



# JA LIVING LEGACY. ORG

The real story. Japanese American History told by those who lived it.

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## NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Nikkei Writers Guild**

Japanese American Living Legacy began in 2005 with the mission to document Nikkei history by those who lived it. Our volunteer team spent many weekends and nights traveling to people's homes to record personal testimonies and memories. This remains the core of the organization's work; however, our consistent proximity to the community reveals many challenges that Nikkei routinely face. In fact, the "birth" of Nikkei Writers Guild arose during one of JA Living Legacy's earliest oral histories.

In 2007, Susan Uyemura had the opportunity to interview Vincent H. Okamoto, a Superior Court Judge and a Vietnam combat veteran. During the oral history, Okamoto mentioned that he had written a novel based on his personal experiences in Vietnam. Uyemura asked if she could read the manuscript since she wanted to learn more about the Vietnam War. He reluctantly agreed on the premise that she would provide feedback about his writing. Okamoto had previously sent his manuscript to a few publishers, but all of them had refused to publish his work for various reasons. Uyemura found the manuscript engaging and finished it in a day. She took Okamoto's novel to military history professor, Dr. Gordon M. Bakken at California State University, Fullerton; she wanted Dr. Bakken's opinion. Bakken agreed with Uyemura that this book should be published. It was the only book of its kind that discussed the Vietnam War from a Nikkei soldier's perspective. Bakken had published over twenty military history books but none of those were memoirs, novels or non-fiction; they were military textbooks. Nonetheless, Dr. Bakken made some phone calls. He received two positive-interest callbacks but the deal was that a lot would have to be changed beginning with the title "Behold Thy Son" to "Wolfhound Samurai" as well as chapter edits. While Okamoto didn't mind the title change, he rejected other "required edits" citing that those details were essential to his story.

Uyemura pondered, "Why can't a publisher and an author work together to produce a book without demanding ultimatums?" Friends of Uyemura who worked in the publishing business, reinforced that it is usually the publisher who controls the scripts, title, marketing, sales since the publisher carries all of the liability. However, after a year of negotiating with other publishers, it became clear to Uyemura that Okamoto's book would not get published unless she took it upon herself to publish it. Uyemura then

asked her JA Living Legacy board to form the Nikkei Writers Guild publishing wing of the organization. Nikkei Writers Guild did not have funds to pay the printer at the time, let alone any of the other costs associated with publishing a book. Regardless, Uyemura decided that the book needed to be published and it needed to be the book that Okamoto wanted published. Nikkei Writers Guild needed to find a way to make it happen.

Uyemura approached John Iwakiri from J & L Press in Glendale to work with JA Living Legacy on a payment schedule; he graciously agreed. Uyemura's first step was to offer Okamoto's book during a pre-publishing sale; i.e., taking orders for books that were not yet published. Presale orders covered more than half of the cost of printing. Uyemura designed the layout and shipped it off for press. Nikkei Writers Guild sponsored two book signings within a month of publishing the book. With a better than expected initial sale of the books and a generous donation from the Uchima Foundation, Nikkei Writers Guild paid-off the printer's entire tab. Nikkei Writers Guild sold out of hard copies almost immediately; paperbacks continue to sell.

After the publication of *Wolfhound Samurai*, Nikkei Writers Guild started receiving inquiries on other publishing requests. After hearing from various individuals who had also been rejected from mainstream publishers it became clear there were plenty of stories that were never going to be told unless Nikkei Writers Guild took the lead and published them. It takes significant funding to produce a single book; even though staff volunteers edit, design, and conducts book sales, the printer must still be paid. Thanks to some strong community benefactors, Nikkei Writers Guild has completed six publications with many more on the way.

Here is a brief list of Nikkei Writers Guild's publications:

- Wolfhound Samurai by Vincent H. Okamoto
- From the Battlefields to the Home Front: The Kazuo Masuda Legacy by Russell Shoho
- Talk Story by Ted Miyamoto
- SEINAN – Southwest Los Angeles by Ansho Uchima and Min Shinmoto
- Nikkei Generals and Admirals by Ansho Uchima and Min Shinmoto
- Go For Broke! Me and the War by Isami "Mike" Tsuji

A brief synopsis of each of Nikkei Writers Guild publications are available on the JA Living Legacy website: [www.jalivinglegacy.org](http://www.jalivinglegacy.org). Books are available for purchase online and at local book stores in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo.

Japanese American Living Legacy is a California Nonprofit 501c.3 organization based out of California State University, Fullerton. All of the board of directors, staff and advisors are volunteers. For more information on Japanese American Living Legacy, please visit their website at [www.jalivinglegacy.org](http://www.jalivinglegacy.org) or call them at (714) 515-5501.