ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

It's a Long Way from China to Hollywood
Grace F. Yang
Sames
iUniverse
978-1-4502-9659-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

It's an old story: an immigrant family survives serious hardship and manages to make it big in America. Some may think they've heard it all before, and yet there is always something new to learn from each experience. In *It's a Long Way from China to Hollywood*, readers learn about Chinese and American culture through the immigrant eyes of Yanyan Yang, who became known as Grace F. Yang as she made her way across the globe seeking a better future for herself and her daughter.

Culture shock started early for Yang, who grew up in communist China's Henan Province in the 1960s. As a child, she was accustomed to ration coupons, water shortages, and constant hunger. Yang was thus completely stunned by her first trip to the city of Beijing. On this rarest of occasions—an extended visit with her father—Yang encountered indoor plumbing and the most amazing invention: the toilet. She tells of her discovery with equal parts awe and good humor, a technique that makes her anecdotes both compelling and friendly.

Yang continues in this vein, sharing stories that not only tell about her life, but also provide a window onto cultural changes. Yang's maternal grandparents, for instance, had a traditional arranged marriage, and did not meet until after the wedding vows, when the ceremonial red cloth was removed from the bride's head. In contrast, Yang knew her first husband, Lu, all her life, though their families were still intimately involved in bringing the pair together. Several years later in America, the newly renamed Grace Yang found herself making relationship decisions completely on her own. She divorced Lu and married an Iranian man, throwing all Chinese tradition out the window save for the tight-fitting wedding gown that made it impossible for her to kneel at her new Iranian family's floor-level wedding feast.

The ability to capture culture clash in details like a Chinese-Iranian wedding is one of Yang's strengths, which is why the final section of her memoir is a bit disappointing. When Yang begins to focus on her daughter, Yvonne, the storytelling becomes somewhat vague.

Readers hear about the amazing opportunities Yvonne has in California—appearing on Disney television shows, music videos, and even a movie with her mother—but not a lot about the day-to-day relationship between mother and daughter. Yang tells us it was a tumultuous time, but doesn't show it with the precision of her earlier descriptions.

Yang's own story comes across quite clearly, however, and provides a personal look at larger social issues like marriage, economics, and politics. Readers will be drawn to the take-charge personality that sustained Yang during her struggles and the gentle humor she applies when looking back at a life fully lived.

Sheila M. Trask