



Geisha: A Life

By Mineko Iwasaki

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GEISHA, A LIFE

"No woman in the three-hundred-year history of the karyukai has ever come forward in public to tell her story. We have been constrained by unwritten rules not to do so, by the robes of tradition and by the sanctity of our exclusive calling...But I feel it is time to speak out."

Celebrated as the most successful geisha of her generation, Mineko Iwasaki was only five years old when she left her parents' home for the world of the geisha. For the next twenty-five years, she would live a life filled with extraordinary professional demands and rich rewards. She would learn the formal customs and language of the geisha, and study the ancient arts of Japanese dance and music. She would enchant kings and princes, captains of industry, and titans of the entertainment world, some of whom would become her dearest friends. Through great pride and determination, she would be hailed as one of the most prized geishas in Japan's history, and one of the last great practitioners of this now fading art form.

In *Geisha, a Life*, Mineko Iwasaki tells her story, from her warm early childhood, to her intense yet privileged upbringing in the Iwasaki okiya (household), to her years as a renowned geisha, and finally, to her decision at the age of twenty-nine to retire and marry, a move that would mirror the demise of geisha culture.

Mineko brings to life the beauty and wonder of Gion Kobu, a place that "existed in a world apart, a special realm whose mission and identity depended on preserving the time-honored traditions of the past." She illustrates how it coexisted within post-World War II Japan at a time when the country was undergoing its radical transformation from a post-feudal society to a modern one. "There is much mystery and misunderstanding about what it means to be a geisha. I hope this story will help explain what it is really like and also serve as a record of this unique component of Japan's cultural history," writes Mineko Iwasaki. *Geisha, a Life* is the first of its kind, as it delicately unfolds the fabric of a geisha's development. Told with great wisdom and sensitivity, it is a true story of beauty and heroism, and of a time and culture rarely revealed to the Western world.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Now in her 50s, Mineko Iwasaki was one of the most famed geishas of her generation (and the chief informant for Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*). Her ascent was difficult, not merely because of the hard, endless training she had to undergo--learning how to speak a hyper-elevated dialect of Japanese and how to sing and dance gracefully while wearing a 44-pound kimono atop six-inch wooden sandals--but also because many of the elaborate, self-effacing rules of the art went against her grain. A geisha "is an exquisite willow tree who bends to the service of others," she writes. "I have always been stubborn and contrary. And very, very proud." And playful, too: one of the funniest moments in this bittersweet book describes a disastrous encounter with the queen of England and her all-too-interested husband.

Revealing the secrets of the geisha's "art of perfection," this graceful memoir documents a disappearing world. --Gregory McNamee

From Publishers Weekly

From age five, Iwasaki trained to be a geisha (or, as it was called in her Kyoto district, a geiko), learning the intricacies of a world that is nearly gone. As the first geisha to truly lift the veil of secrecy about the women who do such work (at least according to the publisher), Iwasaki writes of leaving home so young, undergoing rigorous training in dance and other arts and rising to stardom in her profession. She also carefully describes the origins of Kyoto's Gion Kobu district and the geiko system's political and social nuances in the 1960s and '70s. Although it's an autobiography, Iwasaki's account will undoubtedly be compared to the stunning fictional description of the same life in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Lovers of Golden's work--and there are many--will undoubtedly pick this book up, hoping to get the true story of nights spent in kimono. Unfortunately, Iwasaki's work suffers from the comparison. Her writing style, refreshingly straightforward at the beginning, is far too dispassionate to sustain the entire story. Her lack of reflection and tendency toward mechanical description make the work more of a manual than a memoir. In describing the need to be nice to people whom she found repulsive, she writes, "Sublimating one's personal likes and dislikes under a veneer of gentility is one of the fundamental challenges of the profession." Iwasaki shrouds her prose in this mask of objectivity, and the result makes the reader feel like a teahouse patron: looking at a beautiful, elegant woman who speaks fluidly and well, but with never a vulnerable moment.

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From Library Journal

Iwasaki, who started training for her demanding profession at age four, here takes readers into the rarely glimpsed world of the geisha.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stewart Ramirez:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? E-book is very important thing for us to know everything in the world. Each reserve has different aim as well as goal; it means that publication has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They are really reading whatever they get because their hobby is definitely reading a book. What about the person who don't

like reading through a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book whenever they found difficult problem or maybe exercise. Well, probably you'll have this Geisha: A Life.

Mac Cutter:

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Karen Schanz:

This Geisha: A Life is great guide for you because the content and that is full of information for you who also always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. This particular book reveal it details accurately using great manage word or we can declare no rambling sentences inside it. So if you are read this hurriedly you can have whole info in it. Doesn't mean it only provides straight forward sentences but hard core information with splendid delivering sentences. Having Geisha: A Life in your hand like finding the world in your arm, facts in it is not ridiculous just one. We can say that no guide that offer you world with ten or fifteen moment right but this publication already do that. So , this is good reading book. Hey Mr. and Mrs. hectic do you still doubt in which?

Lorenzo Maskell:

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