

The AACCP Newsletter

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An Interview with Hiroshi Kashiwagi on Poetry and The Release of his New Book *Ocean Beach*

Interviewed by Leonard D. Chan

Your preface to *Ocean Beach* mentions that you started writing poetry when you were a librarian and had been assigned to select books for the poetry section. How long ago was this and did you have any earlier efforts at writing poetry?

Well, I started working as a librarian in the Literature department of the San Francisco Public Library in June 1966 and I was assigned the poetry section in 1968. That's when I started to write "poems." Before that, I wrote some short pieces (more like prose poems) for the AMERICAN BUDDHIST, which I edited from 1957-65. Some of these earlier pieces are in *Ocean Beach*.

Did you get most of your poetry education from just reading good and bad poems and do you have any favorites among the poetry books that you reviewed? Do you model your style on any particular poets?

I was an English major at UCLA for two years before I switched to "Oriental Languages." So I've read a lot of early English poetry.

Offhand, my favorite poets are William Carlos Williams and of course Gary Snyder. If I try to copy anyone it's Gary Snyder. He is a master. I just like how and what he sees. He deals with concrete, observed objects and situations.

How do you evaluate poetry - what constitutes a good poem? Is it like music and up to the tastes of the individual?

The easy answer to this is that it's up to the individual's taste. If more people like a poem, then it must be a good poem.

Many poems are like abstract paintings and hard for many people to grasp - is it an acquired taste, do we need to be trained to appreciate these poems? Many people I know treat poetry like chopped liver and shy away from it without giving

it a try. What can be done to make poetry more accessible to the masses?

Very often I read a poem and I don't get it. But that's okay. I read it for the use of the words or if read aloud, the sound of the words. Or why the poet decided to write the particular poem.

I don't want to generalize the whole Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) community, but are many of them missing the boat when it comes to poetry? We tend to see the stereotypes of APIAs tending towards the technical fields and not as much towards the humanities like literature and poetry. Do you think I'm off the mark on this and if not, what can be done to stem the tide?

I don't know much about the contemporary APIA community so I'll skip this question except to say that one should give literature and poetry a try. Read my stuff--it's easy and it's fun.

The *Ocean Beach* preface mentions that you feel that poetry is best when it just happens. I often find the stories behind the creation of artistic endeavors fascinating. Can you give us an example of the genesis of one or more of your poems?

Some poems were written by other people, especially children. I was just there with big ears to record them. Examples are: "Cello," "Luis Hiroshi," "Merry Christmas." The genesis of another poem--"Separation."

Once I was asked by a Buddhist priest to accompany him to a funeral home where he conducted the last rites of a Japanese war bride. The only other person was the woman's husband, a large American. I was there as a surrogate mourner and observer. I was struck by what I saw and recorded it.

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Poetry in San Mateo Day 2010 A Celebration for the Release of *Ocean Beach*

This January 16 at 2pm, we will hold our 6th Annual Poetry in San Mateo Day. We're moving the event back to the intimate surroundings of our store on 3rd Ave.

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 our poetry event will also doubling as a book release celebration for our newly published book *Ocean Beach* by Hiroshi

Kashiwagi. Come and hear awarding winning author Hiroshi Kashiwagi read from his wonderful new book.

Hiroshi Kashiwagi is a noted poet, playwright, actor, and retired librarian. His book *Swimming in the American* won the American Book Award and his book *Shoobox Plays*, a collection of Hiroshi's plays, has also receiving critical praise. Come hear Hiroshi read from his wonderful new book.

We also encourage all attendees to come with their own penned poems. Anyone that reads their own poems or poems by their favorite Asian or Pacific Islander American will get 20% off any one item in our store.

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
Jan 16 2pm	6th Annual Poetry In San Mateo Day A Beginning of the Year Poetry Celebration Hiroshi Kashiwagi	AACP Store 529 E. 3rd Ave San Mateo, CA
Jan 24 1-5pm	Families with Children from China - N. CA 15th Between Two New Years Celebration!	Mill Valley Community Center Mill Valley, CA
Feb. 14 11am-2pm	Foster City Chinese New Year Celebration	Foster City, CA
Feb. 14 5:30pm	The 30th Annual San Jose Day of Remembrance 2010	Betsuin Bud. Church 640 N 5th St. San Jose, CA
Feb. 20	Day of Remembrance 2010	Merced, CA
Mar. 6 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. 13-15	Assoc. of CA School Administrators Every Child Counts Symposium	Portola Plaza Hotel Monterey, CA
Feb. 6-28	Chinese New Year Celebration Events in SF	Chinatown San Francisco, CA
Feb. 20-21	25th Annual Oregon Asian Celebration	Lane County Convention Center Eugene, OR
Feb. 27 5:30pm	Chinese New Year Parade	San Francisco, CA
Mar. 5-7	California Council for the Social Studies Conference	California Council for the Social Studies Conference
Mar. 6-7	Reading the World XII	USF San Francisco, CA

An Interview With Hiroshi Kashiwagi

(Continued from page 1)

People familiar with your poetry may best know your works dealing with the Japanese American Internment and your World War II experience - tell us a little bit about these poems and how they came about.

The camp poems--"A Meeting at Tule Lake" is probably my most famous poem. I've read it so many times. I guess it's the emotion in it that makes it work. It was written while riding on the bus at

Editor's Message

Hello Everyone,

Happy New Year!

Just a short message this month.

Thank you very much Hiroshi Kashiwagi for allowing us to publish your new poetry book and for doing this month's newsletter interview. We wish you much success with your new book and your future endeavors.

Thank you Frances Kakugawa for letting us use one of your marvelous poems. We hope to see you soon.

Thank you Philip for your haiku and tanka poems. I hope it wasn't too painful :).

Sorry Melissa for not waiting for your poems. Feel free to come to our poetry event and read your poems.

Leonard Chan
Executive Editor

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>

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 for Kids (grades 1-8)
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/>

night going to Tule Lake for the first time in over 30 years. When we arrived early in the morning the poem was complete. I made another copy that I could read and I don't think I changed even a word.

I like "Radio Station KOBY in Medford, Oregon." I think it tells a lot about life in camp--the tedium, the conflicts, and the danger.

Tell us about your book *Ocean Beach* - what's the oldest and newest poem in this collection? Do you have a favorite?

I once spent a weekend at Yosemite and the result of that experience were my earliest pieces--"At Tuolumne" (my favorite), "Mirror Lake," "Man." The later poems are: "For Manong Al Robles," " Morning Walk, " "Mortality," "For Ryo Kashiwagi."

I would like to share "Mortality" and "For Ryo Kashiwagi." Hoshi, our Shiba-inu was euthanized last year and my baseball-playing brother passed away on Nov. 2, 2008. Both represent a void in my life.

Which poem from your collection, would you like to share with everyone? Tell us a little bit about this poem. Thank you very much.

Poems by Hiroshi Kashiwagi
From his book *Ocean Beach*

Mortality

Hoshi is fourteen, nearing fifteen
 I suppose that's old for a dog
 I notice certain changes
 she is more cautious and hesitant
 going down the stairs
 and her morning walks are more circumscribed
 only after a bath does she show any energy
 running around as she used to
 I guess to shake the water off her coat
 she doesn't always hear my calls
 but her sight and smell are good
 and her appetite is healthy
 still I watch her closely
 thinking of mortality
 hers and mine

For Ryo Kashiwagi

(March 24, 1924 - November 2, 2008)

Home run! the crowd implored
 whenever you came to bat,
 forgetting for a moment
 the barbed wires, the sentry
 and the tedium.
 A mighty swing
 and you obliged-
 the ball hit too far
 to catch up,
 as you circled the bases.
 Indeed another home run!
 Now you are the ball
 hit too far to catch up,
 the crowd faintly calling
 your name.

31 Dec. '08

A Poem by Our Guest
Poet Frances Kakugawa

A Poet's Declaration

From Teacher, You Look Like a Horse

I am a star
 In the Milky Way.
 I am the crest
 On emerald waves.
 I am a dewdrop, crystal clear,
 Capturing sunbeams in the morning mist.
 I am that dust
 On butterfly wings.
 I am that song
 Of a thousand strings.
 I am that teardrop
 You have kissed.
 I am a poet!
 I am! I am!
 I am that rage
 In the thunderstorm.
 I am that image
 Of a thousand forms.
 I am magic on each page.
 I am a poet!
 I am! I am!

Poems by Us at AACP
Our Annual Attempt at Writing Haiku and Tanka

By Philip Chin

Chinese American Family

Hundred forty years here
 Fought and bled for this place
 Still damn foreigners?

Together Again

Autumn dawns and thoughts
 Far away I see you dancing
 Forever young, beautiful
 Hearts far apart but spirits near
 Happiness so close in mind

Ghosts

Smile haunting my thoughts
 Your arms circled around me
 Visions and memories fleeting
 And a voice silenced forever
 My wordless longing sorrow

By Leonard D. Chan

On the First Day of...

Christmas ornaments
 Orange-red and vermilion
 Nuttall's wintry feast

Other Comforts

Not a kiss
 On cold New Year's night
 Heater's hiss

Getting Out

Dawn breaks another day
 Raindrops pour like waterfalls
 Safe secure in bed
 Temporary sanctuary
 Planes beckon above, "take wing!"

ADDITIONS TO OUR WEBSITE

The following books are discounted for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end February 7, 2010.

	<p>Ocean Beach</p> <p>By Hiroshi Kashiwagi 2010, 99 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>See the interview with Hiroshi Kashiwagi on page 1.</p> <p>Item #3588, Normally \$12.00 ... for newsletter subscribers \$9.60</p>
	<p>World Ball Notebook</p> <p>By Sesshu Foster 2009, 96 pages, Paperback. 2-3 weeks for delivery.</p> <p>World Ball Notebook is the winner of the 2009 Asian American Writer's Workshop (AAWW) poetry book award.</p> <p>You can read AAWW's review of the book by going to http://www.citylights.com/book/?GCOI=87286100793060</p> <p>Item #3590, Normally \$13.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$11.16</p>
	<p>The Phoenix Gone, The Terrace Empty</p> <p>By Marilyn Chin Revised 2009, 112 pages, Paperback. 2-3 weeks for delivery.</p> <p>The Phoenix Gone, The Terrace Empty is a reissue of famed Asian American poet Marilyn Chin's 1994 notable poetry book. Marilyn Chin fans can rejoice and new readers can discover Chin's early works of deep and intricate writings.</p> <p>Item #3589, Normally \$16.00 ... for newsletter subscribers \$12.80</p>
	<p>The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry From Ancient to Contemporary, the Full 3000-Year Tradition</p> <p>Edited by Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping 2005, 436 pages, Paperback. 2-3 weeks for delivery.</p> <p>In an anthology that covers Chinese poetry, going back three thousand years, what is hope for is lots of excellent background information on the poets as well as great translations of their works. The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry does just that.</p> <p>In addition, the editors also make a good effort to include Chinese women poets, people that are often left out of other anthologies, in this wonderful collection. An interesting example is the inclusion of a poem by American architect Maya Lin's aunt Lin Huiyin.</p> <p>All in all, this book is a fine introduction to Chinese poetry written throughout China's long history.</p> <p>Item #3591, Normally \$17.00 ... for newsletter subscribers \$13.60</p>
	<p>Intersecting Circles The Voices of Hapa Women in Poetry and Prose</p> <p>Edited by Marie Hara and Nora Okja Keller 1999, 396 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>Intersecting Circles is a fascinating anthology written by more than 40 hapa (people of mixed Asian or Pacific Islander ethnicity) women. The contributing authors explore issues of self-identity and much more through their essays, short stories, and poems.</p> <p>Item #3592, Normally \$18.00 ... for newsletter subscribers \$14.40</p>