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Geisha, A Life



Synopsis

No woman in the three-hundred-year history of the karyukai has ever come forward in public to tell her story—until now. "Many say I was the best geisha of my generation," writes Mineko Iwasaki. "And yet, it was a life that I found too constricting to continue. And one that I ultimately had to leave." Trained to become a geisha from the age of five, Iwasaki would live among the other "women of art" in Kyoto's Gion Kobu district and practice the ancient customs of Japanese entertainment. She was loved by kings, princes, military heroes, and wealthy statesmen alike. But even though she became one of the most prized geishas in Japan's history, Iwasaki wanted more: her own life. And by the time she retired at age twenty-nine, Iwasaki was finally on her way toward a new beginning. *Geisha, a Life* is her story -- at times heartbreaking, always awe-inspiring, and totally true.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read this as a follow up to *Memoirs of A Geisha*, as she was interviewed by its author as part of the research. I found this to be much more enjoyable and a striking contrast to that book. Highly recommend it (although take her words with a grain of salt, as for anyone to contradict her claims, they'd have to break their tradition of silence like she did, and face the same negative feedback and responses.)

I felt that this book was very honest, but at the same time sensitive and in some ways surprisingly relate-able. The author talks about the glamorous side of being a Geisha as well as the downside. You feel that you have a real sense of what it's like to step into her shoes. A large part of the book

focuses on exploring the unusual family she was born into which is in itself very interesting. I recommend this book to any one who is interested in the Geisha world. Jennifer K. Lafferty Author of Offbeat Love Stories and More

lovely book. I would recommend.

The used book arrived in great shape and it was a worthwhile read that gave wonderful insights into the true life of a geisha and debunked a lot of the myths.

Great read!

I was thoroughly entranced while reading this book. She is so forthcoming. She leads the reader along her life story...All the How, What, When, Where, and Whys are answered in detail. I know anyone interested in the life of geisha will want to read this detailed life story.

Very entertaining and informative! A great behind the scenes view of the world of geisha. Highly recommend it to anyone for research or simple curiosity.

This is a memoir of Japan's foremost geisha. I loved this book and will read it again. It tells of how geisha girls are picked and groomed for their profession. They are not prostitutes; simply entertainers, and very skilled ones at that. Anybody who loves Oriental culture will love this book.

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