

# The AACCP Newsletter

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## An Interview with Frances H. Kakugawa

Interviewed by Leonard D. Chan

Frances Kakugawa is an author and poet of over eight books. Her most recent work includes *Mosaic Moon: Caregiving through Poetry*, *Teacher, You Look Like a Horse: Lessons from the Classroom*, and two storybooks *Wordsworth the Poet*, and *Wordsworth Dances the Waltz*.

Frances currently lives in Sacramento, but will be making a special appearance at our poetry event in San Mateo on January 17, 2009.

Here is our interview with Frances Kakugawa.

### **Tell us about yourself - where did you grow up and what was it like?**

I was born and raised in Kapoho, on the Big Island of Hawaii. It was a plantation village. We had no electricity or a water system. Every house had an outhouse. We played until sundown with homemade toys and games. It was a good place for dreams. We were the true country bumpkins. Everything changed when an eruption destroyed Kapoho.

### **What happened to you and your family, and the rest of the people that lived in Kapoho after this devastation?**

The Red Cross helped residents relocate to another town. They opened up state land and had a public auction with set prices for evacuees. We escaped to our aunt's house in Mt. View (Hawaii), later rented a house for about a year until we were able to relocate to a new town. The Red Cross took whatever was left of our house (It was pretty intact, the earthquake had left a crack beneath our house) and relocated it for us in our new place in Pahoa.) We

still return to funerals of people who once lived in Kapoho. I wrote a few poems on Kapoho: *Once There Was a Kapoho* and *Outhouse* are two of them.

### **Tell us about some of the influences that laid the foundation for your career as a teacher, poet, and author.**

Four major events influenced me: The bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima (both sides of my grandparents families were killed), learning to read in first grade and overhearing a conversation among the elderly Japanese. "The 2nd Kakugawa girl isn't going to amount to much, she's not too bright, that one." I needed to disprove them and this dream became one of forgiveness because whenever I felt I was being unfairly treated, I said to myself, "That's okay, someday I'm going to be a writer."

### **For those that have not read your memoir *Teacher You Look Like a Horse! Lessons From the Classroom*, tell us about the intriguing title and some of the lessons you learned.**

I was teaching Kindergarten. The French braid hairdo was the fashion that year. I got up early one morning and did my hair in a French braid. I felt very Parisian and chic in my French twist until a Kindergarten student ran into the room, stopped, looked at me and said, "Teacher, you look like a horse."

I learned the value of respect and human dignity from early life and never let this go. In this book I give actual classroom stories to show how children best learn.

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## Poetry in San Mateo Day 2009

A Beginning of the Year Poetry Celebration

It's that time of the year again when we hold our annual poetry celebration. This year, it is being held on Saturday, January 17, 1pm at the San Mateo Main Library.

Poetry in San Mateo Day was originally started by AACCP for the purpose of promoting Asian and Pacific Islander American poets. January was chosen for the month of this event because in many Asian cultures, poetry is traditionally the first writing done at the beginning of the year.

This year we feature Hiroshi Kashiwagi and Frances Kakugawa.

**Hiroshi Kashiwagi** is a noted poet, playwright, actor, and retired librarian. His book *Swimming in the American* won the American Book Award and his most recent book *Shoobox Plays*, a collection of Hiroshi's plays, is also receiving critical praise. Come hear our engaging friend as he makes his return to our event.

**Frances Kakugawa** is an author, poet, and educator originally from Hawaii. Her writings include her moving poetry anthology *Mosaic Moon: Caregiving through Poetry* and the Wordsworth storybooks featured below. Her books capture her experiences in Hawaii, her work in leading workshops for Alzheimer's caregivers, and much more.

Come and hear her read some poignant poems on her experiences and how journaling and writing became part of her tools for rising above the burden of care.

We invite everyone - poets, people that enjoy poetry, and anyone desiring an enjoyable afternoon to come to our event. Share your New Year's writings or just sit back and enjoy the others.

## Give Us Your Feedback

Please feel free to send us your reviews, comments, and book suggestions. You can contact us by going to the following web page - <http://asianamericanbooks.com/contact.htm>

### Up Coming Events

Here are some events that AACP will soon be attending. Invite us to your events.

Date/Time	Event	Location
Jan 17 1pm	5th Annual Poetry In San Mateo Day- A Beginning of the Year Poetry Celebration	SM Main Library San Mateo, CA
Feb. 3	Library Materials Fair Exhibit/Sales	SC County Office of Educ. Santa Clara, CA
Feb. 15 5:30pm- 7:30pm	The 29th Annual San Jose Day of Remembrance 2009	Betsuin Bud. Church 640 N 5th St. San Jose, CA
Jan 31 1-5pm	Families with Children from China - N. CA 14th Between Two New Years Celebration!	Mill Valley Community Center Mill Valley, CA
Mar. 8 11am-5:30pm	Chinese New Year's Celebration	Stockton Civic Aud. 525 N. Center St. Stockton, CA
Other Event of Interest that AACP May Not Attend		
Jan. 14-16	Assoc. of CA School Administrators Every Child Counts Symposium	Portola Plaza Hotel Monterey, CA
Jan. 17 11am	Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents Panel Discussion - Boreth Ly, Susette Min, ShiPu Wang, Santhi Kavuri-Bauer	De Young Museum San Francisco, CA
Jan. 24- Feb. 15	Chinese New Year Celebration Events in SF Chinatown	San Francisco, CA
Feb. 1 11am-3pm	Foster City Chinese New Year Celebration	Foster City, CA
Feb. 3 6pm	Slideshow and talk by Jean Pfaelzer author of <i>Driven Out</i>	King Library San Jose, CA
Feb. 7 5:15pm	Chinese New Year Parade	San Francisco, CA
Feb. 8 10am-6pm	12th Vietnamese Spring Festival & Parade	Parkside Hall 180 Park Ave. San Jose, CA
Mar. 6-8	California Council for the Social Studies Conference	Ontario Convention Center Ontario, CA
Mar. 28-29	Reading the World XI USF	2350 Turk Blvd. San Francisco, CA

### An Interview with Frances Kakugawa

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#### How long have you been teaching and what have you taught?

I retired from teaching in 1995 and became a caregiver for my mother. I started out as a Kindergarten teacher, taught first, third and sixth graders and ended my career as a curriculum writer, a district and state writing teacher and a lecturer for the University of Hawaii. I started out as a Kindergarten teacher because I avoided all math courses since that was one of my downfalls and

## Editor's Message

Hello Everyone,

Glad to be here and writing to you in a new year. I hope you all had a wonderful Holiday Season. For those of you that celebrate the Lunar New Year, the Holiday Season isn't over yet. So I wish you all a Prosperous and Happy Lunar New Year!

When we first started the planning for our annual poetry event, I wasn't so sure that we should do it, but with times the way they are, we certainly could use this event.

When I was little, one of the first books I ever chose to buy was a Charles Schulz Peanuts book called *Happiness is a Sad Song*. I was curious by this contradictory title - "how could sad songs make you happy?"

With time, I learned how powerful a sad song or even a moving poem could be. So please come to our poetry event and see if it can help you chase a few blues away.

Thank you again Frances for doing the interview and for coming to our event.

Leonard Chan  
**Executive Editor**

my one and only college degree reads: Pre-School Primary Teaching diploma. You can say I kept silent and did what I could do. What I'm doing now with caregivers or with people of any age or interest was what I did in my career...giving writing and poetry workshops.

**If it's not too personal, tell us a little bit about your Alzheimer's care giving experience.**

I became the sole caregiver for my mother. I have four other siblings. Like many families, we ran into family problems because of disagreement on how my mother should be cared for. Finances became a problem so I took my mother from the Big Island to Honolulu and cared for her there. I gradually found myself being the spokesperson for caregivers and especially for the ones afflicted with this disease.

**How did you get started with the poetry workshops for Alzheimer and other long-term illness caregivers? Tell us about the making of your book *Mosaic Moon: Caregiving Through Poetry*. How did you come up with the idea for the book and was it difficult to get people to reveal their personal stories and works?**

It evolved very naturally. When I found how poetry was helping me rise above the burden of caregiving and turning me into a compassionate caregiver, I volunteered to lead a poetry writing support group for caregivers at the Hawaii Alzheimer's Association. I wanted others to experience the wonders of writing and how it could bring dignity back into caregiving. People began writing at the first session and never stopped. I'm on my 3rd support group in Sacramento and the story is the same, they write immediately and never stop, exploring all honest feelings and experiences. Writing forces us to find my true voice and often this voice is one of compassion and love.

**Were you a little like your character Wordsworth the mouse in your series of children's storybooks - did you get started writing poetry at an early age? Did you learn then about the powers of poetry? Wordsworth's poetry was the salve that provided comfort for both his grandmother and friend's illnesses, and was also the thing that chased the rainy day blues and fears away for his friends. Did you experience something like this in your early poetry writing days?**

Yes, I would say Wordsworth is autobiographical.

I began writing poems when I first learned to read in first grade. Like Wordsworth I was viewed as being different and a bit strange. But the love for writing, especially poetry, made everything manageable. Details of what I experienced are found in one of my short stories.

**At such an early age, did you have any formal help in getting you started with poetry or did it just flow naturally out of you without any prompting or guidance? Being from a small town, did you even have access to poetry books?**

No, I have no formal training. In fact, my teachers from grades 1 - 6 were non-college grads; they were high school grads from the village. They read to us a lot. The bookmobile came once a month. So writing was naturally developed by reading books. In fact, I never did take any writing courses in college. I was afraid some professor would tell me I was no writer and no one was going to interfere with my dreams. I'm sure I would have become a better writer with formal training.

**You mentioned earlier about the destruction of your hometown by a volcano and the bombing of Pearl Harbor - did your writings help you cope with these events? Do you have any of these early poems that you could share with us?**

What these events did was to influence the person I became where human dignity was of such importance. And this became part of my writing.

I had written *Wordsworth the Poet* for a writing contest, this was in the 70's. It won a prize. At that time a publisher wanted to publish that book, he even had selected the illustrator. I was thrilled. We met over lunch and when I saw the publisher treat the waitress with such indignity, as though she was beneath him merely because of her work, I had to make a decision: do I let a publisher who shows no respect for others, publish *Wordsworth the Poet*? I took the manuscript back the following morning. Thirty years later, he was published by a publisher who stood for everything that first publisher was not.

My earlier poems were lost during the evacuation. I had them all in a shoebox. I recalled a few lines and used them in *Wordsworth the Poet*.

I have a few poems on the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima that I can share: One is:

*Under the rising sun  
The enemy came  
Wearing my face.*

**In *Wordsworth Dances the Waltz* you were able to broach a difficult subject matter in a children's book - that being the topics of people with dementia and helping their grandkids learn to cope. How did you come up with this idea and was it difficult to convince your publisher that this was a subject matter that needed telling in a children's story?**

I knew this needed to be explored when I discovered how many people say, "I don't visit them since they don't know me anymore." Many viewed communication as being possible only through language and body language. Children are not involved with the problems of the elderly. I feel it's the adults bringing on this fear of the elderly. I felt this fear of the elderly or the fear of aging is part of our culture and maybe the next generation will embrace aging. When my publisher first heard my first *Wordsworth* story, he asked for a series. He has two more stories in his hands.

**What are you currently working on? Can you give us a preview of your upcoming projects?**

My 2nd caregiving book called *A Caregiver's Voice: Breaking Silence Through Writing* will be out next summer or fall. Included with the poetry are comments on what I had learned about caregiving. I include poetry from five other caregivers. I feel this is a more advanced look at caregiving than *Mosaic Moon*, simply because I have grown.

I'm working on a collection of short stories on growing up in the islands, from being called Jap to following that dream to become a writer.

I also hope to have another book of poems published. I had four book of poetry published earlier and would like to add a fifth book to that collection.

**Thank you very much Frances. We look forwards to having you at our poetry event.**

## Poems by Frances H. Kakugawa

### A Poet's Song

*If the pen,  
The tongue,  
And the heart  
Filled the air  
With one song,  
What a symphony of truth!*

### The Surfer

*Soaring like seagulls,  
Gliding, gliding, sprinkling free,  
Surfer on a wave.*

## Poetry Links

### Haiku Links

- Haiku for People  
<http://www.toyomasu.com/haiku/>
- Jane Reichhold  
<http://www.ahapoetry.com/haiku.htm>
- Keiko Imaoka  
<http://www.ahapoetry.com/keirule.htm>
- Gerald England  
<http://www.nhi.clara.net/gepm002.htm>

### Tanka Links

- Jane Reichhold on Tanka  
<http://www.ahapoetry.com/tanka.htm>
- American Tanka, Inc.  
<http://www.americantanka.com/>

### General Link

- Scholastic Inc. Poetry Writing Page for Kids (grades 1-8)  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/>

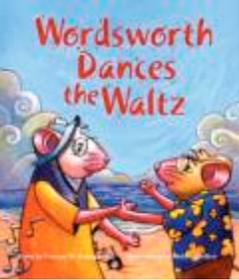
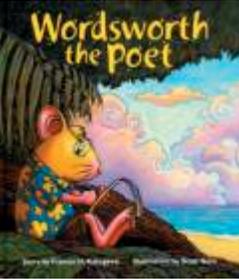
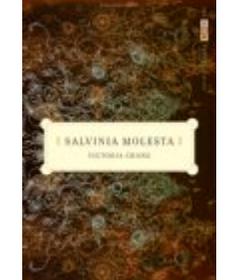
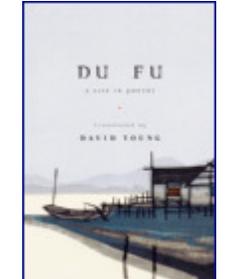
## Poems by Us at AACP

### Our Annual Attempt at Writing Haiku and Tanka

Poems by Melissa Eng		
<b>Tea Heaven</b> <i>Searching with closed eyes Tea's heat crawling within me Pondering my life</i>	<b>Legacy</b> <i>Grandma's in heaven. Proud ancestral roots passed on Wise Eyes, Chinese Pride Kids, Grandkids, and Great Grandkids True success is in her love.</i>	<b>Recession No More</b> <i>Won the lottery Economy flourishing I must be dreaming.</i>
Poems by Philip Chin		
<b>Enlightened through Writing</b> <i>Brush strokes on white page Leading here, leading there, lost Writer's block knock head</i>	<b>Decade</b> <i>Breath like crystals raining Memories of dearest lady Laughter, smiles, a touch Far away yet so close to mind Winter's breath and thoughts of you</i>	<b>Financial Market Investments</b> <i>Run here, run there, stop Like scrambled eggs, shattered yolks Heads spin, bankruptcy</i>
Poems by Leonard D. Chan		
<b>New Year's Night</b> <i>Revelers On a cool new night No change yet</i>	<b>Too Fast</b> <i>Cars swish by Towards Christmas they head No, slow slow It's here, happiness and cheer Lights blink, don't go, stay</i>	<b>You Don't Like Poetry?</b> <i>Joni, Bob and Jewel Feather canyons, diamond sky Am I standing still? Red is grey and yellow white But we decide what we like</i>

## ADDITIONS TO OUR WEBSITE

The following books are discounted for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end February 8, 2009.

	<p><b>Wordsworth Dances the Waltz</b></p> <p>By Frances H. Kakugawa Illustrated by Melissa DeSica 2007, 32 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>When Wordsworth the poet mouse discovers that his grandmother is losing her memory, he uses his poetry to express his feelings about her illness and his love for her. This is a must have touching book for any families that have members with dementia and young kids.</p> <p>Item #3535, Price \$10.95 ... for newsletter subscribers <b>\$8.76</b></p>
	<p><b>Wordsworth the Poet</b></p> <p>By Frances H. Kakugawa Illustrated by Scott Goto 2003, 32 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Wordsworth the Poet is the first in the series of stories about a poet mouse living in Hawaii. Follow along and enjoy his poetry as others in Wordsworth's little community discover the magical powers of poetry.</p> <p>Item #3536, Price \$10.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$8.76</p>
	<p><b>Skirt Full of Black</b></p> <p>By Sun Yung Shin 2007, 104 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>Skirt Full of Black is the winner of the 2007 Asian American Writer's Workshop (AAWW) poetry book award.</p> <p>You can read AAWW's review of the book by going to their website <a href="http://aaww.org/awards_2008reviews.html">http://aaww.org/awards_2008reviews.html</a>.</p> <p>Item #3538, Price \$15.00 ... for newsletter subscribers \$12.00</p>
	<p><b>Salvinia Molesta</b></p> <p>By Victoria Chang 2008, 88 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>Salvinia Molesta is Victoria Chang's second collection of her own poems.</p> <p>You can read about the book by going to Victoria's website at <a href="http://www.victoriamchang.com/">http://www.victoriamchang.com/</a>.</p> <p>Item #3537, Price \$16.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$13.56</p> <p>Note: This book is not yet in stock and therefore will take 2-3 weeks to ship.</p>
	<p><b>Du Fu A Life in Poetry</b></p> <p>By Fu Du Translated by David Young 2008, 226 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>Listen to a radio news story at National Public Radio (NPR) on the 8th century Chinese poet Du Fu and about this new book of English translations of Du Fu's works.</p> <p>Item #3539, Price \$16.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$13.56</p> <p>Note: This book is not yet in stock and therefore will take 2-3 weeks to ship.</p>

