

Akiko Nakano and Otis Cary: A Christmas Story

Akiko Nakano is a Carleton graduate, class of 2002. She took a course from me during her time there, and we became friends. We even hosted a graduation party for her and her roommates in our back yard. Here's a picture of that. Akiko is in the front row, her parents are standing on the right edge of the third row. My daughter Nora, who figures in this story, is sitting on the left edge of the front row.



In 2000, when I was the Resident Director of the Japan Study Program at Waseda University in Tokyo, we connected with Akiko in Japan. Of course the family wanted to go to Kyoto, and Akiko volunteered to show us around her hometown. Here's some pictures, one with the deer in Nara, and the other at Ryōan-ji.



Akiko's grandfather was an officer in the Japanese navy during the Pacific War. He and his men were on the island of Guam. Guam had been taken by Japanese forces on the same day they attacked Pearl Harbor. By 1944, Japan had a large garrison there. The island was mountainous and had dense forests and many caves. The Americans began their attack on July 18, 1944. Fighting was fierce, and lasted until August 10th. By the time the Americans had secured the island, around 1,800 American soldiers had died. The Japanese losses were estimated at around 18,000, but perhaps over 7,000 soldiers had survived, and many fled to the densely forested interior. Among these were Nakano san and his men. He led his troops up a mountain where they could look down on the Americans on the beach below. They had no food or ammunition. It soon became clear that they would starve if they stayed up there. The emperor had forbidden surrender, but Nakano san decided that he would take his chances, with a desperate hope for survival and reuniting with his family after the war ended. He and a few of his men went down the mountain and walked into the American camp, where they expected to be tortured and perhaps killed.

They were stripped of their clothes and braced for what would happen next, but what happened was that they were sprayed with DDT to remove the insects and then were given clean clothes and something to eat. Since Nakano san was an officer, he was sent to the interrogation camp in Hawaii, where he met Otis Cary. This is from Cary's obituary:

As an interrogator of Japanese POWs, then Navy Lt. Cary was able to persuade many prisoners to overcome their defeatism and shame at being captured alive by convincing them that the highest service to their country would be helping rebuild it from the ruins as a strong democracy.

"Cary was determined to treat prisoners not as enemies but as human beings, individuals who deserved to have a bright future aiding the reconstruction of a new, democratic Japan," wrote retired U.S. diplomat Ulrich Strauss in his 2003 book, "The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POWs of World War II"

<https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Otis-Cary-Japan-expert-WWII-vet-2537175.php>



Cary was born in Ootomari, Hokkaido to Christian missionaries. He was fluent in Japanese and he knew Japanese culture very well. He was a graduate of Amherst College, and after the war in 1947 he joined the faculty at Doshisha, where he would teach American History for 33 years. He and his wife later lived in the Amherst Guest House, which was built in 1962. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Over time in Hawaii, Cary and Nakano san became friends. Cary helped Nakano san find a place back in Japan after the war ended. (He could not go home because he had surrendered.)

Cary's alma mater Amherst College had a long association with Japan. Shortly after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, representatives from Japan visited Amherst, and the next year the College president Julius Seeley visited Japan and even had dinner with the Emperor Meiji. Amherst House, at first a dormitory, was built in 1932 to honor Doshisha's founder and Amherst graduate Neeshima Jo. After WWII, Amherst renewed its relationship with Doshisha. Otis Cary was appointed as Amherst's representative at Doshisha and joined the faculty as a professor of American History. At this point, Cary contacted his friend Nakano san, and asked if Nakano san could come to Kyoto to help him set up this relationship. Nakano san was enthusiastic about the idea. Nakano san would live in the small house that is adjacent to Amherst House. Together they built a program of cooperation between Doshisha and Amherst, which led in 1972 to the establishment of the Associated Kyoto Program, of which Carleton is a founding member.

My family and I visited Kyoto around Christmastime in 2000. Akiko suggested that we might stay in the Amherst Guest House. She told her aunt, who was then living in the Nakano-san's house, that her teacher was coming to Kyoto. The aunt replied that though the Guest House would be closed during this time, because I was Akiko's teacher, they would open it specially for us and we could stay there. We had the place to ourselves. It was a great experience, in no small part due to Akiko's hospitality.

My younger daughter Nora was only eight years old at the time, and she expressed some doubt about whether or not Santa Clause would be able to locate us in Kyoto. So we got some presents ahead of time and sent them on to Akiko's aunt in Kyoto and she hid them in the kitchen of the guest house. After the girls were asleep on Christmas Eve, I could sneak down there and retrieve the packages.

Voila, presents on Christmas morning 2000 for the Flynn/Dietz family in the Amherst Guest House at Doshisha University.

And thanks to Akiko Nakano, her grandfather, and Otis Cary.

This essay is posted here with the permission of Akiko and Akiko's father, Sho Nakano, who also helped me with some details.