends, like I think one was a bachelor party and one was just with friends just traveling around Asia. So I feel like he, he just knows like he'll say he doesn't <laugh>, but he really does know a lot about the Korean culture and part of culture is food. So he knows like all of that and, and I just feel like I learned more from him than I have had from any other important person in my life.

Adapted Podcast:

Yeah, and I'm just, just wondering, there's something different about him as well having a Chinese father that's maybe not in the picture,

Samantha Lyons:

Right? Yeah. So because the father wasn't in the picture, everything was Korean, all the family was Korean, the language, everything, all the like the holidays. So almost culturally you could say he is a hundred percent Korean biologically he's half Chinese.

Adapted Podcast:

And then like growing up, I know maybe I'm making too much much of this, but growing up you had these kind of subtle things where like being Japanese was best and now that you've married your husband and you have in-laws and a mother-in-law who's Korean and you know, they probably like the fact that you're Korean. They

Samantha Lyons:

Do, but I think they don't think I'm full Korean because when you're adopted and they know the history of adoptees and how adoptees are looked at, I feel like they'd probably never say to me that I'm not. But I can't imagine they don't think it because, because of my background.

Adapted Podcast:

Do you feel like there was still some kind of stigma when you guys got serious and

Samantha Lyons:

I don't feel like if there was a stigma, but I just feel like, you know, we've been together for 10 years and because I wasn't raised in a Korean household the way my husband and all of his cousins were raised, it's just different. So it'll, it'll never be like, it'll never be, I don't think they'll ever think, oh you're full Korean because you're adopted and because you were raised by a white father and a Japanese mother and you don't speak Korean. Maybe you look like you are, but maybe they think I don't even, I don't know.

Adapted Podcast:

so you don't feel like there's maybe like this full acceptance in this aspect?

Samantha Lyons:

I mean I feel like they accept me in that they've always been pretty nice. But if you were to say, do you think Sam is full? Does Sam seem full Korean to you? They'd all a hundred percent probably say no. But I don't feel like that makes me, I don't think they're saying no and like, oh, because we look down on her, we like don't accept her into our family, but they just probably don't think so. And I'd probably have to agree.

Adapted Podcast:

Yeah. Did maybe that, does that kind of let you off the hook then from expectations that you should know everything and cook the best Korean food and

Samantha Lyons:

Maybe cuz I don't like, I cook more almost like Italian and I don't know, like I do, I cook other types of food. My bro, my brother, my husband can make pretty good food and his mom is a really good cook. But yeah, it's not like we even get together that often anyways. And when we do it's like a potluck and everyone's making like all different foods anyways. Even his cousins who are Korean. So I don't feel like there's any sort of real pressure to like be a certain way because they, his cousins were actually all born here. So I don't feel like it's so strict or anything.

Adapted Podcast:

You're just Californian?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah, California is its own place too. <laugh>

Adapted Podcast:

And, okay. So well it's been about an hour, Samantha. I wanted to ask a little bit about your daughter. What, you know, does she, have you found, you said she's 11?

Samantha Lyons:

Yes.

Adapted Podcast:

Has she asked you questions about being adopted or the Korean side?

Samantha Lyons:

I mean, so I think the nice thing, even when I was little myself, my parents never tried to pretend that that I was, that I wasn't adopted or something, you know, it was always like celebrated. And so like my daughter always knows that I'm adopted. I don't know if I ever sat down and told her guess what your mom's adopted, but it's like, she's just always known because if she goes to my mom's house, there's pictures of the three of us and clearly my dad looks like different from the, from the other two. So yeah, I don't know. She's never really, I mean she's always known. She actually said she wants to adopt, which I thought was kind of cool. She's like, yeah, I don't even wanna have my own like kids. It just seems so painful. She's like, I just wanna, I'd rather adopt a kid that's already born who needs a home than, you know, like I'd rather do that. So it's kind of interesting, like she see, I I actually think she may, I could see her adopting when she's an adult.

Adapted Podcast:

And how, what do you wish for her? What, you know, are you, is she identifying in terms of being Korean or She

Samantha Lyons:

Always just identifies as like half and half. She actually wanted the Netherlands to win the World Cup because she's born there and she visits there with her father.

Adapted Podcast:

Every and she has Dutch relatives? Yeah.

Samantha Lyons:

You know her, her grandparent like, so her father's brother and sister and her grandparents all live in a pretty small town in the Netherlands, the south of Nether south of Amsterdam near the ocean or near the sea. And she's been there now three times and each time she goes, she's staying for like two to three weeks. So, and she's not staying in hotels, she's staying at their hou at their homes. So, and she's just hearing Dutch the whole time. So she actually, and because she was born there, she actually identifies as being half Dutch because, you know, that's where she came from. <laugh>. So she actually, yeah, like I said, she wanted, she didn't, she wasn't even rooting for the US or Korea or any other team. She wa was rooting for the Dutch team. And then I said, why are you rooting for them?

Like, I don't want them to win. And she's like, well do you say that you're originally from Hawaii or California? And I said, why would say, I'm from Hawaii. And she's like, see, that's why I say I'm from the Netherlands cuz that's where I'm originally from. And I'm like, wow, okay <laugh>. but she also identifies as half Korean. Like she love, I mean she's been using chopsticks since she was a little kid. she can, she loves spicy pork, like she can eat like all the Korean foods no problem. she loves anything like all the Asian stores, whenever you go to those like malls in LA and they have all those cute little stores with the stationary and the stuffed animals. I mean she is liked that stuff since she was little and I've always exposed her to it. Plus because of my husband who's her stepdad and all of his side of the family, she's grown up seeing them constantly. So she kinda has a good mix of both actually. Cuz she actually gets to visit the Netherlands and she gets to see a lot of people here and she's been to Hawaii like a bunch of times, so she has a pretty nice life. Like I never went anywhere, going anywhere was expensive when I was growing up <laugh>. So the fact that she's gone to these places, I'm like, do you even know how lucky you are? I had to wa I had to work for my airplane ticket <laugh>. So when she just gets to go.

Adapted Podcast:

So have you ever discussed like what, who she'd root for, if it was Korea versus the Netherlands or versus the US? She'd

Samantha Lyons:

Root for

Adapted Podcast:

S So she really does feel very strongly a connection to the Yeah.

Samantha Lyons:

Oh yeah, totally.

Adapted Podcast:

Samantha, I I I know we're, we're gonna try to wrap up here, but I wanted to ask you, you know, your, are your parents both alive still?

Samantha Lyons:

My mom's still alive. She's 73 and my father passed away when I was 24. I was young, I was really, because he was so much older growing up, I, it's strange, but I like never thought I'd have a lot of time with him because he just looked older, you know? So I always thought it would be limited, but I think because I always knew that, I always just tried to like, like we were very close. I would say he w we were like best friends and my mom was the one that was always working five, six days a week and working really long hours. But he became a stay-at-home dad when I was, I think seven because he had already had a career <laugh>, you know, cause he's so much older, he's retiring. So he became a stay-at-home dad and my mom was the one, the only one that then worked for the rest of my like life.

So we were always together so we were very close. So yeah, that was pretty hard. He had a lot of heart problems so I knew. Yeah, I mean you just kind of knew. Actually what's crazy is that he passed away when he was 76. And now when I see like friends' parents who've passed away or people even we know our age that get like this rare cancer and they've passed away I'm like, wow, he lived longer than all of them and he and he had a lot of health problems and some of these people they seem much healthier. And I'm like, you only made it till you were like 60. Like it's crazy that if that my dad outlasted some of these people, like I'm kind of shocked by it actually. Especially when, I mean you'd think medicine and different things are are better now, but I mean,

Adapted Podcast:

You know, I was gonna ask you, since you spent so much time with him too, did you feel white when you were younger?

Samantha Lyons:

no I didn't feel white. I felt like I could transition very easily.

Adapted Podcast:

The code switch.

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah. Even now I know how to do that. Which I know sounds, I don't know if that's a good or bad thing. I mean I just know how to make people feel comfortable especially too for, with my job. I mean every year you get different students from different, they could be different ra a race than you or different religion than you or a different political viewpoints than you. So you just have to be able to find commonalities with everyone. but I never felt like I was, I was white

Adapted Podcast:

Or Okay. That's interesting about the code switching cuz I know I felt like I've, I've been able to, that's like a skill. I think many, like at least transracial adoptees and learn.

Samantha Lyons:

I think minorities learn it.

Adapted Podcast:

Yeah. And, and right. And people of color have had to learn it. Especially if you're living in, if you're interacting in sort of white spaces a lot too. So. Yeah.

Samantha Lyons:

Especially when you have like a public type of job.

Adapted Podcast:

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. where do you, would you like to, where do you think you are in your adoptee journey? Are you just enjoying the moment for now?

Samantha Lyons:

so I think I'm kind of at the, maybe like the initial step. So if I get selected then hopefully I can go to Korea with that program. I guess if I don't get selected you could try to find another program. I'm sure there's, well I know that different ones exist just cuz I've looked it up on the internet.

Adapted Podcast:

You applied for the mosaic?

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah. And I know there's other ones cuz I've looked, I've like Googled it and it seems like there's a lot of them at least that popped up that maybe do the same thing. I think either way I'd wanna go to Korea with my family cuz the three of us haven't been together. Like I've been to Korea on my own, my husband's been to Korea on his own probably to like party. but I feel like we should go just to go together. like I asked my husband like, do have you even been to like museums or anything? There he is like no <laugh>, like I have, you know I've been to cultural places in Korea, but I think it'd be good for my daughter to go. I think that'd be fun. It would be fun for her. I guess the next step on your journey could be trying to, you know, submit more paperwork and try to find more information.

it's hard cuz it's like, you know, we all have full-time jobs and we're busy. Like I am. I help my mom out, I <laugh>, you know, I am, I help my daughter. I'm on like committees for her school. It's not like I have like all these free hours in the day to do these like searches. I guess if anyone has any suggestions as to like the fastest way to do a search with what paperwork you need and where to mail it to, I'm open to that. I mean maybe there's something like that, but yeah, I guess I'll just see cuz I'll find out this month if I'm even selected and then I can see from there, okay, let's try this. Or if not, what should I do next?

Adapted Podcast:

What did you write about in your essay?

Samantha Lyons:

Adapted Podcast:

I think they require an essay, right? To apply. Yeah.

Samantha Lyons:

So I wrote about, actually I wrote a lot about my dad and I wrote a lot about on how, on what happened to him when I was younger and I'm trying to remember how I tied it into everything, I guess. Yeah, just that it'd be kind of nice if I did have family members that are existing to get to know them and to, and to be close to them because I mean, I think as we all know with Covid and <laugh>, all sorts of different current events in this world that, that are, that have always happened and will continue happening. it might be nice to try to have some connections with possibly existing people before, you know, I get older and die <laugh> or they, they, I mean clearly they're gonna be older than us, so then who knows what condition they're in. So I think trying to do it now I think is better than if I wait till I'm 50 or 60 or even older, they may not even be alive anymore. So I think now might be a good time to try to find out more if there's anything to be found.

Adapted Podcast:

So you've already had one parent who's died and so you've thought about your, if you have biological family or parents alive, that they are at possibly that point too, where they're aging. Yeah, yeah.

Samantha Lyons:

And maybe you don't even wanna be found. You don't really know until, like, as you start, I'm not the type who like expects anything. I expect things of myself, but like I don't, I don't need things from others. So for me, whatever happens is like, okay, that, that was, that was interesting. But if it, if nothing happens, I mean you can't really like dwell on what, what's not there or what maybe people don't want to do. So if that's what it is, then that's what it is.

Adapted Podcast:

Why you've been to Korea before, Sam, why, why apply to go with other adoptees? I

Samantha Lyons:

Think it's just better to maybe, you know, cuz you're gonna have this shared experience, so then maybe if they're at that same place and their journey, you can kind of like go through it together. It almost kind of feels like, not like you're applying for like the co for college, but almost this weird adult trip of like, kind of something similar. Like we're, oh, am I gonna have a roommate and then we're gonna like get to know each other and have fun for 10 days or, and also trying to like learn something almost like a school trip, but for grown adults

Adapted Podcast:

It's like kind of a, a lifetime milestone or something, right? Yeah,

Samantha Lyons:

Yeah. And I was like getting to know new people. So I think that's one of my, one of the most fun parts of life. So I feel like even if I could get to know one person, then that would be fun and of itself.

Adapted Podcast:

Well Sam, thank you so much for your time today. I enjoyed talking to you. I hope it was, is there anything else you wanted to say then? I didn't

Samantha Lyons:

No, thanks for having me and taking the time to do this. Sorry if it wasn't more like interesting <laugh>.

Adapted Podcast:

No, no, no. It's, I think it's, it's, it's really brave, especially you've, you've been to just only two adoptee meetups and then come on a podcast. I think it's really brave.

Samantha Lyons:

So, oh, thanks.