

The AACCP Newsletter

Since 1970

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An Interview with Hiroshi Kashiwagi

LC - Leonard Chan
HK - Hiroshi Kashiwagi

LC: We're here with Hiroshi Kashiwagi author of *Swimming in the American* and new recipient of the **American Book Award** given by the Before Columbus Foundation. Congratulations. Let's start with a standard question - how does it feel? We missed your award ceremony, did you get a chance to give an acceptance speech and what did you say or if you did not get a chance to speak, what would you have like to have said?

HK: *As for the American Book Awards event I will send you a copy of my acceptance speech. I got quite a few good comments on it. At least, it was short and not so drawn out as some of the other acceptances were. I guess it was funny but it revealed our state of mind (my wife's and mine) when we learned of the award. Also, I was trying to show how someone of my age felt and reacted. I feel great about the recognition.*

LC: Talk about the making of your book. The process - why, how, and when did you get started? Discuss the difficulties writing about embarrassing and/or painful memories.

HK: *Actual work on the book started about a year and half ago. It almost seems like the book just came together. I say that because I think I always had a book in mind as I was writing through the years. For this book I started from the beginning--birth, early years on the farm, the move to the store in town, the depression years, my father's illness that forced us to live for two years with*

friends in the country. Then we moved back to town where father resumed the business at another location. I had materials on this period and I also had written quite a bit about the war years, especially the period before going to camp. I had covered the camp in the play "Laughter and False Teeth," which dealt with my mother's dental problems as well as the moral breakdown of the people in camp. Much of the section on camp life and experience was written for the book. A lot of it was based on research. The chapter on the lawyer Wayne Collins was based both on memory and research. The affidavit prepared by Mr. Collins was based on answers I had provided to the questions that he had circulated to all his clients. So the affidavit is pretty much in my voice. The chapter on my life as a writer and actor and reader was written after my editor suggested it. Of course, the play "The Betrayed" was already written and had been performed several times.

The poems were all written previous to working on the book. I must give credit to my editor Tamiko Nimura for the placement of the materials and shaping them into book form. By the time I applied for the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program grant the book was already written. The grant I received was used to publish the book.

(Continued on page 2)

Shizue Yoshina

We Will Miss You

On September 3, 2005 Shizue Morey Yoshina passed away in Los Gatos, California. Shizue Yoshina was a founder and long active board member of our organization. Here's a brief history on our dear colleague and friend.

Shizue was born on July 18, 1908 in Monrovia, California. She grew-up in Pasadena and Los Angeles and went to college at UCLA (then called the University of California Southern Branch). Shizue graduated with a degree in Chemistry and went on to do her postgraduate Masters work at UC Berkeley and Davis in Biochemistry. After college she worked as a medical technologist at various hospitals.

In 1936, Shizue married Dr. Teruo Yoshina and moved to Hilo, Hawaii. While in Hawaii Shizue started her long career in education as a science and math teacher. In 1962 Shizue and her family moved back to California and she lived the remainder of her life in the San Jose area.

Shizue had an impressive list of achievements. She was appointed by the governor to serve as commissioner on the Hawaii State School Board. Shizue was elected president of the

Hawaii Congress PTA and later became president of the National PTA. She was elected president of the Sunnyvale Education

Association (a teacher's organization) and in 1971 she was honored as Teach of the Year for the Sunnyvale School District. Following her retirement, she became active with her church. Shizue served as a delegate to national and local meetings, and was involved in Sunday school and the creation of stained glass windows for her local church.

As a charter board member of the Japanese American Curriculum Project (AACCP's original name), Shizue worked with the other founders on the creation of educational materials that told of the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans into relocation camps during World War II. As time went on and as more Asian American educational materials became available, JACP changed its name to AACCP and spent more of its efforts in the advocacy and promotion of these materials. Shizue tirelessly spent many trips with Florence Hongo in promoting Asian American educational materials throughout the United States. Shizue spent a lot of her time and resources in keeping AACCP's effort alive.

This brief background on Shizue only scratches the surface in describing the intelligence, drive, and compassion of this great person. We will all miss her.

Give Us Your Feedback

Please feel free to send us your reviews, comments, and book suggestions. You can contact us at - aacpinc@asianamericanbooks.com

Up Coming Events

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

| Date/Time | Event | Location |
|--|---|--|
| Oct. 6-9 | Chinese American Studies Conference | Radisson Miyako Hotel San Francisco, CA |
| Oct. 15 | AACP Sponsored Book Signing 1pm - Cynthia Chin-Lee 3pm - Hiroshi Kashiwagi | San Mateo Library 1100 Park Place San Mateo, CA |
| Other Event of Interest that AACP May Not Attend | | |
| Nov. 4-7 | CA Lib. Assoc. 107th Annual Conference | Pasadena, CA |
| Nov. 19 8-4pm | National Pacific Islander Educator Network (NPIEN) 4th Annual Education Conference | Paramount High School 14429 S. Downey Ave. Paramount, CA |
| Nov. 17-20 | CA School Lib. Assoc. Conference 2005 | Ontario Conventional Center Ontario, CA |

Editor's Message

Hello Everyone,

I'm a little late on this announcement, but the Library of Congress just held its National Book Festival event on September 24, 2005. You can read more about this event by going to - <http://www.loc.gov/bookfest/>. This website also has an interesting suggestions page for doing such things as having a virtual simulcast of the event at your local library. The event appears to take place either in September or October of each year. This year's event even had a few Asian American authors such as Linda Sue Park and Gish Jen. So please take note of this website for next year.

The National Book Festival highlighted a non-profit organization that is working to donate books to those in need. This organization called First Book (<http://www.firstbook.org/>) also has a special Katrina relief page. One of the stated goals of this special relief website is to replace the school, library, and personal books lost in the recent hurricanes in the Gulf Coast region. So check out this website and see how you can help.

National Novel Writing Month is coming soon (this November). Registration begins October 1. To learn more check out their website site - <http://www.nanowrimo.org/>.

Thank you Hiroshi Kashiwagi and Florence for your help with this month's newsletter.

Leonard Chan
Executive Editor

First Book's Katrina Relief Page

http://www.firstbook.org/site/c.lwKYJ8NVJvF/b.1040731/k.85D2/Book_Relief/apps/s/custom.asp

An Interview with Hiroshi Kashiwagi

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HK: *Embarrassing or painful memories. I had a few; I guess I re-wrote them several times as I pondered how to deal with them. I decided I would treat them as honestly as I could. However, my friend wondered how some of the sexual references would go over in the "Bible Belt."*

LC: How did you come up with the title?

HK: *The title of the book is a story in itself. The original title was "I Nearly Drowned in the American River," which I had used for a one-man show I did once. I decided that it was too specific for the book so I changed it to "Swimming in the American River," then the "River" was dropped. This was quite a bold move but I had a feeling it was right but I had a comment that it was confusing so I was about to put "River" back in when Florence Hongo said she liked "Swimming in the American." By then the title was also part of the grant application so it remained and I'm proud of it.*

LC: Any tips for others that wish to write their autobiographies?

HK: *Tips for writing memoirs--write honestly, fearlessly. Having a good editor helps too--not too intrusive but savvy. Now, if you're writing for your children to leave them a record of your life--that's a little different. It's a great thing to do but in my case I was writing for myself just as I've been doing all my life.*

LC: I just saw an interesting movie called *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Essentially it's about people that purposely remove painful memories from their minds and the consequences of this memory loss. In your book you mentioned your lost years during the war and post war - was part of the problem you had attributable to your desire to trying to forget the painful memories of your war time incarceration at Tule Lake Internment Camp?

Speak to us about the issues of memory - is it important to hold on to or at least remember the painful memories too? You have quite a bit of experience in play writing and story telling - what are your thoughts about the purposes of telling tragic and/sad stories?

HK: *The following is from the point of view of a writer. Memories are important to writers, especially in writing autobiographies, whether painful or happy. Memories are raw materials that he mines. When dealing with memories that are especially painful or unpleasant, I think the writer steps aside to save his sanity: sometimes writing becomes a cathartic experience. Tragic or sad stories are part of life and should be treated equally with happy stories.*

LC: One of the things I didn't realize was the initial stigma attached to being at Tule Lake. Today, for people that didn't live through the internment experience, it kind of has a reverse image as a place where people stood their ground against the unfair policies of the war time incarceration. After I read your book, I

found it kind of ironic that, at Tule Lake, group behavior and the fears and anger stemming from it, were major factors in many people's decision to take a resistive stand. Are we basically flotsam on the currents of history? In other words, is our sense of control partly an illusion? For example, some people believe that Fred Korematsu was really just an accidental hero.

HK: *Tule Lake stigma. Yes, there was stigma about Tule Lake. Tuleans were partly responsible--their uncertainty about their decision and feelings of guilt that they betrayed America. But it was a difficult time--so much emotion, rumors, pressure, and violence. Yet, basically Tuleans were reacting to the injustice. Blame the government for that.*

LC: Your play "The Betrayed," at the end of *Swimming in the American*, beautifully illustrated the complex decisions people were faced with over the answering of the infamous internment camp questionnaire. The two characters of the play are people that took different stands on questions 27 and 28. The character Tak Fujimoto appears to be loosely based on yourself. Was the character Grace Tamura based on a real person or is she just a reflection of yourself that you used to debate the many thoughts that have gone through your mind all these years? Please discuss a little about the making of this play.

Side note for those of you reading this that are unfamiliar with the questionnaire, the two most controversial questions were numbers 27 and 28. Men answering no to both questions are often described as being No-No Boys. The way internees answered these questions caused deep divisions among them. To this day, some former internees still find strong contention with those that answered differently. Here are the questions.

No. 27: *Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?*

No. 28: *Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or to any other foreign government, power or organization?*

HK: *Actually, the loyalty registration was an order by both the War Relocation Authority (WRA) and the U. S. Army. The WRA wanted to screen us (make sure we were loyal Americans) in order to remove us from the camps and the Army wanted to recruit volunteers for a special unit that became the 442nd Battalion.*

In "The Betrayed" yes, Tak is based on myself as a country bumpkin: perhaps a bit exaggerated. Grace, on the other hand, is a figment of my imagination. She is a bit idealized. True, she is the other side of me--the struggles I went through in coming to a decision. I made her a native of Seattle because I wanted her to be urban, sophisticated and educated. Actually, I had been to Seattle a couple of times (after the war) and I knew that many Issei Japanese there were hotel managers. After writing the play, a few years later, I was in Seattle again and I was surprised to find how provincial it was with deep divisions within the community.

As for the play, for a long time it was a short play titled "A Question of Loyalty" with Tak and Grace trying to overcome their differences on the loyalty questions. Then I worked with the Talespinners Theater in San Francisco and I was determined to develop a full-length play. In the second act which takes place 40 years later, I opted to deal with the consequences of the loyalty questions, how people's lives were affected by their actions in camp, the decisions they made when they were very young. No matter what positions we took, we all paid dearly. Again blame the government.

LC: I loved your chapter entitled Dominguez and the related poem *Remembers*. Dominguez told of an incident where you witnessed discrimination from a local druggist against a Filipino farm worker friend of yours. That same druggist turns on you years later, right before your evacuation to an internment camp, as described in your poem *Remembers*. Did the incident with Dominguez at the drug store enter your mind when Mr. Stevens the druggist failed to serve you too? You hinted that you could sense Dominguez's pain - was the lesson of the extent of Mr. Stevens' racism completed when you were directly discriminated against?

HK: *The poem "Remembers" is the angriest piece in the book. In "Dominguez" the narrator was a 13 year old kid, hardly aware of the druggist's bigotry toward his friend Dominguez.*

Years later in "Remembers" when he is refused service he is 19 being forced to leave his home town and the rejection by Mr. Stevens who to him represents the town makes him realize that he had been a racist all along.

LC: What's up next? In *Swimming in the American* you hinted at possibly creating a book from a collection of your plays, is this a possibility? How about a book of your poetry? Any interest in writing a novel? Are you working on any new plays? Is there any chance that some of your plays may be translated to film? I think "The Betrayed" would translate well to film or video and should be seen by students everywhere. Note to teachers - don't wait for the film, buy the book and put on your own stage performance of this play.

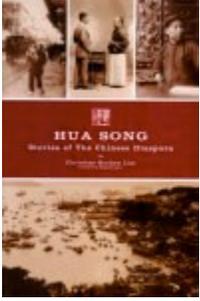
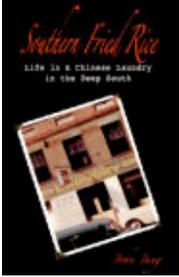
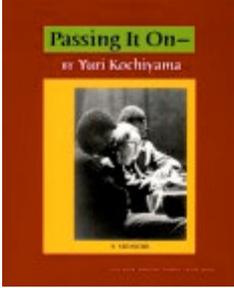
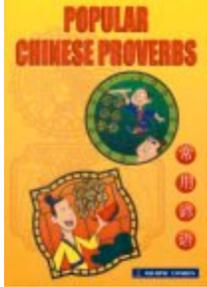
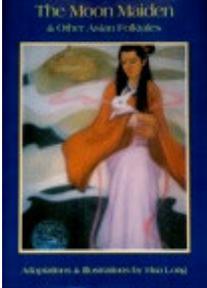
HK: *I've been thinking hard about writing something new. Also I have looked at some other things that I had written and put away. With some re-writes maybe they will work with some new things that I might do. My next book will definitely be a collection of my plays. I have asked my son Soji to type them but he is pretty busy with his life as a producer of shows. But he has typed several of the plays. I don't want to type them myself; I'm afraid I'll get bogged down re-writing them. The plays represent a certain period of Japanese American history and also a certain point in my development as a writer. I'm reading some poetry and hope to write some new ones. I think my strong point is humor; I love to be funny in my writing and as a stand-up.*

I've also thought of looking at my journals (I've kept a diary since 1970) and put together excerpts from them. Or I might find ideas in them that I can expand into stories though I don't think I would do novels.

LC: Thank you.

Come Meet Hiroshi Kashiwagi
At the San Mateo Main Library (1100 Park Place)
On October 15, 2005 at 1 pm
Swimming in the American -- \$14.95

The following books are discounted an additional 20% from the listed price for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end October 16, 2005.

| | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Hua Song Stories of the Chinese Diaspora By Christine Suchen Lim With foreword by Wang Gungwu 2005, 263 pages, Paperback.</p> <p><i>Hua Song</i> is the photo history of the Chinese that left China during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Not only does it cover Chinese American history, but other Chinese that settled around the world. This book will engage you for hours as you page through the fascinating photos and text of distant Chinese cousins.</p> <p>Item #3312, Price \$19.95 - for newsletter subscribers \$15.96</p> |
|  | <p>Southern Fried Rice Life in A Chinese Laundry in the Deep South By John Jung 2005, 221 pages, Paperback.</p> <p><i>Southern Fried Rice</i> is the real life story of Professor John Jung's Chinese family. Follow his family as they settle in the Deep South during the Depression and segregationist eras.</p> <p>Item #3310, Price \$15.00 - for newsletter subscribers \$12.00</p> |
|  | <p>Passing It On A Memoir By Yuri Kochiyama 2004, 224 pages, Paperback.</p> <p><i>Passing It On</i> is the memoir of Yuri Nakahara Kochiyama, an extraordinary Asian American woman who spoke out and fought shoulder-to-shoulder with African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Whites for social justice, civil rights, and peace. Her life is a life worth examining.</p> <p>Item #3284, Price \$17.00 - for newsletter subscribers \$13.60</p> |
|  | <p>Popular Chinese Proverbs Compiled by Goh Pei Ki Illustrated by Wu Xiaojun Translated by Geraldine Chay 2004, 134 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>Do you have some comic book readers at home? Want them to learn some Chinese wisdom? <i>Popular Chinese Proverbs</i> might just be the trick. This book uses a comic book format to help explain often difficult to understand Chinese proverbs.</p> <p>Item #3313, Price \$14.95 - for newsletter subscribers \$11.96</p> |
|  | <p>The Moon Maiden & Other Asian Folktales By Hua Long 1993, 31 pages, Hardback.</p> <p><i>The Moon Maiden & Other Asian Folktales</i> is a new addition to our selection of Asian folktale books. It contains 12 traditional favorite stories including The Moon Maiden, Li Chi Slays the Serpent, Peacock with the Fiery Tail, and nine other wonderful stories.</p> <p>Item #3311, Price \$12.95 - for newsletter subscribers \$10.36</p> |

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