

## **Anna Gilstrap: An Interview by Maggie Yang**

**Conducted on via Zoom on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Anna is a transracial adoptee from Wuhan, China, and the founder of *Adoptee Unite*—an Instagram-based platform to foster community and understanding among adoptees. Beyond fostering meaningful conversations about the adoption experience, Anna's ultimate vision is to provide to fully fund adoptees through higher education. Her work stems from her experiences navigating the "adoptee fog," during which she began connecting with fellow adoptees. As founder of *In Between*, Anna supports Asian American adoptees and Asian Americans alike who didn't feel like they belonged within the binary Asian or American culture. As a biology major at the University of Utah, Anna continues to promote her voice as a scientist and as an adoptee activist.

**Maggie Yang** 00:00

Hello, Anna. I wanted to start by saying thank you for your time. I appreciate you being here today and sharing your experience with us. The work you do for the adoptee community is so incredibly important. And I can't wait to learn more about it. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, feel free to stop me, and we can end it whenever you want. Besides that, I'm very excited to start our conversation. First of all, tell me a little about yourself. How did you become involved in adoptee activism?

**Anna Gilstrap** 00:25

Thank you so much, Maggie, for inviting me to this archive process. My name is Anna Gilstrap, and I am an adoptee from China. I was adopted at 11 months old. I was adopted from Wuhan, China and I was adopted transracially by a white family.<sup>1</sup> The adoption process, to me, was pretty straightforward. There were no bumps in the road or anything, but it wasn't until I reached my teen years [that] I started to question or come up with the adoptee fog, which is a term used in the adoptee community to represent coming to terms with your adoption story and coming to terms with your adoption, history and identity as an adoptee. When I was a teenager, I started questioning a lot. That's when I started really reaching out to other organizations and other people like me. My adoption agency was CCAI, and I was in their cultural language school.<sup>2</sup> The cultural language school had a lot of adoptees and I started reaching out to a lot of them talking about my history, as an adoptee and my feelings towards adoption. All of these questions that came up to me, like, why

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<sup>1</sup> Transracial adoption, or interracial adoption, is when a child of one racial identity is adopted by parent(s) of another racial identity.

<sup>2</sup> CCAI is a non-profit 501c3 charity founded by Joshua Zhong and Lily Nie in 1992. It works with governments in China, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Colombia to facilitate international adoptions. CCAI opened the Joyous Chinese Cultural School (JCCS) in 1996 as part of their post-adoption support.

did my birth parents abandon me? Or why was I relinquished? Why did my adoptive parents decide to adopt me? All these questions came up, and I started conversing with other adoptees. When I was about 17, I decided to go on a service trip for adoptees who wanted to help out in an orphanage in China. I decided to apply, and it was through the Adopteen CCAI organization.<sup>3</sup> I got in, and I actually got to go to Wuhan, my birth town. There were about 29 other girls with me, and we kind of just experienced life in Wuhan, and experienced life as service people in an orphanage. We got to converse with a lot of the orphans in the orphanage. We got to talk to a lot of the teens, and some people who have aged out for not being adopted anymore, because in China, you have to be below the age of 14. I'm not sure if it changed, but there are some rules that go along with that. There were just a bunch of stories and my friends. After the trip, we decided to create an organization called In Between that supported Asian American adoptees or Asian Americans who didn't feel like they belonged within the binary Asian or American culture. We did that, and I became the editor-in-chief of that national organization. I also decided to make a club at my university at Regis University at the time concerning In Between.<sup>4</sup> That's how I got started in activism: just going to China and working at an orphanage for the summer. It was really, really eye-opening and really emotional.

**Maggie Yang** 05:36

It sounds like the experience of going to China was a very grounded experience. I'm curious to see what that experience was like. Could you speak more about the most important takeaway from this trip, and if you feel comfortable, was there, like a specific individual at the orphanage you connected most with?

**Anna Gilstrap** 05:56

There was a lot that went on in the service trip, it was very, very emotional, and very bonding for all of us. Even though there were 30 Other adoptees, we all felt like, we were connected. And we all felt like we were really, really close. We all talk to each other and everything. The orphanage was pretty. It wasn't like you see in the movies. It was a very nice orphanage. The children had a lot of different resources and everything. We don't know if that's [just] the orphanage that they decided to take us to because it was so nice, but there were a lot of children there who really spoke to me and really made an impact in my life. There were two sisters, who were very, very close with each other. One of them was almost to the age of 14, and the other one was younger. They were in the process of getting an adoption but then one day, the older sister turned 14, and so her adoption process was terminated completely. So, the other sister decided to terminate her adoption as well because she

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<sup>3</sup> *Adopteen* is part of The Park Adoption Community Center. It is an organization focused on creating in-person connection spaces for teenaged adoptees to form community.

<sup>4</sup> Regis University is a private Jesuit university in Denver, Colorado.

didn't want to leave her sister. That was really, really hard for me to, to have to hear. And hard for me to, I guess, process. It brought up questions like, what if I had a sister? What if I had a brother or like other siblings on? And where are they exactly? It brought up those kinds of questions. Then there was another girl at the orphanage who had a major heart disease. She had such a major severe heart disease that her complexion was always like a bluish tint. I think something happened where she was trying to get surgery or something, and they didn't have enough money for the surgery. And so that was pretty heartbreaking to have to know that she was going to pass on soon. , that was really heartbreaking because she was about 13. Yeah, just other small stories and they were all really impactful to me. I Every day we came back from the orphanage, and all of us would just start crying. Because it was so emotionally labor intensive. It was really special though, it was a lot. I still keep in contact with the people who I went to China with on the service trip. We wish each other happy birthdays every year. We have a mini celebration of the anniversary of when we went to China together.

**Maggie Yang** 10:45

Thank you so much for sharing. From what you've been telling me, it seems like these are all “small” stories, but they have had such a big, enormous and significant impact on you guys. I wanted to ask about your questions about potential siblings? Have you been able to answer these questions?

**Anna Gilstrap** 11:06

Yeah, so there is a really good resource, I'd have to look at it, though. It's for adoptees who want to find their birth family. It's different private investigators that reside in China. And you can contact them through WeChat, or, like Gmail, or your email, and they can find your birth parents or birth family.<sup>5</sup> I was thinking about doing that a lot. But some questions came up. I'm like, why? Why exactly did they—my birth family—relinquish me at such a young age? And would they even want to see me? Would they even want to contact me? And is it even safe to do so? Is it safe for them to contact me? I'm still thinking through it. I still have the contact information of the private investigator. She says whenever you're ready, whenever you're emotionally ready, I can start this process for you. I started a finding poster with a WeChat group. And so they post my finding poster on Weibo, or different social media sites in China.<sup>6</sup>

**Maggie Yang** 12:59

This is a very emotionally taxing experience, especially if you're an adoptee, so take all the time you need in the world because there's obviously no rush. This is such an essential part of these

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<sup>5</sup> Wechat, or Weixin in Chinese, a widely used instant messaging social media application used in China.

<sup>6</sup> Weibo is a widely-used social media platform used for media sharing in China.

identities that there can't be any rush to it. So you talked a bit about using the word “relinquish”. In popular media, people often use the word “abandon”, is there a significance when you're using these words about the adoptee community?

**Anna Gilstrap** 13:35

Yes, so relinquished. It depends on where you are with your journey. A lot of people want to use the word relinquished because it doesn't sound as potent, or it sounds more politically correct. I like to use the word relinquished when I'm talking one-on-one with someone. But when I'm with my therapist, I use the word abandoned, because it holds that reality, and it holds that weight, where there's a lot of trauma that goes with abandonment. To face that trauma, you need to name the trauma and name what you're going through in order to heal from that trauma.

**Maggie Yang** 15:06

Thank you for sharing that the words you use are very meaningful. They do have a lot of impact on the adoptees themselves. I want to learn more about what it means to you to be a transracial adoptee. How does that part of your identity play into your role as editor in chief or In Between?

**Anna Gilstrap** 15:29

Can you repeat that question again? Sorry.

**Maggie Yang** 15:34

Yeah, no worries. I wanted to ask what it means to you to be a transracial adoptee. How does that part of your identity play into your role as editor-in-chief for In Between?

**Anna Gilstrap** 15:47

For In Between, being a transracial adoptee correlates to the aspect of me being taken away from my roots, as my heritage is Chinese and going through a white upbringing. It's a lot of work for the editor-in-chief position In Between. I did a lot of research on resources for transracial adoptees, and resources for international adoptees, specifically Asian Americans. That was a really big aspect of why I decided to start In Between. After I started In Between at my university, I decided that while I realized that there were other adoptees who weren't transracial adoptees and weren't international adoptees like me. I thought that that was really interesting. I wanted to know if we had the same questions and if we had the same type of same type of inquiries and traumas. That's how I developed Adoptees Unite—to reach the full holistic adoptee community. That's how I started Adoptees Unite and why being transracial was a steppingstone towards Adoptees Unite.

**Maggie Yang** 18:25

Yeah, speaking of Adoptees Unite, I wanted to ask, why is it important for adoptees to have this connected community online that you've established through Adoptees Unite?

**Anna Gilstrap** 18:40

Yeah, so there are a lot of organizations out there who do support for the adoptive parents, and who do support for adoptees and foster care youth simultaneously. But there aren't very many for specific adoptees. And that's why I decided to create adoptees unite so that adoptees can have this safe space, this brave space as well, in order to process their trauma with other adoptees in a nonprofessional setting and also to share their experiences and share their questions as well. I think it's important because there are a lot of adoptees out there who don't feel like they belong in either of their cultures. Even if they're domestic and non-transracial adoptees, there's still that cultural imbalance between different families and different regions in their country. We want to have a community of people who can help us through different traumas and different aspects of those traumas. Sometimes, the only way to help a person through something is to experience it yourself. Since we've all experienced the trauma related to adoption, we can help each other through different questions that we have concerning it.

**Maggie Yang** 20:48

I agree with you about the need for resources specifically for adoptees. And so, I wonder, what are some challenges that you faced in establishing and growing this organization?

**Anna Gilstrap** 21:04

Some of the challenges that I've faced is when I'm getting the word out there. I'm advertising that we have a community of adoptees, and we have a safe space for people like us. Also, we're a solely volunteer-based organization, and there aren't very many people out there who have heard of this organization and who have expressed interest in being volunteers. We do have a content team, a diversity equity inclusion team, an administrative team, and a moderator team for our online space. But it's still, like, a huge thing to undertake. We're always in constant need of staff and volunteers. So that's a really big, really big aspect of it at night is our staff and our volunteers.

**Maggie Yang** 22:48

I'm impressed with all the initiatives that these volunteer staff have created, like the Adoptees United Scholarship Fund. I'm curious to see what the goal your vision for Adoptees Unite is, both in terms of reach and its impact on the adoptee community as a whole.

**Anna Gilstrap 23:10**

My vision, personally for Adoptees Unite is to fully fund adoptees through higher education. That would be an amazing goal for Adoptees Unite. To have these scholarships that can fully fund adoptees, or maybe even work with specific universities to fully fund adoptees throughout their higher education with the help of donors and other resources. That would be amazing because a lot of adoptees have certain aspects of their lives where they can't pursue higher education sometimes. Maybe it's because their passions don't align with their adoptive families' passions and so their adoptive family may not fund them or just other personal issues. There's also the aspect that we want to fund adoptees by searching for their birth families. We would love to find donors or on different scholarship opportunities where we can fully fund adoptees through DNA testing and the private investigators to help find their birth family. And then we would really like to grow our Instagram account to make it so that it's more educational as well. A lot of our resources and a lot of our Instagram content is pretty content heavy. And so I would really like to keep that up. I'm making it a more educational experience for the followers.

**Maggie Yang 25:27**

Yeah, speaking of these different projects, are there any specific campaigns or projects that Adoptees Unite is currently working on? And how can individuals interested in supporting or getting involved contribute to these efforts?

**Anna Gilstrap 25:45**

Yeah, so with the Adoptees United Scholarship Fund this year, we're in limbo right now with our scholarship. It was supposed to open this November or this month, but we didn't have enough contributors to or donors to donate for the scholarship. And so, we're in a limbo right now. And then other aspects of that. We're trying to broaden our partnership opportunities as well. And so we've been partnering with organizations like Sisters of China and My China Roots.<sup>7</sup> We've been partnering with other life coaches as well as adoptee life coaches specifically. We have a life coach who is currently working with us, they are offering their services for Adoptees Unite. We're trying to work with other life coaches and healthcare professionals to help adoptees have that community and also those resources to help them through trauma and to help them through their questions.

**Maggie Yang 27:31**

Outside of the scholarship fund, what do you hope to get out of long-term from these partnerships with life coaches or bigger organizations like My China Roots?

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<sup>7</sup> Sisters of China is a community organization intended to unify female-identifying Chinese adoptees worldwide. My China Roots is a Chinese genealogy organization founded by Huihan Lie that help clients uncover their family history.

**Anna Gilstrap 27:43**

So I'm hoping to really grow adoptees unite into a an organization that has a bunch of resources for adoptees just holistically, adoptees, not specifically. Maybe not specifically Chinese adoptees or international or transracial, but every adoptee can come and find these resources and find these mental health or life coaches, and finally, scholarships that they can apply to, or that they can find other aspects of our community that they may resonate with. And to just find a community of adoptees and to understand that they're not alone. And that's the big goal of Adoptees Unite is to really push that adoptees are not alone, and that we're a community, not just a sole person. We're a huge community that can help you.

**Maggie Yang 29:18**

I think you've been able to achieve that. Looking at the Adoptees Unite Instagram page, a stronger sense of community is being built. Given the digital nature of Adoptees Unite, have there been any innovative approaches that you've integrated into the platform to enhance the online experience for adoptees overall?

**Anna Gilstrap 29:43**

Discord has been really helpful for us. Initially, Adoptees Unite was a group chat. It was just a small WhatsApp group chat.<sup>8</sup> And then people ended up saying, Oh Anna, you should do this on Discord because it has so many channels that you can create and so many other just like resources that you can provide for adoptees. I looked into Discord, and I was like, oh, this looks cool.<sup>9</sup> And so, I decided to create, like, the community around Discord. And there were a ton of people that started flooding in. And there were a ton of adoptees who were on very lost, especially during COVID. This was all during the COVID pandemic.<sup>10</sup> There were a lot of adoptees who were coming out of the fog, and they needed a community. We put it out there on Reddit.<sup>11</sup> And we said, hey, please join. We're a community of adoptees who want to talk about our questions concerning adoption. And so, yeah, that's how it grew.

**Maggie Yang 31:16**

Yeah. You mentioned this adoptee fog. Can you speak more as to what it is and how it is significant for adoptees?

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<sup>8</sup> Whatsapp is an instant messaging platform.

<sup>9</sup> Discord is an instant messaging social media platform which facilitates communication between users through multimedia.

<sup>10</sup> COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Reddit is an online community-based discussion platform.

**Anna Gilstrap** 31:27

Yeah, so adoptee fog. Coming out of it is on the process accepting your adoption story and finding out more about certain aspects of adoption that you may not have heard of before or been aware of or even accepted. Adoptee fog is mainly just like the suppression of all of those realizations about adoption, there could be like a very popular example is the fact that a lot of or some adoptees have been—this might be a trigger warning—a lot of adoptees may have been trafficked. That aspect of the fog is to suppress that, but coming out of the fog is saying, okay, I know that there is trafficking that occurred during my adoption story, and I want to delve deeper into that. So, in adoption, fog is the suppression and then coming out of it is the realization.

**Maggie Yang** 33:09

Thank you for explaining that very complex topic. I also wanted to ask how big is the Adoptees Unite team now compared to when you first started through Discord and a WhatsApp group chat?

**Anna Gilstrap** 33:26

Yeah, so our team right now. Let me look actually. I think there are there are about 20 members of our staff right now. It used to be mods and there was just me so there were probably six people. Those six people that we started off with during the 2021 year. So then, it grew into 20 members. So, yeah it's a lot. I feel like managing the staff is a lot of work, but it's super rewarding because I have so many people who are just as passionate about adoptee activism as I am. And it's really cool to see all the growth that happens within our staff and within our volunteer work and everything.

**Maggie Yang** 34:47

How did you initially come in contact with the six people you started the organization with?

**Anna Gilstrap** 34:55

I got in contact with them through Reddit. I put out an advertisement about that I needed staff or volunteers for Adoptees Unite. So, a lot of them were already a part of Adoptees Unite. It was easy for me to say tell, oh, this is this person, or that is that person. But there were some people who I didn't know and who weren't in adoptees unite yet. But we're still adoptees. And so, yeah, just adoptees from all over the world. We have a staff member from Belgium, we have a lot of people from all different parts of America, and we have some people from the UK. It's pretty diverse.

**Maggie Yang** 36:10



It sounds like it's a very international organization. I do hope that you continue to grow it. You also mentioned that many of the posts that Adoptees Unite puts out are content-heavy. Has there been any controversy over how these posts are perceived and received by both people within and outside the adoptee community?

**Anna Gilstrap 36:36**

There was a post that we did a while ago, it was on an adoptee named Landon, who was murdered by his adoptive family.<sup>12</sup> That was a pretty big post, it was really dark and very heavy for all of us. It took a lot for us to gather the information on Landon and do the graphics for it and keep our mental health in check. Because, you know, this is an adoptee from our community who passed away and it was just very, very sad. And a lot of our mental health was bad during that time. I'm trying to get through this post. But we were able to come together and say, like, a lot of people need to hear about this because there is a problem with adoptees dying by suicide, or being or by homicide, or other abuse that goes on within the adoptee community. We need to shed light on that. Another post was the Adoption Barbie post. We posted that during the time that Barbie came up with the movie. And so many adoptees started posting pictures on Adoptees Unite about this white doll holding a little tiny baby who is supposed to be like Chinese and it was called the adoption Barbie. And we renamed it as the white savior Barbie.<sup>13</sup> There was a lot of controversy with that. Because a lot of adoptees say, well, this is a portrayal of my adoption, and I'm proud of my adoption and I feel connected to my adoptive parents, this is just a very special and sacred journey for me. And so, this doll is a representation of that. But then some other adoptees believed that it was a commodification of adoptees and of people of color. When you see the doll holding the baby, it's like an accessory. Barbie always has an accessory, so there was that controversy, and it was pretty big. But I feel like these types of controversies needed to be [addressed]. Controversial topics need to be [addressed] within the adoptee community and need to be brought forth.

**Maggie Yang 40:21**

Considering the diversity of the adoptee experiences that you've touched upon, either through the Barbie situation or the Landon situation, how do you ensure that Adoptees Unite remains a supportive and inclusive space for all?

**Anna Gilstrap 40:38**

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<sup>12</sup> Landon Maloberti was a 5-year-old boy who faced abuse and was murdered by his adoptive parents, Lauren and Jacob Maloberti. <https://www.cbsnews.com/pittsburgh/news/homicide-charges-brought-against-adoptive-parents-in-death-of-5-year-old-boy/>.

<sup>13</sup> White Savior Barbie is the "Going Home Barbie," a white doll holding a small Asian baby made to help Chinese adoptees transition to their Western adoptive families. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/souvenir-slammed-white-savior-barbie-chinese-adoptees-reconnecting-rcna96692>.

Yeah, so we recently launched our diversity, equity and inclusion Task Force on the committee called the Mosaic team. We named it Mosaic because there's a mosaic of adoptees that come together and unite. They are responsible for ensuring that all of our posts are inclusive. Their main purpose is to promote inclusivity within adoption, Adoptees Unite, and to ensure that the members are staying inclusive and are promoting productive conversations within all of our chats. So there's the Mosaic team that we actually launched [one or two months ago].

**Maggie Yang** 41:45

I'm curious to see where the Mosaic team goes. Keep me updated. Going back to creating the post about Landon and your experience visiting the orphanage in China? These are all heavy topics that are often difficult to grapple with. How do you keep your mental health in check?

**Anna Gilstrap** 42:04

Yeah, so, I keep my mental health in check by talking with other people. I feel like talking is a big is a big important aspect of mental health. I talked with other people within Adoptees Unite and I talked to some of my friends from the orphanage trip the service trip. I also talk with a therapist as well. she's a trauma-informed therapist, not really an adoption-focused therapist, but she is trauma-informed. So, I do talk to her a lot. During the pandemic, I internalized a lot of the struggles of other people, and a lot of the trauma that other people have endured, instead of separating myself from their trauma. I've worked a lot with trying to separate myself from other people's trauma, while still maintaining empathy and reaching out to other people as well.

**Maggie Yang** 43:39

Thank you for sharing all these important approaches to keeping your mental health and health in check. I know it's a really important conversation to have surrounding the adoptee community, but these are really difficult concepts to grapple with. I want to pivot our conversation to your current role as a university student. I know you're currently a senior, so I wanted to ask if any of the work you do and adopt the activism have carried over to your student career and if your aspiration has evolved in any way.

**Anna Gilstrap** 44:16

So, I am currently a university student at the University of Utah.<sup>14</sup> [I'm a] senior and studied biology with an emphasis in biochemistry. I think a lot goes on with my background as a scientist. But really, I think Adoptees Unite has allowed me to understand and grapple with the activism within science as well. I'm promoting my voice as a scientist and as an adoptee activist. So, [Adoptees Unite] is

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<sup>14</sup> The University of Utah is a public research university established in 1850 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

like a stepping stone towards amplifying my voice through different opinions that I have as an adoptee. I'm liberating myself with science.

**Maggie Yang** 45:25

100%. I want to go back to your involvement in this bicultural organization, In Between, which you founded. How do you see these initiatives impact the experiences of Asian Americans who may disconnect from Asian and American identities?

**Anna Gilstrap** 45:43

What exactly do you mean by that? Sorry.

**Maggie Yang** 45:53

Yeah, no worries, I just wanted to understand what the ultimate goal for In Between is.

**Anna Gilstrap** 46:01

Okay, the ultimate goal for In Between, for all of us, is to build on a voice for ourselves as Asian Americans and to feel like we belong somewhere. I feel like a lot of Asian Americans, whether they're adoptees or not, feel like they don't belong in either culture. There's the aspect of language. I don't know the language as a native speaker [or] a person who was raised by Asian parents or raised in China. I don't know enough Mandarin to speak it fluently. There are some times when I go to China or I come in contact with someone who has been raised in that environment and I feel like I don't belong completely in the Chinese culture. Then there's also the aspect of the American culture, where I don't look white and I'm Chinese. There's this disconnect of, well, who am I? Who exactly am I as an Asian American? It's conflicting identities. And so, In Between is trying to mold those identities together as one.

**Maggie Yang** 47:57

Speaking of which, what do you want adoptees and Asian American youth to take away from the work you do?

**Anna Gilstrap** 48:06

So, I would really like the adoptee community and adoptees in general to know that they're not alone. I remember feeling really alone during the pandemic and feeling really alone during my teen years in general. Because I didn't feel like any adoptees felt the way I felt and had the same questions that I had. There were a lot of adoptees who I was with in the language school, who didn't really want to talk about those issues or topics, and that's completely fine. But I was in the stage

where I was trying to come out of the fog. And so, I want to try to amplify the voices of adoptees who want to ask these questions and who want to push the boundaries of what society views as adoption. Through rose-colored glasses and everything. I would like adoptees to know that they're not alone, that their voices are heard, and that there's no question that can't [or] shouldn't be asked.

**Maggie Yang** 49:49

To further realize the vision that you have, are there any specific goals or projects that you hope to pursue in the future?

**Anna Gilstrap** 49:59

I think the main project that we would love to push for [in the] future is the scholarships.<sup>15</sup> I think that the scholarships for higher education for adoptees is a big one. Especially since adoptees feel like they shouldn't apply for scholarships concerning immigration or they don't feel like they really fit the narrative of an immigrant. There aren't very many scholarships for adoptees. And so, I thought it would be something that we would really like to push for in the future. Also, [having] more collaborations with mental health professionals and like coaches would be a big one.

**Maggie Yang** 50:54

In your work with adoptees, have you identified any common themes or reoccurring issues within the adoptee community that you believe require more attention or advocacy?

**Anna Gilstrap** 51:09

Education is a big one. Educating other people, [like] non-adoptees about adoptee issues is a really big aspect of why I wanted to create an Instagram account for Adoptees Unite. Because even [with] some of my non-adoptee friends, there are a lot who say, oh, adoptees just should be grateful. They shouldn't want to find their birth family or why would you want to find your birth family if you have family now or something like that? Just pushing for education about adoptee issues is a big [goal].

**Maggie Yang** 52:07

You mentioned this idea of other people believing that adoptees should be inherently grateful. What are some other big misconceptions people have about the adoptee community?

**Anna Gilstrap** 52:22

[There's] a lot of misconceptions. If I could summarize it, I'd say that a lot of people think that the adoptee community is very exclusive and very entitled. There's a lot of talk, especially with my own

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<sup>15</sup> Adoptees Unite is hosting a scholarship with Bold.org to help adoptees pursue higher education.

friends who are non-adoptees, who say stuff like, oh, why do you want to find your birth family if you have such a great family now? And why do you not let other non-adoptees join your adoptee group? Because they want to be educated on this. Why don't you let non-adoptees into Adoptees Unite? My answer to that is adoptees have specific traumas that we don't want other people to have access to that, especially with other adoptees who are minors. There's been some adoptive parents that have come into the server pretending to be an adoptee and then spying on their kids. That's been a really hard thing to try to get away from and try to decrease. There needs to be a community that not only supports adoptees but also protects adoptees. I think that the protection is a big aspect.

**Maggie Yang** 54:57

What advice would you give to people in general wanting to get involved or contribute to adoptee activism?

**Anna Gilstrap** 55:07

If you're not an adoptee, I think the biggest thing that you can do is to share on social media information online, through your posts or through stories to amplify the adoptee voices out there and to follow different adoptee Instagram accounts or adoptive Facebook groups or on Twitter, which is now X, and social media in general.<sup>16</sup> Since a lot of adoptees are now switching to social media to amplify their voice. I think social media is a big contribution to amplifying adoptive voices. So, that would be a good place to start. Another thing is to do research. There's this thing where children can internalize the trauma that they had in the past. There's this book called *The Body Keeps the Score*.<sup>17</sup> It's about how we are physically remembering a lot of our trauma. There's that aspect as well. For adoptees, I think putting your voice out there is a big aspect of what you can do to get into activism, to put your voice out there, to contact other adoptee activist groups, to really delve deep into your own trauma as well, and to share that story with other people is a big one.

**Maggie Yang** 57:45

Do you want to share the link to Adoptees Unite?

**Anna Gilstrap** 57:50

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<sup>16</sup> Elon Must changed Twitter's name to X in 2023.

<sup>17</sup> *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* is a book by Bessel van der Kolk M.D. about getting through difficulties that arise from trauma by examining the psychology behind them.

Yeah, Adoptees Unite is adopteesunite.org. So, you can go on there. It's a Carrd website as well [so] it'll automatically transfer you to our card website. We're trying to figure out a better website platform. But for now, it's a Carrd.<sup>18</sup>

**Maggie Yang** 58:27

To close out, I'm very interested in your name. Through our correspondence, I know that you also have a Chinese name. If you feel comfortable, could you please share a bit about the significance of your name?

**Anna Gilstrap** 58:40

Yeah, the significance of my name. So, my Chinese name was from the orphanage. The orphanage gave me the name Li Qiao.<sup>19</sup> I think the orphanage director's name was Li. I'm Qiao because apparently I was very cheeky as a child. I'm very, I don't know how to describe it, but I guess I was cheeky. And so, Qiao signifies smart and cheeky.

**Maggie Yang** 59:35

Thank you so much for sharing with me. This has been such an enlightening conversation. Let me take a second to say that your dedication to the cause for adoptees and Asian Americans alike is very inspiring. It is rare to come across a youth organization that is continuing to build on the sense of community for adoptees. Is there anything else you want to add before we wrap up today?

**Anna Gilstrap** 1:00:00

Not that I can think of at the moment, but I will email you if I have anything else.

**Maggie Yang** 1:00:09

All right, please feel free to reach out to me whenever. Thank you again for this conversation.

**Anna Gilstrap** 1:00:15

Thank you so much.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://adopteesunite.org/>

<sup>19</sup> 李巧