

## April 2021 StoryWalk Program

*We are the Gardeners* by Joanna Gaines and Kids

Well before this book was conceptualized, the garden was a special place for me and the kids. Since they were little, we've always had some scope of garden in our yard—whether it was only several feet wide or much larger like the one we're growing at the farm today. It has always been a place where I go to retreat or unwind, or to simply spend some time in nature—and of course any time my kids would join me was always more fun.

When I started to ask for their help in the garden, I found that, like me, as soon as their hands hit the soil they were hooked. Over the years, we've had to learn by trial and error because a garden is hard work—plain and simple. There have been times where we've all been frustrated and could have thrown in the towel, but thankfully, the garden has always called us back.

My hope for this book is that it inspires families to want to get out and connect in fun, creative ways—whether or not it's in the garden. It could be sewing or painting or cooking together. Whatever it may be, at the end of the day there's always something to learn and I believe taking the time to try something new together makes it all the more meaningful.

([The Making of We Are the Gardeners | Magnolia](#))

### About the Author

Joanna's parents, Jerry and Nan Stevens, actually met in Seoul, Korea, while her dad was serving overseas during Vietnam, according to the Gaineses' book, *The Magnolia Story*. Jerry and Nan fell in love over letters, Nan came to America, and the two married.

While Jerry had been raised Catholic, Nan was raised Buddhist Korean. Despite their different upbringings, the couple bonded over their faith, "memorizing Scripture together each day," Joanna revealed in the memoir.

The couple moved to Jerry's hometown of Wichita and welcomed three daughters, including Joanna, who are each half Korean, a quarter Lebanese, and another quarter German.

The family moved around a lot for Jerry's job with Firestone, which Joanna wrote was difficult "when kids started noticing that I didn't look exactly like they did."

"Most people don't look at me and automatically think I'm half-Korean," she continued. "But in those first couple of years in elementary school, kids started picking on me because of it."

The lunchroom bullying was so bad that Joanna started packing her lunch and eating in a separate room with a smaller group of kids. Then, Joanna's Korean grandmother came to live with them, which Joanna felt drew even more attention to her diverse family.

"Kids in kindergarten would make fun of me for being Asian and when you're that age you don't know really how to process that," explained in an interview with *Darling*. "The way you take that is, 'Who I am isn't good enough.'"

Eventually, things got better, but when another move meant Joanna would be attending a larger public school, those same fears resurfaced. She ended up hiding in a bathroom stall or stealing away with her mom at lunch to avoid interaction with her peers.

Finally, the Stevenses settled in Waco, where Joanna was able to make some good friends—she was even voted her high school's homecoming queen.

That same year, "I started to think consciously about what it meant to be half-Korean," Joanna wrote. "I remember thinking, 'I'm either white, Korean, or both, but I've got to own this. It's me.' I started to see how beautiful my mom's culture was and how beautiful she was, and there were times when I wanted people to know she was different and she was unique. I didn't want to be embarrassed about that."

As Joanna told *Darling*, those childhood challenges, as well as her travels to New York, eventually helped her pinpoint her purpose in life: "I really felt like God was telling me that I would be able to help women who weren't confident, who were looking for guidance or who were lonely. And so I knew that from that place of pain there was going to be a place to reach others, because I had actually lived in that place; I had felt that pain myself."

Now, she inspires women with her words and her designs—and she encourages her kids to reach out to lonely, less confident peers in need of a friend.

[\(Joanna Gaines Ethnicity - What Is Joanna Gaines Nationality \(countryliving.com\)\)](#)

### **About the Illustrator**

Julianna Swaney is an illustrator whose work is inspired by themes of imagination and whimsy. She grew up homeschooled, which allowed free range for her imagination and interests in folklore, animals, nature, and history. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

[\(Amazon.com: Julianna Swaney: Books, Biography, Blog, Audiobooks, Kindle\)](#)