

★ **All Our Ordinary Stories: A Multigenerational Family Odyssey****Teresa Wong**

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A Canadian woman learns about her family's past in the excellent graphic memoir *All Our Ordinary Stories*.

Wong's mother had a stroke in 2014, prompting a deeper investigation into the family history. Through conversations, recollections, and a trip to China, Wong tried to understand her parents' experiences, including famine during the Mao regime, forced relocation, and daring escapes to Hong Kong. She reconciled her love for them with their distant personalities and her own feelings as the child of immigrants, separated from her ancestors by time and distance.

Illustrated in a simple, clear narrative style, the book delivers both humor and poignant moments, sometimes in the same panel. For example, at the height of an emotional scene in a movie that parallels their own relationship, Wong's mother tells her, "This movie isn't very interesting" and walks away. Unusual layouts emphasize the communication gap between Wong and her mother, as seen on a page with only two small panels placed as far apart as possible, separated by blank white space.

Skillful writing binds the disparate stories of relatives into a cohesive whole. Brief interactions make outsized impacts: difficulties created by the language barrier between Wong and her mother are shown by contrasting what Wong means to say with what she does say. A statement intended as "The doctor says the stroke was minor" is delivered in Cantonese as "The doctor says your stroke not too sharp."

All Our Ordinary Stories is a moving, honest graphic memoir about a woman's efforts to find her own identity by deepening her understanding of her parents and their pasts.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2024)

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