



# Hapa Girl: A Memoir

*May-lee Chai*

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## **Hapa Girl: A Memoir** May-lee Chai

In the mid-1960s, Winberg Chai, a young academic and the son of Chinese immigrants, married an Irish-American artist. In *Hapa Girl* ("hapa" is Hawaiian for "mixed") their daughter tells the story of this loving family as they moved from Southern California to New York to a South Dakota farm by the 1980s. In their new Midwestern home, the family finds itself the object of unwelcome attention, which swiftly escalates to violence. The Chais are suddenly socially isolated and barely able to cope with the tension that arises from daily incidents of racial animosity, including random acts of cruelty.

May-lee Chai's memoir ends in China, where she arrives just in time to witness a riot and demonstrations. Here she realizes that the rural Americans' *"fears of change, of economic uncertainty, of racial anxiety, of the unknowable future compared to the known past were the same as China's. And I realized finally that it had not been my fault."*

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