

those two years, but Müller attempts to answer such questions as the reasons behind Anne's difficult relationship with her mother, and who finally betrayed the family's secret whereabouts to the Nazis.

Müller does not end her story with Anne's final journal entry on August 1, 1944. Instead she recounts what happened to each member of the Frank family following their arrest three days after Anne wrote her last words. Though records are sketchy, Müller details what she learned about the separation of the family, the death of each—except for Otto who survived Auschwitz and lived until 1980—and even the numbers tattooed on the Franks' arms.

R. Z. Sheppard wrote in *Time* magazine, "Müller pays respect to the legend, but she also does something long overdue. She saves Anne Frank from idolatry and impersonal symbolism by restoring her physical presence: an extraordinary woman-not-to-be with greenish eyes, a trick shoulder and an overbite that kept her from whistling."

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

PERIODICALS

- National Review*, December 7, 1998, Julie Crane, review of *Anne Frank: The Biography*, p. 73.
New York Times Book Review, November 1, 1998, Jonathan Rosen, review of *Anne Frank*, p. 18.
Newsweek, September 21, 1998, Laura Shapiro, "Anne Frank Out of Hiding," p. 96.
School Library Journal, April 1999, Frances Reiher, review of *Anne Frank*, p. 165.
Time, September 28, 1998, R. Z. Sheppard, review of *Anne Frank*, p. 88.
Women's Review of Books, Volume XVI, number 8, Nina Auerbach, May 1999, p. 8.

OTHER

- Denver Post Wire Service*, <http://www.denverpost.com/> (July 1, 1999), review of *Anne Frank*.
Page One Radio, <http://www.wiesenthal.org/> (July 1, 1999), Jane Lueders, review of *Anne Frank*.*

MUNRO, James

See MITCHELL, James

* * *

MURA, David (Alan) 1952-

PERSONAL: Born June 17, 1952, in Great Lakes, IL; son of Tom K. and Teruko Mura; married Susan Sencer (a pediatric oncologist), June 18, 1983; children: Samantha Lyn, Nikko, Tomo. *Education*: Grinnell College, B.A. (with honors), 1974; graduate study at University of Minnesota—Twin Cities, 1974-79; Vermont College, M.F.A., 1991.

ADDRESSES: *Home*—1920 East River Terr., Minneapolis, MN 55414. *Agent*—Margaret Troupe, Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency, PMB 515, 1155 Camino del Mar, Del Mar, CA 92014-2605. *E-mail*—DAVSUS@aol.com.

CAREER: COMPAS Writers-and-Artists-in-the-Schools, creative writing instructor, 1979-85, associate director of literature program, 1982-84; The Loft, Minneapolis, MN, core faculty member and instructor in poetry and creative nonfiction, beginning 1984, member of board of directors and head of long range planning committee, 1982-84, president of board of directors, 1987-88, vice president of board, 1988-89, Asian-American Inroads instructor, 1993, 1994, 1998. St. Olaf College, instructor, 1990-91; University of Oregon, visiting professor, 1991; University of Minnesota—Twin Cities, instructor, summers, 1993-94, Edelstein-Keller Visiting Professor of Creative Writing, 1995; Hamline University, visiting professor, 2001—. Center for Arts Criticism, member of board of directors, 1990-92, president, 1991-92, vice president, 1992—; Jerome Foundation, member of board of directors, 1991-2000, program officer, 1999; Asian-American Renaissance Conference, member of board of directors and development and volunteer artistic director, 1991—; Pangea World Theater, volunteer artistic associate, 1997. Gives readings from his works and speaks on race and diversity at colleges and universities and at public gatherings.

MEMBER: Phi Beta Kappa.

AWARDS, HONORS: Fanny Fay Wood Memorial Prize, American Academy of Poets, 1977; U.S.-Japan creative artist fellow, Japan-U.S. Friendship Commis-

sion, 1984; literature fellow, National Endowment for the Arts, 1985 and 1995; creative nonfiction prizes, from *Milkweed*, 1985, and *The Loft*, 1987; "Discovery"/*Nation* Award, 1987; winner of National Poetry Series contest, 1989, for *After We Lost Our Way*; Pushcart Prize, 1990; Minnesota State Arts Board grant and fellowship, 1991; grant from Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center, 1993; Martha Scott Trimble Poetry Award, *Colorado Review*, 1991; Josephine Miles Book Award, Oakland chapter, International PEN, 1991, for *Turning Japanese*, which was also cited as a notable book of the year, *New York Times*; Loft McKnight Award of Distinction for poetry, 1992, award for prose, 1998; PEW/Playwrights' Center Exchange, 1993, for *Painted Bride*; McKnight grant, Playwrights' Center, 1993; fellow, Salzburg Seminar, 1994; travel grant, Center for Arts Criticism, 1994; Carl Sandburg Literary Award, 1995, for *The Colors of Desire*; Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award, 1995; D.H.L., Grinnell College, 1997.

WRITINGS:

A Male Grief: Notes on Pornography and Addiction, Milkweed Editions (Minneapolis, MN), 1987.

- After We Lost Our Way* (poetry), Dutton (New York, NY), 1989.
- Relocations: Images from a Japanese American* (multimedia performance piece), first performed at Intermedia Arts Gallery, 1990.
- Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, Atlantic Monthly Press (New York, NY), 1991.
- (With Tom Rose, Kim Hines, and Maria Cheng; also performer) *Silence and Desire* (play), first performed at Red Eye Theater, 1994.
- (With Alexis Pate; also performer) *The Colors of Desire* (performance piece; also known as *Secret Colors*), first produced at Southern Theater, Walker Art Center, 1994.
- (With Alexis Pate; also performer) *Slowly This* (documentary film), Alive TV, 1995.
- The Colors of Desire* (poetry), Anchor/Doubleday (New York, NY), 1996.
- Where the Body Meets Memory: An Odyssey of Race, Sexuality, and Identity* (memoir), Anchor/Doubleday (New York, NY), 1996.
- After Hours* (theater piece), first performed at Intermedia Arts, 1996.
- (With Esther Suzuki) *Internment Voices* (theater piece), first performed at Theater Mu at Intermedia Arts, 1997.
- (Adaptor) *The Winged Seed* (theater piece; adaptation of memoir by Li-Young Lee), first performed by Pangea World Theater, at Guthrie Laboratory Theater, 1997.
- (With Meena Natarajan) *Silent Children* (theater piece), 1997.
- Song for Uncle Tom, Tonto, and Mr. Moto: Poetry and Identity*, University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor, MI), 2002.

Author of *Listening* (poetry chapbook), Minnesota Center for Book Arts. Work represented in anthologies, including *The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets*, edited by Bill Moyers and James Haba, Doubleday (New York, NY); *Poets of the New Century*, David R. Godine; *Men and Intimacy: Personal Accounts Exploring the Dilemmas of Modern Male Sexuality*, Crossing Press; *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian-American Poets*, Greenfield Review Press; and *The Open Boat: Poems from Asian America*, Anchor/Doubleday (New York, NY). Contributor of poems and articles to periodicals, including *Nation*, *New Republic*, *River Styx*, *New England Review*, *Quarry*, and *American Poetry Review*. Some of Mura's works have been published in Japan and the Netherlands.

WORK IN PROGRESS: Two novels, *Harry Ohara* and *The Warlord's Daughter*; a poetry collection, *Angels for the Burning*, for Boa Editions (Brockport, NY), 2004.

SIDELIGHTS: Poet and memoirist David Mura creates his work from the perspective of a Sansei—a third-generation Japanese-American. In both his poetry and his nonfiction, Mura deals with themes such as racism, sexuality, and what it means to be Japanese American.

Mura's first memoir, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, Mura writes of the year he spent in Japan on a writing fellowship. His account of the year abroad, which brought him to a greater understanding of his own identity as a Japanese American, was warmly received by critics. In an article for *Canadian Literature*, Guy Beauregard wrote, "Make no mistake about it: Mura's narrative is not a naive search for lost 'roots' or an essential 'Japanese-ness.' Instead, Mura works through the more difficult task of rethinking what precisely 'home,' 'nation,' and 'culture' can mean to a Japanese American who would rather have gone to Paris than Tokyo to spend a year writing." A reviewer for *Washington Post Book World* praised, "Mura's nonfiction is a potent antidote to one-dimensional portrayals of the Japanese." In the *New Yorker*, a contributor commended, "There is brilliant writing in this book, observations of Japanese humanity and culture that are subtly different from and more penetrating than what we usually get from Westerners." R. Bruce Schauble of *Kirkus Reviews* called *Turning Japanese* "noteworthy for its seriousness of purpose and for its unusual intelligence, sophistication, and honesty," and Donna Seaman of *Booklist* described the book as "an eloquent account of a catharsis that illuminates both personal and societal aspects."

Mura continues to discuss the themes of racial and sexual identity in *Where the Body Meets Memory*. The book delves into not only how his racial identity was shaped by the fact that his parents were both sent to internment camps during World War II, but how his racial identity impacted his sexuality. Jonathan Rauch of *Washington Post Book World* wrote that in *Where the Body Meets Memory*, Mura writes "with a novelist's humane eye and a poet's taut economy. His prose is diamond-pure, and he uses it to tell two stories in counterpoint, one of his parents' flight from their eth-

nicity and their past, the other of his own recovery of both." A writer for *Transpacific* lauded Mura's use of humor in the text, calling the book "seriously hilarious," and Donna Seaman of *Booklist* praised the writing as "unique, invaluable, and skillfully conveyed." Though the book hinges on Mura's sense of what it means to be Asian American, Rauch was struck "not by the ethnic uniqueness of Mura's experience, but by its universality. . . . [T]he story has rarely been so movingly told."

In Mura's poetry, many of the same themes appear. Zhou Xiaojing, in an essay on Mura's poetry for *MELUS*, cited an interview with the author in 1989, in which he stated that "everything I write, except for certain pieces of criticism, reflects an outlook which is conditioned by my being Japanese American." Xiaojing goes on to write, "In confronting his ethnic identity and the Japanese-American experience, Mura opens up new areas of inquiry and new artistic challenges and possibilities for his poetry." Tim Brady, writing in *MPLS-St. Paul* noted that Mura's heritage as a Sansei is "a fact that informs a good chunk of his writing." Brady continued that because Mura's poetry tells history from the side not of the victors, but of the colonized, "A lot of readers are cupping their ears to hear more."

After We Lost Our Way, Mura's first book of poetry and the winner of the 1989 National Poetry Series contest, uses the technique of the monologue to explore several points of view, allowing Mura to critique racial discrimination from several angles. Though the content explores Asian-American identity, critics have noted that his poetry in this collection has a more European than American feel to it. Edward Butscher of *American Book Review* wrote that *After We Lost Our Way* "flares up in passion and ambition against traditional walls, blazes a lushness of metaphor that is constantly seeking political and social associations."

In *The Colors of Desire* Mura focuses on the interplay between race and eroticism. Though continuing to explore the Japanese-American identity, Mura also discusses sexual desire and addiction, infidelity, and the difference between memory and truth. In *Booklist*, Elizabeth Gunderson praises his "powerful" poems for their combination of brutality and sweetness, writing, "Mura bares his soul and amazes his readers with the beauty and darkness in his work."

Though best known for his award-winning nonfiction, Mura has also been active in creating performance and theater pieces, and he has made himself a presence in the Minneapolis arts community through his work in founding the Asian-American Renaissance, an Asian-American arts organization, where he served as artistic director. As a contributor to newspapers and magazines, Mura has spoken out against the inherent racism and orientalism present in such lauded works as *Miss Saigon*.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY:

David Mura contributed the following autobiographical essay to *CA*:

The Facts & Fictions of Autobiography

I was born in 1952 at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in northern Illinois. My birth took place there because my father was in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany. This was the nearest military facility that my mother, who was living on the south side of Chicago then, could make use of. When my father returned six months later, we lived for a while on the south side, then moved to the near north side, about a mile from Wrigley Field.

Perhaps because of this, I grew up as both a White Sox and a Cubs fan, loving Nellie Fox and Ernie Banks. In the summer after my third grade, we moved to a near north suburb, Morton Grove, which bordered a Jewish suburb, Skokie. In part my father moved there because of the good schools, which he associated with Jewish people. He worked at the AMA, then at Blue Shield, moving up eventually to a position as vice-president. He wanted me to go even further.

In high school, I studied long hours, played baritone in the band, played on the football and basketball team, and was often desperately unhappy. I went out a couple times with a couple of girls, but my dating was thwarted in part because the parents of the Jewish girls I dated found out I wasn't Jewish, and of course, they couldn't pass me off as a Jew, as they could some of my *goyim* classmates. The only people of color at my high school were a few Japanese and Chinese Americans, whom I generally tried to disassociate myself from. I thought of the Japanese and Chinese



David (left), age one, with cousin Steve

American guys in my classes as nerds. Yes, I got good grades like them, but I was athletic. I at least sat with the cool kids in the lunch room, but I always sensed I was merely tolerated because, though a third stringer, I lettered on the basketball team.

Autobiographical facts. Many of them are like any typical American childhood of the fifties and sixties. And yes, I was in many ways typical. A smart and lonely teenager who felt his parents didn't understand him and his peers didn't appreciate him. Who couldn't get a date and would only begin to find success with girls in college, at a school—Grinnell—where it was cool to be smart and where most of the student body considered themselves freaks or hippies. For the first three years there I thought I wanted to get my J.D. and practice civil rights or poverty law.

While in college I met the girl who was to become my wife. She grew up in Atlanta, the daughter of northerners, her father a doctor and the director of the

Center for Disease Control. Through three of her grandparents, she had relatives all the way back to the *Mayflower*. The fourth, her paternal grandfather, had origins we only found out years later: He was a Jew, of a family that originally came from Austria-Hungary. (At this news, my immediate reaction was, “I always knew I was going to marry a Jew.”) At the time we met, I was mainly conscious of the fact that she was pretty and smart. We’d both chosen the same wacky leftist high-pressured academic school; we’d both grown up in suburban middle class neighborhoods. Race? That wasn’t something we discussed in terms of our relationship. I was obviously an American just like her, and if we were different, it was because she had grown up in the South and I in the North.

When I speak at universities these days, I sometimes tell the white students that I am more like them than they would probably guess. And, at the same time, more different. It took me years to discover what that difference was. It took me years to see how race affected my sense of sexuality and my relationship with my wife. It took two books of poetry, two memoirs, and countless essays to investigate an identity I was taught—by my parents, by the educational system, by the culture and society around me—to deny.

In retrospect, this denial is hardly surprising. Asian Americans are usually offered the choice of two identities. The first is as a perpetual alien, a foreigner, someone who just came here yesterday and isn’t familiar and doesn’t quite belong—and this may be true even if you’re a seventh generation Chinese American or your family first came to America, as mine did, a century ago. The second identity is as a honorary white person, someone I very much wanted to be growing up.

A third identity, which my writing and those of other Asian-American authors are now exploring, is still being articulated. It involves the obvious permutations and combinations of cultural identity that we Asian Americans grapple with, the tensions and interminglings we make between the American culture we live in and the ethnic culture of a country in Asia where we were born or our parents or our grandparents were born. But, less obviously, this third identity involves understanding what it means to look racially Asian and live in America; how this situation affects the way others look at you and the way you look at yourself.

I tell people that I wrote my books, especially my memoirs, because when I looked up at my book-

shelves, I never saw a book about someone like me, someone who grew up not just where I did and when I did, but who was a Sansei—a third-generation Japanese American—and who experienced that appellation not simply as a name but as a question of identity. For a long time I deferred that question; then I confronted and wrote about it, and in doing so, reexamined and reimagined my life and the lives of those around me.

*

Though I always got good grades in school, English was my weakest subject (math was my best). Freshman year in high school, I was in the honors track for all of my classes except English, and I asked my English teacher if I could transfer into honors English. She decided I was uppity. After that, every time I made a mistake in class, she’d raise her eyebrows and say disdainfully before the whole class, “Honors?”

She made me read Henry James’ *Portrait of a Lady* for extra credit, implying it was a hurdle I needed to get over if I was going to have any chance of switching classes. I got through what I thought was the whole book only to find I had read only the first of two volumes. I had absolutely no desire to pick up the second volume. In retrospect, I can’t imagine what I made of the opening paean to English tea time or the differences James invoked between the sophisticated, refined British and the brash, naive and unsuspecting Americans, embodied in his Bostonian heroine, Isabelle Archer. It must have all tumbled over my head.

I might have been considered brash and boorish. I talked too much in class, didn’t respect my teacher. Or so she thought. Though I was getting an A in the class, she sent home a failing notice because of my behavior. Not surprisingly, I never made it into the honors English class that year.

In my junior year, I wrote a few poems for a contest. The only one I recall was about a young black boy in the ghetto. I associated him with a young Puerto Rican boy who lived in my cousin’s uptown neighborhood in Chicago and would stare down at the street from his third story window. In the poem, the young black boy is gazing down at the street, taking in the shabbiness of his neighborhood.



Age four, with paternal grandfather Jinosuke Uyemura

When my father read the poem, he told me I should write what I knew.

In a way, I see now that I *was* writing about what I knew, only I didn't know that. My father's remarks implied that I had nothing in common with this young black boy. We didn't live in a ghetto section of Chicago, we weren't black.

My father made his living writing; he worked in the communications division at the American Medical Association. Even after I eventually made it into honors English, he would correct my English compositions, marking mistake after mistake, muttering about where in the world did I learn how to write (my math, on the other hand, was far beyond him).

In college, I suddenly started getting A's in English, and I sometimes surmise now that this was in part because my father was no longer going over my compositions. I was writing songs then, and I took a course on major British poets, in part because I thought it might help with my lyrics. One assignment was to write imitations of Spenser and Pope. I not only got an A, but my professor read my version to the class as a model example. I said to myself, "Well, that wasn't too hard. Maybe I can do some more."

I didn't know then that I had just chosen my life's vocation. I thought of poetry as something that might

interest girls, though perhaps not as much as writing songs like Neil Young or James Taylor. But I was a freshman, and the freshman coeds were interested in upper classmen. I took to taking long walks beyond the campus on weekends, or spending weekend nights in the dark listening to the moody, jazz influenced ballads of Laura Nyro. Songs about empty streets in Manhattan after midnight, about loneliness and heart-searing relationships, lovers pining for the one who'd left them.

As the young tend to do, I thought of such brooding behavior as poetic. But if you told me that eventually I would write poems about something other than my loneliness and sad love life, I wouldn't have believed you. Nor would I have had the slightest idea what that something else might be.

After the major British poets course, I continued to take English and writing courses, and wrote poetry. But that was for fun; I was planning to go to law school. Then, while working in an insurance office between my junior and senior year, I found myself hiding poetry books in my desk. I realized if I became a lawyer I would have to do this the rest of my life. I decided to pursue a path where I could keep the books on top of my desk.

Looking back, I feel it's both unlikely and inevitable that I became a writer. Of course, one can say that about many or even most writers. Who would expect that the best-known poet writing in English in the twentieth century would be born and raised in St. Louis? Or that the greatest poet in English would come not from London but from some out-of-the-way small town called Stratford. Still, though both T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare appear to have arrived, in certain ways, out of left field, on closer inspection there's a revealing difference. Eliot came from a family with prominent Boston connections; growing up he knew he was headed for Harvard. In the end, he rejected his family's ambitions for him and never returned to graduate school there. He was an insider who felt like, or wanted to be, an outsider. Shakespeare possessed no such connections; he was a commoner who eventually purchased his family a coat of arms. In other words, he was an outsider who wanted to be an insider.

The distinction I'm making here comes from the poet Richard Hugo, who saw himself as an outsider who wanted to be an insider. I too see myself in this group.

For me, my outsider status comes from my race and ethnicity. When I was growing up in the 1950s I never read a book with any characters remotely resembling me or my family. Nor did I see any such characters on television or the movies. Instead, I learned to read from the Dick and Jane books, with brown-haired Dick and fair-haired Jane and their blonde little sister, Sally. I watched TV shows like *Donna Reed* and *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*, white suburban middle class families who always seemed chipper and healthy and good humored. If there was an “oriental,” it would be someone like Peter the cranky houseboy in *Bachelor Father* or the cook, Hop Sing, in the cowboy show *Bonanza*, or the Chinese messenger in *Have Gun Will Travel*.

This last show featured a hired gunslinger named Paladin, who was one of my childhood heroes. In the childhood photographs of many American boys of the fifties, whatever their race or ethnicity, there will often be a five or six year old with a cowboy hat and six-guns tied at his side. So, in certain ways, it’s not surprising that my cowboy dreams would appear in a poem of mine. Here’s a section from the title poem of my second book, *The Colors of Desire*:

Cut to Chicago, June. A boy of six.
 Next year my hero will be Mickey Mantle,
 but this noon, as father eases the Bel-Air past
 Wilson,
 with cowboy hat black, cocked at an angle,
 my skin dark from the sun, I’m Paladin,
 and my six guns point at cars whizzing past,
 blast after blast ricocheting the glass.
 Like all boys in such moments, my face
 attempts a look of what—toughness? bravado?
 ease?—
 until, impatient, my father’s arm wails
 across the seat, and I sit back, silent at last.

Later, as we step from IGA with our sacks,
 a man in a serge suit—stained with ink?—
 steps forward, shouts, “Hey, you a Jap?”
 “You from Tokyo? You a Jap? A Chink?”
 I stop, look up, I don’t know him,
 my arm yanks forward, and suddenly,
 the sidewalk’s rolling, buckling, like lava melt-
 ing,
 and I know father will explode,
 shouts, fists, I know his temper.



Mura, age nine

And then,
 I’m in that dream where nothing happens—
 The ignition grinds, the man’s face presses
 the windshield, and father stares ahead,
 fingers rigid on the wheel...

That night in my bedroom, moths,
 like fingertips, peck the screen;
 from the living room, the muffled t.v.
 As I imagine Shane stepping into the dusty
 street,
 in the next bed, my younger brother starts
 to taunt—*you can’t hurt me, you can’t hurt
 me...*—
 Who can explain where this chant began?
 Or why, when father throws the door open,
 shouts stalking chaos erupted in his house,
 he swoops on his son with the same swift mo-
 tion
 that the son, like an animal, like a scared and
 angry little boy,
 fell on his brother, beating him in the dark?

I refer to this poem often when I talk to audiences about race and ethnicity. I tell them that when my friend, the Japanese-Canadian playwright Rick Shiomi read this poem, he asked me if I remembered what happened at the beginning of *Have Gun Will Travel*. I replied that Richard Boone as Paladin would come walking down these stairs, dressed in black, his six-guns at his side: the epitomé of cowboy cool. But Rick told me that wasn't the whole opening. Just before Paladin appears, a Chinese messenger, in a little cap and with pig-tail flapping, comes running through the hotel lobby, shouting, "Terragram for Mr. Paladin, Terragram for Mr. Paladin!"

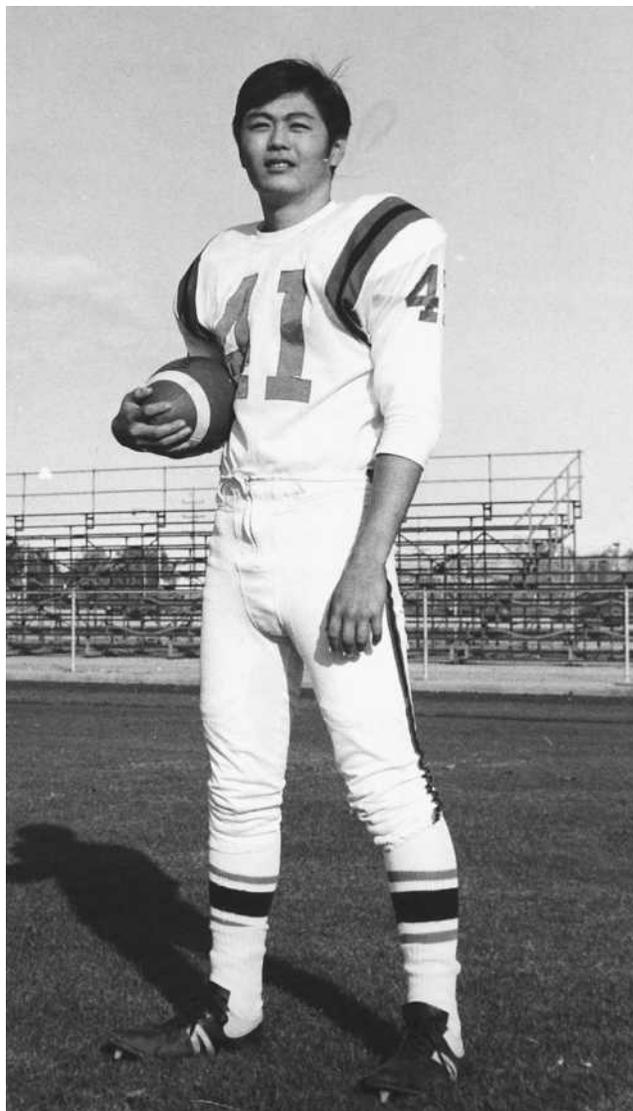
But even after Rick told me this, I could not recall the Chinese messenger, whose name, Rick informed me, was "Hey Boy." I've wiped him from my memory. And what I believe happened, way back when I was five or six, was that I looked at this opening scene and knew who I wanted to be and look like: I wanted to be the gunslinger, the hero, the white guy. The Chinese messenger? He was a figure of ridicule, a lowly servant, a peon. I must have sensed people—and here I mean white people—would associate him with me, and I wanted no part of that association. It was easier to distance myself from him if I simply forgot he ever existed.

So the background of this poem and the opening stanza brings up the question of memory in autobiographical writing. I don't know if the poem would have been different if I had remembered "Hey Boy," the Chinese messenger. Perhaps I would have tried to bring him in, perhaps not. But his absence from my memory speaks volumes about my development: I grew up wanting to be white.

*

If this poem brings up the limitations and distortions of memory, there's another way the poem points to the unreliability of autobiographical writing. The poem focuses on a confrontation with racism, and my father's reaction to that confrontation. In part the poem implies that the anger my father represses, and my own emotions that arise out of this incident, both culminate in what happens that night: the fight between me and my brother; my father hitting me and punishing me for fighting.

But in actuality, this confrontation with the man in the serge suit never occurred. Or rather, it happened to



As a high-school football player, age seventeen

someone else I know, another Sansei, whose father reacted as my father reacts in the poem: frozen, numbed, paralyzed. Now my father did hit me one night for fighting with a sibling, and my sibling did taunt, "you can't hurt me, you can't hurt me." But that sibling was my sister, who was two years younger than me, and not my brother, who was six years younger.

Poets, said T. S. Eliot, are "constantly amalgamating disparate experience." In other words, poets will often bring together in their poems various different and seemingly unconnected experiences, and weld them together in a new and unexpected whole. To the ordinary person, said Eliot, there's little connection

between a rose, the smell of steaks in a passageway, the sound of typing, falling in love, and reading Spinoza. But for the poet, in the act of writing a poem, these experiences can be fused together.

In my poem above, I've brought together various experiences—riding with my father in the car, wanting to be and pretending to be a cowboy at age six, a story a friend told me about an incident with his father, a fight between my sister and me and my father's reaction to that fight. The poem also connects to larger more generalized experiences—television icons, American heroes and the cultural milieu of the fifties, and, in a more subtle yet powerful way, the internment camps.

In 1942 the U.S. government rounded up 110,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast, herded them into assembly centers, and sent them to prisons in desolate areas inland—the deserts of California and Arizona, the swamps of Arkansas, the high mountain plains of Idaho and Montana. My parents and their families were among those “interned.” (Several decades later, the government apologized to the Japanese Americans and admitted that the camps were not a military necessity or protection against “fifth column” activities, but were instead caused by racism, war-time hysteria, and a failure of leadership.)

My parents were in their teens when they were ripped from their homes and put into these camps. They never spoke about this experience to us children. Sometimes, when the name of a Japanese American came up in their conversation with relatives, someone would ask, “What camp were they in?” But no one told me or any of the other children what the camps were for, much less what my parents experienced there, or how they felt being taken from their homes and put behind barbed wire fences with rifle towers and armed guards.

Later, when I was much older and asked them about it, my parents downplayed the effect of the camps. My father told me that when he was in Los Angeles before the war, he had to mow lawns for his father's nursery. When he got to the camps, after school, he could just go outside and play baseball. My mother claimed she was too young to remember the camps.

So, as a child, I never thought about the internment camps. They meant nothing to me. And even as a young adult I believed what my parents told me.

It was only as I began to write about the camps and my parents and my own life that I came to understand that the real truth was much more complicated and contradictory—that what my parents had told me about their past was only partly the truth; or perhaps, even a lie.

*

In the poem “The Colors of Desire,” I incorporated the story of a friend into a seemingly autobiographical poem. When I was a young poet I came upon an essay where Richard Hugo argued that the poet should not tie himself to the literal truth but the aesthetic truth of the poem. If you need to alter the facts because the poem seems to demand it, Hugo maintained that the poet should do so. Sometimes that change might involve a word choice, such as making the color of a car “blue” instead of “tan”; sometimes it could involve larger divagations from fact.

But I didn't need Hugo to learn this. I could see from any number of poems ways in which poets had altered or distorted autobiographical facts for the sake of the poem. I had read poems where I had at first believed the facts to be autobiographically true to the poet, only to learn later in an interview or article that this was not the case.

Hugo spoke not just of changing the facts, but also of an adherence to an aesthetic truth. In my poem, what happens to the father and boy outside the grocery store is not a literal truth from my life. Yet the incident and the father's reaction does seem true to how my father would have acted had such an incident happened to us.

Even more importantly, the incident for me reads as an allegory to the experience of my father and many other Japanese Americans who were in the camps. The camps were an attack on them racially. In face of this massive attack by the government, there was little or nothing they could do. They felt helpless, paralyzed. I would argue that this feeling of helplessness, paralysis, and amnesia affected them after the war, and thus affected their children. The incidents in the poem helped me embody this aesthetic truth.



With future wife, Susan Sencer, 1972

It's an intricate and contradictory business writing poems. But then so is our experience of history.

*

I wrote "The Colors of Desire" after I had completed my first memoir, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*. In the process of writing that book, I had a major epiphany about my father's life and his relationship to the internment camps, without which I could not have written this poem in the way I did.

Turning Japanese recounts the events of a year I spent in Japan, and at one point in my stay there, my wife and I went to Hiroshima. I wrote about the experience of going to the memorial museum in Hiroshima, of seeing a child's charred lunch box and the shadow of

a man's hand burned into a brick. Later, this experience and writing about it made me wonder about where my father was at the end of World War II. By that time, he had been released from the internment camps and was enrolled at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, living there in the house of a white professor.

As I wrote, I pictured in my mind what it would have been like for my father on the day they held the V-J celebrations in town:

It is the year the war has ended, the summer between his freshman and sophomore year. August, a few days after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A holiday has been declared, men

sweep women up in their arms in the middle of streets and kiss them, and the women, abandoned for a moment, respond; firecrackers, streamers, confetti, all the trappings of a carnival, whirl through intersections and squares throughout the country. People sport the smiles and laughter of peace, as if the muscles, clenched like a fist for so long, have moved on to another task, all brightness, promise and plenty.

On August 11, 1945, my father is sitting on the steps of a house in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He hears the swooping sirens of the fire trucks from the center of town, the high school band blaring “Stars and Stripes Forever,” the tooting of horns, loudspeakers filling with speeches. He sees in his mind the street filled with banners and flags, the men with faces bright and beet-red from joy and drink, the women yanking their children at the wrist, dabbing their eyes with handkerchiefs. A squirrel comes chattering across the lawn, rears up on its haunches, begging as usual for a handout. My father picks up a stone from the dirt, pulls back his arm, and then drops the stone to his feet. A voice rises inside him, insistent and restless, a twitch in his muscles, an urge to move, go somewhere, do something. “It won’t always be like this,” he remembers his teacher in the camps saying. “After the war you will be free again and back in American society. But for your own sakes try and be not one, but two hundred per cent American. . . .”

I am American he says to himself. I am glad we won. The light through the leaves is bright, blinding. The heat immense, oppressive. The sounds all over town joyous. He repeats his mantra over and over. He learns to believe it.

My father had always told me that when he got out of the internment camps, his return to American society was uneventful and went smoothly. Writing this passage, I realized that he had not told the whole truth to me. His experience of American society and his racial identity and the legacy of the internment camps were far more complicated than he had let on.

And yet, this passage which led me to this truth, a truth which I now believe absolutely, this passage describes events which I never witnessed and which may or may not have occurred. The whole passage in a way is an act of fiction: It is a passage of fiction in an autobiography or memoir; a lie which tells me, and hopefully the reader, an important truth about my life and my father’s life.

On the other hand, there is also another sense in which the passage is actually true: It is a true picture of a sansei or third generation Japanese American trying to imagine what life was like for his Nisei—second generation—father after he left the internment camps.

*

I began writing as a poet and have written two books of poetry, but I may be better known as a memoirist. As I’ve implied above, poets, when they falsify or distort their biographies, seem to have precedence and to function within certain literary traditions. Memoirists, one might think, are another matter.

And yet, as a memoirist, I know one obvious facet of the genre is this: A memoir could not or should not be used in a court as evidence.

Unfortunately sophomore readers and sometimes their seniors don’t know or want to believe this. Some readers, for instance, pick up memoirs believing such works contain the unvarnished and real goods, or at least the eye-witness version of the goods. This desire has been heightened by the popularity of talk-show confessions and the *Oprah-Jerry Springer* atmosphere of the age; many claim such an atmosphere has helped spawn the recent wave (or glut) of memoirs. To certain media critics the memoir becomes then another unwholesome and narcissistic journey into psychobabble, filled with unpolished self-pity, woundings and complaints—from eating disorders to incest with one’s father, from coming out of the closet sexually to coming out of the closet racially (to use my own case).

There is a certain “truth” to this characterization and criticism of the genre of memoir. But such a critique ignores other truths about the nature and construction of autobiography and the ways we read such works. The “whole truth” here is a lot more complicated.



David and Susan on their wedding day, 1983

To highlight the fictitious nature of autobiography, I often talk of how one could write accounts of one's childhood at the ages of twenty-five, thirty-five, forty-five, and so on until death, and each account would differ. Which then would be the "true" account?

My question points to the subjectivity of autobiography. In general we feel we're more likely to receive an objective account of a person's life from their biographer than from the person themselves (though the biographer can possess her own biases). One current criticism of the recent wave of memoirs cites instances of egregious self-justification and/or the incessant vilification of various oppressive others—from one's parents to media projections, from homophobia to racism. Implicit in such criticism is the charge that the memoirist is not able to put his life in a proper perspective: If he has not distorted the actual events in his life, he certainly errs in his description of motives, tenor, and outcome.

And yet it is the very subjectivity of autobiography that draws us towards these works. More sophisticated readers realize that the autobiography is not going to be an accurate, neutral, or objective accounting, such

as we might expect from a news reporter or presumably from a biographer. We go to an autobiography because we receive the words of the person without the mediation of a third party; in the process we hope to gain access not to the truth of their life but to their subjectivity.

But subjectivity is a tricky thing. As post-modern theory has reminded us, all writing is in a sense a fiction and at the same time a revelation of subjectivity.

Beyond this there's the question of who is permitted to possess subjectivity, and thus, whose life can be a legitimate subject for memoir.

*

In *Turning Japanese*, my memoir about a year I spent in Japan, one reason I paid so much attention to my own personal story and the personal nature of my take on Japan was instructional: I wanted to point out the falseness of the objective and commanding tone many Western authors evince when writing about Japan. I felt it was truer to be up front with my own biases and to explore their nature and etiology than to pretend I could attain a scientifically neutral viewpoint. I wanted readers to see when I was confused and uncertain, to sense the limitations of my knowledge and position. I had read contemporary cultural theory and was aware of the issues of ethnocentrism and Orientalism explored by such writers as Edward Said; I also saw how those issues had been ignored by so-called experts on Japan such as James Fallows. As Said points out, there has been this tradition of white Western authors writing about the "orient" as if their observations were the objective and unvarnished truth.

In light of all this, *Turning Japanese* constantly points to the fact that the account of my encounter with Japan is intensely personal and not objective. At various points in the narrative, events in Japan cause me to reflect on my identity. There are periodic flashbacks concerning my own life, the life of my parents and grandparents, and the history of Japanese-Americans in general. I focus on the way the internment of Japanese-Americans was occluded both in my schooling and in my family. I explore how the process of assimilation in a racist culture exacts a terrific price, one many Americans, including my own family, do not



Family photo on David's wedding day, 1983: (from left) brother John, sister Linda, David, mother Teruko, father Tom, sister Susan

want to examine. That price is self-hatred and self-neglect, an inability to acknowledge crucial parts of one's experience and psyche.

Whenever I describe the book to people, I stress how it centers on my going to Japan not just as an American, but as a Japanese-American. Yet it has been enlightening for me to see how some people wanted to ignore how my book as a memoir of a Sansei is intimately tied to my vision of Japan. Certain white reviewers, for example, focused almost entirely on the book as a travelogue and generally ignored the sections on my Japanese-American identity. A couple critics found the sections on identity self-conscious, and intimated that this self-consciousness intruded on the book's picture of Japan.

In a generally favorable review for *Conde Nast Traveler*, Simon Winchester wrote that my book presented an "illuminating essay" on the bewildering complexities of contemporary Japanese society. He also noted that I had written honestly about my understandable confusions concerning my Japanese American identity, but this element of the book seemed to him definitely of secondary importance: "While it would be impolite to indicate a lack of real interest in Mura and his trials . . . it is his notes on the society that temporarily surrounds . . . and prevents him from really 'turning Japanese' that are the more valuable." (I should note that Mr. Winchester's belief that I felt Japan rejected me is more his own interpretation than what's in my book.)

I received a similar response in a letter about my book from someone who appears to have lived in Japan for

some time: "I read it not as a 'Sansei's memoirs' but as a 'gaijin's encounter' with Japan. Because—Japanese ancestry aside—your encounter is in many ways like all first-time coming-to-grips-with Japan type experiences. And therein lies its universal appeal." In this letter writer's mind, there's an implicit assumption that a "sansei's memoirs" cannot be as important as a book about encountering Japan.

Beyond this, the letter writer assumes that universality can only be achieved by ignoring questions of identity which a white American does not feel is substantial. If I write as a generic American, that's okay, but if I write as a third generation Japanese-American, that's being self-conscious; that's less than universal.

Revealingly, this is an assumption which no Asian-American critic of my book has made. All of them have chosen to use the focus of identity as their prime starting point. The Asian-American reviewers understood that in writing *Turning Japanese*, in order to be more truthful or more accurate, I had tried to acknowledge openly the subjective nature of the writing. As a result, their reading of my work strikes me as more complex and comprehensive than a reviewer like Simon Winchester or this letter writer above.

For a critic like Winchester to understand fully the nature of my enterprise he would have to question his own identity and subjectivity and compare them with mine. This would alter significantly his view of himself and the world, particularly his position in the world. He would have to exchange his illusion of centrality and objectivity for an encounter between two subjectivities.

*

But subjectivity is a confusing and contradictory area of inquiry. With my memoirs, I sensed both Asian-American and readers in general tended to view the revelations about my personal life as an act of truth telling. In other words, their reading saw the work as a truthful account of my own subjectivity.

In certain ways this is how I wished them to read the work. In both memoirs, I explore the intimate details of my family life and various aspects of my sexuality. My own struggles to access areas of my experience

that were unflattering and shameful was something I had worked hard on. I spent draft after draft going over and over those experiences, trying to move the writing deeper and at the same time shaping it aesthetically. As a writer I can sense those times or places where I know I'm crossing some boundary, both in my own psyche and in the greater culture, that I'm not supposed to cross. At such points, I push myself further because I know this is where my most powerful writing often comes from.

Still, the view of my memoirs as "truth telling" brought up for me certain questions about the nature of autobiography and the ways readers receive the form. Sometimes this "confessional" lens made readers look more favorably on my work, and they praised my boldness and candor. At other times, especially from less sophisticated readers, their dislike of the subjective David Mura in the work seemed to anchor their dislike of the work as a whole.

Of course a similar response sometimes occurs with novels; some readers dislike the main character and so dislike the book. But with a work of fiction, even autobiographical fiction, there's always the caveat that the main character is not the author and a certain aesthetic distance is achieved in the act of judging the book. With novels, we make a division between the main character and the book as a whole; we separate the main character's view of himself from how the author wants us to judge that character.

Obviously, the division between the subject of an autobiography and the author is not so clearly marked. Yet there is a distinction between these two. The fact is that the protagonist of an autobiography and his subjectivity is constructed, a fiction in its own right, and this is true not just for my work but in any autobiography. On one level this protagonist and his subjectivity can be seen as a convention which entails the manipulations of tone, style, and content. As such, there is no one Platonic and true formulation of identity, only the choices made by a particular author at a particular time (and which could very well be different the next time the author takes up the subject of himself). Certainly, in literature, the strategies for constructing one's subjectivity differs greatly from author to author.

Many readers, though, are not aware of just how widely these practices vary. Just as importantly, we have not yet devised an adequate critical vocabulary



With Japanese poet Kazuko Shiraiishi, Japan, 1986

for these practices and therefore an adequate method of aesthetically judging this form.

*

In *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith writes of the impossibility of the autobiographer ever recapturing the entirety of her subjectivity or her experience. She argues then that the "I" of the narrative "becomes a fictive persona":

Involved in a kind of masquerade the autobiographer creates an iconic representation of continuous identity that stands for, or rather before, her subjectivity as she tells of this "I" rather than of that "I." She may even create several, sometimes competing, stories or versions of herself as her subjectivity is displaced by one or multiple textual representations (Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 47).

Even if one admits the "fictive" nature of autobiography, the question remains about how the autobiographer on a practical level addresses the problem of this form. I'm talking here about the sorts of strategies and questions that might anchor a discussion in a writers' workshop or the mind of the writer rather than an academic analyses.

In my own case, I began to write *Turning Japanese* with the skills of a poet and an essayist, someone familiar with the writerly tools of description and analysis but not those of a fiction writer. My first draft of the book used as its raw material notes, letters, diary entries, and cultural analyses I had made during my year in Japan. The result was a series of personal though fairly detached and intellectual essays on Japanese culture and society, a postmodern take influenced by various structuralists and post-structuralists including Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault; Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Fredric Jameson; and the revolutionary writings of Frantz Fanon on race.

When I brought the first draft of *Turning Japanese* to my writing group, their response was simple and straightforward: “More narrative, more you.” I rewrote the book and came back to them and the response was the same: “More narrative, more you.” I rewrote it a third time—the same response. Then I obtained an agent and my agent sold the book and my editor said, “More narrative, more you.” In all, I did five major drafts of the book with this imperative in mind.

From the very start this imperative of “More narrative, more you” required new and different skills and involved at times two distinctly different tasks. I will start with the simpler and more defined problem—how to bring the qualities of story and fiction to writing that had begun in the mode of intellectual analyses. I read various books on fiction writing; I learned about constructing scenes, about character development, about organizing dialogue. At a certain point I could only tackle scenes involving myself and one other person, but gradually I felt more comfortable doing scenes with several individuals. My models for this work came from both fiction and non-fiction, from favorite books to works that seemed to echo something of the situation or scenes I was describing. A partial listing would include fictional works by James Salter, Hemingway, Garcia Marquez, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Marguerite Duras, Fumiko Enchi, Yukio Mishima, Kawabata, Joyce, Proust, and Kafka. I also searched for models in creative nonfiction, reportage, and memoirs: Jon Berger, Tracy Kidder, James Fenton, Maxine Hong Kingston, James Baldwin, Michelle Cliff, Czeslaw Milosz, Paul Auster, Bruce Chatwin, and various authors in *Granta* (a literary journal that often publishes travelogues).

In terms of narrative technique, *Writing for Story* by Jon Franklin was particularly useful. In his book, Fran-

klin demonstrates how he used certain narrative strategies to organize non-fiction material and achieve the readerly pull such stories elicit. To create story, Franklin argued that the protagonist must face a properly articulated problem. Then, through a series of actions or events, the protagonist must solve that problem. In a longer narrative, the process of solving or addressing one problem should create or bring up another complication, which will lead to another problem. Through solving or addressing a series of problems, the narrative takes the protagonist and reader on a journey from which the protagonist emerges changed in some significant way.

In adapting these fictional and narrative structures to my experiences in Japan, I had to address certain basic questions: How much was I willing to fictionalize in order to achieve narrative structure? Could I alter events? Could I rearrange the sequence of events? Could I alter the cast and persona of the characters I encountered in Japan? Could I alter the picture I was creating of myself? My wife? What were the ethical and aesthetic issues involved in answering these questions?

And then, just as importantly, what was accuracy? Sometimes I was working from notes written almost immediately after the events. But with other events, I had no notes or more significantly was dealing with events from my childhood or even from my parents’ and grandparents’ lives before I was born. What did it mean to be accurate to my memories or to events I had not even witnessed?

Over the course of the writing I constructed my own answers to these questions. For example, with dialogue I wrote what felt was accurate according to my memory or sense of the people I knew. Or at least I started the dialogues in such a fashion. When the conversations relied on notes I generally kept to these. And yet I also let the dialogues move in ways which didn’t absolutely reflect my memory or which I had not planned if somehow the scene demanded this. My sense of these demands sometimes had to do with practical questions, such as transition, logic, and progression of the conversation or placement of the people, but I also allowed for heightening tension and dramatic interest or even to make some ideological or intellectual point.

In this way, I was invoking the principle I had learned from writing poetry: If the aesthetic truth of the writing seems to ask for fictionalizing, I would do so. Yet



With novelist and friend Alexs Pate

I was writing a memoir, not a novel. So where did the line between the two exist for me?

*

In the end, I came up with a set of rules for the memoir which allowed a certain amount of what might be called fictionalizing, but still kept the writing for me in the realm of memoir.

In terms of the overall narrative, I decided I could not alter major events. This proved particularly tricky when dealing with my encounter with Gisela, the German woman with whom I have a brief flirtation (the name, of course, is not her real name). Though nothing overtly sexual occurs—there is no physical contact between us—the fact that I did not immediately inform her I was married constituted a breach of marital trust, and I wanted to make this clear to the reader. I realized that the whole question of betrayal would have been more dramatic and easily rendered if I were writing fiction. There the obvious solution would have

been for the protagonist to have sex with Gisela or at least for them to physically touch. To choose the more accurate rendering required a subtlety and complications that were more difficult to convey.

I did decide that I could alter minor events on a more drastic level, particularly rearranging the sequence of events in order to heighten the narrative flow. For example, take the fire festival that ends the first half of the book and comes immediately after the argument between me and my wife over my flirtation with Gisela. In actuality, the fire festival did not take place at this time, nor did I go there alone, as I do in the book, but instead I went with my wife. But placing me in isolation at the fire festival increased the uncertainty and consequences of the argument and my actions; such tension seemed to me worth the dramatic license. In a similar fashion, the trip to my grandparents' home town did not come at the end of my stay in Japan, as it does in the book. But I wanted to use the trip as the ultimate goal, which keeps being deferred and which could act as a culmination of my time there.

Another way I altered actual events occurs later in the book when I take a trip to Osore-san, where I engage in a seance with one of the famous blind women shamans there. In real life I took this trip with friends who do not appear in the book. But to introduce a whole new set of friends near the end of the book would have bogged down the narrative momentum and also been diluting and confusing, providing the reader with too many characters to digest. My solution was to have friends who had already been introduced accompany me on the trip; in writing about the trip, I used dialogue reconstructed from actual conversations we had had at other times and in other places.

But it was easy to change the sequence of events in my trip to Japan and accept that as a legitimate aesthetic device. A more knotty problem was how to portray myself and those around me. Obviously, the portrayal and analysis of oneself and others involves subjective judgments. But beyond this, as I began to rearrange and construct a narrative throughline, as I began to work to dramatize rather than describe or analyze, the nature of the book and its characters began to change. In some ways this change enlivened me both creatively and intellectually. For instance, in a dialogue I could occupy both or even several sides of an issue, whereas the essay format tended to force me

into a univocal and unitary response. In other words, the dramatic and fictional form allowed for a more dialogic voice (to use the term of the Russian critic Bakhtin). I felt such a portrayal was actually more accurate and complex than the intellectual pronouncements of the earlier, more essay-like drafts.

At the same time, as I set various characters, including myself, in opposition, it became apparent that if I exaggerated slightly certain personality traits or tendencies in myself and others, I could create more tension and interest. Again, I gave myself permission to make use of these fictional techniques.

Then too I developed in the writing my own sense of how I would portray my relationship with my wife and our marriage. I wanted to be as open about our conflicts and tensions as I could. My wife and I, after some discussion, reached an agreement about this (the issue of how memoir writing interacts with the author's personal relationships is the subject of another essay). But I also felt that because I was the one telling the tale, if anyone was going to look worse in the relationship, it would be me. This decision to tilt things against myself was also reinforced by my sense that it made the book more interesting and highlighted certain issues in ways that were more revealing.

Self-assessment is difficult, as is evaluating one's own writing. But it's my belief that the person portrayed in *Turning Japanese* is a bit more naive, a bit more self-righteous, a bit more irritable and opinionated, a bit more insecure, and a bit more self-centered than I am in real life. For instance one alteration of my personality occurs at the very start of *Turning Japanese*. There I deliberately exaggerated my reticence about going to Japan and learning about Japanese culture and deliberately heightened my Francophone—as opposed to Japanophile—leanings and my general fear of travel. Such exaggeration provided the protagonist with a much further distance to travel, as he acclimated himself to Japan and learned to love the culture there. It also provided opportunities for humor and drama that wouldn't otherwise be available.

On a more general level, perhaps it's almost inevitable that the consciousness that creates the book, almost by necessity, must be more complex and knowing than the character "I" portrayed in the book. In writing the memoir, I am creating or at least recording voices

contrary to the views and consciousness of the "I" who experiences the events of the memoir. Moreover, I am conscious of how these voices play off against the words of that "I." In other words I must be more aware of the gaps, insecurities, and contradictions in his statements than he is himself. Part of this comes from the retrospective nature of the memoir—the older wiser self looking at a younger less wise self. But part of it derives from the dialectics of constructing a narrative and the limitations of convention and language in the portrayal of consciousness. Again, this points to the similarities between a work of autobiographical fiction and memoir. As Borges has implied, there is a never ending labyrinth of consciousness that can be portrayed in the telling of any tale.

Or at least this seems to be the case with my experience with memoir. I can imagine a writer of memoir coming to these questions with less self-consciousness than I did, and I cannot say whether such self-consciousness improves or detracts from the work. What I do know is that other writers have voiced similar questions and come up with their own answers, sometimes echoing my own, sometimes not.

*

Of course fiction writers have used these techniques over and over again, and the uncertainties such exaggerations bring up have plagued writers of autobiographical fiction. For instance I have been guided in my thinking and influenced in my writing by Philip Roth. As Roth frequently notes, readers often mistake Roth the author for his protagonists. In actuality, maintains Roth, he is constantly distorting and changing real life to accord with the demands of fiction; autobiography and fiction, he insists, are not the same. In an interview with the *Paris Review*, Roth is asked whether his character Zuckerman's rage at Milton Appel, a critic who accuses Zuckerman of being a self-hating anti-Semitic Jew, reflects "the expression of a kind of guilt on your part?" Here is Roth's answer:

Guilt? Not at all. As a matter of fact, in an earlier draft of the book, Zuckerman and his young girlfriend Diana took exactly opposition positions in their argument about Appel. She, with all her feisty inexperience, said to Zuckerman, "Why do you let him push you

around, why do you take this shit shitting down?” and Zuckerman, the older man, said to her, “Don’t be ridiculous, Dear, calm down, he doesn’t matter.” There was the real autobiographical scene, and it had no life at all. I had to absorb the rage into the main character even if my own rage on this topic had long since subsided. By being true to life I was actually ducking the issue. So I reversed their positions, and had the twenty-year-old college girl telling Zuckerman to grow up, and gave Zuckerman the tantrum. Much more fun. I wasn’t going to get anywhere with a Zuckerman as eminently reasonable as myself. (George J. Searles, ed., *Conversations with Philip Roth*, University Press of Mississippi, 1992, pp. 181-82).

One way of stating this is that issues of accuracy in fiction are not as important as issues of aesthetic interest. But such a tension also applies to autobiography. There were countless times in Japan when my wife and I got along amicably, when we sat spooning together in bed reading or watching television. But I myself get bored with the idea of writing about such incidents, so I’m certainly not going to inflict them on the reader. No, what was more revealing and energizing and interesting during our stay in Japan were our arguments. But by highlighting these and even at times exaggerating them slightly, I did not give a full or accurate portrayal of our marriage. I did expect readers to intuit our more congruent periods and to see our arguments within the dynamics of any intimate relationship. But it’s clear to me that the response from some readers is bewilderment at our marriage and my wife’s tolerance of my presence.

Admittedly, this perception is perhaps one I helped create, but it brings up a critical question: How do such alterations and exaggerations of the protagonist affect our readings of autobiography? When Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee wrote a book about their travels together in India, they decided that the book would be improved if they demonized slightly Clark’s character and his position as a white male. Not only was the book made more interesting but certain other truths were revealed. But a reader expecting an accurate portrayal of their marriage might wonder how the two even wrote the book together. Would a more satisfactory way of reading be to take the portrayal of



The Mura family, 2001: (clockwise, from left) daughter Samantha, David, Susan, son Tomo, son Nikko

their relationship as a version of the truth, rather than the whole truth? But isn’t this what we do with autobiographical fiction?

In my memoirs I’ve tried to avail myself of some of the techniques of fiction and even mythology and dream life, and still maintain a level of fidelity to the facts that would not transform the work into fiction. This has meant allowing for a the inadmissible, the shameful, the unregenerate, or at least some larger section of this portion of my life than is generally considered permissible in polite society or certain literary circles. This, for many, is one of the blasphemies of contemporary memoir. Conversely, it is also one of the difficulties one experiences in writing a memoir: if you’re too careful and circumspect, the book may lack a strong *raison d’être* or may fail to interest the reader.

At the same time, certain details in a memoir will be more charged than in a work of fiction and compel the reader in ways fiction cannot. Characters in novels have adulterous affairs all the time; it’s quite another thing to reveal such an affair in a memoir. If the protagonist in a novel announces she has a fatal disease, we may be moved, but not in the same way as when an autobiographer writes about his struggles with AIDS.

So, in certain areas, it does seem to me that there is a line between autobiography and fiction. After all, if readers found out I wasn’t Japanese-American or that

my parents hadn't been in the internment camps, the work could not be considered a legitimate memoir or work of nonfiction.

Yet once we stray from these larger areas, things become more gray. In the eyes of many readers, Bruce Chatwin, for instance, has written two travelogues—*In Patagonia* and *Songlines*—the second a book about his investigation of the ways Aborigines in Australia map the landscape through songs. Yet after I finished *Songlines*, I read an interview with Chatwin where he pronounced the book a work of fiction. There's nothing to indicate that on the book cover and, in fact, the narrator of the book calls himself Bruce Chatwin. But Chatwin declared it a work of fiction in part because he made up a major character, the Russian émigré who serves as his travel guide and intermediary with the Aborigines. In the interview Chatwin is asked about the division between fiction and nonfiction; he replies:

I don't think there is one. There definitely should be, but I don't know where it is. I've always written very close to the line. I've tried applying fiction techniques to actual bits of travel. I once made the experiment of counting up the lies in the book I wrote about Patagonia. It wasn't in fact, too bad: there weren't too many. But with *Songlines*, if I had to tote up the inventions, there would be no question in my mind that the whole thing added up to a fictional work. (*Granta 21: The Story-Teller*, 1987, p. 24)

According to Chatwin then, there is a line but the line isn't clear cut.

Part of what Chatwin implies here is that once you let in the imagination, your unconscious, it's the work itself and not your conscious mind which tells you where you'll stop.

*

Beyond the facts and events of one's life, it's clear to me that if you are writing a memoir and your memoir involves your relationship with your parents, your imagination must inevitably enter the writing. How

else can you picture the lives of your parents before you were born or who they might have been beyond their interactions with you as a child? And beyond that, what about your grandparents or even your great-grandparents?

In Japan, for instance, I realized that as my knowledge of Japanese culture and history grew, as I felt more and more comfortable living in Japan, I could create in my mind a more complete picture of who my grandparents were. This in turn affected my understanding of my parents, because I realized that until I visited Japan, I had really only known the side of my parents that grew up in America, in American culture. I could not picture what it was like for them to go from the household of their Japanese immigrant parents to the streets of America, because I had not known much about Japan or the Japanese.

So, as I proceeded in the drafts of *Turning Japanese*, I began to imagine moments in the lives of my grandparents and parents, particularly my grandfather and my father. But even though I now knew something about Japan and Japanese culture, I was then faced with another void: Neither of my parents had talked to me much about their parents or about their lives as children, just as they had not said anything to me about the internment camps. For them the past was better kept in the past; silent and forgotten.

In *China Men*, which is about the men in her family, Maxine Hong Kingston encountered a similar dilemma. While her mother was quite voluble about her past, Kingston's father was not; she was faced then with the problem of how she would write his story. In the book, Kingston says finally to her father, "I'll tell what I suppose from your silences and few words, and you can tell me that I'm mistaken. You'll just have to speak up with the real stories if I've got you wrong" (Ballantine Books, 1980, p. 10).

With Kingston's words in my head, I decided I would simply recreate the past as best I could. What I discovered, even early on in *Turning Japanese*, was that this represented a different task from writing about my own life. At one point, looking at an early draft, my editor remarked that it seemed some of my writing about my father was more vivid than anything in the book. I thought about this and realized that when I was dealing with my own life I was only putting down

what I could remember. If I could not remember what a person was wearing or what the weather was like that day, I wouldn't place these elements in the scene. When I was writing about my father's life, all of it was imaginative recreation; I had the freedom one enjoys in fiction to provide all the details and to use whatever details my imagination came up with.

In a way, this marked a crucial turning point in my writing of the memoir. I realized then that I should avail myself of the same freedom when I was writing about my own memories. As a result the scenes involving my life became both more fictional and more vivid, more compelling as writing, and this seemed more important than any rigid distinctions between genres. The line between memoir and fiction still did not seem clear. But the line between dull and interesting writing? That was a line I wanted to cross.

*

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the great educator Paulo Freire argues that for the oppressed to become liberated, they need two basic languages. The first language must express or convey the experiences of their lives, their thoughts and feelings about the immediate world around them, what they encounter day by day. The second language must enable them to connect their own individual life with the workings of the society around them, to place and connect themselves to the great world. Without these languages, Freire argues, the oppressed cannot discover the limits of their lives and thus, cannot begin to devise strategies for overcoming those limits.

I know that my memoirs were involved with my own discovery and creation of these two languages. I also felt that such a discovery could not take place in fiction. In one sense, I felt the encounter with the hard facts of my life and the construction of my own identity needed to take place before I could even embark upon a work of fiction. Certainly the writing of *Turning Japanese* unlocked for me an aspect of my poetic voice I could not have found otherwise. Previous to the writing of that work most of my poems had been written in the voice of others or about the lives of others. With *Turning Japanese*, I discovered a language for writing about myself, my consciousness, and identity. At the same time, I discovered a way of writing about my family and the history of our com-

munity and the larger issues of race that I blocked out and ignored as a child growing up in the heart of America.

And yet, somewhat to my chagrin, I feel that even after writing two memoirs I still have not understood, much less described adequately, my subjectivity. My identity still remains a mystery to me. When I read over my writings, my formulations seem to me both useful and true on one hand, and inadequate and fictitious on the other, too pat, too armed with the shield of completion. At the same time, this duality reflects the position from which I speak, in this culture, at this historical moment.

Still my two memoirs have, in another sense, given me an island upon which I can exist, a place to stand on to make my forays into the consciousness of others. It's no mistake that I am finally writing a work of fiction and feel I could not be doing so at this time without having written my memoirs. I needed to write them in order to move further along the arc of my own writing; they were steps I could not avoid if I wanted to grow and flourish as a writer. In this I feel they bear the stamp of both a personal and historical imperative and are not simply reflective of a confessional narcissistic age. In a way, growing up as a child of color who wanted to be white, I did not understand how to read the details of my own life, nor did the culture provide me with that reading. I had to perform and articulate that reading myself.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

PERIODICALS

American Book Review, June, 1991, Edward Butscher, "Angst, American and Otherwise," p. 28; February, 1996, Frank Stewart, "The Color of Shame," p. 22.

Booklist, February 1, 1991, Donna Seaman, review of *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, p. 1110; December 15, 1994, Elizabeth Gunderson, review of *The Colors of Desire*, p. 732; May 1, 1996, Donna Seaman, review of *Where the Body Meets Memory: An Odyssey of Race, Sexuality, and Identity*, p. 1476.

Canadian Literature, August, 1997, review of *Turning Japanese*, p. 162.

Condé Nast Traveller, April, 1991, p. 80.
KLIATT, November, 1992, R. Bruce Schauble, review of *Turning Japanese*, pp. 41-42.
Los Angeles Times Book Review, April 28, 1991, Karl Taro Greenfeld, review of *Turning Japanese*, p. 10.
MELUS, fall, 1998, Zhou Xiaojing, "David Mura's Poetics of Identity," p. 145; fall-winter, 2000, Mary Slowik, "Beyond Lot's Wife: The Immigration Poems of Marilyn Chin, Garrett Hongo, Li-Young Lee, and David Mura," p. 221.
MPLS-St. Paul, January 1990, Tim Brady, "Poet of the Not-so-Pretty," p. 17.
New Yorker, April 15, 1991, review of *Turning Japanese*, p. 104.
New York Times Book Review, March 31, 1991, p. 10.
Onthebus, summer-fall, 1990.
Publishers Weekly, January 18, 1991, Genevieve Stuttaford, review of *Turning Japanese*, p. 51; March 11, 1996, review of *Where the Body Meets Memory*, p. 49.
Transpacific, May, 1997, review of *Where the Body Meets Memory*, p. 20.
Washington Post Book World, April 21, 1991, Kunio Francis Tanabe, review of *Turning Japanese*, p. 6; May 31, 1992, review of *Turning Japanese*, p. 12; July 28, 1996, Jonathan Rauch, "Discovering His True Colors," p. 11.

* * *

MUSSIO, Laurence B. 1964-

PERSONAL: Born December 15, 1964, in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada; son of Egidio (a maintenance supervisor at a petrochemical refinery) and Vittorina (Pighin) Mussio; married Flavia Gonsalves (a communications strategist), October 25, 1997. **Ethnicity:** "Italian-Friulano." **Education:** University of Western Ontario, B.A. (with honors), 1987; McMaster University, M.A., 1988; York University, Ph.D., 1995. **Religion:** Roman Catholic. **Hobbies and other interests:** International travel, enology, languages, jogging.

ADDRESSES: *Office*—Executive Research and Communications, 275 Coleridge Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4C 4J2. *E-mail*—laurence.mussio@sympatico.ca.

CAREER: Self-employed historian, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1994-98; Executive Research and Com-

munications, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, principal and senior communications and strategic consultant, 1999—. McMaster University, lecturer, 2001—.

AWARDS, HONORS: Fellow in Italy, Regione Autonoma, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, 1986.

WRITINGS:

Telecom Nation: Telecommunications, Computers, and Governments in Canada, McGill-Queen's University Press (Montreal, Quebec, Canada), 2001.

Sun Ascendant: A History of Sun Life of Canada, McGill-Queen's University Press (Montreal, Quebec, Canada), 2002.

Contributor to books, including *Perspectives on the New Economics and Regulation of Telecommunications*, edited by W. T. Stanbury, Institute for Research on Public Policy (Montreal, Quebec, Canada), 1996. Contributor to periodicals, including *Canadian Journal of Communication*.

WORK IN PROGRESS: Research on the struggle over international standards, specifically the politics, regulation, and emergence of a global communications infrastructure; research on twentieth-century Canadian business in the global economy; "The Digital and the Divine," a research project on religion in culture in the contemporary West.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

PERIODICALS

Business History Review, winter, 2001, Hudson Janisch, review of *Telecom Nation: Telecommunications, Computers, and Governments in Canada*, p. 869.

Technology and Culture, July, 2002, Vincent Mosco, review of *Telecom Nation*, p. 627.

* * *

MYERS, Amy 1938-

(Alice Carr, Laura Daniels, Harriet Hudson)

PERSONAL: Born August 3, 1938, in Kent, England; daughter of Albert Edward (an electrical contractor) and Grace Violet (Hudson) Howlett; married James K. Myers, 1976. **Ethnicity:** "English/Caucasian." **Educa-**