



## HOST OF MEMORIES

*Tales of Inevitable Happenstance*



Peter Rupert Lighte

ISBN: 978-0-9912529-7-8  
Paperback • 344 pages • \$15.95  
Memoir  
acausalbooks.com

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*Tales of Inevitable Happenstance*

PETER RUPERT LIGHTE

**H***ost of Memories* is a collection of stories stemming from the life of Peter Rupert Lighte, sinologist and founding chairman of J.P. Morgan Chase Bank China. The book begins during Peter's childhood and meanders eloquently through his adult years. In luscious descriptions, he portrays the drama and security of his Jewish New York upbringing melting into his struggle, as a quizzical young man, to hone his ideas on life while traversing the continents, discovering his sexuality, and ultimately finding himself in anything but a tidy fashion.

Artfully navigating between Europe and Asia and finally making his way back to Princeton, where he had previously studied, the author traipses through diverse social and cultural climates, finding niches into which he fits and reveling in terrain where he is not so sure. Whether living in London or Beijing, he is the epitome of a *flâneur* who endeavors to inhabit the adventuresome worlds he describes; in Princeton he is home.

Over the course of the book, the author's effort to find his true identity blooms into a celebration of his life, which takes on new meaning with the adoption of his Chinese daughters. In his words: "It was Hattie and Tillie, rather than a diverse world, who sorted me out." As a tourist, observer, homebody, and active participant, he uncovers the greatest significance in episodes that are freed from the leash of causality.

*"I couldn't put down Peter Lighte's Host of Memories until I had finished it."*

—ALISON KLAYMAN, Director, *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*

*"With a lively sense of humor and no holds barred, [these] stories reveal the roots and development of a man deeply committed to and appreciative of family and friends."*

—TOM GORMAN, Chairman and Editor-in-Chief, *Fortune China*

*"An utterly charming book. . . Perfect bedtime reading."*

—ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER, PRESIDENT/CEO OF THE NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION AND PROFESSOR EMERITA AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

**PETER RUPERT LIGHTE**, a banker, as well as a sinologist who has taught Chinese history and philosophy, lived abroad for almost three decades, dividing his time between London and Asia. A regular participant in the Conference on World Affairs in Boulder, Colorado, he is on the boards of Half the Sky Foundation and Council on International Educational Exchange and is active in Princeton alumni activities. He is also the author of *Pieces of China*, a calligrapher, and a mosaicist. Peter and his husband Julian Grant, a distinguished English composer, live in Princeton, New Jersey, with their two daughters.

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[www.blessingway.com](http://www.blessingway.com)



Announcing the release of

***Host of Memories: Tales of Inevitable Happenstance***  
**by Peter Rupert Lighte**

Neither the “bamboo curtain” nor sexual confusion could keep Peter Rupert Lighte from his appointed rounds. He was determined to become a sinologist before President Nixon called in on Chairman Mao and to be a father when gay still meant festive.

In *Host of Memories*, Lighte crafts a collection of personal anecdotes into a loving and quirky history to embrace his two adopted daughters, and to introduce readers to his world of “inevitable happenstance.”

William B. Russel, Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School of Princeton University, offers: “This memoir deftly covers a remarkable range of changes in American society over the twentieth century through rites of passage—adolescence, divorce, death, and sexual awakening—as played out in family and academia.”

The book begins during the author’s childhood and meanders eloquently through his adult years. In descriptive passages, Lighte portrays the drama and security of his New York Jewish upbringing melting into his struggles as a quizzical young man to hone his ideas on life while traversing the continents, discovering his sexuality, and ultimately experiencing the belonging he was seeking.

As a sinologist and banker, he was a pioneer in Beijing who went on to become founding chairman of JP Morgan Chase Bank China. Peter lived abroad for almost three decades and artfully navigated between Europe and Asia and eventually made his way back to Princeton, where he had previously studied. Throughout his travels, he traipsed across diverse social and cultural climates, finding niches into which he fit and reveling in terrain where he was not so sure.

“The vignettes—perfect bedtime reading—resonate with universal themes,” says Anne-Marie Slaughter, President/CEO of the New America Foundation, Professor Emerita at Princeton University, and former Director of Policy Planning for the US Department of State.

Over the course of the book, the author's efforts to find his way blooms into a celebration of his life, which takes on new meaning with the adoption of his two Chinese daughters. In his own words: "It was Hattie and Tillie, rather than a diverse world, that sorted me out."

In addition to a career in banking, the author has taught Chinese history and philosophy. A participant in the Conference on World Affairs in Boulder, Colorado, he is on the boards of both Half the Sky Foundation and Council on International Educational Exchange and is active in Princeton alumni activities. A calligrapher and mosaicist, he is also the author of *Pieces of China* and is currently working on a book about the adoption of his children. He and his husband Julian Grant, a distinguished English composer, live with their two daughters in Princeton, New Jersey.

Paperback: ISBN: 978-0-9912529-7-8 \$15.95

E-Book: ISBN: 978-0-9912529-6-1 \$9.95

5x 8, 344 pages

Memoir

Pub Date: May 15, 2015

Published by Acausal Books

Distributed by Baker & Taylor

[www.acausalbooks.com](http://www.acausalbooks.com)

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## Expanded Bio

### Peter Rupert Lighte

#### *Author, Host of Memories: Tales of Inevitable Happenstance*

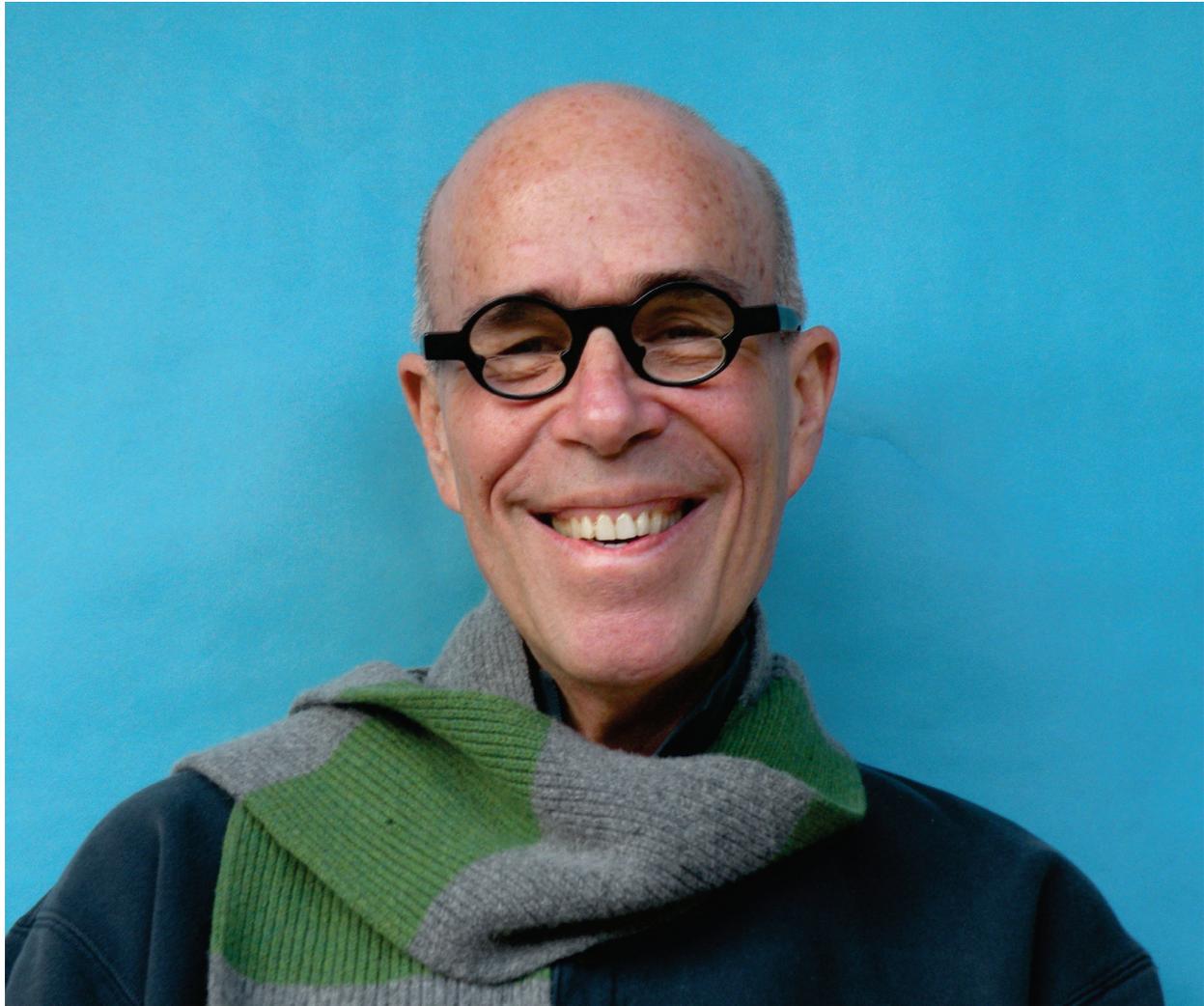
Neither the “bamboo curtain” nor sexual confusion could keep Peter Rupert Lighte from his appointed rounds. He was determined to become a sinologist before President Nixon called in on Chairman Mao and to be a father when gay still meant festive.

In the early 1970s, Peter studied Chinese culture at Princeton University and subsequently taught Chinese history and philosophy to college students. In the early 1980s, he went on to open a bank’s office in Beijing and soon found himself thriving in the world of international finance. He continued to live abroad for almost three decades, dividing his time between London, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Beijing. Currently he serves on the boards of Half the Sky Foundation and the Council on International Educational Exchange and is active in Princeton alumni affairs. A calligrapher and a mosaicist, he is also the author of *Pieces of China*.

In his latest book, *Host of Memories: Tales of Inevitable Happenstance*, he crafts his personal stories into a loving and quirky history with his two adopted daughters from China in mind. The effects of his parents’ divorce in the late 1950s, which precipitated his move as an awkward “only child” from segregated pre-Castro Miami to New York City, ricochet throughout his adventuresome life. He was raised by his fragile mother amidst a community of relatives and friends whose eccentricities, drama, affection, and wisdom shaped his soul. Along the Way, he found his future husband, Julian Grant, a distinguished English composer, with whom he went on to create a home and family of their own.

As these stories demonstrate, Peter’s present has been powerfully shaped by the richness of his past. He explains: “For me, time does not seem to pass; rather, it

surrounds me. Thus I do not feel removed from memories, nor do they lose their intensity. I have keen recollections not because I have a good memory—I simply retrieve them from the ether. When memories have no velocity, they are very much at hand.” Peter, Julian, and their two daughters now live in the Princeton house where Peter resided in the 1970s as an intimidated cat sitter. Fuqi, a dog they found in a Beijing park, now happily rules the roost. Peter finally belongs.



Peter’s newest book, *Host of Memories: Tales of Inevitable Happenstance* is scheduled to release in May 2015. To schedule a talk, program, or book-signing event, please contact Blessingway Authors’ Services at [jherzl@blessingway.com](mailto:jherzl@blessingway.com) or by phone at 505.983.2649.

For additional information about Peter Lighte please visit: [www.peterlighte.com](http://www.peterlighte.com) or [www.acausalbooks.com](http://www.acausalbooks.com).



## Q & A

### **Peter Rupert Lighte**

**Author, *Host of Memories: Tales of Inevitable Happenstance***

**1. What makes *Host of Memories* stand out from other collections of personal short stories?**

The stories have a vivid immediacy tied to my unusual sense of time. For me, time doesn't seem to pass; rather, the past surrounds me in the present. These tales also have a sense of inevitability right alongside randomness. Often I have found myself adrift only to prevail, ending an adventure exactly where I am meant to be. Little did I expect my study of classical Chinese to provide a primer for living well in the world. There is a word in Yiddish, *bashert*, that refers to one's destiny. *Host of Memories* is about being surrounded by the past, with fate leavened by chance.

**2. Can you tell us a little more about the title?**

The word *host* has a troika of meanings, each of which alludes to my intent as a writer: one who welcomes or entertains guests, a multitude of things such as memories, and a medium used to culture microorganisms. I am welcoming the reader into the living room of my life, awash in memories that never recede into the past. I also cannot help but feel that my life has been itself a culture on which relationships evolve and adventures unfurl.

**3. What was it like to tell the stories from your perspective as a child witnessing and narrating your own life?**

Telling stories from a child's perspective provides a framework for a high level of detail that only a child can impart. I have come to learn that the big picture is not worth recounting which is very much in keeping with a kid's inability to filter perceptions of life. There are two recurring themes in this book: the divorce of my parents and my move to New York from Florida. These events still loom large and illustrate not only the immediacy of the past, but also how the past continually

informs the present. I had such ease of recall because there is no stretch. Rather than revisiting earlier times, I am surrounded by my memories, which can be effortlessly retrieved. After all, time has no velocity.

I do not think I could have written this book before becoming a father. The one I might have produced would have been more concerned with having the last word than taking notice of life's quirky rhythms. As an adoptive parent intent on imparting the security of the past to my daughters, I sought to wrap them in an organic heritage. In the end, this book is about belonging. As a gay man with children, my family completed me —and has made me a more discerning storyteller.

#### **4. What prompted you to start writing?**

On the cusp of the computer age, I bought a notebook at Smythson's, the English stationer. At about the same time, I was given an elegant silver Yard-O-Led propelling pencil. That summer on Shelter Island, I began carrying the notebook and pencil around with me on my daily bike ride. I would buy the morning paper and an iced coffee, then settle down to read at a little plastic table outside of the drug store. One day as though on automatic pilot, I fetched the notebook and pencil out of the bike's basket and began writing. I felt like a cypher, with memories tumbling out of me. Even after returning to work in the autumn, I continued writing right through business meetings, prompting colleagues to take note of my conscientious approach to detail. This routine carried on for years. When the words finally did stop, I knew it was time to craft a book, but I was obliged to consider the stories as gifts to my daughters. So I began to wrestle with the question of how to speak both to my girls and to strangers. Convinced that being truthful does not force a writer to be burdensome, I took an ax to my stories in order to pass on what matters. In doing so, I edited history without doing violence to its messages.

#### **5. Confucius to banking, how did that happen?**

When I was a kid, no one wanted to be a banker. One sort of fell into it if all else failed. I was preparing for a life in the academy, having taken up a teaching job in California. The west coast just didn't work for me. When I was back in Princeton that summer working on my dissertation, I was invited to a Princeton-in-Asia fundraiser. Having been sent to Taiwan years before to study Chinese by this worthy organization, I was more than happy to attend. While chatting up a fat cat, I began whining about my professional exile. He asked if I'd consider a career in banking. "It's vulgar," I smugly replied. He howled with laughter and insisted that I pay him a visit in his office the very next day. High above Park Avenue, I was told that the firm wanted a renaissance gentleman who could be transformed into a banker. And by the way, I should never expect to use my area of expertise. I quickly reckoned that corporate finance could coexist right alongside Confucius. I was offered a job, sent through the training program and then swiftly dispatched to Beijing as the bank's founding representative. There has been plenty of room for banking, classical Chinese and lots more.

**6. You're donating proceeds from the book to Half the Sky Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to enriching the lives of orphaned children in China. How did you connect with them?**

When I was working with J. P. Morgan in Beijing, Jenny Bowen, Half the Sky's founder, came to make a pitch for support. She brought along her husband's new book of photographs and put a copy in front of each of us around the table. I couldn't bring myself to touch mine because I thought I would start to cry at the mere sight of the child on the cover. Jenny, who mistook my paralysis for a hard heart, was rather chilly when we said goodbye. Later, when I told her that I'd been on the verge of tears, our relationship was sealed.

Jenny's mission is to transform the lives of orphans and she is succeeding. Half the Sky seeks to ensure that they are properly cared for by trained and constant professionals. Jenny has even made headway in helping the Chinese overcome their cultural aversion to adoption by encouraging the creation new families for children with disabilities.

I am so very proud to be at her side.

**7. You've lived as a foreigner in China, Japan, Hong Kong, and London. Can you say more about being a guest in these countries rather than the host?**

Never try to go native. It doesn't work. We are valued for our baggage because that's what makes us who we are. There is no conflict between standing for something and being a sensitive guest.

To schedule a talk, program, or book-signing event, please contact Blessingway Authors' Services at [jherzl@blessingway.com](mailto:jherzl@blessingway.com) or by telephone at 505.983.2649.

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## Praise for

*Host of Memories: Tales of Inevitable Happenstance*

By Peter Rupert Lighte

“I couldn’t put down Peter Lighte’s *Host of Memories* until I had finished it. Every chapter is filled with a rich assortment of characters that he has met, loved, and learned from during an adventurous life. I hope he continues this project of recording memories in his elegant prose for us to read more”

—Alison Klayman  
Director, *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*

“*Host of Memories* is an utterly charming book, weaving together kosher rituals in New York City, nights at the opera, draft dodging, quirky professors, sexual awakening, and China in the first years after its opening. The vignettes—perfect bedtime reading—resonate with universal themes, above all the love, strength, and eccentricity of an extended Jewish family. Lighte’s aunts, cousins, grandparents, and step-relatives of all sorts are drawn with a warmth and affection that implants them in our own memories.”

—Anne-Marie Slaughter  
President/CEO of the New America Foundation, Professor Emerita at Princeton University, and former Director of Policy Planning for the US Department of State

“In this touching and insightful memoir, Lighte gracefully weaves a tapestry of tart anecdotes and sweet tales about the characters (significant and otherwise) who shaped his life. It’s poignant, funny, and achingly sad—often all at once.”

—Jenny Bowen  
CEO of Half the Sky Foundation and author of *Wish You Happy Forever*

“This memoir deftly covers a remarkable range of changes in American society over the twentieth century through rites of passage—adolescence, divorce, death, and sexual awakening—as played out in family and academia. . . . Throughout, the hurly-burly of the author’s personal existence reflects the dramatic cultural transformations surrounding him. And yet patterns emerged, revealing not only that young Peter felt life deeply but that his formative years never stopped informing him.”

—William B. Russel  
Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School  
Princeton University

“The author’s warmhearted, positive temperament shines through this eminently readable collection of tiny stories that together form an unusual autobiography about an unusual life lived in many interesting locations around the world. With enviable ‘total recall’ of the big and small moments in his life, Peter Lighte illuminates personal encounters and family history with quirky humor and elegant style. An entrancing book.”

—Judith Weir  
Composer and visiting professor

“An engaging collection of anecdotes, *Host of Memories* begins with tales from the author’s childhood in New York and Florida, and continues through his discovery of ancient Chinese philosophy and history in university, and his unlikely transformation from Chinese scholar to distinguished international banker. The chapters dance from New York to London, Tokyo, Beijing, Sydney, Hong Kong, and many points in between. With a lively sense of humor and no holds barred, his stories reveal the roots and development of a man deeply appreciative of family and friends, who shines as a wonderful storyteller and an exceptional human being.”

—Tom Gorman  
Chairman and Editor-in-Chief, *Fortune China*

“Peter Lighte has written a charming memoir—Proustian in detail but much easier to enjoy. It is a wonderful story of a life well-lived. Don’t miss its erudite musings endowed with charm, thoughtfulness, detail, and delight.”

—Sybil Shainwald  
Women’s advocate

“As in his first book, *Pieces of China*, Lighte’s sharp eye for details creates vivid pictures, whether of his childhood days in Florida and New York or in the prime of life in London. With a supporting cast of colorful and sometimes cheeky relatives, chance acquaintances who become adopted relatives, and others who are swept into oddball scenes, Lighte tells stories that are often funny, frequently touching, and always tied together by his irreverent perspective, empathy, and quick wit.”

—Timothy Massad

Lawyer, Washington, DC

“Peter Lighte’s stories remind me of those of Gerald Durrell, one of my favorite read-aloud authors.”

—Melanie Clarke  
Executive director of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra

“A little boy is so uncomfortable at a family dinner that he pushes his shoe into the center of the elegantly set table. Decades later, he gathers the relatives together to his own table, his own telling of their stories. Here the host of memories travels back and forth in time. With a keen sense of humor and detail, he makes us enjoy Aunt Marcy, a Hindu festival opening a textile factory in North Carolina, and a quirky Princeton doyenne, with all the sillinesses, misjudgments, and vulnerabilities of being alive.”

—Miriam Peskowitz  
*New York Times* bestselling author of *The Daring Book for Girls*