

**Fadiman – The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down – p 3-37, etc.**

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- pronunciation pp. 291-292
  - Hmong written here with Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA)
  - most words monosyllabic
  - tonal, eight tones; pitch high, low, middle; rises, stays same, or falls
    - last letter (consonant) indicates tone and tone shift
    - just **ignore the final consonant!**
    - i.e. *dab* = “da”
  - *x* = “s”
    - *txiv* = “tsi”
  - double vowel = the vowel followed by “ng”
    - *neeb* = “neng”
    - *Hmoob* = Hmong = “Mong”
  - *w* = French “u”
    - *txwv* = “tsu”
- Hmong are from Laos
  - Lia Lee; mother Foua Yang, father Nao Kao Lee
  - *txiv neeb* (“tsi neng”) = shaman
  - *dab* (“da”) = malevolent spirit
  - medical beliefs of Hmong p 4-6
    - *txiv neeb* can intervene in case of illness, infertility, etc.
      - trances, travels with familiars, negotiates with spirits, even fights them
      - returns with orders to make x sacrifice, etc.
    - pregnant mother must obey cravings or baby will be harmed
    - must give birth in husband’s or husband’s cousin’s house, or *dab* may harm her
    - long hard labor made easy by drinking water in which a key has been boiled
    - specific diet and herbs after birth – Nao Kao cooks it and brings to hospital for Foua; they grew the herbs themselves for this purpose at the edge of the apartment parking lot
  - many causes of illness p. 10
    - most common: soul loss (dispute about how many souls one has) but one, the life-soul, is the one that tends to get lost
    - through anger, fear, wanderlust, grief, curiosity...
    - babies’ souls particularly likely to wander off, be frightened away, be snatched by a *dab*
    - one can protect babies from losing their souls with hats that look like a flower to *dab* viewing from above, or with pigpen motifs on the baby carrier, or necklaces with locks
    - call out to children’s souls before leaving a place, so they don’t get left behind
  - soul-calling ritual: invite a soul to be reborn into the infant
    - not a human being until done, several days after birth (a month for Lia)
  - description of soul-calling ceremony and sacrifices, in language just like that of description of western medical birth process

- plastic baby-warmers, injections in the thigh, and eye drops must have seemed as odd to Foua Yang as her earlier births and beliefs do to us
- using exactly the same tone emphasizes this without saying it
- vs. western medicine
  - description of hospital birth procedures p 6-7
- Hmong in western medical system
  - Foua has no idea of her date of birth, other than October by the season her parents told her
  - Foua made up the date of October 6 to satisfy endless demands by clerks and forms
  - staff never questioned 1926 date, even though it would have made her 55 at Lia's birth!
  - Nao Kao's cousin who said all nine children born on same day, 9 consecutive years!
  - Foua cannot read or write, but can more or less write her name
- responses of western doctors
  - totally opposite descriptions of the post-partum food brought by Hmong p. 9
    - how can they disagree so radically?
- father must bury placenta deep below house floor
  - girl under parents' bed
  - boy at base of central post, where a male spirit lives
  - placenta = "jacket", the first and finest garment
  - at death, soul retraces steps in life to recover placenta
    - then can continue past monsters, dabs, etc. to place beyond sky
    - eventually be reborn as a new baby
    - without placenta, soul must wander naked and alone forever
    - Lia Lee born at MCMC, placenta burned; their apartment has a wooden floor...
- naming ceremony = soul calling on third day after birth. Not a full human until then.
  - eases loss of newborn, if it happens
  - usually later in US, due to hospitalization, time to save money for event
- Note complicated narrative structure, hopping back and forth, digressing, returning
  - intentional: like the Hmong approach described in "Fish Soup" chapter p 12-13
  - everything is explained by something else, the world is full of things that seem unconnected but actually are
- Hmong history
  - sequence of fighting and migrating
  - mostly in China
  - Chinese call Hmong Miao or Meo – insulting, "othering" terms
  - Facing Chinese domination, moved south, resisting and maintaining culture
  - "allergic to authority"; Hmong kingdom established, with king selected by vote of fighters from among many royal sons
  - very effective fighters
  - early 1800s, about half left China for Indochina (Vietnam and Laos)
  - French finally gave up and left them alone in peace in highlands of Laos
    - traits:
      - they don't take orders

- they'll fight rather than lose
- they aren't persuaded that others' ways are better
- character descriptions p 17-18
- more history to come later in the book...
- 150,000 Hmong fled Laos since communists won in 1975
- Lees and many others now in Merced
- Merced Community Medical Center = MCMC = hospital
- Ch 3
  - Sister Yer slams door, Lia seizes
    - Her soul fled
  - Epileptics often become shamans (txiv neeb = “tsi neng”)
  - Hmong are attentive, caring parents
  - Of 40+ doctors and social workers, only Jeanine Hilt asked Lees what they thought the cause was
  - Had seen western medicine work sometimes in Thailand
  - MCMC a good hospital
  - Merced: 12,000 Hmong among 61,000 residents! 20% (1/5) of the population!
  - Hmong cost more to treat: need bilingual staff – lab assistants, etc.
    - None available at night
  - Used children as translators
    - what are some problems with that?
  - Without translators, doctors and staff “practice veterinary medicine”
  - Lia's first two seizures misdiagnosed as bronchial congestion because seizing had stopped and no communication was possible
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> time, still seizing, had English-speaking cousin, and sympathetic Dr. Dan Murphy
  - is epilepsy disease, or inspiration? p 29
  - Lees can't read or understand directions
- Ch 4
  - Differences between shamans and doctors
  - Shamans
    - Come to you
    - Take time
    - Don't ask questions
    - Immediate diagnosis, rather than waiting for tests and still can't tell
    - Never undress patients
    - Treat soul as well as body
    - If they fail, not their fault, due to particularly troublesome spirits
  - doctors and Americans who work them harm Hmong patients (in their view) by
    - taking blood
    - using anesthesia, risking the soul
    - using surgery, making one frequently ill or even incomplete in next reincarnation
    - doing autopsies, so soul can't be reborn and may take vengeance

- embalming the dead, which traps the soul
- Hmong accepted antibiotics, which work quickly
- don't mind needles
- use lots of herbal remedies
- avoided medical help in Thai camps because of religious proselytizing
- nurses cut “unsanitary” strings from their wrists
  - these are what kept the soul from leaving!
- only those too poor for a shaman would go to a doctor!
- Dwight Conquergood at Ban Vinai camp p 35-37
  - Anti-rabies parade
  - To get dogs vaccinated
  - Sanitation parade
  - Accepted Hmong herbal treatments for diarrhea and gashed toe
  - Used both Hmong and western treatments for dengue fever...
  - Hmong see western medicine not as a gift, but as coercion...