

The AACCP Newsletter

Since 1970

Asian American Curriculum Project, Inc.

July 2005

AsianAmericanBooks.com - The Most Complete Nonprofit-Source for Asian American Books

An Interview With Ibuki Hibi Lee

By Leonard D. Chan and Philip Chin

The following is an interview with Ibuki Hibi Lee, the editor of *Peaceful Painter: Memoir of an Issei Woman Artist*. The book is an autobiography written by Ibuki Hibi Lee's mother, artist Hisako Hibi. Ibuki's father (Matusaburo Hibi) and mother taught art at the Topaz internment camp (in Utah) during World War II.

The book tells the story of Hisako Hibi - from her arrival in the United States, through her internment at Tanforan and Topaz, the loss of her husband after the war, her struggle to work and raise a family, and her never-ending love of art.

AACP's Hisako Hibi Gallery

<http://AsianAmericanBooks.com/hibi.htm>.

Interview

Ibuki, please tell us a little bit about yourself - your background (education and work history). Were you blessed with your parent's talents for art or are you just an art enthusiast like many of us? Did you come to find your own eye for art?

As far back as I can remember, I can recall my mother and father holding their colorful palettes and painting on canvas boards. They loved to paint, and I noted that they spent inordinate amounts of quiet time in solitary, intense concentration. These were pleasant, peaceful times, and my parents did not need company to be happy.

I sought a career field with more daily social interaction and graduated from U. C. Berkeley and became a physical

therapist in 1960. My connection to art has been in the realm of art appreciation and the legacy of my parents that art transverse time and space through all human cultures.

Tell us a little bit about your parents, especially things that were not included in the book. What influenced the artwork of your mother and father? Were they classically trained and was this part of a long family traditions? It sounded like an interesting partnership of two well-matched intelligent and creative people. This did not sound like your typical first generation couple's experience. Care to expand on this thought?

My mother was happily living with her devout Zen Buddhist grandmother in her farming village in Fukui-ken and reluctantly, came to the United States in



Windy

February 1944, 20x24 in., oil on canvas, Topaz, Utah

1920 to join her parents here when she was thirteen years old. With the realization of newfound opportunities unavailable in Japan, she longed to remain here. Her father had been successful enough in his southern California business to return to Japan in 1925 and to build his family a home there. My mother was the eldest in her family and disobeyed her father, refusing to return to Japan, knowing that she would become the caretaker of her five younger siblings. So she remained totally alone in San Francisco afterwards, working as a schoolgirl to complete her high school education. Since her language ability was limited, she was drawn to painting, as a means of self-expression. Throughout her life, she found "consolation" in painting.

(Continued on page 2)

Counting Our Blessings Or How I Can Say Something Good Too

An Editorial by Leonard D. Chan

A couple of years ago, my friend Gary read a string of my more critical editorials and asked if I could ever say a kind word about the United States and our society. At that time I thought, this should be easy. Contrary to his perceptions, I really do love my country. So the deal was for me to write a piece in our July newsletter as a kind of patriotic gesture. Several Julys have passed and Gary reminds me each time that he's still waiting. Well here it is

Gary - maybe this is just my first installment in a regular July series of counting our American blessings.

Have any of you read Jarod Diamond's books on the rise and fall of societies? If so, please excuse me if I get his message wrong. I recently heard a NPR (National Public Radio) program discussing the author's new PBS program based on his books. From my understanding of his

theory, he believes that a society's technological and economical advancements are more attributable to geography than to any other factor. Therefore, our environment is a bigger reason why we have rocket ships and why people in the jungles of New Guinea are still pretty much living the same way they have for 15,000 years.

(Continued on page 4)

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 AACCP will soon be attending. Invite us to your events.

Date/Time	Event	Location
July 23 10am-4pm	Books by the Bay	Yerba Buena Gardens San Francisco, CA
July 23-24 Sa 1-10pm Su 11-8pm	Ginza Bazaar & Obon Odori	Buddhist Church of SF San Francisco, CA
Other Event of Interest that AACCP May Not Attend		
July 22-23	Manzanar Cultural Landscape Management Meeting	Manzanar & Los Angles, CA
July 22-24	The 7th Annual KAAAN Conference (Korean Am. Adoptee Adoptive Family Network)	Southfield, Michigan
July 24, 30-31	Stockton Obon Festival and Cultural Bazaar	Stockton, CA
July 28-31	OCA's Annual Convention	Las Vegas, NV
Aug. 13-21	Nisei Week	Little Tokyo Los Angeles, CA
Aug. 13-14 Sa 10-4pm Su 10-4pm	Pistahan Festival	Filipino arts, culture and cuisine Yerba Buena Gardens San Francisco, CA
Aug. 14 Su 11-2pm	Pistahan Parade	Civic Center to Yerba Buena San Francisco, CA
Aug. 27-28 10am-6pm	18th Annual Oakland Chinatown StreetFest	Oakland Chinatown Oakland, CA

Editor's Message

Hello Everyone. How's your summer going? In our last newsletter we had an article with some suggestions for interesting Asian American travel destinations. It has been suggested to me that we should definitely do this again next year. So if you have some interesting travel destinations that we can use for next year's newsletter, please take some notes now and pass them along to us so we'll have them on record.

For this newsletter, a big thank you goes to Ibuki Hibi Lee for doing the interview with us. A thank you also goes to Heyday Publishing for allowing us to use some of the text and pictures from Peaceful Painter. Thank you Gary Poon for your editorial suggestion.

There are still a lot of volunteer opportunities with us. We welcome your help and we encourage you all to give us feedback, suggestions, and possible pieces that we could use for our newsletter.

That's it for now. Bye.

Leonard Chan
Executive Editor

An Interview With Ibuki Hibi Lee - continued from page 1

My father came to Seattle in 1906 as a nineteen-year-old student, supported by his silk industry business family in Shiga-ken. He would relate to me his dislike for business and the constant attention given to counting money. He was the youngest in a large family and sought adventure in the western world. He worked as a handyman and also wrote articles for Japanese language newspapers here in the U.S. Later, he discovered his deep interest and love for painting and attended the California School of Fine Arts (now the

San Francisco Art Institute) for eleven years.

My parents met at the art school and married in 1930 with Chiura Obata as their best man. My mother would tell me that she had many Japanese suitors in business and farming at that time, but my father was the only one, who understood art and would allow her to continue to paint after marriage.

Please tell us a bit about the quality, styles, and importance of your mother's work? How is your mother's work regarded in the art world? What individual characteristics made your mother's artwork stand out from others? Were there any hidden meanings or secret symbolism in her art that your mother told you about or that you discovered on your own? The book mentioned that some of the artwork was left with a neighbor before you left for the internment camps -

what ever happened to the paintings, were you able to recover them all?

My mother displayed her paintings in Bay Area major museums, shows, and exhibitions before World War II. She recovered only four paintings from this period. The Hayward neighbor, who had stored some paintings, had died by the time of her return to the Bay Area in 1954. Michael Brown, an Asian art author (Views from Asian California, 1920-1965) and collector, has found a few of my parents' paintings at garage sales, flea markets, and Internet sites.

As my mother developed her ability "to put down paint" on canvas and as her understanding of life deepened, she was able to paint in an abstract style, relying only on the art elements of color, form, and line in order to express her feelings and thoughts. She believed in the power of art to create peace of mind, and she wanted to convey a good feeling to onlookers, who would take the time to study her paintings. She was able to express herself better via abstract works than through a realistic scene, where a viewer might become more engrossed in the subject matter than in the art aspects.

My mother's artwork is limited in its quantity (several hundred paintings) and its outreach. In her last decades she had her own style of painting, which no other artist could duplicate. She sincerely and humbly continued painting with her belief in "art for art's sake," and most of her general recognition has occurred after her passing in 1991.

Tell us about the making of the book - When did you start working on the project? When did your mother start writing her memoirs - Some of it reads like a diary, did she take notes when she was interned? What was the most pleasurable thing about working on this book? What was the worst? What was left out of this book that you wish you had included?

My mother began writing her memoirs in the early 1950's, as a children's book. She continued to work as a dressmaker, paint, travel, and still return to her writing, as the years passed into the 1980's. I think that she did not want to forget what she had experienced in her lifetime and wrote objectively for others to read also. She did keep a diary during part of her internment.

I started to edit her memoirs in 1999, transferring them on to my old Apple computer, when my mother had her retrospective exhibit at the new Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, "A Process in Reflection." Languishing in a furoshiki (a cloth wrapper), I rediscovered the memoirs and took more interest in my own mother's legacy to me.

Kimi Kodani Hill informed me about the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program after her successful book publication. I applied in 2000 and received a grant but became too ill in 2001 to work on the manuscript. I applied again in 2003 and was provided with a grant and professional assistance. Mark Johnson, Professor of Art at San Francisco State University, was my mentor, who enthusiastically

supported the project. The publisher, Heyday Books, gave me the editorial assistance needed to form the book and make it a reality. I also was given a new PC through a friend. Without all of the help I might have been at a loss, trying to publish the book privately. Instead, I had a very pleasurable experience, especially since I was retired now. The worst thing is an error in the date of one painting in the book, Spring #2, Hayward, which should read 1940, not 1949!

You mentioned that your mother was thinking of using the memoirs for a children's book - I was wondering if she was influenced by the work of Yoshiko Uchida or the other way around. Writing children's books is not a common activity, especially when the subject of the books is on the Japanese American internment. Uchida who wrote children's books with such subject matter also went to Topaz. Did your mother know Uchida?

My mother was a creative introvert, who thought of new inventions (colored cigarettes and colored sheets before they became vogue, for instance), and she started writing her memoirs as a children's book in the early 50's. I remember, feeling embarrassed about this prospect, as a self-conscious, sensitive teen that she may include me in this book! Oh, no! I doubt if my mother knew Yoshiko Uchida at Topaz. Ms. Uchida was an educated writer and a warm, natural storyteller of fiction and nonfiction. My mom sent Ms. Uchida a copy of her manuscript

sometime in the 1980's, and as I remember, Yoshiko wrote back a reply that my mom's writing needed much editing before it would be acceptable to a publisher.

On another note my adult 38 y/o daughter in Virginia is currently contracted with the Children's Book Press in San Francisco to write a children's (3rd grade level) fictionalized book about the art school at Topaz. In fact her draft is due this week, and I learned that Felicia Hoshino will be the illustrator. I have not read the draft but my father is fictionalized. My daughter, Amy Lee Tai, has heard and read about the camps, but it is a different realm to actually have experienced the life there.

Where can people go to see your mother's paintings? Are there any plans to have an exhibition in the Bay Area or anywhere else? How about your father's work - where can people find it and are there any plans to exhibit in the near future? How about a book on his work? Are there a lot of pieces of your parent's work that have not been exhibited?

An exhibition of many of her paintings took place at the de Saisset Gallery of Santa Clara University from Sept. 2004-March 2005, and I understand that a few thousand people came through the gallery. The show was entitled, Peaceful Painter, as was the book. There are a number of websites on the Internet, which show her paintings. One major site of her internment paintings is the Japanese American National Museum website.

My mother was unable to hold on to my father's paintings due to her limited space. However, she did have a retrospective exhibition of his internment paintings in 1963. She sold some and donated the remainder to the UCLA Research Project. I understand that these paintings are stored at UCLA and are inaccessible to the public. My father was a prolific oil painter with hundreds of paintings done before the internment, but these paintings are misplaced, lost or destroyed. Some have been found or located in homes or art sales. So it would be difficult for me to try to do a book on my father, though it would certainly be an interesting one. He had mastered technique and painted with a strong, bold style, as contrasted with my mother's. He liked to paint wild animals, birds, mystical landscapes, and portraits.

(Note - some of Hisako Hibi's work will be exhibited at the Ginza Bazaar in San Francisco this coming weekend. Check our schedule for information on this event.)

This book had one of your father's poems, was he and/or your mother good at poetry too and is there any interest in publishing their poetry? Sounds like they both had an interesting philosophical perspective on life.

I have a lot of my father's writings in the Japanese narrative script, which I cannot decipher. I guess that they both wrote poetry, though their visual art took precedence in their lives. My father's philosophy comes from his Buddhist family background near Kyoto...

...Nothing is more inconceivably profound than being alive, having life and living in the present.

Would you mind if I use your father's poem and the last part of your mother's memoir to end this interview?

Okay.



*Kono aki wa, ame ka kaze kawa
Shiranedemo
So no hi no wazani tagusa torumari.*

*It is not known whether this autumn will be
Rainy or windy,
But, as for today's task, take weeds from the
rice field.*

- **Matsusaburo Hibi**



*Life is transitory.
Yesterday's flower is tomorrow's dream.
Everything changes in time and condition.*

*I thought the terrible war ended on
August 15, 1945. Quite the contrary,
fiercer fighting and war, and evacuations
of people, seem to continue in a human
tragedy today in other parts of the world.
I see and hear helpless mothers and their
crying children.*

*Through our own bitter experience of
World War II, I hope to contribute
something positive towards a better future
and a peaceful existence for all people on
Earth.*

*Forever moving, changing the forms of
human-made society in the vastness of the
universe, I seek something beautiful with
line, color, and form in such a way,
wishing to convey a message of peace.*

*Art consoles the spirit, and it continues on
in timeless time.*

- **Hisako Hibi**

Counting Our Blessings - continued from page 1

I don't know if technological and economical advancements are good measures of a great society. Who am I to say that we are better off with our rocket ships and computers than people living in a jungle? For that matter, it's hard for me to say with any certainty, that our way of life is better than any one else's because I never lived anywhere else. So I cringe every time I hear someone brag about how great America is - how do they know for sure that we're the best? All I can describe are the reasons why I like it here. I can't ever say for certain that I wouldn't like living somewhere else better. So I'll just stick to my reasons for liking America.

Geography

Let's start by using Mr. Diamond's chief factor, geography. Yes, we are blessed with a great land. For the most part, America is large enough to withstand many natural hardships. For example, if you lived in a small country where the crops failed, you wouldn't have any chance to get your food from somewhere else in your country - you'd have to import it. When we had massive crop failures in Oklahoma during the dust bowl years of the 1920s, we still had productive harvests in California and elsewhere to sustain us. So far America has never had a nationwide crop failure. This is not a trivial point because many civilizations have experienced economic and social

upheaval or even collapse after losing the ability to feed its people.

America has also been blessed with a wealth of natural resources, sparsely populated lands, and opportunities related to them. These have been major pull factors, in encouraging people to migrate to the United States.

The People

I'm not sure what Jared Diamond has to say about the factor of a country's residents, but I believe that America benefits from having a very diverse population. By being comprised of people with origins from all over the world, we draw upon a wealth of cultures and

knowledge. Americans are in a much better position to understand the other people of the world because we are comprised of people with origins from every corner of it.

Our diversity does not in any way guarantee universal understanding, but it's at least a start. Neighbors and friends are often our best teachers and advocates for getting us to understand and think more globally. At the very least the cultural diversity has given us a lot more diversity in our diets. I'm reminded of my trip to China 15 years ago where my traveling companions became tired of the limited variety of foods that we could eat. I'm

sure the food situation has changed over there since then. I'm also sure that not everyone in the US is as culturally diversified as my home in the San Francisco Bay Area, but I can't keep from smiling when I observe people of all ethnicities, enjoying the wide variety of restaurants in just one little corner of my neighborhood. Seems like everyone around here knows how to use chopsticks :).

I don't know if understanding how to use chopsticks makes us all better people. But getting back to my point, it's useful to have friends that can tell me about their World War II internment experience when I try to understand what people in the Muslim community might be going through when one of theirs is unjustly mistreated.

Our Governmental System

We've pointed out some of the many failings of our government in past editorials and articles, but for the most part, it's a self-correcting functional system. W. Edwards Deming, a well known scientist and philosopher of business management, basically states that a functioning system requires that it has provisions for self improvement. Although our system of government is miles from anything approaching a Deming model of efficiency, the founding fathers nonetheless created an amazing

system of self government that was totally visionary for it time.

Our governmental institutions with their checks and balances are in place and provide avenues for correction. When a bad law is created, the judiciary is there to evaluate it and strike it down if needed. If the branches of government still fail to make the correction on something we don't like we have the power to remove


lawmakers through the ballot box and find individuals that could make laws more accommodating to our desires.

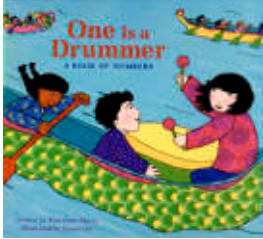
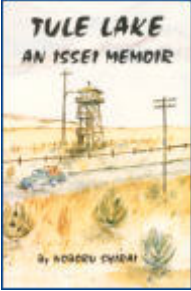
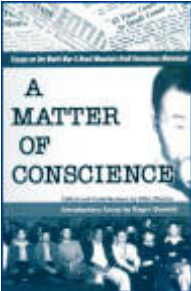
Our basic rights to peacefully express our opinions allow us to inform others of our interests and beliefs. Societies work best when there is a diversity of intelligent views express openly in debate. Therefore it is the patriotic duty of citizens to express criticisms and give input

whenever it is needed. This is what keeps us sane, allows government to self-correct, keeps us from reverting to the barbaric desperate acts of terrorism, and ultimately keeps our society from collapse.

So Gary, for me to be able to peacefully contribute to the local and national debate is part of why I love this country.

The following books are discounted an additional 20% from the listed price for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end August 12, 2005.

	<p>Peaceful Painter Memoirs of an Issei Woman Artist</p> <p>By Hisako Hibi Edited by Ibuki H. Lee 2004, 75 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>Please read our article <i>An Interview With Ibuki Hibi Lee</i> in this newsletter for more information about this book.</p> <p>Item #3306, Price \$20.00 - for newsletter subscribers \$16.00</p>
	<p>Calling Tokyo Japanese American Broadcasters During World War II</p> <p>Produced by Janice D. Tanaka and Gary Ono Written by Screescanda and Gary T. Ono Edited by Screescanda 2002, 47:30 min., DVD Documentary</p> <p>Calling Tokyo is a fascinating and informative documentary on the Japanese Americans that participated in the United States and Britain's World War II broadcast campaign to influence the hearts and minds of people in Japan.</p> <p>The Japanese American broadcast workers participated in this campaign even though they had relatives and friends locked up in internment camps.</p> <p>Item #3350, Price \$25.00 - for newsletter subscribers \$20.00</p>

	<p>One Is a Drummer A Book of Numbers By Roseanne Thong Illustrated by Grace Lin 2004, 29 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>A young girl numbers her discoveries in the world around her, from one dragon boat to four mahjong players to ten bamboo stalks.</p> <p>Grace Thong's enjoyable rhyming verse and Grace Lin's charming illustrations makes this a delightful book for young counters.</p> <p>Item #3307, Price \$14.95 - for newsletter subscribers \$11.96</p>
	<p>Tule Lake An Issei Memoir By Noburu Shirai 2001, 257 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>This is the autobiographical account of Noboru Shirai about his experiences as an Issei during World War II. As a immigrant from Japan, Noboru was particularly torn by between two countries. He was interned at the Tule Lake camp and describes experiences there with surprising frankness, including petty corruption, the day to day life and humiliations of camp life, and the more familiar story of Tule Lake resistance against the internment, ranging from passive resistance to actually expressed treason.</p> <p>Item #3341, Price \$20.00 - for newsletter subscribers \$16.00</p>
	<p>A Matter of Conscience Edited by Mike Mackey 2002, 185 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>The story of the draft resistance trial of sixty-three Japanese Americans at Heart Mountain camp during World War II has been neglected and forgotten because of the anger and shame it caused in the Japanese American community. Lesser known areas of the Japanese American internment are covered including the psychological effects of internment, the reasons why certain individuals resisted and others didn't, and the oftentimes bitter postwar conflict between those who did resist the draft and those who did not.</p> <p>Item #3361. Price \$13.83 - for newsletter subscribers \$11.06</p>

Portion of text and picture from "*Peaceful Painter: Memoirs of an Issei Woman Artist*," by Hisako Hibi,
© 2004 by Ibuki H. Lee, and
reprinted by permission of Ibuki H. Lee and Heyday Books

© 2005 by **Asian American Curriculum Project, Inc.** (a **non-profit** organization since 1970)
Visit our website at **AsianAmericanBooks.com**

529 East Third Avenue, San Mateo, California 94401
Tel 650-375-8286 or 800-874-2242