

READING GROUP NOTES

HOUSE

OF

KWA

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MIMI KWA

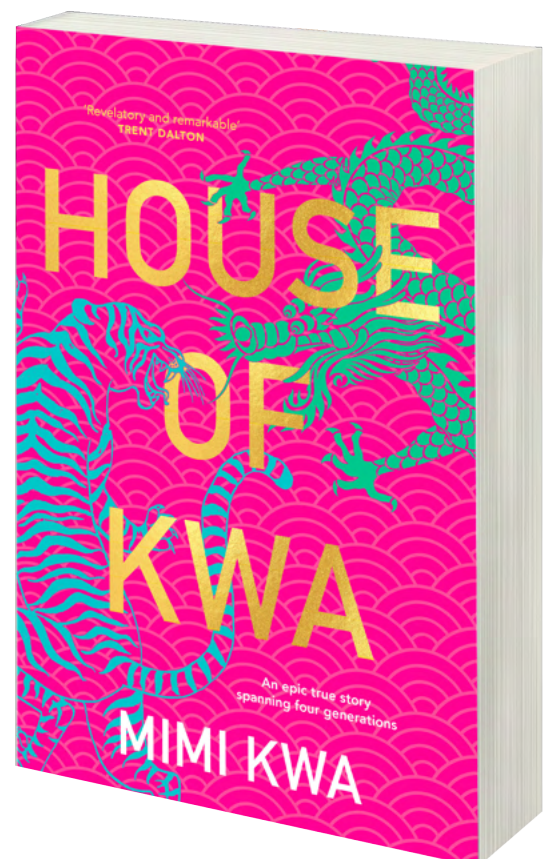
The dragon circles and swoops ... a tiger running alone in the night ...

Mimi Kwa ignored the letter for days. When she finally opened it, the news was so shocking her hair turned grey. Why would a father sue his own daughter?

The collision was over the estate of Mimi's beloved Aunt Theresa, but its seed had been sown long ago. In an attempt to understand how it had come to this, Mimi unspools her rich family history in *House of Kwa*.

One of a wealthy silk merchant's 32 children, Mimi's father, Francis, was just a little boy when the Kwa family became caught up in the brutal and devastating Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during World War II. Years later, he was sent to study in Australia by his now independent and successful older sister Theresa. There he met and married Mimi's mother, a nineteen-year-old with an undiagnosed, chronic mental illness. Soon after, 'tiger' Mimi arrived, and her struggle with the past - and the dragon - began ...

Riveting, colourful and often darkly humorous, *House of Kwa* is an epic family drama spanning four generations, and an unforgettable story about how one woman finds the courage to stand up for her freedom and independence, squaring off against the ghosts of the past and finally putting them to rest. Throughout, her inspiration is Francis's late older sister, the jet-setting, free-spirited Aunt Theresa, whose extraordinary life is a beacon of hope in the darkness.



PRAISE FOR HOUSE OF KWA

'Revelatory and remarkable storytelling.'

Trent Dalton

'Compelling, memorable and vividly told, this is a startling tale of the past, its grip on the present, and the battle to set yourself free.'

Richard Glover

'An astonishing true tale that leaps across centuries and cultures to land with a thump in your heart.'

Lisa Millar

'Heartbreaking and uplifting.'

Meaghan Wilson Anastasios

'Mimi's heroic saga illustrates what makes us the multi-cultural nation we are today.'

Mike Munro

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mimi Kwa has been an Australian journalist and television newsreader on the ABC and Nine Network for twenty years as well as an actor and presenter appearing in commercials and FOXTEL, STAN and ABC TV series. She and her partner, John, live in Melbourne, with their four children, a cavoodle and a Burmese cat. Mimi loves to paint and write. This memoir is her first book.

READING GROUP NOTES

1. Mimi has called this book *House of Kwa*. What does this 'house' symbolise?
2. There is an inherent vulnerability in 'writing things down' but can it also be a positive process? Do you think the writing of her story has played a role in healing Mimi? Does 'the Kwa madness' end with her? (p. 357)
3. What was the role of the dragon and tiger metaphors in your understanding of this story?
4. Does the exposition of the intergenerational trauma experienced by the members of the House of Kwa allow you to have empathy for the characters and their behaviour?
5. Where does Mimi obtain her resilience as a child?
6. When she starts school, Mimi's father Francis tells her that, 'Everyone likes me ... You need to be like me and get everybody to like you.' (p. 153) What strategies does Mimi use to try to meet his expectations? What barriers are there for her?
7. Aunt Theresa plays a crucial role in Mimi's story. What does this say about the importance of special adult mentors in a child's life?
8. What does the concept of 'family' represent to Mimi?
9. Thirteen-year-old Mimi starts writing a diary: 'on some pages I'm brutally candid, and on others I outright lie, even to myself' (p. 216). What role does journal writing play in our own lives?
10. As he shows her his medals, Granddad tells five-year-old Mimi, 'The greatest reward in life is survival. Keeping your health and staying alive are worth more than all the medals in the world.' (p. 157). How did Mimi draw on that wisdom throughout her childhood and adolescence?
11. In dealing with her father, Mimi resolves 'to fight back with love' (p. 347) and sends him an album filled with photos of him and her, and his grandchildren. Do you think this is an effective response?
12. What does this memoir say about forgiveness? Is it possible to separate the behaviour from the person in a family context?

