

“Where Are You Froooooooooom?”

As a five-year-old adoptee from Korea who has grown up in the primarily Caucasian world of central Nebraska, I often wished, as a child, that I could look like everyone else. Early on, I was often confused by the unthinking remarks I received. Neighborhood boys teased me about my eyes and I was hurt. As a teen, I remember a lady in the locker room turning in my direction and saying slowly and loudly: **“Welcome to America!”** When I was sure she was talking to me, I said: **“Uh, thanks! You too?!”**

While chasing my kids around the playground, another little girl climbed up a ladder close to me. When she was eye level with me, she brightly said, “Hola!” It took me a second, but I chuckled and, with a smile said, “Hola!” back to her. Likewise, at a friend’s relative’s house, a woman claimed that I look just like someone she knew. She searched all her photo albums to show me a picture of an Asian man who, in my opinion, looked like a sumo wrestler.

Today I have grown to embrace the beauty of diversity, to see the humor or lack of education in insensitive remarks so that my initial response is not one of hurt or anger, but grace.

As a nurse, my experiences like this have grown exponentially. When gently waking a gentleman from anesthesia after surgery confused and dazed, he looked straight at me and yelled, “Am I in China!?” Most of the time I find the best response is to smile and answer simply, in this case, saying, “no sir, you are not in China.”

One of the first patients I took care of as a new RN was a talkative Caucasian woman who, though considered a difficult patient, for some reason, adored me. While doing my tasks, I would listen to her. The last day I cared for her, she said to me, “My husband and I were thinking. When my husband was in the service, he spent time in Japan and had ‘relations’ with

some of the Japanese women there. We think it is possible that you could be our granddaughter.” There was *so much* that was inappropriate about that comment, and I admit I was so shocked I just did a confused nod while backing out of the room.

Other times I feel I can gently help educate people a bit. The question I get most from people is “Where are you from?” I know what they want to know, but I like to make them work for it a little bit. When I nonchalantly tell them that I grew up right here in Nebraska, they usually reply with “But where are you frooooooom?”

I tell them though I was adopted as a little girl from Korea, I am an American, and just like them, I grew up in America. Sometimes I see the light dawn, and sometimes not – but I have spoken the truth in love. I’ve learned to extend grace instead of taking offense, to assume the best in people, and to embrace the humor in it all. Fortunately, these practices flowed right into nursing and have made me become the nurse I am now today, one I am proud of.

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