



DAUGHTER OF MOLOKA'I

by Alan Brennert

About the Author

- A Conversation with Alan Brennert

Behind the Novel

- Daily Life at Manzanar
- Play Ball! A Conversation with Rosie M. Kakuuchi

Keep On Reading

- Recommended Viewing
- Reading Group Questions

Also available as an audiobook

For more reading group suggestions,
visit www.readinggroupgold.com.

 ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

A
*Reading
Group Gold
Selection*



A Conversation with Alan Brennert

*What inspired you to write a sequel to *Moloka'i*?*

Not long after *Moloka'i* was published, I was speaking to a book club when one of its members asked me, “Have you ever considered telling Ruth’s story?” I had not, and though I found the idea intriguing, so soon after *Moloka'i* I was ready to move on to other subjects. Two books and a decade later, I was talking to my brilliant agent, Molly Friedrich, about an idea I had for another novel when she said, “You know what you should write? You should tell Ruth’s story,” and argued that there was potentially a powerful story there to be told. Well, I don’t need to be hit on the head with an idea a third time! After some initial thought I began to see a perfect three-act structure to Ruth’s life: her childhood in Honolulu and California; her internment during World War II; and the final third of the novel, Ruth’s meeting with Rachel and her 22-year relationship with her birth mother, which had only been alluded to in *Moloka'i*. Two and a half years later, with substantial help in shaping the story from Molly and my editors, Hope Dellon and Elisabeth Dyssegaard, the structure I first envisioned remains.

Was it difficult revisiting characters you’d written over a decade ago?

Quite the opposite; I think they’d been inside my head all along, waiting for the opportunity to tell the rest of their story. When I wrote the first line for Sister Catherine in the prologue, I slipped back into her voice as if no time at all had passed. I did reread *Moloka'i*—for the first time since I’d corrected proofs back in 2002—to reacquaint



myself with key parts of Rachel's life and to listen again to her voice and to that of the adult Ruth. The first dialogue I wrote for Rachel was an extension of a scene in *Moloka'i*, and she just popped out onto the page, casually continuing a conversation begun years earlier.

For Ruth I had to engage in a bit of reverse-engineering, figuring out from her adult self what kind of child she had been, the childhood and life experiences that had shaped her into the person we met in the first book. It was actually quite a satisfying process, filling in those blank spaces of Ruth's past with people, places, and animals. I began to see this not as a sequel *per se*, but as a companion or parallel tale that serves as a complement to *Moloka'i*: together they form one large, overarching, interconnected story.

How was writing *Daughter of Moloka'i* different from writing the first book?

In *Moloka'i*—as in *Honolulu* and *Palisades Park*—I was writing not merely the life story of a person, but the history of a place as well. *Moloka'i* had a large cast of characters dating back to the 1870s in Kalaupapa, long before my protagonist, Rachel, was even born. But since Ruth lives in a variety of locales, *Daughter* is more narrowly focused on her life and the point of view of her and her family. As with *Moloka'i*, there was an intimidating amount of research to be done—into daily life at the Kapi'olani Home for Girls; Florin, California, in the 1920s; and Manzanar and Tanforan relocation centers. At times I felt constrained, not being able to add some interesting historical sidebars because they fell outside the boundaries

*About the
Author*

of Ruth's experience. But what makes Ruth's story so different from Rachel's is the way her life repeatedly turns on a dime: the day Taizo and Etsuko adopt her; their sudden move to California; the jolting loss of her home and freedom; and Rachel's unexpected appearance in her life. It's that ability to cope with the hairpin turns in life, her resiliency, that made her such an interesting character to write, and, I hope, to read about.

What surprised you most about your research into the lives of Japanese immigrants in the early twentieth century?

What struck me most was how similar—depressingly similar—the arguments against Asian immigrants to the U.S. were to those being made against immigrants today. Organizations like the Anti-Japanese League and the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West claimed that Japanese farmers were taking land away from white farmers; in reality the Japanese were leasing or buying poor-quality land that white farmers wouldn't touch and using their intensive farming techniques to make the land productive. Today you hear similar complaints that Latino and other immigrants are taking jobs away from American workers. But many of these jobs don't pay enough for American workers and/or are the kind of backbreaking labor, like picking crops, that most Americans don't want to do.

Back in the 1900s, anti-Asian organizations also claimed that Asian culture and religious beliefs were too “alien” and that Asian immigrants were incapable of being assimilated into American culture. But the second generation of Japanese



immigrants, the Nisei, fully embraced American culture and thought of themselves as Americans.

This only made their internment after Pearl Harbor all the more shocking to them: they were hardworking, law-abiding citizens, yet the government viewed them all as potential spies, security risks. The truth is that during World War II not a single Japanese American in the United States was ever convicted of espionage or sabotage.

Do you see parallels between Japanese Americans in World War II and Muslim Americans today?

Yes, though not exact parallels. No one can deny that there have been a handful of Muslim Americans who have committed terrorist acts against the United States. But the majority of law-abiding Muslim Americans are tarred by the actions of a few and so face prejudice due to their ethnicity and religion. We also hear the old canard that they're not capable of assimilating into American society. I think it's useful to remember that virtually all new immigrant groups—Irish, Italians, Jews, Poles, Germans—faced similar skepticism and prejudice when they first came to this country. And over time those prejudices faded (mostly) and the groups came to be accepted as part of the patchwork quilt we call American culture. There's a bit of hope to be had when you look at it that way.

In all my books I've sought to portray other ethnic groups—Native Hawaiians (as well as Hansen's disease patients) in *Moloka'i*, Koreans in *Honolulu*, African Americans in *Palisades Park*, and the Japanese in this book—in terms that anyone

*About the
Author*

from another culture can relate to and identify with, while treating their cultures with the same respect Americans would want shown to theirs. If a reader comes away from my books with a deeper understanding of our common humanity, then I've accomplished what I set out to do.



ALAN BRENNERT is a novelist, screenwriter, and playwright. He was born in 1954 in Englewood, New Jersey, to Herbert E. Brennert, an aviation writer, and Almyra E. Brennert, an apartment rentals manager. He has lived since 1973 in Southern California, where he received a B.A. in English from California State University at Long Beach and did graduate work at the UCLA film school.

His novel *Moloka'i* was a national bestseller and a One Book, One San Diego selection for 2012. It also received the Bookies Award, sponsored by the Contra Costa Library, for the 2006 Book Club Book of the Year. His next novel, *Honolulu*, won first prize in *Elle* magazine's Literary Grand Prix for Fiction and was named one of the best books of 2009 by *The Washington Post*. Of his novel *Palisades Park*, *People* magazine said, "Brennert writes his valentine to the New Jersey playground of his youth in *Ragtime* style, mixing fact and fiction. It's a memorable ride."

His work as a writer-producer for the television series *L.A. Law* earned him an Emmy Award and a People's Choice Award in 1991. He has been nominated for an Emmy on two other occasions, once for a Golden Globe Award, and three times for the Writers Guild Award for Outstanding Teleplay of the Year. His short story "Ma Qui" was honored with a Nebula Award in 1992, and that same year he co-wrote the libretto for the Alan Menken/David Spencer musical *Weird Romance*, produced by the WPA Theatre in New York and since performed in dozens of regional, high school, and college productions throughout the country. Columbia Records released a soundtrack album in 1993, which is currently available on iTunes.

*Get to
Know the
Author*

 *Daily Life at Manzanar*



Manzanar Relocation Center, as seen from a guard tower. Photograph by Ansel Adams.



Manzanar internee Tōyō Miyatake and family in their barracks room. Photograph by Ansel Adams.

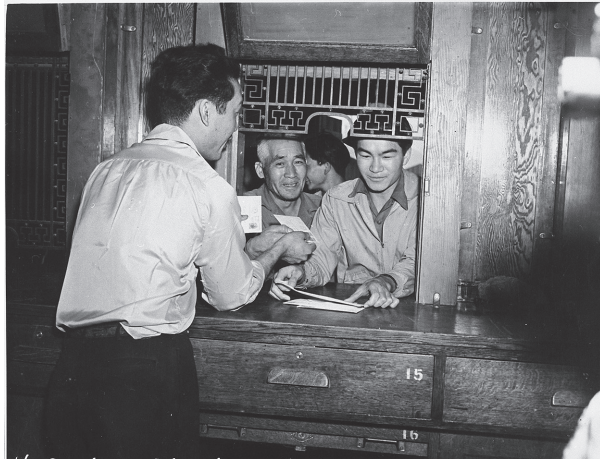


*Agricultural workers in fields outside the camp.
Photograph by Ansel Adams.*



Winter at Manzanar. Photograph by Ansel Adams.

*Behind the
Novel*



Post office. Photograph by Clem Albers.



The Dusty Chicks softball team choosing sides for a practice game. Rosie M.Kakuuchi is fourth from left, wearing a white kerchief. Photograph by Francis Stewart.

Kind permission was granted to reprint these photographs by the Library of Congress (Ansel Adams) as well as the Manzanar National Historic Site and the National Archives and Records Administration (Clem Albers, Francis Stewart).



*Behind the
Novel*



Play Ball! A Conversation with Rosie M. Kakuuchi

Rosie played with the Dusty Chicks, mentioned in chapter 12, one of Manzanar's many women's softball teams.

Were you on any of the baseball teams?

I don't know if you heard of the Dusty Chicks? That was the first softball team that was formed, to my knowledge . . . Yoshio Kusunoki, when she was in elementary school, she was small. Today, she is not too small, but anyway she got the nickname PeeWee, and everyone knows her as PeeWee . . . Chiyo Tashima was known for her bowling. She was a 300 game bowler . . . She was a man's woman, because she played cards with them, but anyway, she was a pitcher and the only open position was catcher. So they said, "You want to be a catcher?" "Sure! All I have to do is catch it, right?" So here I am, and here comes Chiyo pitching. Whoom! it comes. I nearly fell on my butt because she pitches so hard. And I said, "Gee, I don't know if I want to do this."

Our team had Jack Kunitomi's wife, Masa, she was second baseman, a Nisei Week princess, and Mae Noma, who was also a Nisei Week princess, she played third base. So these were kind of glamour people—older age, but they were glamorous. And here PeeWee and I were the two young ones on the team. But we just had a real great time with them.



Did you stay as catcher?

I remained as a catcher.

What else do you remember of who was on the baseball team?

Well, Chiyo's older sister, Misa, was on first base. PeeWee was center field. Alice Yamamoto played left field, and Fuji Kuwahara played right field.

Oh, and then the [camp's] administrative staff, the men, wanted to challenge our team. So we played against them and naturally they hit hard, so the ball went way out in center field. PeeWee caught it and the guy said, "Relocate that gal!" (laughter) 'Cause at that time people were starting to relocate and they were trying to get people out of the camp.

So you were playing the staff hakujins?

Hakujins. We played against them.

And they were all guys?

They were all guys.

And who won?

I think we won. Maybe by one point, or barely. But anyway, all I remember is that guy saying, "Relocate that gal!" (laughter) And I can never forget that. We were so proud of PeeWee because it was way out in center field.

*Behind the
Novel*

What did baseball mean to you?

Baseball, to me and to the camp people, is an American pastime. The final game that they had in Manzanar had the whole camp out there to watch. I think a newspaper from Philadelphia came to publicize our team. And it's in one of the books that's put out on Manzanar.

Rosie M. Kakuuchi, interviewed by Alisa Lynch, 2006, Manzanar Oral History Project Interview #MANZ 1083 (transcript). Reprinted by kind permission of Manzanar National Historic Site, National Park Service. Special thanks to Rosemary Masters.



Recommended Viewing

There are a wealth of nonfiction books available about the Japanese internment, many of which are cited in the Author's Note. But here are some works in other media that can be viewed with your entire family and that present vivid and moving stories of Japanese Americans' experiences in World War II relocation centers.

Farewell to Manzanar was one of the first films about the Japanese internment. A powerful television movie based on the memoir by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, it has rarely been seen since its first airing in 1976. Happily it has recently been released on DVD by the Japanese American National Museum. To order a copy, go to <https://janmstore.com/products/farewell-to-manzanar-dvd>.

Allegiance is a stirring stage musical inspired by the true life experiences of its star, George Takei. It fictionalizes and conflates the draft resistance at Heart Mountain camp with the violence that took place at Tule Lake to create a poignant musical drama about conflict, estrangement, and reconciliation. It is currently playing in theatrical venues across the country and there is also a film of the musical that is presented on special occasions (such as December 7). For information on both stage and film productions, go to <https://allegiancemusical.com>.

Rabbit in the Moon, an award-winning documentary by Emiko Omori, explores not only



*Keep On
Reading*

her family's years at Poston War Relocation Center in Arizona, but takes a wider look at the tensions, divisions, and resistance in the internment camps in general. One of the people interviewed is Harry Ueno, whose arrest sparked the Manzanar riot. It too is available through the Japanese American National Museum at <https://janmstore.com/products/rabbit-in-the-moon-a-documentary-memoir-about-the-world-war-ii-japanese-american-internment>.

The Untold Story: Internment of Japanese Americans in Hawai'i is a documentary by Ryan Kayamoto focusing on the little-known internment camps in Hawai'i, where the majority of Japanese Americans were not interned. The story of those who were—leaders in the Japanese community, Buddhist priests, schoolteachers, often subjected to degrading treatment—has long needed telling. The DVD can be ordered from the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i at <https://www.jcch.com/gift-shop>. (The Hawaiian internment camps were also the subject of a memorable episode of the rebooted *Hawaii Five-O* titled "Ho'onani Makuakane" that aired in 2013 and is available on Netflix.)



Reading Group Questions

1. If you've read *Moloka'i*, you already knew that the U.S. government used to take away the newborn children of Hansen's disease patients out of fear their parents would infect them. If you weren't aware of this, does it shock you to learn of it—and the fact that this practice continued even into the 1950s? What must Ruth's parents have gone through to give up their child?
2. What do animals represent to Ruth?
3. If you were Taizo, would you have accepted Jiro's offer and moved to California? If you were Etsuko, what would your response have been?
4. What is your opinion of Jiro, and did it change in any way over the course of the story?
5. Would it shock you to learn that Joseph Dreesen was based on a real-life person—his name was John Reese—who made public statements about the Japanese similar to those Dreesen makes in this novel? Were you aware of the widespread prejudice that Japanese immigrants faced in the early twentieth century?
6. Were you aware of the way many Japanese Americans lost their homes and jobs when they were “relocated” and interned? Do you believe Executive Order No. 9066 was justified or unjustified?
7. Can you imagine yourself living under the conditions Ruth's family finds themselves living at Tanforan and Manzanar?
8. Who, in your judgment, was at fault in the Manzanar riot—the protesters, the military police, or both?



*Keep On
Reading*

9. If you were a Japanese American being interned during World War II, what would your response have been to the government's "loyalty oath"—Questions 27 and 28—referred to on page 157 of the novel?
10. Did you find Taizo's sense of honor baffling or frustrating? Did you come to understand it better by the end of the story?
11. What would you have done had you been Ruth, suddenly confronted with the news that her birth mother was alive—and that she had Hansen's disease? Would you have agreed to see her, as Ruth does, or not?
12. Compare and contrast the kinds of exile that Rachel and Ruth each experienced. Which would you have found more oppressive?
13. Do you believe Sister Catherine ultimately found peace and was forgiven by her God?
14. How is the Hawaiian phrase "The land is the chief, man is its servant" relevant to us today?
15. How would you have dealt with the secret that Jiro and Nishi tell Ruth? Would you have been as angry as she was, and how difficult would it have been for you to keep the secret?
16. Do you believe Ruth and Peggy actually heard the *huaka'i pō* at Kahakuloa?
17. Would you have done what Rachel does in order to see her great-grandchild?
18. Discuss Ruth's changing views on what it means to be *hapa*. Do you think the peace she finds in it has been well earned?