



Inside
FISH FOR JIMMY:
Inspired by One Family's
Experience in a Japanese
American Internment Camp

A Conversation with
Katie Yamasaki

Q: *We know you're a busy teacher, muralist, and author-illustrator, but when you do find time, what are your favorite hobbies?*

A: Travel! Also, Swimming, salsa dancing, time with friends and family, piñata making, sewing, and riding my bike.

Q: *Tell us about **FISH FOR JIMMY: Inspired by One Family's Experience in a Japanese American Internment Camp.***

A: *Fish for Jimmy* tells the story of two young brothers in the Japanese American internment camps of WWII. When Jimmy, Taro's younger brother, stops eating upon arrival at the camp, Taro must take extraordinary, risky measures to care for him.

Q: *What was the inspiration behind the book?*

A: The book was inspired by a true family story. In the real story, my grandfather's uncle snuck out of the camp when his very young son refused the food. It was also inspired by growing up in a very anti-Japanese climate where the internment was never taught or acknowledged. Many bits and pieces of many family stories have been combined to create this book.

Q: *What makes this book special to you? What important message do you feel it brings to young readers?*

A: This book is special to me because it tells a largely untold piece of not just my own family history, but of American history. Every day I meet people who had never even heard about the internment and the consequences it had for hundreds of thousands of lives spanning generations. I hope that the book shows the special bond between brothers and how children endure difficult circumstances with a lot of grace. I also hope it reminds kids to look deeply into the past and not be shy to ask questions to find a bigger, more truthful picture of our collective history.

Q: *What was your favorite book growing up?*

A: I love everything by Tomie dePaola, the Arthur series, *Blueberries for Sal*, Berenstain Bears, and a book my aunt sent from San Francisco Chinatown called *Sisters of the Grassland*.

Q: *What is your favorite memory from childhood?*

A: I grew up in a true community, made up of about four families and ten kids. We were always together in a group. Every week we ate dinner together at a different family's home and every week, there was a different adventure. Sometimes the kids put on comedy shows, sometimes we played in our outdoor "fort." One time, in the middle of winter, we made a beach upstairs in the bedroom I shared with my sister. We put on our swimsuits and filled the beds (covered with plastic sheets) with water. We had the best time! Until the water leaked downstairs . . .

Q: *Did you have any pets growing-up? If so, which one was your favorite?*

A: I had a few guinea pigs. . . . Coco, named after a dancer from the TV show *Fame*, Monkey, named after the one that I really wanted to buy but had been already sold when we got back to the pet store, and our family cat named Yuki. Yuki had a snow white fluffy chest—and Yuki means snow in Japanese.

Q: *What inspired you to write and illustrate and when did you know you would become an author/illustrator?*

A: I always really felt there was a lack of Japanese American literature growing up. I never felt like there was anything that represented my family's history in school and I wanted to change that, but I didn't know how. I started drawing, really studying art, when I was 19. I was terrible—worst in my college class, but I loved it. I saw it as a way to tell stories, tell my family's story. The icing on the cake was having an internship with Ed Young in the summer between my Junior-Senior years of college. I cataloged all of his work— over 80 books at that time. Watching his process, as I recorded all of the pieces, was beyond inspirational.

Q: *List your three favorite author/illustrators:*

A: Ed Young
Leo and Diane Dillon
Ezra Jack Keats

Q: *What books have you most wanted to read, but haven't yet?*

A: Too many to list! For starters, Zadie Smith's new book, *NW*. I also haven't read *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* yet—saw the movie, but haven't read the book. That is also on the list.

Q: *What book from your childhood changed your life? Adulthood?*

A: The books that changed my life were Ed Young's sketchbooks. When I was working for him as an intern, I had the amazing opportunity to go through them all to add them to the archive. What inspired me most was that his sketchbooks were full of not only amazing beautiful drawings, but also of drawings that were not so "good." Before that, I was under the impression that "good" artists only made "good" drawings. He laughed when I told him that and said that the process he goes through to get to the finished, beautiful pieces is full of sloppy, messy, mistake-ridden drawings. It made drawing, and all of my millions of "bad" drawings, somehow feel like just part of my process.

Q: *Who is your favorite children's book character and why?*

A: I would have to say that Big Anthony by Tomie dePaola is my favorite character. He is so human—so full of good intention, and so full of mistakes!

Q: *If you could live in any book, which would it be?*

A: I would like to live in *Sector 7* by David Weisner. I love the sky and all of its dramatic exhibits! The idea of a visit to a cloud factory is magnificent to me.

Q: *If you could have a magical talent, what would it be?*

A: I would love to be able to teleport through time and space. Some nights when I work late in my studio, I'd love to be able to just teleport myself back to my bed and skip the late-night subway ride. Other times, I would like to teleport back in time to be able to have real conversations with my grandparents when they were my age.

Q: *What is your favorite food?*

A: I love Japanese food, and I love most things that have to do with coconut. I also love dark chocolate and homemade dill pickles. I don't know if I can pick one favorite food! My mom also makes a pear tart that I love.

Q: *Have your tastes changed since childhood?*

A: I once ate an entire jar of pickles by myself when I was a kid. So no, not that much :-). We ate very simple Japanese food cooked at home growing up; and now, living in NYC, I have the opportunity to try a much broader range of Japanese foods, which is fun.

Q: *What food did you hate growing up but came to love in adulthood?*

A: I was never a fussy eater growing up—the only thing I didn't like were mushrooms. Now I like them about 40 percent more, but not the slimy ones.

Q: *Who was your hero growing up? Who is it now?*

A: Growing up, I always looked up to my mom. I also admired Mother Teresa and many players from the Detroit Tigers and Detroit Pistons teams. And Whitney Houston.

Now . . . It's still my mom, but also my dad. And I really love Arundhati Roy, Michelle Obama, and Eve Ensler.

Q: *If there is one thing you could tell your readers about life, what would you say?*

A: I would say to never minimize or underestimate the power of the human spirit—including your own. I've worked around the world in some pretty difficult places. And I am inspired every day by the tenacity of the human spirit. It continues to be triumphant against remarkable odds.



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