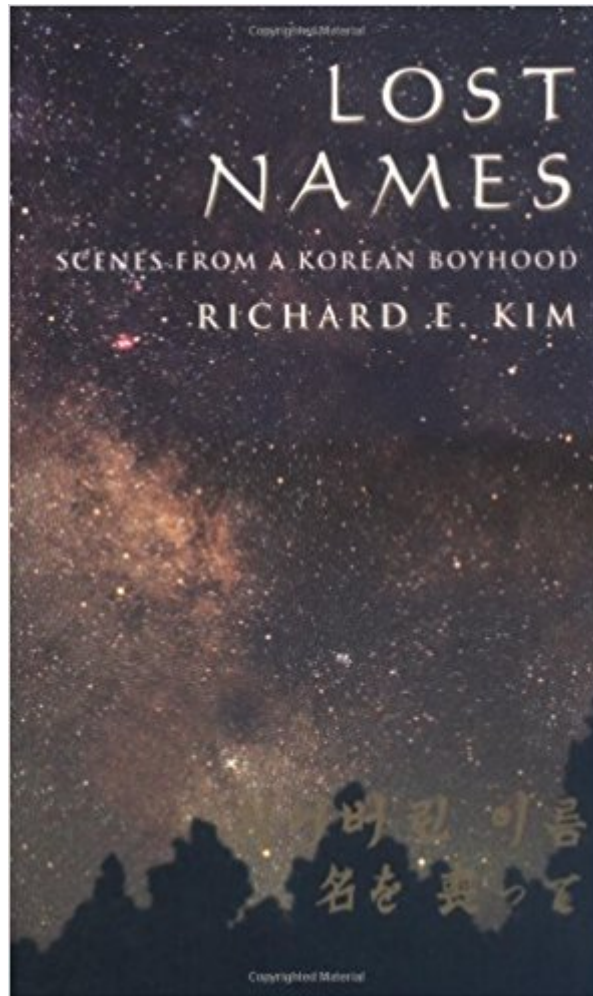




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# Lost Names: Scenes From A Korean Boyhood



## Synopsis

In this classic tale, Richard Kim paints seven vivid scenes from a boyhood and early adolescence in Korea at the height of the Japanese occupation, 1932 to 1945. Taking its title from the grim fact that the occupiers forced the Koreans to renounce their own names and adopt Japanese names instead, the book follows one Korean family through the Japanese occupation to the surrender of the Japanese empire. *Lost Names* is at once a loving memory of family and a vivid portrayal of life in a time of anguish.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

From 1932 to 1945, the Japanese occupied Korea. Organized in seven vivid scenes, Kim's fictionalized memoir tells the story of one family's experience, as told by the boy. The narrative starts in 1933 with a dramatic iced-river crossing into Manchuria, when the boy was just a year old, a story the boy knows from the many times his mother has told him the tale. Next scene and we're in 1938. The boy and his family have moved back to Korea, where the boy is the new boy in school and is learning new routines like bowing his head toward where the Japanese emperor is supposed to be in Tokyo. He does as he is told, but wonders if the emperor knows the children are bowing to him, wonders if he's asleep, or eating breakfast--or maybe even in the toilet. He pictures someone knocking on the door, saying, "Your Majesty! The children, the children! They are bowing to Your Majesty!" and him saying, "Wait a minute! I have my pants down!" A few years later, the children are told they need new names--the Koreans must renounce their family names and take Japanese ones instead. Later, his father takes him to the cemetery to ask forgiveness from their ancestors for

the humiliation of losing their names. The scenes continue as the boy grows up, mingling the experiences of childhood with the history of the occupation, seen in the small day-to-day moments that bring history alive. Richard Kim uses a simple but powerful voice to evoke painful times, a loving family, and a strong spirit of survival. *Lost Names* is a beautifully written tribute to the people of Korea that is subtle, moving, and hard to put down.

"Lost Names is not a poem of hate, but a poem of love. . . . It is elegaic. It rises to moments of considerable dramatic power, but its finest moments, as when we see the cemeteries full of Koreans apologizing to their ancestors for having lost their names, are lyrical." -- Edward Seidensticker, *New York Times Book Review*"The author's clear, evocative narrative describes a terrifying experience -- foreign occupation. Its homely detail demonstrates how pervasive nationality is, and how painful any attempt to destroy it." (The New Yorker)"This memorable document of courage and endurance is written with clarity and vigor, pierced with moments of poignant love and the blazing resentment of the young." -- *Saturday Review*

The protagonist in this story is too amazing, but once you realize (or remember) it's a historical fiction and not an autobiography, you can realize that the protagonist is meant to be an "everyman" stand-in in a story about what life was like in colonial Korea under harsh Japanese occupation. I generally don't like "Mary Sue" types of characters that don't have real weaknesses, but in the case of this book Richard Kim had a specific story to tell and he makes excellent use of his protagonist to tell this story. A more realistic protagonist would probably require a longer, sadder book and perhaps multiple (perhaps deceased) protagonists rather than one boy.

I collect books about Korea, and have read many novels, poems and non-fiction works. But *Lost Names* is certainly one of the best. Small details and major characters both help to build an accurate, emotional depiction of Koreans and the struggle to live during the brutal Japanese occupation of World War II. I read this book in one sitting, mailed it to one of my sisters, and have bought a copy for another sister. Some passages are humorous, and others are painfully sad...but the author infuses the entire work with hope and forgiveness. The main character's father is a memorable study of dignity, wisdom and strength. My 13 year old son has read this book four times! It is slightly mature for a young reader, but if you or your child have any interest in Asian history, Korea or warm stories of childhood, you'll love it. A must-read for any Korean-Americans wanting to understand the deprivation, tenacity and social conditions forced upon their parents or

grandparents, who survived the harsh conditions of life in Korea during WWII.

While reading this book I got the impression that it was a memoir. It is actually not so please be aware of this when reading. Considering that it is fiction the author was surprisingly "tame" in telling the story. I was expecting another depressing memoir of a family destroyed by the Japanese occupation. In Kim's book, however, the family's suffering is more subtle and their eventual triumph refreshing. It's nice to not read a book where everyone and their mothers die a painful death. This book gave a lot of insight into the lives of Koreans during the occupation. It was also nice to know that not all of the imperial Japanese soldiers were as gruesome as they were in the Rape of Nanjing.

This book is about a boy growing up in Korea during the Japanese occupation and how he was treated by the Japanese police, teachers and Shinto Priest. Book arrived on time and in great shape.

I always find books on Korea interesting as I go there twice a year. Younger generations now seem to bear no grudge to the Japanese, but this recent history is fascinating and one has to wonder at the progress South Korea has made.

Very much enjoyed reading this book. A story about a little known era of history about a little known area of the world. It explained a lot.

My daughter needed this book for a reading assignment. She states it was actually "REALLY GOOD!" That says a lot coming from a high schooler.

111%

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