

Okinawa's G.I. Brides: Their Lives in America

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Author's Introduction

Okinawa Prefecture comprises more than one hundred islands with a population of about 1,400,000. The islands reach to the southernmost tip of Japan where the climate is subtropical. In 1945, after the end of the Pacific War, the U.S. placed Okinawa under military occupation and constructed an extensive network of bases there. The American military seized many privately-owned lands for this purpose, violating basic human rights and igniting widespread protests. Relations between the American military and local residents were strained, to say the least. Yet, even under these circumstances, large numbers of American soldiers and Okinawan women fell in love, married, and moved to the United States. *Okinawa's G.I. Brides: Their Lives in America* explores this little-studied aspect of postwar history during the U. S. occupation period involving multiple confrontations between the U.S. military and local residents before Okinawa reverted to Japanese administration in 1972. The book presents interviews of women who discuss their lives in the U.S., their opinions of America, and their feelings about Okinawa. The original Japanese version, *Okinawa: umi wo watatta Beihei hanayome-tachi*, was published by

Kōbunken in 2000. The English version based on it was completed in 2016 and published in 2017.

Readerships of the English and Japanese editions have been different so, naturally, reactions have differed as well. If one word could sum up readers' reaction to the Japanese edition, it would be "sympathy;" for readers of the English edition, it would be "surprise." Many readers of the Japanese edition felt sympathy because they knew women among their relatives or friends who had married American soldiers, and could picture what things were like during the U.S. occupation. Readers of the English edition were surprised because most of them had no idea so many Okinawan women had married American soldiers and lived in the United States. They might have heard of Okinawa, but knew nothing about its complex relationship with the United States. Many couldn't understand why people in Okinawa oppose the American bases.

More than seventy years after the end of the Pacific War, the bases continue to pose enormous political and social problems in Okinawa. In the context of what is sometimes called "the Okinawa issue," I am hoping this study of American servicemen's wives can contribute to understanding one aspect of postwar history.

Women who married American soldiers during and just after World War II were often called "war brides." However, this term does not

reflect circumstances in Okinawa. The San Francisco Peace Treaty ended the Allied Occupation of the Japanese mainland in April, 1952. But the treaty severed Okinawa politically from Japan, and U.S. military rule lasted there for another twenty years. Even after Okinawa reverted to Japanese sovereignty as Okinawa Prefecture in 1972, the American military bases have remained there in overwhelmingly disproportionate size and numbers compared with the rest of Japan. Starting from the years just after World War II, marriages between Okinawan women and American military personnel have continued to this day. Thus, the term “war bride” doesn’t fit them. In Okinawa, they are usually called “international marriages.”

The U.S. military in Okinawa imposed severe restrictions on marriages between American servicemen and Okinawan women, starting with a total ban on them during the first few months of the occupation.¹ Encountering negative stereotypes in Okinawa, many Okinawan wives of American servicemen also found their marriages unwelcome in the United States. Such attitudes often reflect racial prejudice which remains deeply seated in American society. Even after the reform of immigration laws to permit the entrance of Japanese, several states maintained anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting inter-racial marriages.

The first postwar international marriage

In July of 1945, after the Battle of Okinawa, but while war continued between Japan and the United States, the American occupation army in Okinawa began publishing a newspaper in Japanese to inform the public of occupation policies and report local news. The Okinawan staff of *Uruma Shimpō* (later *Ryūkyū Shimpō*) working under American officers’ supervision, translated military directives and wrote articles. Its August 1, 1947 edition reported the

first marriage between an Okinawan woman and an American soldier. Frank Anderson, a twenty-three-year-old Ohioan stationed at Ryukyus Command (RYCOM) headquarters in the post engineers, had visited the office of civilian governor Shikiya Kōshin to apply for a certificate of marriage to Higa Hatsuko of Ginowan Village. The couple brought the marriage license they had obtained in Ginowan. According to the article, Mr. Higa, the office’s chief of public relations, told them that current U.S. law did not permit marriages between Americans and Japanese, to which Anderson replied, “Then we’ll join hands, and by the time we get to America, I believe Congress will have changed the law.”

Higa Hatsuko became well-known in Okinawa as “American Hatsu” for being the first woman to marry an American soldier (the character “hatsu” in her given name means “first” in Japanese). However, the U.S. military apparently saw this marriage as a problem and annulled it before one month had passed. According to reports in *Uruma Shimpō* and American newspapers, the couple was forced to separate. (“First international marriage dissolved,” *Shūkan Rekio*, November 13, 1987)

As Chief of Public Relations Higa had noted, the U.S. government was still prohibiting immigration from Japan and other Asian countries during the early postwar years. Moreover, interracial marriages were illegal in some American states.

As reported in an article entitled “Marrying and going to America” in the August 15, 1947 issue of the *Uruma Shimpō*, “A new law, passed by Congress and signed by the president, permits the immigration of soldiers’ brides to the United States. On July 16, the U.S. Military Government released a memorandum listing the marriages of American citizens in Okinawa.” The article goes on to explain that the American Consul General in Japan had started coming from Yokohama to Okinawa for

a few days each month to accept marriage applications at the Military Government's legal section.

Sixty-three such marriages were recorded in Okinawa during the initial one-month period of the law. Most of them, fifty-three, were to Japanese American soldiers. Eight were to white soldiers, one was to a black soldier, and one was between two Japanese Americans. A total of 825 such marriages were recorded in all of Japan, including Okinawa, during this period. 397 were to Japanese American soldiers, 211 to white soldiers, and fifteen to African American soldiers. (*Uruma Shimpō*, September 5, 1947) The newspaper noted that "the extremely high proportion of these marriages in Okinawa, when measured against the number in Japan as a whole, indicates [the highly militarized] conditions here."

The U.S. Military's Marriage Ban

The *Uruma Shimpō* reported enthusiastically on marriages between American soldiers and Okinawan women, but they did not receive everyone's blessing. On April 1, 1948, the U.S. command issued a "special order" prohibiting marriages between Ryukyuan civilians and military personnel. It explained that "this order is necessary to insure that personnel under this command fully perform their duties." Among its seven articles were "Article 1: Definition," "Article 2: Illegal acts," "Article 3: Application when there is intent to marry," and "Article 4: Penalties." Consequently, it was now a crime for local town halls and village offices in Okinawa to register such marriages. Moreover, "a Ryukyuan civilian convicted by special court martial of violating any of the articles herein shall be fined ten thousand yen, imprisoned for five years, or both." American military personnel were excluded from these penalties, which applied only to "Ryukyuan civilians." The marriage ban was not exclusive to Okinawa, but part of the U.S. military's overseas policy of

"non-fraternization" between soldiers and civilians in occupied areas. Its purpose was, first, to maintain separation from local civilians thought essential to the occupation army's authority and the smooth implementation of its policies. The concern was that, if soldiers became intimate with local women, troop morale would suffer. Furthermore, in the case of marriages to Japanese women, including those from Okinawa, racial prejudice in the United States was considered too pervasive.

After only four months, however, the ban was rescinded. The September 3, 1948 *Uruma Shimpō* announced an end to the policy that had stopped all marriages after April 4 between Okinawans and U.S. military personnel.

MG Commander Eagles issued Special Order No. 31 on August 17, effectively rescinding the marriage ban. As a result, marriages were now permitted for U.S. military personnel, American civilians, and their families in the Southwestern Islands or surrounding waters. Also permitted were the registration of such marriages at civilian government offices and participation in religious wedding ceremonies.

The marriage ban seems to have been so hastily rescinded because intimate relations between American military personnel and Okinawan women had become a widespread reality. Although the U.S. command might have considered them problematic for troop morale, it became impossible to prevent contacts between American soldiers and Okinawan civilians when they were living side by side on a small island with vast military bases.

The marriage ban represented the Military Government's unrelenting disapproval of marriages between American soldiers and Okinawan women. Even after the ban was lifted and these marriages became legal, the military continually pressured soldiers not to become too friendly with local women. This policy was described by some of the women I interviewed.

Living in New York City, Okushima Tokiko had worked from 1951 to 1964 for the Army Corps of Engineers at Camp Kuwae in Chatan. Her job dealt with compensation when land was confiscated for base construction. It was standard procedure, she said, to discourage newly arriving troops from dating local women.

The company commander told them it was all right to play around with the girls in town, but never to get serious. Not only did they hear this in their initial “orientation,” but it was also printed in their “information pamphlet.” Maybe the American military had this attitude because our country lost the war, but it seemed to me like racial prejudice and totally degrading of Okinawan people.

The military especially pressured high-ranking officers not to marry. They were always told they had to set an example for the other soldiers.

Tokiko recalled a friend who had fallen in love with an American Air Force officer. The couple was living together, but when his commanding officer found out, he was threatened with forcible return to the U.S., and they broke up. Tokiko herself had married an American, but his commanding officer had tried hard to talk him out of it.



Groom in Air Force dress uniform

Long Journey to a Huge Country

“I thought the trip would never end,” recalled Sachie (born 1931 in Naha, now living in New York City). She’d come to the United States after her marriage in 1954 when she was twenty and her husband, then in the Army, was nineteen. Her journey began from White Beach Naval Base in northeastern Okinawa at the tip of Katsuren Peninsula. The ship bound for San Francisco carried about two thousand passengers. Aboard ship were movies and dance parties, so most of the passengers and crew enjoyed the trip. But Sachie, suffering from severe sea-sickness, missed out on all the fun. “I couldn’t eat for fifteen days, and threw up all my meals. The only things I could keep down were sips of Coca-Cola and apple slices. I

thought I was going to die by the time we got to San Francisco.” Sachie rode the bus for another four days, all the way across the country to the east coast. “The trip from Okinawa had been grueling, but when my husband’s family welcomed me warmly, I was happy.” Traveling two weeks on a ship and four days crossing the country made her acutely aware of how far she was from home.

Many women said they’d known America was a big country, but were still amazed when they saw it with their own eyes. Yukiko (Nevada, age 62) explained,

Before marrying, I’d worked in Okinawa at the overseas branches of a bank and a trading company. I also had lots of contact with Americans through my husband’s parents who lived with us, so I was somewhat familiar with American life. When I arrived in 1977, I felt no special culture shock, but the next year we travelled from California to Florida by car, and the country seemed incredibly wide. In Okinawa you’re never more than one or two hours drive from the ocean, but in America we drove more than ten hours and saw only land. It made me realize what a small island I’d come from.

Reiko (Georgia, age 70) was similarly impressed by “the wide highway that seemed to go on forever. Riding on that wonderful road, I felt the nation’s power.”

Many were also surprised that the America they came to was so different from the America they’d seen in the movies. “I imagined America was a place where lots of people wore cowboy hats and boots. We first lived in my husband’s home town in New Jersey, and I remember being disappointed because I saw no one there wearing them,” said Masako (New Jersey, age mid-fifties).

American men often lived in comparative affluence as U.S. military personnel in Okinawa

during the occupation era. Thus, some women were disappointed to discover, after arriving in their husbands’ hometowns, that their standards of living were middle class or lower. “I thought our life in America would be like in the movies, and we would have a maid,” remembered a 65-year-old woman living in Georgia. “Wow, was I ever wrong!” Though she could laugh about it now, she’d been deeply disappointed at the time.

A 75-year-old woman living in Connecticut also recalled that, soon after marriage, her chronically ill husband temporarily changed jobs. They couldn’t make ends meet on his salary, and were always short of money. For a while, she made soup from weeds she picked in the yard. “I thought we’d be rich in America,” she said, remembering times when she’d regretted her marriage.

The Kindly Occupiers

I often asked women what had attracted them about their husbands. Why had they made the momentous decision to move to faraway America? Chizuko (North Carolina, age 72) told me that she had hated Americans after the war, but her feelings changed because, she said, American soldiers seemed so gentle, courteous, caring, and honest toward women. Many other women I interviewed gave the same answer.



Wedding picture in traditional (mainland) kimono.

American soldiers opened doors for women getting into cars or going outside; they carried heavy packages for them; and they pulled out chairs for them to sit down. From the time of their first meeting with American soldiers, women were amazed, and deeply impressed, by such good manners. “Whenever I was lost in thought, he’d ask if something was worrying me,” one told me. “It made me happy that he always showed his love for me,” said another.

Shōko (California, age mid -fifties) met her husband when she was working as a bus conductor in Okinawa. At first, she was surprised by his aroma.

When I approached him to sell the ticket, he smelled like soap. In those days few homes had baths, so people went to the public bath a few times a week. Soap just wasn’t available. On rainy days when the bus windows were closed,

the passengers’ body odor filled the air inside and made it hard to breathe. I knew I had to marry a man who really cared about cleanliness.

At a time when Okinawans stitched their clothes from military surplus fatigues, American soldiers wore uniforms with neatly pressed khaki trousers and crisply starched shirts. The smell of soap they emanated seemed like the aroma of civilization.

To be sure, their kind ways, sweet words, and generous gifts were calculated to lure women, but with the grim conditions in Okinawa at the time, women were undeniably impressed.



Groom in Navy dress whites

Women Defied Their Parents' Vehement Opposition to Their Marriages.

Hardships awaited them in this faraway country with a different language, history, and culture, but many defied their parents' opposition and came anyway.

"My father grabbed a pole and told me he'd

break my legs if I married a Yankee," a 65-year old woman living in Florida recalled during a group interview. "With my parents having been so much against it, there was no way I could go back to Okinawa no matter how bad things got here," she added. Each woman told of her experiences while the others listened quietly, nodding occasionally.

Kimiko (California, age 74) remembered bitterly how much her family opposed her marriage.

I never felt lonely after leaving Okinawa. My whole family had opposed my marriage. "If you go to the U.S., as soon as he finds an American girl, he'll dump you," they said, trying to scare me. But I remember telling them, "That wouldn't bother me. I'd just find someone else." This really shocked my father. "Marrying an American brings shame on our family. We'll act like you died in the war, so go ahead with it, but don't contact us anymore." After that, being "a shame on the family," I was never invited home, not even for holiday gatherings.

The quarrel with them over my marriage was still dragging on after five years, so I was anxious to leave for America as soon as possible. My father told me he would pay my airfare if I came back to Okinawa, but I had no intention of returning.

Kazumi: "My Father Told Me I Was No Longer His Daughter."

Kazumi (Texas, age 50) was the fifth of seven children. Six were girls, but when her father found out she was marrying an American, he said, "From now on, I have only five daughters."

Later, the parents of both women expressed relief that their daughters' marriages were

going well, celebrated the birth of grandchildren, and didn't hesitate to give them material and moral support in times of trouble. But Kimiko and Kazumi still feel the pain inflicted by the hurtful things their parents said to them before marriage.



Army soldier and family.

Okinawan Communities in the United States

Okinawan women live throughout the United States, but many reside in cities and towns adjacent to military bases or in nearby communities. Jacksonville, North Carolina is

one such city, the location of the Marines' Camp Lejeune, and home to many Okinawan women who married Marines. As in North Carolina, the wives of American soldiers founded associations throughout the country

These women maintain a strong Okinawan identity, especially as distinct from Japan. Although Okinawa is now a Japanese prefecture, they felt a connection to its past history as an independent country. They identified closely with a homeland located far from most of Japan that differs from it in climate, natural surroundings, culture, and language. Today, Okinawa is a leading tourist destination in Japan, and people from all over the country want to move there. But, before World War II, Okinawans encountered severe discrimination on the mainland. During the Battle of Okinawa, mainland Japanese soldiers expelled evacuees, mostly women and children, from cave shelters to make room for themselves, massacred civilians, and ordered mass suicides of local residents. This deeply troubled history has also helped to forge an Okinawan identity. It is shared by Okinawans living in the U.S. who are active in their prefectural associations, but have few contacts with people in the associations of other Japanese prefectures.



Atlanta Okinawa Association celebrates its tenth anniversary in 1995.



Las Vegas Okinawa Association celebrates New Year's 2013.

Varied Experiences of International Marriage

Teruko: "War stole the most important men in my life."

Getting to know Teruko (born 1941 in Nago, now living in New Jersey) was what first inspired me to conduct interviews of women who'd married American soldiers in Okinawa. She was an officer of the local Okinawa Prefectural Association, and a dedicated instructor of *eisa*, the Okinawan summer festival dance, which includes both karate movements and drumming.

Teruko had married her airman husband when she was twenty-two and he was twenty-six. She met him after graduating from college when she was working at the *Morning Star*, an English-language newspaper published in Okinawa for a readership mainly of American military personnel.

Al was witty and I enjoyed his company. He could speak Japanese with beautiful pronunciation. He also acted like a true gentleman, and was well-dressed and groomed. We both fell madly in love." Al was of Italian ancestry, had dark red hair, and practiced karate. When he'd been stationed at Kadena Air Base, his commanding officer often called on him to interpret for meetings with Japan's Self-

Defense Forces and other Japanese visitors to the base.

After they decided to marry, she took Al to meet her mother and elder brother. "He ate lots of the spinach salad my mother made," recalled Teruko. "And he must have been nervous because he sat the whole time with his legs folded Japanese style on the tatami floor even after his feet fell asleep." Impressed by his graciousness and sincerity, her mother told Teruko, "this guy is right for you," and agreed to the marriage.

After they married, Al was transferred to South Carolina in March of 1964, and Teruko first stepped on American soil. Their first child, a daughter, was born in September of 1964. Many people in their neighborhood had never seen a Japanese person, and thought Teruko was strange. Animosity left over from the Civil War seemed to be deeply rooted, and because he was from the north, her husband was called a "Yankee." However, friends there gave Teruko a baby shower after their first child was born. During their three years in South Carolina, she had a second daughter.



Formal family portrait.

Her Husband's Service in Vietnam and the After-effects of Agent Orange

In 1967 the couple's son was born. Four days later Al left for deployment to Vietnam. Teruko was to go later with their children to Okinawa. "I really wanted to go back to Okinawa. My husband said that if he served in Vietnam, he could choose Okinawa as his next duty station. So, whether he lived or died, we would be there."

Al's tour in Vietnam of just over a year ended safely, and he went to Okinawa in the summer of 1968. There, he rented a house for the family, and waited for them to arrive. The family lived in Okinawa for five years, and then moved to Al's next duty station in Colorado. In 1973, he retired from the military, having completed twenty years of service. In

December, 1977, they bought a house in New Jersey where they decided to settle down. This should have been the start of Al's peaceful civilian life, but a year later he died.

His health had begun to fail in Okinawa after his tour ended in Vietnam. In 1968, during his first Christmas holiday after returning from Vietnam, he started looking pale. His stomach hurt, and he threw up everything he ate. Always cheerful and constantly joking, Al was now weak and sullen. At first the doctor said it was pancreatitis, but further tests showed that his stomach, intestines, and other organs were all infected. Teruko spent many nights massaging her husband's back as he sat on the bathroom floor clinging to the toilet and vomiting. Sometimes he would lose consciousness, and was hospitalized as many as three or four times a year.

It was two days after Christmas during his third hospital stay of 1978. Teruko was at work when the hospital phoned asking her to come as soon as possible. Sal had just been admitted the night before and his condition had stabilized, so she thought the doctor probably wanted to explain the plans for his treatment or for surgery. But she arrived to learn that her husband had died. A white sheet covered his body and a rubber tag was attached to his ankle. All his personal belongings had been put in a sack.

The attending physician asked Teruko for permission to do an autopsy. He had also served in Vietnam and suspected this might have had something to do with Al's death. She was sure that, if this would contribute to progress in medical science, her husband would have wanted it, and she signed the consent form. Later, however, some of his Catholic relatives were unhappy with her decision.

A week later the doctor called Teruko to his office. He gave her a copy of the examination record and told her to keep it in a safe place

because it would be extremely important for her in the future. It was evidence that Al's illness was probably related to his service in the Vietnam War.

At that time few people knew about the damage to humans caused by chemical defoliants. Several years passed before it became a public issue. She always felt strongly that Al's death was related to the war. He'd been in robust good health, and passed a thorough physical with flying colors right before leaving for Vietnam after just turning thirty.

Al had served in the Air Force for twenty years, so medical treatment was free at military hospitals, but only 75% was covered in the civilian hospital where he went twice before he died. The charges were a heavy financial burden and, having just bought a house, there were also mortgage payments. Al had tried to buy health insurance, but with the pre-existing condition of damaged internal organs, no company would accept him. Teruko remembered the many times he'd woken up in the middle of the night, gone into the living room, and sat there in the darkness. "I know he was terribly worried about dying and leaving us burdened with debts because he couldn't get health insurance. I tried to re-assure him, telling him we would be fine because I could work."

While her seriously ill husband was going in and out of the hospital, Teruko took a job in a nearby sewing factory. She'd chosen this job because it was only five minutes' walk from home, but there was another reason she'd quickly decided on this line of work. At Easter she'd gone around to the local clothing stores to buy white dresses for her two daughters, but discovered they would cost fifty dollars. "That was ridiculous. Fifty dollars would pay for two weeks of groceries. So I bought a pattern for fifteen cents, ten dollars worth of cloth, and made the dresses for my girls. They cost me just over ten dollars." Moreover, they were

praised by everyone for their original design.

At a nearby factory she cut patterns at first, but one day when Al came to the factory in his sport suit made by Teruko, her supervisor took her by the hand and led her directly to the sewing section in the next room. Two supervisors there watched the way she operated the machine, and she was reassigned immediately. This happened in 1977, and her pay was raised from \$4.50 to \$8.00 an hour. She did piece work, and was the highest paid worker in the section for a while. Al died while she was working there. At the time of his death he was 41, Teruko was 37, and their three children were eleven, thirteen, and fourteen years old.

Before his death, her husband had been going to graduate school to become a social worker. "While he was studying and after he got sick, supporting him was the most important thing for me. I had started working at the factory to help pay the bills and because it was very close to home and the hospital. Any job would have done as well. But after he died, my work seemed pointless." So she quit, and began studying psychology at a nearby state university.

Teruko had decided to major in psychology when she saw how differently her children reacted to their father's death. Her elder daughter hid in her room and wouldn't talk to anyone. Her younger daughter's crying provoked an asthma attack. Her son tried to cope with his grief by screaming and kicking the couch across the room. She couldn't get those scenes out of her mind, so she began buying and reading books on psychology. She wondered how three children raised much the same way could behave so differently. After that, Teruko struggled hard to start a new life. She cut down on her sleeping hours to keep up with her studies, her job, parenting, and housework. She managed to complete a degree and become a social worker, the same career

her late husband had been studying for.

Although he didn't die in combat, the Vietnam War had directly caused Al's death.

War killed the most important men in my life. After my father was born in 1906, his father emigrated to Mexico. My father was still an infant, and his mother planned for us to join her husband later, but he died in the Mexican Civil War. He was still in his twenties. When my father was thirty-nine, he was killed in World War II. War also killed my husband. I once told my son never to join the military. But he said, "If my country needs me, I'll go." Maybe he felt that way because he'd grown up the son of an airman as a "military brat."

Eiko: "He seemed like a movie star when we got married."

Eiko was born in the central part of Okinawa in 1936. I first met her in 1995 when the Okinawa Prefectural Society of Atlanta was celebrating the tenth anniversary of its founding.

Eiko had met her husband when she was working on Kadena Air Base as a housemaid. Her family was poor. Her father died in the war, and her mother, in failing health, had raised three children. While still in middle school, Eiko helped support them with money she earned housecleaning and babysitting in the neighborhood. She began working on the base as a housemaid as soon as she finished middle school. The twenty dollars she was paid in cash every week was her family's sole income.

She'd been twenty-five when she met her husband. "He was so handsome, so kind, so masculine! I couldn't believe this man looking like a movie star was in love with me." Meeting him had been like a dream, but, when he first proposed, Eiko was afraid to go to America,

and tried to avoid him after that. "Then one day he told me if I didn't marry him, he was going to jump off the second floor of the building and kill himself."

Eiko got pregnant soon after their marriage, and she finally agreed to go to America. Her husband's mother, living in Alabama, had absolutely opposed his marriage to an Okinawan woman, and insisted he not bring her back with him. He replied that "I love her, she's pregnant with our child, and we're married, so she's coming with me."

In 1963, Eiko was twenty-seven when they arrived in the United States. During the next few years, she gave birth to two daughters and a son, but in America her husband gradually lost the kindness and gentleness she'd known from their time together in Okinawa. "He started saying mean things, calling me uncultured, stupid, ugly, and vulgar."

He yelled at Eiko in the middle of the night to complain that her snoring disturbed his sleep. He said if she kept it up, he'd throw her out the window into the valley below. Some nights she was so scared she couldn't sleep at all. Although he never attacked her physically, he assaulted her daily with verbal abuse. As a result, she withdrew more and more into herself, losing all contact with the society around her.

Then, during her fifteenth year in America, Eiko's husband threw her out of the house, demanding a divorce. "At the time I didn't even know the meaning of the English word 'divorce,'" she told me. Left only with the clothes on her back and nowhere to go, Eiko stopped in at the church she attended. Its sympathetic minister let her stay there until he found her an apartment where she began a new life alone.

Ten years had passed since then. She was working now, driven to and from her job by a co-worker who lived near her. She received

phone calls at home occasionally, but almost never called anyone. She says she gets scared every time the telephone rings, but, when I asked what she was afraid of, she didn't know herself. Her daily life is going to work and coming back to her apartment. She has almost no contact with other people.

I couldn't understand Eiko's relationship with her children. She obviously loved them, and proudly showed me their photographs. But even now that they were adults, none of them seemed interested in helping their mother who'd been abandoned in a foreign country with no one to rely on.

Many times during our interview Eiko said, "I want to go back to Okinawa." She hadn't made even one return visit since coming to America. "My mother was sick, and I heard she died, but I have a younger brother. I want to see my home one more time. Won't you take me back with you," she asked me.

I worried about Eiko, so totally alone, and decided to help arrange her trip home. I negotiated with a travel agency for a special discount rate, and they even offered to cover the whole fare. Finally, after thirty years, it seemed she would be able to visit Okinawa. But now I couldn't contact her. She answered none of my many telephone calls, perhaps because, as she said, "I'm scared and hide whenever the phone rings." I still worry about Eiko today, having been unable to meet or talk with her since our interview in 1995.

Chizuko: "A pregnant woman came to my house and told me, 'The baby is your husband's.'"

Interviewed at her home in North Carolina, Chizuko was born in 1938 on Tinian Island, then a South Pacific territory of Japan where many Okinawans had migrated for work. After U.S. forces captured it in 1944, they used

Tinian's airfield to launch B-29 air attacks on Japan, including the August 6, 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Before that, her family was leading a comfortable life, but they had to return to Okinawa after the war ended when Chizuko was eight. With no home there, they ended up in a civilian refugee camp. Having lived abroad, Chizuko also suffered because she was unable to communicate in Okinawa dialect. "It was all because of the war, I thought, and I hated America."

When Chizuko graduated from high school, she was working at a men's clothing store on Kadena Air Base. The Korean War had just ended, and American troops from Korea began arriving in Okinawa. One day her boss said, "I know this is your day off, but a lot of Marines are coming to Camp Hague. I need you to go there." So she left Kadena for Camp Hague. "That changed my life," she recalled. Most of the airmen at Kadena lived with their families, but the Marines at Camp Hague were all young, single men. She'd hated America, but was astonished at how kind, open, and cheerful they seemed.

For example, when I was carrying boxes through the hallway, an officer behind me rushed ahead to open the door. When I sat down, another one pulled out the chair for me. Would a Japanese officer open the door for a girl? Never! I couldn't believe there were such kind men in this world.

Chizuko was the youngest of the six women working at Camp Hague. Before long a young marine began stopping by every day. He always brought chocolate, so the women called him "chocolate boy." He was three years younger than Chizuko. On their first date, they were on their way to town for coffee when he suddenly asked her, "What's your monthly salary?" Just as she was thinking how impolite this guy was, he spoke again, sheepishly. "I'm so jealous I can't stand it when I see you talk to other GI's at work. I'll give you your salary if you'll quit

your job.” At that time a Marine PFC made about \$30.00 a month, so she told him \$35.00.

Chizuko lied to her parents that she was going to an English language school, and they continued dating. When his tour of duty ended and he was scheduled to return to America, they decided to get married. Chizuko’s parents were completely shocked. Having no idea what to do, they insisted on waiting until Chizuko’s older brother got back from Tokyo. He was well known in the village as the first student from there to attend one of the most prestigious universities in Japan, and her parents trusted his judgment.

“If you make my sister unhappy, I’ll kill you,” Chizuko’s brother said.

When her brother returned from Tokyo and met Chizuko’s fiancé, he realized that their decision to marry was firm. He gave his approval reluctantly and with misgivings, insisting that “if you make my sister unhappy, I’ll hunt you down wherever you are in America and kill you.” He was a truly caring brother. Years later, in America, they divorced, and nowadays, when she sees her former husband occasionally, he jokes that her brother would kill him if they ever met.

Just after marrying, the couple lived in Okinawa for a time. Chizuko’s parents were unhappy that she had married an American marine. Worried what the neighbors would think, they told her that, whenever she visited them, she should come after dark. She complied most of the time, and, if she had to come during the day, she wore a headscarf and sunglasses.

Her husband’s family also objected to their marriage. His commanding officer contacted them to ask whether or not they approved. After a time, a letter came from his mother saying that her son “was confusing sympathy

for love” and that they were opposed. In the cases of marriages involving military personnel, it was customary for the couple to receive counseling from the chaplain. “Do you really think you can live in America?” the chaplain asked Chizuko. “Your children will be called ‘Japs,’ and teased constantly.” He gave many other reasons why they should abandon the idea.

Finally, despite his parents’ opposition, he began marriage procedures. While they were still in process, he was transferred back to the U.S., but the separation only made them both more determined. One year later, he returned to Okinawa, and they were married. He was still in the Marine Corps when they moved to the U.S. and lived on Camp Lejeune. A devoted father, he always came straight home from work, and often took care of the children. He was just as kind as he’d been before marriage, and things went smoothly. After she had their third child, Chizuko heard that several Okinawan women attended a nearby church. She began going there, too, and they eventually formed a local Okinawa Prefectural Association.

Then one day, shortly after the birth of their third child, a pregnant woman visited Chizuko’s home. “This baby inside me is your husband’s,” she said. Shocked at this sudden declaration, Chizuko remained dubious until her husband got home from work. But when she pressed him for an answer, he admitted it was true. He told her he intended to break off with this woman, but kept making excuses and things dragged on with no end in sight, so Chizuko decided to get a divorce.

He didn’t want a divorce, and hoped to stay with his family while continuing the affair. After it became known, he began openly spending nights at her place. “Having two women might have been fun for him, but I couldn’t stand it.”

Divorce under North Carolina law required a

minimum of one year's separation and the testimony of witnesses. After living apart for a year and a half, Chizuko informed her husband's commanding officer of her intentions, got her friends to testify as witnesses in court, and filed for divorce. After completing the papers, she sent them to her husband at work. He was furious.

After we got married, I was quite the traditional Japanese woman, totally devoted to serving him. When he came home from work, I even pulled off his socks. He probably got the idea I could only be obedient to him, and was incapable of doing anything on my own. When I left him, though, I told him, "I'm not just some trusty animal, and I'm not your maid."

Her husband agreed to their divorce on condition that the word "adultery" be removed from the "cause" box on the decree. He explained that Marines highly valued discipline, and that having sex with a person other than one's spouse was considered disgraceful. Concerned about his future, he didn't want to have this on record. After Chizuko accepted his condition, the case went smoothly, the divorce was granted, and she was awarded a support allowance for their three children.

Just after her divorce, Chizuko's friends took turns driving her to and from work. Soon her family in Okinawa sent money to help her buy a car, and she was able to work and take care of her children without depending on others. Later, her friends introduced her to the man who became her second husband. He especially loved Japan, and its culture, and fully accepted her circumstances.

Even now, Chizuko still regrets that, when she first decided to divorce, she didn't have seventy-five dollars to pay the legal fees. In America, unlike in Japan, husbands control a married couple's money. It's hard for housewives to keep even small amounts for their own use. "That's why I always advise

young women to save whatever money they can, even if it's only one or two dollars change at the supermarket. You never know when you might need it," she told me.

If I had it to do over, I'd never have gotten involved in an international marriage with an American soldier. I can't believe that young women in Okinawa today still marry them, and come here to live. When we were young, Okinawa was poor, but things are different now. Japan is richer than America. There's too much suffering in an international marriage.

Chizuko's three children have all grown up, and she has five grandchildren. She's become a devout Christian. "I've been through a lot," she says, "but I'm happy now."

More than two decades have passed since Chizuko and other women joined in founding the Okinawan Prefectural Association of North Carolina in 1988. She was its president for ten years, but nowadays younger members in their thirties and forties serve as its president and officers. Created by Okinawans, the association's membership had been limited to Okinawans, but since staging events requires men's help, the rules were changed recently to admit their children, and Chizuko's son is now a member. Besides Chizuko, four or five of the other most active members are women in their seventies and eighties. She was married to her second husband for twenty-two years until his death, and now lives alone. She enjoys most spending time with her grandchildren, traveling, and participating in charity events.

Loneliness and Isolation

"Okinawan wife murdered, husband sentenced to life in prison," read a headline in the January 15, 2012 issue of the *Okinawa Times*. The murder of Higa Shinobu in Ohio had occurred in March of 2011, and her husband, Peter

Primeau, had just been sentenced. Suffering wounds in several places from a beating, she had arrived in critical condition at a hospital where surgery was performed, but she died shortly thereafter. Her husband, who brought her to the hospital, claimed that she had been attacked on the street in town by a stranger, but the police found inconsistencies in his story during questioning, and placed him under arrest.

According to the local newspapers, Shinobu and Peter met in Okinawa when he was stationed at Kadena Air Base, and came to the U.S. together, marrying in 2009. At the time of her murder, he had left the military and was attending college. Shinobu had been in the U.S. just over a year when she was beaten to death by her husband. At his trial in Cleveland on January 4, 2012, witnesses testified that he had often battered her.

This case tragically exemplifies the isolation too often experienced by women who come to the U.S. as the wives of American soldiers. Of course, many Okinawans live in America, but women in these marriages have no relatives here, other than their husbands, no friends or acquaintances, and no way to overcome the language barrier. Many can't become acquainted with their neighbors, and don't know where to turn for help when they need it. Shocked by Shinobu's murder, Okinawans living throughout the U.S. responded with all-out support. In Ohio they helped in numerous ways, making arrangements for her family when they came from Okinawa to claim her remains, aiding in the police investigation, volunteering as interpreters, and assisting at the trial. Okinawa Prefectural Associations around the country collected donations for her family, and organized a network devoted to preventing future occurrences.

I interviewed many women from Okinawa who spoke of the isolation they felt living in the United States. All of them were remembering

times after leaving home and coming to America when they'd felt a profound sense of isolation.

"One night I had a fight with my husband over something trivial, and got so angry I grabbed my daughter and stormed out of the house with her," recalled Kazumi (Texas, age 51).

We got into the car, and I sped away on the interstate, but after about half an hour, when my daughter asked where we were going, I realized I didn't have the slightest idea. In this situation, my husband could have driven to a friend's house, or visited his brother, or gone somewhere to drink. But I'd lived here four years, and didn't know anyone I could visit late at night on the spur of the moment.

Many G.I. brides from Okinawa had first set foot on American soil deeply apprehensive about a country they knew little about, except that it had won the war, become an economic super-power, and was their husbands' homeland. America received the women from this small island in East Asia as just another postwar immigrant group--sometimes warmly, sometimes coldly, but mostly with indifference.

"I came to America in the 1960s. What baffled me the most at first was the lack of contact among neighbors," recalled Yuri (New Jersey, age 60).

When we first moved in, the door of the neighbors' house stayed shut, and I couldn't even tell if anyone was living there. The lights inside were on at night, so I knew the house wasn't vacant, but no one there said a word to us. This must be what was meant by "individualism," I thought. Everyone takes care of themselves, and no one bothers anyone else. Next door neighbors don't even speak to each other, which is completely different from the way things are in Okinawa. It made me sad.

Yet, it was mostly older women who expressed this regret. They'd grown up in an Okinawa where neighbors always greeted each other, and no one locked their doors. In most homes, three generations of a "greater family" lived together, and in many small villages all the residents knew each other, saying "hello" whenever they met on the street. For these women, it was incomprehensible that, when someone moved into a neighborhood, the neighbors would keep their doors shut in total indifference.

They saw America as the victorious nation in World War II that had become a world superpower. Veterans' educational benefits had helped many Americans join a growing middle class. In a spacious country where parents usually lived apart from their adult children, families became increasingly nuclear. People had little interest in their neighbors.

Yet, some had entirely different experiences. "I was so grateful for our neighbor's support," said Kazumi of her first year in America. Arriving in 1987, she lived in a town house in Yucca Valley, California, near the base where her Marine husband was stationed. "Barbara was our next door neighbor, probably in her fifties. Without all the help she gave me, I don't know how I would ever have made it through that first year."

The first time Barbara rang her doorbell, however, Kazumi didn't open the door. "I was afraid because my husband, Henry, wasn't home and I didn't know her at all." Fortunately, Barbara didn't give up, and kept coming back. Finally, on her fifth try, Kazumi let her in.

Following self-introductions, they quickly became friends. After that, Barbara visited once a week, and took Kazumi with her to the post office, the grocery store, and the super market, showing her places and giving her information essential for daily life. Kazumi recalled arguing often with Henry in those days because she felt homesick and couldn't seem to

get used to America. Sometimes Barbara would hear them shouting at each other next door. "Other couples might seem to be getting along well," she told Kazumi. "But you can be sure they have their troubles, too."

When Barbara saw Kazumi ironing clothes on a mat spread on the floor in the old Japanese way, she found her a used ironing board. She invited Kazumi to a patchwork club of local elderly women and to other gatherings, giving Kazumi every opportunity to get to know her neighbors.

The sharply diverging experiences of Yuri and Kazumi had much to do with the differing personalities of their respective neighbors. However, their contrasting expectations and impressions of Americans resulted from differences in their local origins and generations. Yuri grew up at a time when neighbors were friendly with each other, and in a place where residents maintained close contacts. On the other hand, Kazumi grew up at a time of growing urbanization in Okinawa, when the trend has been toward less openness, more nuclear families, and fewer contacts among neighbors.

Tears of Yearning for Home

Many had defied their parents' opposition and left Okinawa in a rush. But all said they still loved and missed their homeland. In particular, women who had come to America in the 1950s and 1960s said that, living in a neighborhood where there were no other Asians, they felt isolated and homesick, sometimes crying.

Several told me that, when they happened to see other Asians on the street, they would occasionally follow behind them for a while.

When I first came to the U.S. in 1968, New York wasn't anything like it is today when there are lots of Japanese and other

Asians. Many times when I saw an Asian, maybe in a department store, I followed the person for a while, hoping they were Japanese, and was disappointed if they weren't. (Yuriko, New York, age 79).

I cried whenever a letter came from Okinawa. I'm the type who cries easily, which made my husband angry. He told me, whenever I cried, he felt guilty for being a bad husband and making his wife unhappy. After that, I read the letters in our bathroom where he wouldn't hear me. (Kazumi, Texas, age 51)

Racism

Multiethnic America has been compared to a melting pot, a mosaic, and a salad bowl. The U.S. is a mix of peoples, perhaps like a salad or a mosaic, but they have never melted together as one. The society is, rather, a mixture of races and ethnicities. Okinawans have often had to deal with racism. It wasn't only loneliness and melancholy that interviewees felt, but the special burdens that weighed on them as wives in "international marriages." Kiyomi (New York, age, 28) recalled what happened when she went to apply for a social security card for her new-born child.

I filled in "name" and "date of birth" on the form, but paused when I got to the boxes for "race." For about fifteen minutes I pondered which one to check. I was Japanese and my husband was African American, but what did that make my child? My mother-in-law was with me, so I asked her. "A person with even one drop of African American blood is considered black," she told me. "Anyone can see your child is black." So I checked the "black" box, but couldn't help feeling that this ignored my race and nationality. I realized then that, for me, international marriage meant abandoning my country.

Satoko (New York, age 73) was turned down for a job in New Jersey specifically because of her race. Before marrying and coming to America, she had worked for several years as an accountant on a U.S. military base, and was confident she could do the work. But, after going for a test and an interview, she received a form letter rejection. "I couldn't just accept it," she said, and went to the personnel office to ask why. "We don't like saying this," she was told, "but our company doesn't hire Orientals."

Infuriated, Satoko threatened to sue the company for employment discrimination. It was the mid-1960s, and she decided in the end not to file suit. "There was also severe racial prejudice in my neighborhood, so I finally got fed up and moved to New York. I like the city because people of many races live here, and it's easy to find a job," she said, after living in New York more than thirty years. During that time she's worked at a large American publishing house, Merrill-Lynch brokerage, and an insurance company. "Finding a job has never been a problem."

Women also encountered discrimination in the U.S. when they applied for marriage licenses. "We applied at a city hall in Arizona for a marriage license, but the clerk told us 'our state doesn't permit marriages between whites and colored people,'" recalled one woman. Another told me, "When a friend and I got on a bus, some white women who'd boarded earlier looked at us, and whispered that 'low-class people just got on.'" These incidents occurred in the early 1960s. The woman who'd been turned down for a marriage license went on to recount how "my quick-witted husband told the clerk he wasn't white, but Mongolian, and they issued the license. Actually, he's Jewish, but looks sort of Asian."

In North Carolina American veterans organizations practiced white supremacy, and wouldn't admit veterans with "colored" Okinawan wives.²

Even if they weren't actively persecuted, Okinawan women in America live surrounded by the issue of race. Interviewed at age seventy-seven, a woman in North Carolina told what it was like when she first arrived from Okinawa to live in the south, where racism was more virulent than in the north.

With separate bathrooms for 'white' and 'colored,' I didn't know which to use. I asked my husband, who is white, and he said that "of course" I should use the bathroom for whites. After that, I always went with whites in places where the races were segregated.

In Georgia, Reiko, has taught public school in Atlanta for many years. "When I was first hired, the employee forms had two boxes for race, white and black. I asked the woman in the office which to check, and, after glancing at my face, she said 'white,' so I checked that box." Reiko had forgotten about this until the principal called her into his office one day in the mid-1990s. "He told me there was now a category for 'Asian,' and asked if I wanted to use it. 'Of course,' I said."

As these examples show, at a time when only two racial categories, "white" and "black," were recognized in much of the U.S., women from Okinawa thought it natural to designate their husbands' category. Most of my interviewees had married white men, and placing themselves in the category considered superior made life easier, so few had reservations about it at the time.

Of course, Americans have not been alone in imposing racial barriers. Some Okinawans, including those living in the United States, have adopted racist attitudes themselves. The small number of my interviewees married to blacks told of the following experiences:

"When they found out my husband was black, the other members of the prefectural association said insulting things to me."

"We'd been meeting as friends, then one day she expressed shock that my husband was a *"kuru"* (literally, "black," a derogatory term in Okinawan dialect).

"I went to the association meetings, but got an uncomfortable feeling. As the wife of an African American, I was not accepted by the other members."

One prefectural association president said, "Members with black husbands don't participate much in our activities, and I'm at a loss what to do about it." American patterns of segregation are thus replicated in Okinawan society.

"Organization builds a network for elderly Okinawans living alone in the U.S." headlined a January 27, 2011 article in the *Okinawa Times*.³ Mitzi Uehara Carter, a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, had started the "Afro-American Family Network." Her mother is Okinawan and her father African American. "Many Okinawan women of my mother's generation who married African American men have encountered prejudice from other Okinawans, and become estranged from prefectural associations," she explained, adding that they often live in isolation, especially if they are elderly. "I want to create a place for them to share their experiences and concerns."

Okinawan women living in America have often had to deal with the issue of race, however reluctantly. They know that race is not only a matter of skin color, but is also closely associated with social class. Coming from a place where social status is not determined by skin color, they find this particularly bewildering, and at times infuriating.

Moreover, racism not only affects first-generation immigrant wives, but can be a worse problem for their children. "I haven't suffered that much, but my kids run into it a lot," several women told me.

Yuriko, now in her seventies and living in Pennsylvania, recalled that her younger son had gotten into a fight in the 1980s and come home early from school because another student was calling him a Jap. "His mother telephoned me to complain about the fight, and I asked her if she knew what had started it. She said no, so I told her." At that point his mother stopped complaining, and her son stopped calling Yuriko's son a Jap.

A daughter of another woman, living in New York, was in high school when her social studies teacher called her a Jap. She told her parents about it when her father arrived home from work. "I can't believe it. A social studies teacher? Are you sure you didn't misunderstand him?" he asked. "No way! When he said it, the whole class turned around and glared at me." The next day her father went first thing to the school, met with the principal, and got him to apologize.

Even if they don't encounter such blatant prejudice, bi-racial children raised in two cultures can feel insecure at times about their identities, with negative effects on their self-esteem. "My daughter feels she is different from other children," explained a woman in Pennsylvania. "She once asked me, 'Who do I resemble? Am I like you, or do I have more of Father's blood?' She also told me, 'Nothing I wear looks good on me,' and seemed to lack confidence in herself."

At first, these children assume they are American, having been born and raised in the U.S., but they gradually begin to feel different from other children. And even if this doesn't bother them, other children sometimes reject them.

When he was in high school, the son of Yukie (Texas, age 70) got into fights over race. In African American society there is often a higher degree of unity than in white society, and a stronger awareness of one's own skin color and culture. This derives in part from the long

history of racial discrimination in the U.S. "Among children, divisions of race are even stricter than in adult society," said Yukie. "Black kids play with black kids and Asians play with Asians. With a black father and an Asian mother, my son was rejected by both groups, and was always alone. He resented me for this, and I tended to blame myself for making his life difficult--and mine."

Racial prejudice remains deeply seated in American society. Although adults can often camouflage it in public, children openly express the prejudices they learn from their parents.

Parents' Opposition to Marriages and Prejudice in Okinawa against G.I. brides

The survey and interviews were conducted from 1995 to 1997, with follow-up interviews in 2010 and 2011 for the English edition. I asked respondents what their circumstances were before marriage, when they had come with their husbands to the United States, and what their lives had been like in America,

The reasons for parents' opposition varied. Some didn't want their daughters to marry foreigners, to live far away from home, or to suffer in a strange land. Other parents worried they would be lonely without their daughters nearby, and some simply didn't like the idea of their daughters dating American soldiers. In contrast to parents who opposed marriages that would take their daughters far away, several objected out of pride. The economy of postwar Okinawa developed with expansion of the bases. Military forces are comprised predominantly of young men, and the workers in businesses that cater to them in the base towns are predominantly women.

People in the society at large look down on these women, calling them "honeys" (mistresses) and "pan-pan" (whores). Any woman walking with an American soldier is

seen as debased whether the women is truly in love or just pretending to be in love to sell her body. Parents often share this view, and fear that their daughters will be labeled “loose women.”

It is generally assumed in Okinawa that prejudice against women marrying American soldiers was stronger during the years of widespread impoverishment just after the war. But the results of this survey indicate that younger women today more often meet with parental opposition. This is because, unlike nowadays, marriages to “rich” American soldiers in the chaotic postwar period had liberated women from lives of poverty.

Some women who married American soldiers just after the war had lost their parents or husbands in the fighting, and were struggling desperately to support children. These women, among the oldest surveyed, had remarried after they’d lost their first husbands in the war.

In contrast, by the time the younger women in my survey married, Okinawans’ livelihoods had stabilized, and parents, now part of a growing middle class, were sending their children to junior colleges and universities. Children’s futures were their number one concern. With prejudice deeply rooted in Okinawa against women who date American soldiers, some parents couldn’t bear the thought that, even after putting them through college, their daughters were becoming the objects of public scorn.

Moreover, another common prejudice is that any woman who marries an American soldier must have worked in a bar or nightclub. Some of those I interviewed had worked as bar hostesses before marriage. However, a much larger number had jobs on the bases in stores or movie theaters; or, near the bases in tailor shops, beauty parlors, or restaurants. Still, no matter what kind of work she did, a woman walking together with an American soldier was met with disdainful glares.

Family opposition to their marriages caused women much pain. In fact, they were more troubled by feelings of guilt than by worries about moving to a foreign country. It was especially hard for women whose marriages later broke up, just as their families had warned. “I insisted on marrying over their objections, so I couldn’t tell my parents, no matter how much I was suffering,” one woman explained.

Contrary to what is widely believed in Japan, the divorce rate was not especially high compared with that in Japan as a whole, but the rate of re-marriage was higher. The average number of children was two. Many women struggled with language, had faced strong opposition to their marriages from families and relatives, felt a deep attachment to Okinawa, and maintained a close connection to family and relatives there. The majority responded that they intended to remain in the United States in the future, but many younger women said they liked the idea of living in Okinawa, though they were unable to decide at present whether or not to move there.

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(Kōbunken Press, 2000) is translated as *Okinawa's G.I. Brides: Their Lives in America* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017) and is excerpted here.

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Notes

¹ Occupation marriage policies are discussed in Chapter III, “American Soldiers and Okinawan Women.”

² At this time most local posts of veterans organizations in the south were segregated. While this is no longer official policy, many posts throughout the U.S. remain predominantly white or black.

³ See [here](#), March 24, 2011.