

## Kinnen (Remembrance)

Inge Brennan

By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land as a foreigner; he lived in tents ... for he was looking forward to the permanent city, whose architect and builder is God.  
(Hebrews 11, *The Bible*)

As a kid growing up in small town New Zealand I wasn't normal. Perhaps to someone walking down the street I would have appeared so, but not to other kids: to them I was most definitely not. They would see my parents, bringing me to school or taking me home, and it would become clear: I was not 'one of them'; I was different, the only truly criminal offence in the court of childhood. There were often taunts: 'ching-chong', the odd 'heil Hitler' 'because my father is German'. Kids doing what seems to come so naturally, zeroing in on anything 'different' and proceeding to make a spectacle of it, others joining in to guarantee that the scrutiny would not be turned on them lest they be pronounced 'different' too. The teachers unwittingly would make things worse. A weird name, the kind that, on a class register, makes a new teacher stumble, coming out with something sounding more like hinge.

### **Weird parents. Weird name. Weird kid.**

I loved my childhood and I completely adore my family but alongside it there was always a longing to fit into wider society, to not feel so different. What would it be like to be like the other kids, for whom every third person was their cousin. Sometimes the tension even entered the innocence of family life. A kindergarten dress-up parade. A kid who wanted to be a blonde princess. A mum who wanted to dress her in a yukata or summer kimono. A kid sent to her room.



In an oblique way my hopes of belonging as a child were, at times, realised, but outside of New Zealand. It was only when visiting my mother's family in Japan that I found a place where I felt I fitted in. Family,

friends, strangers treated me like everyone else. Going there felt like going home. I would cry on the flight home, not because I hated New Zealand, but I missed what I had away from it.

As I entered my teenage years and later as I went off to university, a strange change seemed to come about: I became normal. Others began to see that I didn't look all that different. I had the same accent as everyone else. Culturally I was a New Zealander. I began to be more accepted. My trips away became fewer and I felt more and more integrated into New Zealand society: a multicultural citizen of a multicultural country.

At 22, having been away from my mother's country for nearly six years I returned for a short visit with my mother and brother. In my mind, I was going home again, to another home, my memories of the acceptance I enjoyed there preserved from childhood. But just as things had changed in New Zealand they had changed there. In public places I found myself stared at for looking like a foreigner

and I could speak little of the language. My looks and my dress seemed more foreign than they once had. I began to realise the world which I had enjoyed as a child was my mother's world, a world of family and friends to which I was connected only through her. Outside of that world, and now as an adult, people responded differently. I might have felt at home but others thought otherwise.

The question of who I am and where I'm from remains. In terms of resolution between different countries, there isn't a perfect one. And this imperfect resolution becomes clear only as I look away from them to something else. My identity must ultimately rest on something more permanent, more unchangeable, a "permanent city".

The images included in these artist's pages are disparate in subject-matter but they share something: a weirdness, a sense of something being out of place. This is achieved through point of view or placing a motif in an unexpected context.



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Photographs by Inge Brennan, *Untitled*, 2007.

