

# MARGARET PETERSON HADDIX

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## Among the Hidden: Bonus Information

*Article written about Among the Hidden for China Connection, 2006*

My husband and I knew we wanted to have children. We knew we wanted to have more than one. The question that stumped us was, “Do we want to have more than two?”

In the summer of 1996, we had a 3-year-old daughter and a 21-month-old son, and we were beginning to have odd conversations along the lines of, “Are we done? No more backward-facing car seats, no more baby swings, no more baby spit-up, no more sweet, pre-verbal baby coos? Or—do we want another baby?” The conversations veered from the personal to the global, as we debated the impact of our one decision on issues such as overpopulation and the earth’s limited resources. We talked about China’s One-Child policy.

And though I’d certainly been aware of China’s population control policies before, that was the first time I’d really thought very deeply about what impact such policies have on individuals and individual families. I began imagining what it would be like to live with such strict controls and limited choices—specifically, I began imagining a 12-year-old boy who’d had to spend his entire life in hiding, because the government of his country said he had no right to exist. And then I began writing about the boy, in a novel called *Among the Hidden*.

*Among the Hidden* tells the story of Luke Garner, an illegal child whose entire life changes when he discovers the existence of another illegal, hidden child. Since 1996, that one book has led to a seven-book series for kids about “Shadow Children”—third children in a society that only allows two, children who initially have to hide but who eventually band together and risk their lives to bring about change. I’ve written

about a dozen other books for kids as well, on topics ranging from Cinderella (Just Ella) to kids discovering family secrets (Running Out of Time, Double Identity, House on the Gulf, Escape from Memory, etc.). But the Shadow Children books are my most popular, and they always seem to strike a nerve. Among the Hidden has won ten state readers choice awards and has been the teen book selection in “One Book, One City” type programs in Boise, Idaho; Cincinnati, Ohio; the state of New Jersey; and various other places. The series as a whole has been used in classrooms across the country, and the books have been published as well in Germany, England and France.

I am often asked about the connections between the Shadow Children series and the situation in China. The questions range from horror-stricken, newly aware elementary school children telling me, as if it's news, “Did you know that in China, people are only allowed to have one kid?” to graduate students asking me about my political/environmental perspective, and what solutions I would offer to population issues. (The elementary school kids' questions are a lot easier to answer. Usually.) When I was first thinking about Among the Hidden, I did actually consider just setting the book in China. But I wouldn't have felt comfortable writing about a country I'd never been to, and with a 3-year-old and an 18-month-old, I knew I couldn't take off for several months of travel and research. Also, I wanted to set up the government and the government controls in the book in my own way.

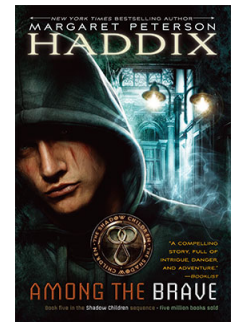
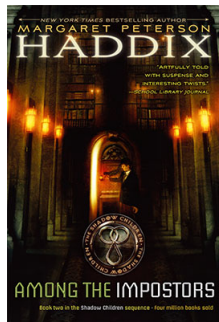
Once when I was visiting a middle school in Beavercreek, Ohio, an ESL teacher asked if she could introduce me to one of her students. He was a Chinese-American boy, the third-born in his family. His older sister, the second-born, had been taken from his family in China; the family was never able to learn what happened to her. So when this boy was born, the family hid him, pretending that he belonged to an aunt. They were not able to tell the truth about him until they came to the United States.

This boy was polite but very quiet; I think we both felt strange about meeting. I almost felt like I should apologize for making up a story very similar to the horrible experience that he and his family had actually lived through. But I wouldn't write fiction if I didn't believe that it can be a powerful force for education, enlightenment and even healing. I am constantly amazed at how passionate kids can become about the fate of my characters—and, when they learn of it—the fate of people on the other side of the globe. Even at 9, 10, 11 years old (maybe especially at 9, 10, 11 years old), they want everyone to be guaranteed

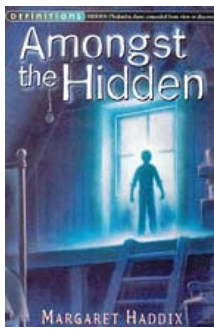
basic human rights.

The seventh and final book in the Shadow Children series, *Among the Free*, was published only a few months ago. My kids are now 13 and 12 –for a variety of reasons, we did not have a third child. (And, as it turns out, no matter how many children you have, at some point you do have to leave the baby phase behind.) It still seems a little strange that those conversations my husband and I had a decade ago led to so many books. But I am glad if those books help kids understand their world better.

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