

June 27, 1983

Dear Philip,

I am giving you a piece of my life which is what you did for many people when you wrote "Song for a Nisei Fisherman". I wish you could have been in attendance during the last week of its performance when so many nisei turned out. Some of them had never seen a play. One retired gardener came up to George and said, "This is about guys like you and me".

This play I am giving you is not a direct translation but a "personal" translation of that great ~~noh~~ noh drama Sotoba Komachi. I read Burns Mantle's Treasury of the Theatre over and over again in Minidoka camp and the noh drama stood out like a silver knife. It was the first time I had read a translation of a noh drama and I was enthralled. I sent it to a off and on issei journalist interned at Ft. Missoula. Months later, I received his Japanese version which is this play. I didn't have the tenacity nor the emotional fortitude to decipher it. I never had a chance to talk to him as he went back to Japan directly from prison. Actually he wanted me to stage it in camp but I was on the way out of camp.

Please do not feel a responsibility. Just look at it once in a while as a reminder of those strange times and how some of us hung on to our love of literature so desperately. By the way, the music perch which was used so effectively in your play was used the last time when I performed Modoribashi on October 5, 1941.

Copy of letter sent to Philip Sotoba
while play sent to me from the Tomb.

Dear Nisei Friend,

Visiting the graveyards during the Memorial holidays, have you noticed the increasing number of familiar names? "Do I have more friends here than out there?" some of us wonder. Lately, have you ever had the experience of driving along and seeing someone driving along looking like an issei and then, lo and behold, "It's not an issei. It's a nisei friend!" Impressions like these make us realize that time marches on, relentlessly flowing on, for all of us.

Now is a good time to pause and reflect. That is exactly what the play "Song For A Nisei Fisherman" does. It's as if a dear friend said, "Remember when ...?" Starting in childhood with the words "Kachan" and "Tochan", it starts an echo in your heart that keeps repeating inside your heart to way back when. The playwright takes us step by step through what we can call the "nisei experience". It is painful, funny, most of all relevant. It's the story of our life. For that reason many nisei who don't generally attend plays are going to see this play and saying how much they enjoyed it. I talked to the playwright Philip Gotanda, Hawaiian sansei, and told him how much I enjoyed it and how wonderful that someone recorded the the nisei experience so movingly. He said, "I wrote it as a tribute to my father". In a way I think it's his tribute to all nisei, not in some fancy way but in an honest, warm, sometimes very funny way. It's not too often we get to look at ourselves on stage. By the way, the actors may not all be professional but the production is nothing short of professional. It is staged beautifully. The Times and Post Intelligencer drama critics praised it, if you don't believe me. Don't miss it.

P.S. George generally doesn't attend but he saw this play and enjoyed it. A play for men as well as women.

Your nisei friend,

Tora