

Trundle rondo for a long time it stood marker and marked
Mostly, we cross bridges we did not see being built
—Myung Mi Kim, *Under Flag*

It was probably 2001 or 2002, definitely before I had kids, and perhaps I even stood smoking as I hobnobbed outside a reading by Harryette Mullen, Myung Mi Kim, and some younger one who had been introduced as the latest Wallace Stevens or something. We were all appalled and frankly I felt sickened at the lack of respect shown for the truly astounding Mullen and Kim. Such weird, semi-conscious gestures are very powerful, unfortunately, and even more unfortunately, they lessen the journeys of us all.

I first knew Myung as her student in the MFA program at San Francisco State University in the mid-1990s. Her teaching like her writing is concise, precise, and luminous, and she was brilliant, demanding, and kind. She allowed us and our work to be present in the field of her vision and practice. Her ability to exist as a poet and as a mother in a culture often categorically hostile to both—and to the combination—was (and is) inspiring. Her pressing upon us of Jabes, Celan, Collobert, Cha, Michael Palmer, Susan Howe, and others—was deeply instructive.

In a later poem, “Lilyfoil (or Boy & Girl Tramps of America),” I tucked her title “under flag,” into a little fable of my elementary years:

it might be enough to say,
some ground cover has flowers that
are perfect doll bouquets, that
teacher read our heads down in the
dusty under flag, that when we were
born there was a war on,
and tear gas
at home.

My best friend during those elementary years was Ngoc, with whom I had the controlling chaos of the Berkeley Unified School District, and a mother with a jaw set in some sort of permanent mourning, in common—not to mention the lessons in femininity provided by the American Broadcasting Company. Ngoc, though, was a refugee from Vietnam, and her and her mother's sorrows and struggles I'm sure I still can't fathom. They were wrapped in my kid-mind in the horrifying image of the young girl running naked, and also a more prosaic but for me indelible moment from an episode of *M*A*S*H* where a mother strangles her baby in order to quiet her/him and save other lives on a bus ride through hell. (And yet another lesson in femininity emanating from the TV.) The stanza above describes our second grade year, when she'd first arrived in the U.S., and the reference to Myung's work, in case it's not obvious, was important to its creation.

I remember Myung taking my daughter Ivy's then two-and-a-half year old hand as we walked to my reading at Rust Belt Books in Buffalo in 2005, and with the swiftest sigh and phrase communicating such a great appreciation for the sweetness of parenting a very small child,

and in the motel room later, she said she was impressed with my patience (apparently changed from my prozac and nicotine fueled grad-schooling years)—as any parent of a very young one can imagine, this praise felt a great salve. It was on that same evening that I first found out we both have connections to the gorgeous red earth of Oklahoma, where my mom and grandma were born, and where Myung’s family first arrived from Korea.

She also took Sarah Anne Cox (my “co-reader”) and me to lunch on that trip to Buffalo and handed out singular encouragement and then, between talk and reading, had us to dinner at her house with her teenage son Malcolm, Michael Cross, my husband Paul, and Ivy, and at one point old Ginny dolls which I’d saved for my kids were produced from my bag and their particular dresses sent Sarah quickly back to her childhood in Puerto Rico.

I know some people spend a lot of time traveling and socializing with other poets, but I don’t somehow seem to, at least not these years, and this trip meant a very lot. It would’ve in any case.

I most recently saw Myung tenderly reading from the manuscript of *Penury* at Small Press Traffic in early 2007 when I was pregnant with my daughter Gemma. I went to the party afterwards at Susan Gevirtz’s. Norma Cole was there, and Simone Fattal, Bob Gluck, and lots of us old students: Dana Teen Lomax, Sarah Anne Cox (who had read also), Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, Sarah Rosenthal. . . My closest memory of that night is Myung and Tsering laughing about moments when it is most convenient to pretend not to know English.