



The Reunion **Jacqueline Pearce**

1-55143-230-7

\$6.95 CDN / \$4.99 US, PAPERBACK

5 X 7 1/2, 96 PAGES

AGES 8-11

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The Story

Shannon is excited about spending a week at her friend Rina's house, but she's a little nervous too. Rina seems to be able to do everything better than she can and Rina's home is chaotic compared to Shannon's own. When things fall apart between the two girls, Rina's grandmother is there to tell them a story from her past, early in the Second World War. The story is about a rift between her and her childhood friend, Mitsu, a rift that could never be healed because Mitsu and her family were taken away from the small town of Paldi and interned with other Japanese Canadians. Rina's grandmother, Jas, never saw Mitsu again. That is, not until Shannon and Rina find a handful of forgotten beads in the bottom of a cardboard box.

The Author

Jacqueline Pearce grew up in Duncan on Vancouver Island. At a summer job, she learned about the small logging town of Paldi, inhabited by people of East Indian and Japanese descent. When an old photograph led her to learn that her friend's mother had grown up in Paldi, the story for *The Reunion* began to take shape. Jacqueline has always been interested in local history and people's stories. *The Reunion* is her first book. Jacqueline enjoys reading, writing, doing art, and exploring nature (even in her own backyard). She lives in Burnaby with her husband, daughter, dog and two cats, and still visits Duncan whenever she can.

Story Themes

Multiculturalism, World War II, family stories, friendship, anger and reconciliation.

The Ideas

- Ask your parents or grandparents or other older friends or relatives to show you photographs from their pasts. Choose one that interests you and ask

about the story behind it. If you like the story, write it down. Or you might want to make up your own.

- Write or draw pictures about something that you love to do at a friend's house that you don't do at home. Jas loved to take baths at Mitsu's. Shannon tried different food at Rina's and was fascinated by all the activity at her friend's house.
- Look up how anti-anti-eye over is played and play a game.
- Find recipes for pakoras and rice balls and see if you can make them with a parent's or other adult's help. Share them with your class. Or make a dish from your own or a family member's cultural heritage. Bring it in to share.
- Choose a part of *The Reunion* to dramatize silently. Someone in the class should pick dramatic moments to call "Freeze," so that you freeze for a few moments into a tableau. That way the class can see all the emotion that you are expressing.
- Read the novel near Remembrance Day and discuss why it is important to remember things that happened in the past.
- Research what happened to Japanese Canadians during the war.
- Read Joy Kogawa's *Naomi's Road* and compare and contrast it with *The Reunion*.
- If you were going away for a week, what would you want to take with you to feel at home in your new place? A stuffed animal? A piece of clothing? A photograph? Write about or draw one or two of the special things that you like to take with you wherever you go.
- Have you ever been really mad at a friend or has a friend ever been really angry with you? Did you ever say or do something you regretted? Write about what made you or your friend angry and what healed your anger.
- Write an imaginary letter from Jas to Mitsu or Mitsu to Jas explaining why you got mad and apologizing. Let her know how you feel about your friendship and about being separated.

A Few Words from the Author

Dear Readers,

Growing up, I was always interested in the history of places around me and the stories people told about life in the past. Although I grew up right next door to the town of Paldi, I did not hear of its unique story until I was a university student working for the Cowichan Valley Intercultural and Immigrant Aid Society. There, someone was doing an oral history project on Paldi, interviewing Japanese people who had lived there before w w II. I was surprised and fascinated to learn about Paldi's multicultural past. I had known about the presence of East Indian people in Paldi. There was still a Sikh temple there that friends of mine attended. But, I hadn't known about the Japanese people or about how they had been taken away. I picked up an old Paldi school photo, like the one that Rina and Shannon are shown in the story, and looked into the face of a girl who looked just like my friend Donna. It had to be her mother. Later, I confirmed that Donna's mother had grown up in Paldi and had also met Donna's dad there. These bits and pieces percolated in the back of my mind until, years later, they found their way into my fictional story, *The Reunion*.

The town of Paldi grew up around a sawmill started by Mayo Singh, who came to Canada from India in the early 1900s. In the early days of Paldi, people of many cultural backgrounds lived and worked together, not experiencing the prejudice that could be found outside of town where seating in theaters was segregated and some stores only served whites. It's hard to imagine what it would have been like to walk into a store and be denied a purchase because of the color of your skin. It's also hard to believe that this happened in my own town not so many years ago.

So many stories from across Canada tell about prejudice and misunderstanding. The Paldi story is unique because it is not about prejudice. It is not about people of different cultures fearing one another. In Paldi, people of different colors and different cultural traditions lived and worked side by side. Children played together. People of different cultures married and had children of their own. Friendships lasted over time. Today, the experience of more and more children everywhere is multicultural. Our communities contain many stories, many colored threads, that we are weaving together into something new that includes all of us.

The favourite stories I liked to hear when I was a girl were tales of the Cowichan people and the stories my grandmother told about when she was a girl traveling across Canada. Who knows. Maybe one of those stories will make their way into my next book.

Sincerely,
Jacquie Pearce

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martha attema. *Daughter of Light*. (2001, Orca) Chapter book.

Janice Kulyk Keefer. *Anna's Goat*. Illustrated by Janet Wilson. (2000, Orca) Picture book.

Joy Kogawa. *Naomi's Road*. (1986, Oxford University Press) Chapter book.

Irene Watts. *Remember Me* (2000, Tundra) and *Good-bye Marianne* (1998, Tundra).

Short novels

Jean Little. *From Anna*. (1972, Harper & Row) Novel.

Kit Pearson. *The Sky is Falling, The Lights Go on Again* and *Looking at the Moon*. (Penguin) Trilogy. Novels.