

How to Make a Life: A Tibetan Refugee Family and the Midwestern Woman They Adopted

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How to Make a Life: A Tibetan Refugee Family and the Midwestern Woman They Adopted, by Madeline Uraneck. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018. xi, 242 pp. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography. \$22.95 paperback.

Reviewer Matthew Walsh is professor of history at Des Moines Area Community College. He is the author of *The Good Governor: Robert Ray and the Indochinese Refugees of Iowa* (2017), which won the State Historical Society of Iowa's Benjamin Shambaugh Award.

Madeline Uraneck's memoir focuses on her mutually beneficial relationship with a Tibetan American refugee family. While employed in Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction, the author began an enduring friendship with office cleaning woman Tenzin Kalsang. Uraneck served as a cultural guide for Tenzin, her husband Migmar, and their four children. At the same time, the newcomers guided Uraneck's learning about Tibetan culture and her newly adopted family's background.

In the 1950s, communist China exerted dominance over Tibet. Tibetans felt under siege as Chinese authorities repressed cultural traditions. During that tumult, Migmar escaped to India, where he eventually met his future wife, Tenzin, in a refugee camp. After winning a U.S. immigration lottery, Tenzin arrived in 1993, and her husband and children soon followed.

Uraneck's book is valuable for addressing underexplored topics. Scholars of the Midwest are far more likely to write about farming than immigrants, particularly Asian Americans. Outsiders often see places like Iowa and Wisconsin as boring and homogenous farm states. University of Wisconsin representatives tried to combat this stereotype when they Photoshopped a black male onto a 2000 application brochure. Yet vibrant communities such as Wisconsin's Tibetan and Iowa's Tai Dam thrive in the Midwest.

When historians do study immigrants and refugees, they often neglect children, whereas Uraneck focuses on this overlooked group. In Wisconsin the four Kalsang youngsters had to adjust to English language classrooms with interactive learning as opposed to the lecture and memorization style they were accustomed to. Among the points of interest are the way the children learned to celebrate birthdays, dealt with Chinese Americans, contemplated total independence for Tibet, and picked their own spouse or married one of their parents' choosing.

This is a fine introduction to Tibetan diasporic culture. Readers are walked through refugee neighborhoods in Wisconsin, India, and Nepal; learn the divide between those who yearn for complete independence for Tibet and those who want the Middle Way; and encounter the 49-

day Buddhist mourning ritual and traditional Tibetan wedding rites. Although written clearly, the book should have included a timeline to help readers with the sequence of important family events. Gender roles receive cursory attention. Did Migmar's cleaning job carry greater stigma because it was seen as women's work? Did Tenzin, who had been employed longer than her husband, earn more money? If so, did that create tension in the household? Also, immigrants and refugees often live in communities with African Americans as neighbors: What interactions did the family have with blacks?

Uraneck, a childless divorcée, filled a void through her relationship with this refugee family. "Welcoming these wayfarers," she writes, "rekindles our humanity and heals our broken parts." These words echo the sentiment of numerous Iowans during the Vietnam War era. As they supported Governor Robert Ray's resettlement of refugees, many Iowans healed from the wounds of the Vietnam War. Uraneck demonstrates that when we close the door on refugees, it is not only the refugees who lose out.

Between Gravity and What Cheer: Iowa Photographs, by Barry Phipps. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018. iv, 104 pp. 105 color photographs. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Drake Hokanson is an author, photographer, and independent scholar. He has written about and photographed Iowa extensively, including *Reflecting a Prairie Town: A Year in Peterson* (1994) and *The Lincoln Highway: Main Street Across America* (1988).

Photographer Barry Phipps is a recent migrant to Iowa from Chicago. In his short years here he has brought us a crisp, colorful look at the wide reaches of the Hawkeye State. Phipps admits that he knew nothing about Iowa's towns and landscape when he arrived. *Between Gravity and What Cheer* is his attempt to discover some essential visual facts about his adopted state.

Over four years he traveled border to border and shot hundreds of rolls of color film (yes, film). Phipps marked up his state map and headed to towns with interesting names (Diagonal, Gravity, What Cheer), eventually photographing in all 99 counties. Phipps draws on his training as a painter and responds to his subjects almost entirely visually — free of history, geography, or a sense of lives lived in a great open state. He was particularly drawn to small-town main streets, where he found old neon signs, red gas pumps, modern blue steel buildings, and a building front painted like the American flag, echoing Robert Frank's *The Americans*. He brings us rural land as well — rivers, fields, wind turbines