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JAPAN
in the heartland

NEW BOOK, DOCUMENTARY OFFER RARE
GLIMPSE AT JAPANESE "WAR BRIDES"

It started with a date

AT A JAPANESE DANCE HALL—
AND LED TO AN ACT OF CONGRESS.



In her new book, *Japanese War Brides in America: An Oral History* (Praeger Publishers), Ohio University scholar Miki Ward Crawford details the courtship and eventual marriage of her parents, Fumiko Tomita and Louis Ward. Her parents' story is part of a collection of narratives about Japanese women who married American servicemen at the close of World War II and then emigrated to the United States. Crawford and her co-authors, Katie Kaori Hayashi and Shizuko Suenaga, interviewed 19 "war brides" for this rare glimpse into the lives of women whose stories do not appear in most histories of that time period.

"You seldom see these stories anywhere; you seldom hear about them," says Crawford, an associate professor of communication studies at Ohio University's Southern Campus in Ironton. "I think that these women are just amazing. Because they loved someone, they defied their culture, and some of them defied their families. They were really pioneers of their time."

From 1947 through 1965, Crawford says, about 50,000 Japanese war brides emigrated to the United States. However, the number of marriages might be as high as 100,000, because some U.S. servicemen opted to stay in Japan with their wives, and some marriages were not officially recognized by either Japan or the United States.

Crawford's mother, Fumiko Tomita, met Corporal Louis Ward during the Allied Forces' occupation of Japan during the post-war period. At the time, Fumiko was working at a military PX (Post Exchange) for American soldiers stationed in Sapporo. Fumiko and Louis often went on dates at a dance hall. On October 12, 1947, they were married by an American preacher in Hachinohe.

Her parents' meeting was typical of many such couples, Crawford says. In Japan before WWII, women usually did not work outside the home, and they were considered inferior to men. But conditions were different after the war. "Japan was totally annihilated," Crawford says. "Many of the cities were 50 percent destroyed. The culture was in flux." Many men had been killed in the war, and women outnumbered the survivors. "It was hard to find a family that was not affected," Crawford says.

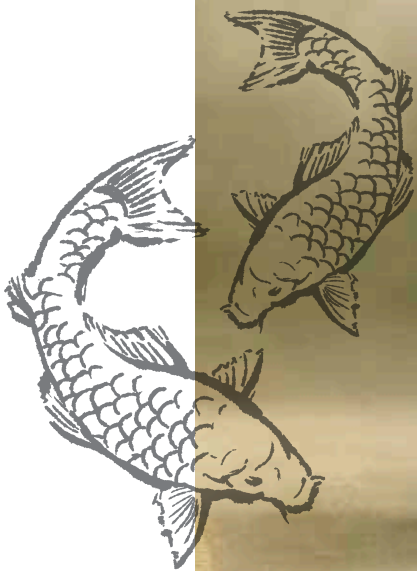
More Japanese women had to work outside the home in order to support what was left of their families, and many of them found jobs working for the occupational forces, which included 500,000 American GIs. The women met the Americans at their workplaces and, despite language barriers, romances bloomed.

Crawford knows that it might be hard to understand why Japanese women—including some survivors of the nuclear bombs the United States dropped on Japan—would marry men who had helped to conquer their country. "I truly give credit to (General Douglas) MacArthur, the way he handled the occupation (and reconstruction)," Crawford says. "He tried to set it up so that the Japanese people would see the Americans in a more humane way." The Japanese people had expected the Americans to rape and pillage, but instead they brought food, jobs, and democracy. "The women often saw the (American) men as very kind, as conquering heroes," Crawford says.

However, the new couples often faced disapproval from their families and prejudice from society at large. "The Japanese did not believe in interracial marriages," Crawford notes, adding that some war brides were disowned by their families. Some of the



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servicemen’s families tried to block their marriages, Crawford says, while others treated the war brides coldly.

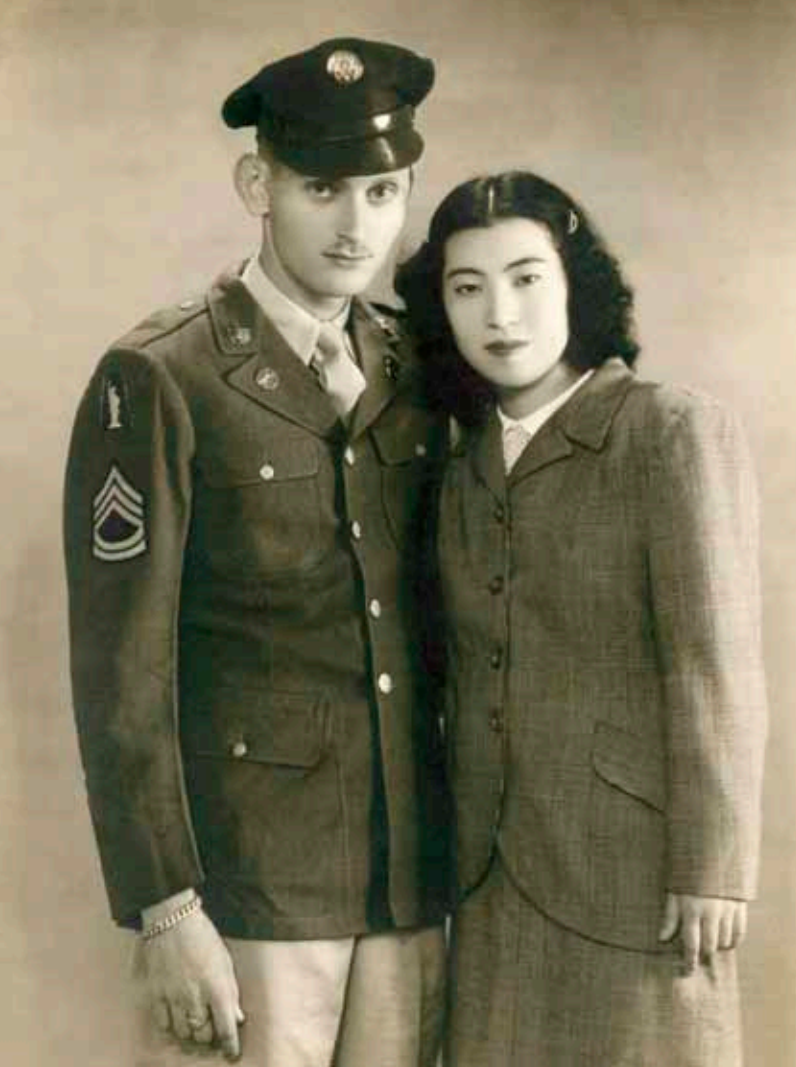
The U.S. and Japanese governments also made it “very difficult” to marry, Crawford says, and the process could take a year or more. (Crawford’s parents had to go through another marriage ceremony, in West Virginia, before their marriage was recognized in the United States.) If the couples did manage to marry, they then had to navigate U.S. immigration laws, which prevented Asians from entering the country. Before 1952, only about 800 Japanese war brides were legally allowed into the United States.

In fact, Crawford’s father Louis had to lobby his congressman for a year to get a special law passed that allowed only Fumiko and their son, Erio (Eddie), to come to America in 1950. It was not until 1952 that Congress eased immigration restrictions, and thousands of Japanese war brides were finally able to emigrate.

Once in the United States, war brides had to adjust to a new culture. They left behind their own language, food, traditions, and sometimes even their Buddhist or Shinto religion. Some women had learned about American culture in “bride schools” run by the Red Cross in Japan, but “many of them had to rely totally on their husbands,” Crawford says.

The war brides often had to work hard to overcome prejudice and to gain their neighbors’ friendship. For instance, Crawford’s parents threw a big party every year on New Year’s Eve—their American wedding anniversary—and Fumiko cooked Japanese food and talked with her neighbors all night long. Some war brides found others like them nearby; organizations such as the Nikkei International Marriage Friendship Society—founded by war bride Kazuko Umezu Stout—helped provide support.

Crawford says that the war brides’ lives were as varied as those of other American women: “I don’t think you can say that there is one Japanese war bride experience,” she says. Some



of the women became stay-at-home mothers, while others pursued an education and a career, “some out of necessity, and some out of desire.”

For instance, she says, after war bride Katsu Hall and her husband separated and then divorced, Katsu struggled for years to raise her three children on little money before she was able to attend college and become a registered nurse. On the other side of the equation is war bride Miwako Cleve, married for 50 years to a man she loves deeply, who began working just to make extra money but eventually became a respected clothes designer. Most of the brides say that if they were given a “do-over,” they would still choose the same path in life, Crawford says.

As Crawford conducted research for *Japanese War Brides in America*, her mother Fumiko went with her to interviews and helped the war brides feel more at ease. Crawford says that in the past, many war brides did not want to talk about their lives. However, “these women are getting older and are ready to give up their stories now,” she says. “The sad part is we’re getting up into the ages that we’re losing them.”

In October 2009, Crawford traveled to the Japanese Overseas Migration Museum in Yokohama, Japan, with a group of war brides who viewed an exhibit there on the

migration of Japanese war brides to the United States. Two Southern Campus staff and faculty members went with them to film a documentary about the trip—Don Moore, assistant professor in electronic media, and Brad Bear, special projects producer. Crawford says she thinks the documentary, which will be complete in mid-2010, would be a good fit for PBS or the History Channel. “We hope (the documentary) will be picked up, because there isn’t anything like this out there,” she says.

Crawford intends to continue her research into the lives of Japanese war brides. She gathered additional interviews on her recent trip and hopes to write another book about their life stories. She is also considering writing a book about the experiences of Japanese war brides’ children, who had to merge two cultures in their personal identities. Crawford believes that the war brides and their children did essential work in breaking down anti-Japanese prejudice. “They helped change attitudes in the United States,” she says. “The empress of Japan once said that ‘the war brides were ambassadors for Japan.’”

American serviceman Louis Ward, left, had to lobby his congressman for a year to allow his wife Fumiko Tomita and their son Erio to come to America in 1950. Once in the United States, many couples thrived. Miwako Cleve, far right, became a respected clothing designer.