

"Where I'm From" Big Paper Quotations

"Guardian Angel"

Now that [Miho] was next to me, I could see that she had probably been crying earlier. I felt sorry for her—how miserable it must feel to be new, to not speak a word of English, and to have to start off in that ridiculous outfit that I was sure her mom had made her wear, with that awful name, and she wasn't even pretty.

But I felt even sorrier for myself. Miho was exactly the kind of person that I feared everyone saw when they looked at me: weird, awkward, Japanese. I couldn't afford to take on an anchor like Miho. (Page 2)

“Fear”

[Eriko’s mother:] “If people don’t want to be your friend because you are Miho’s friend, then they are not the real friend.”

[Eriko:] “They are real friends. She just didn’t fit in.”

I knew in my heart that my mother was right. I knew that I was being a coward. I knew that the right thing to do, the kind thing to do, would have been to be Miho’s friend. But Miho and I being Japanese together would have doomed us both, and I was afraid of testing my friends, of not fitting in myself. My fear was greater than my compassion, and I sacrificed Miho to that fear.

Who can face that about themselves in eighth grade, when we are all made of fear? I couldn’t.
(Pages 6-7)

“History”

Miho wrote everyone’s name in katakana. People thought it was cool. I was proud of us both, and for once, I felt good about being Japanese. Miho smiled at me. I smiled back.

Then someone said, “My grandfather died in Pearl Harbor.” People looked at me and Miho. Miho looked at me.

I wanted to say, That wasn’t me. That’s not my country.

I wanted to say, What about Hiroshima? My great-aunt died in Hiroshima.

But the thing is, I’m not Japanese. (Page 5)

“We”

“Why do you say ‘we’?” my father asks. “Our family was still farming rice in Japan when that happened. And you’re not even white.”

“Because . . .” I have to think about that one for a moment. “Because it was America that did it. And I’m American.”

“What do you say when you talk about Hiroshima, where Haruna-obasan died? Who is ‘we’ then?”

I don’t have a good answer to that question.

(Page 6)

“Bon-Odori”

We bought hanabi to take home with us, and crouched on the street in front of the house and watched tiny balls of orange fire spark and snap at the ends of the rice straws that we held in our hands. My grandmother served us glasses of barley tea and sent us inside to bathe and go to bed.

I could feel the tradition in my bones. When I close my eyes, I can feel it still. (Page 7)