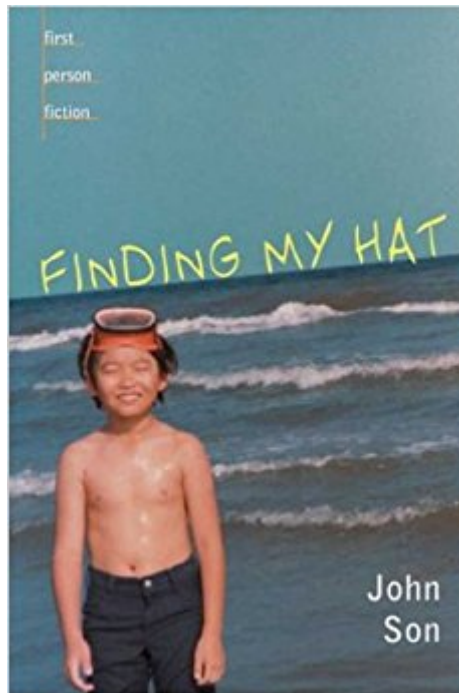




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# First Person Fiction



## Synopsis

In a semi-autobiographical debut novel that is at turns poignant and laugh-out-loud funny, John Son conveys the uniqueness and universality of a Korean-American childhood. Jin-Han begins his story with his first memory, when at age two he loses his hat to a sudden gust of wind. While he never finds that particular hat, his search for his "hat"--his identity--coincides with his family's search for their place in America. Struggles in Korea, losses during the Korean War, and the decision to leave behind loved ones to create a better future in a new, foreign place are all a part of Jin-Han's wise, funny story. But at the heart of this insightful novel is his coming of age and a growing awareness of others' perceptions of him.

## Book Information

Age Range: 12 - 15 years

Lexile Measure: 840L (What's this?)

Series: First Person Fiction

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 5-8-Jin-Han Park's earliest memory is of losing his hat to a strong wind in Chicago. The son of Korean immigrants, he seems to be blown around a lot himself, as his parents move from Chicago to Memphis to Houston searching for a better life and a place to establish their wig business. Son's first novel is a moving and sometimes hilarious portrait of a young immigrant trying to find his place between the culture of his parents and that of his friends and classmates. Set in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the book follows Jin-Han from the age of two to the death of his mother

when he is in high school. Each memory, from wetting his pants in nursery school to the confusion and excitement of his first girlfriend, is endearing. Although Jin-Han is a fictional character, the author's note reveals that the story has many autobiographical elements. And while it is filled with descriptions of Korean food and culture (a glossary is appended), the feelings and experiences described are universal. One thing that may confuse readers early on is that Jin-Han's parents switch between Korean and English, a transition that is sometimes only indicated by the awkward grammar of their English speech. This is a minor complaint, though, in what is otherwise a beautifully written and deeply personal account of growing up. Ashley Larsen, Woodside Library, CA  
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Gr. 4-8. Like other entries in the First Person Fiction series, this debut novel about a first-generation American has autobiographical roots. In poignant, often funny anecdotes and language that is both spare and lively, Jin-Han describes growing up American with Korean parents in the 1970s and 1980s in several cities, finally ending up in Houston. From a preschool pants-wetting incident to adolescent smooching, Jin-Han's universal childhood traumas and triumphs mix with the particulars of his Korean family life: his parents' wig business; kimchi (pickled cabbage) stored in subterranean garbage cans in the backyard; racist remarks from strangers. After Jin-Han's mother dies of cancer, he is bewildered by the Korean funeral traditions he's expected to know. More difficult, though, is trying to find words for his grief, in any language: "Even if I had known enough Korean, I don't think I would've been able to say what I felt." Readers of all backgrounds will recognize themselves in this absorbing novel. An appended glossary defines the many Korean words used in text. Gillian Engberg  
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The book was short, i had to read only a little bit at a time to make it last. i fell in love the mom and dad, they were so hard working and their love for each other and their children was so beautiful and pure. The language is simple and nostalgic, set in the 70's and 80's chronicling a young Korean American boy's youth. I would highly recommend this book to anyone!!!

An outstanding addition to Scholastic's excellent First Person Fiction series, *Finding My Hat*, tells the story of the Parks, a first generation Korean-American family, in the 1970s and 80s. Told in vignettes from the point of view the eldest child and only son, the story, traces Jin-Han's life from his first memories at the age of two to his mother's death when he is a teenager. Jin-Han and his family move from Chicago to Memphis to Houston as the family struggles to find a place for themselves in

America and Jin-Han struggles to find his own identity, "his hat," from among his Korean traditions, his American attitudes, and his own special gifts. The vignettes are often hilarious, as when pre-school Jin-Han wets his pants, or pre-teen Jin-Han discovers girls, while the incident recalling Jin-Han's mother's tragic illness and death is poignant and moving. This engrossing novel captures the universal aspects of Jin-Han's coming of age, as well as, the experiences of an immigrant family adjusting to life in the United States. A valuable feature of the series is an afterword in which the writer describes his or her own experiences of immigrating to the United States. The reading level and subject matter make this book appropriate for seventh through ninth grade and TESOL students. It would work well as reading for social studies and English in studies of culture, immigration, point of view, character development, and style.

One of Jin-Han Park's first memories is of the time he lost a hat that his mother had knitted for him. The wind carried it off and somehow, though he has worn many hats since then, he remembers that particular one best of all. Perhaps it is because his mother can no longer knit him a new hat. We follow Jin-Han's memories from the time he lost his hat to when he lost his mother. These two points of reference are tied together for Jin-Han, connected forever in his heart. But there are some wonderful stories that lie between them. We can enjoy hearing about class photograph day when Jin-Han was in kindergarten, his first kiss, what it was like to become a big brother, and the many other times he shared with his family and friends. Author John Son has created a collection of stories that will make you smile. It will also make you stop and think about the life of immigrants and the many hardships they have to face. There are so many things that need to be learned and understood. Jin-Han and his family undoubtedly must have felt isolated at times, like a small island in the vast sea of American life. We also see how the second generation can become separated from the first. Jin-Han wants to be as American as his friends are, while his parents still hold on to the Korean ways. As we watch Jin-Han grow up, we can see the divide between the parents and the boy widen; it is both interesting and sad to watch. John Son involves us in the life of his Korean family and proves he can tell a wonderful story. --- Reviewed by Marya Jansen-Gruber (mjansengruber@mindspring.com)

Son's debut novel, an entry in the First Person Fiction series, is a tender quasi-memoir detailing his childhood in a Korean immigrant family, trying to find his place in a new and unfamiliar world. Jin-Han's father is in love with American opportunity and is determined to own his own business. He purchases a wig shop, which takes them from Chicago to Memphis to Houston, where they are at

last successful. Along the way, Jin-Han experiences the usual pains of adolescence fitting in, understanding the opposite sex but with the added challenge of an unusual name, language and appearance. Son's language is at times startling with its simple elegance: Jin-Han's first kiss makes his insides feel "like a beehive on a warm, sunny afternoon," and his depiction of a dance party at a friend's house, in which the kids keep playing the same slow dance over and over, captures the essence of sweet teenage romanticism. The family dynamic is strong; Jin-Han's parents emerge as robust and complex individuals. Jin-Han ultimately emerges as his own man, a product of his family ties but not prisoner to them. The book liberally uses Korean words and phrases Jin-Han's mother is his Uhmah, his father his Ahpbah and includes a brief glossary, which adds another pinch of flavor to an already inviting and warm story. Ages 11-15. (Oct.) Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information.

In this memoir-ish novel of growing up in the 70s and 80s, Jin-Han's parents are Korean immigrants to the USA who make a living by running a wig shop with a predominantly Black clientele. While this entry into American capitalism was not atypical for immigrant Korean families, it is an atypical lifestyle for a child becoming an American teenager. Jin-Han's story is told at the point where these several worlds meet, and it is an engaging and moving story. Perfect for young adults and general readers. I found it to be a superior book. I really loved it.

I read the paperback version of this book. It was written in simple text but yet it was very compelling. Being adopted from Korea, I thought at some points in life that living with Korean parents would be better. But after reading this book, I realized, at least I didn't have the cultural differences to go along with being a person of color. I would recommend this book for other kids/adults that were adopted from Korea. Because it gives you insight on the way we might have grown up if we were living with our natural parents. And it fills in some of those missing blanks that all of us have.

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