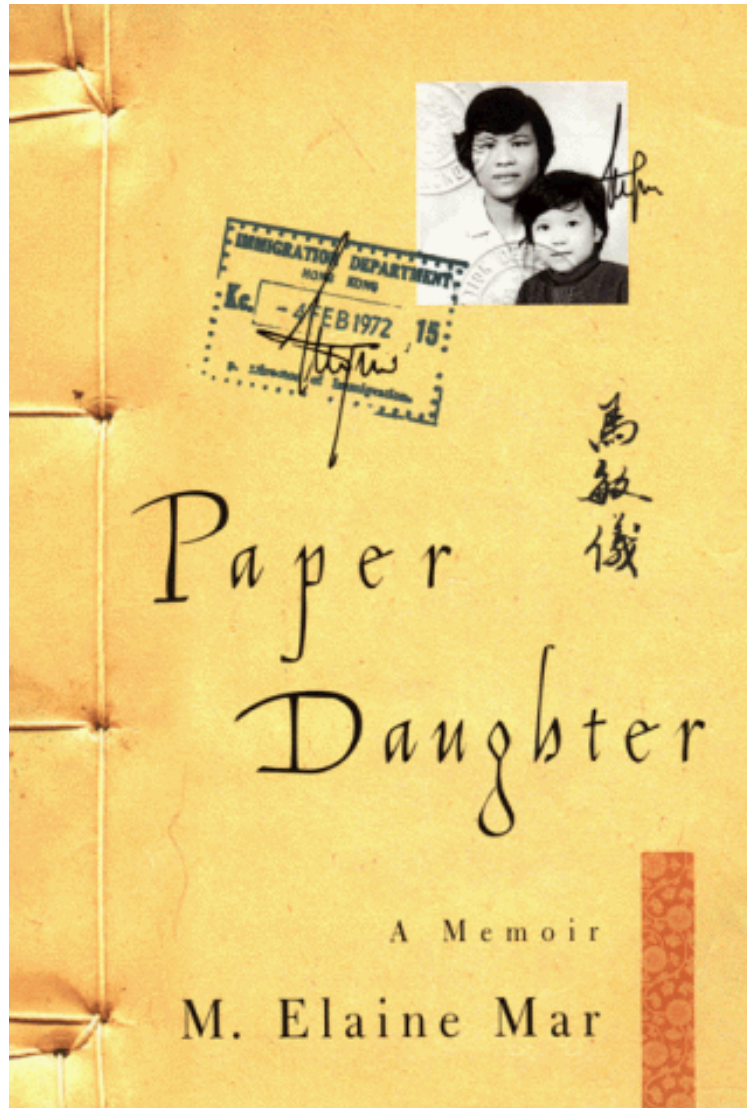


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Paper Daughter: A Memoir

M. Elaine Mar

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M. Elaine Mar : Paper Daughter: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Paper Daughter: A Memoir:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I really enjoyed this memoir By Nicole I really enjoyed this memoir. It gave great insight into the childhood of an immigrant. I would have liked Mar to address the issues of depression and anorexia she goes through. She goes through both but doesn't talk much about their impact. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Amazing story, great read By LoveMyBaby I had to choose a book off of a list for my graduate cross and chose this one. Best pick ever. The author draws you into her story about her immigration into

America from Hong Kong and I was able to relate to her experiences in so many ways, despite being born an American. I love her writing and details and how she incorporates her first language and culture seamlessly with her story, without making it a history or course lesson. I laughed and cried and wished I could speak with her today, that's how amazing I found the book. I love to read, and have to read often for school and because I'm a teacher. I recommend this book to everyone because of how powerful the story is, no matter what your background or reason for reading. 11 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Lonely daughter, sad heart By Luan Gaines From the first page, this moving memoir captures the essence of the transplanted life of a jook-kok, a Chinese-American child born in the old country. Born in Hong Kong, Elaine (her "American" name) immigrates to the United States when she is five years old. All her early childhood memories, the safety of a poor but well-ordered life are based on the identity and acceptance of her Hong Kong relatives. In America, Elaine's nuclear family lives with her father's sister and her family in Denver, Colorado. Most of this extended family works long, arduous hours in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant, preparing "Chinese" food and washing dishes. With the adults engaged in economic survival, Elaine and her young cousin, San, spend many hours supervised by Elaine's non-English speaking mother. The most painful hours of Elaine's life are spent in school. She enters first grade with few language skills, unable to express herself adequately. Unable, as well, to defend herself against the taunts of the children, who call her "chink" and "slant-eyes". Gradually, as her command of language improves, as well as comprehension of American social nuances, Elaine begins to blend in with her classmates. With the longing of a child's heart, she is thrust daily into the fractured world of Chinese vs American. In spite of the painful solitude Elaine endures, she retains a strong sense of self, blindly reaching to make her life tolerable. Her mother will never comprehend the daughter's suffering, she has her own pain, and there are no Chinese words for what the child is experiencing. This is a heartbreaking story of culture shock and self-survival. Elaine's acceptance in America depends upon her ability to adapt, to read the signs of her environment. Ultimately, her life is split in half, between Chinese and American. She makes difficult choices, at the cost of her Chinese heart. She has written this memoir to reclaim that heart, and to tell her family she has not forgotten. But they cannot read English words and she is forever outside the embrace of her two cultures. In the last sentence, M. Elaine Mar tells us, "Like my grandfather, I'd immigrated, with no way to send for my family."

When she was five years old, M. Elaine Mar and her mother emigrated from Hong Kong to Denver to join her father in a community more Chinese than American, more hungry than hopeful. While working with her family in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant and living in the basement of her aunt's house, Mar quickly masters English and begins to excel in school. But as her home and school life--Chinese tradition and American independence--become two increasingly disparate worlds, Mar tries desperately to navigate between them. Adolescence and the awakening of her sexuality leave Elaine isolated and confused. She yearns for storebought clothes and falls for a red-haired boy who leads her away from the fretful eyes of her family. In his presence, Elaine is overcome by the strength of her desire--blocking out her family's visions of an arranged marriage in Hong Kong. From surviving racist harassment in the schoolyard to trying to flip her straight hair like Farrah Fawcett, from hiding her parents' heritage to arriving alone at Harvard University, Mar's story is at once an unforgettable personal journey and an unflinching, brutal look at the realities of the American Dream.

.com Born in Hong Kong to parents who immigrated there from the Toishan region of mainland China, Elaine Mar came to America in 1972, when she was not quite 6. Colorado was quite a shock to a girl who had previously shared a five-room apartment with four other families. "She must be rich," Man Yee (her Chinese name) thought, emerging from the basement room where she and her parents slept to explore her Aunt Becky's three-bedroom house in a working-class Denver neighborhood. Not so: her aunt, father, and other relatives worked in the kitchen of a restaurant owned by others, and Mar's pungent memoir of her odyssey from poor immigrant to Harvard undergraduate shatters stereotypes about Asians as the "model minority." She was a smart girl and a good student who soon preferred the American name Elaine and "only spoke Chinese when absolutely necessary," but she found it hard to decipher the "cultural cues" on which social success in school depended. Honestly chronicling conflicts with her parents, whose horizons and expectations seemed unbearably limited, Mar outlines her youthful rebellion and their response with mature understanding. Her observation of American life is as clear-eyed and unsentimental as her self-portrait of a girl adrift between two cultures. --Wendy Smith From Publishers Weekly Asked by her third grade teacher to tell the class "what it's like being Chinese," Mar stumbled for a moment and answered, "Um, I like it, I guess." Her plainly told memoir, which recounts her passage from life in a crowded Hong Kong tenement to being a Harvard graduate, is the longer answer to her teacher's naive question. Opening the book with her first memory (the crunch of chicken bones between her teeth), Mar goes on to depict, with a strained simplicity, her arrival in Denver at the age of five and the difficulties of dealing with the competing demands of her traditionally minded parents and her new American peers. For Mar, being from Hong Kong is not all firecrackers and dragon dances, though she assures her classmates that these are weekly pleasures there. In elementary school, her greatest desire is to "obscure" her "foreignness." Nightly, she peers into the mirror, pinching at her face, hoping to shape her nose into something narrower and more "American."

Rather than delve into the motivations of those around her, Mar often attempts to preserve the confusion she experienced as a child: "I didn't understand anything about America. In Hong Kong, everybody liked me. Now no one did." The result is a curiously shallow look at her life. She closes the book with an epilogue summarizing her years at college during which the breach between her and her parents widened. Attending Harvard, she concludes, was her own irreversible immigration. Agents, Lane Zachary and Todd Schuster. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Mar came here from Hong Kong at age five, lived for years between two cultures, and ended up at Harvard. Sounds like a nice addition to the burgeoning genre of Chinese American memoir. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.