

IN MEMORIAM

MARION D. HANKS
AND CHIEKO N. OKAZAKI

Among the First

by J. Frederick (Toby) Pingree

J. FREDERICK (TOBY) PINGREE is a lifelong disciple of Elder Hanks, and, under Hanks' personal endorsement, has served as chair of the Sunstone Board of Directors.

ALONG WITH NEWS of this beloved Church leader's death came much well-deserved recognition of the extraordinary fullness of the life he'd lived. Collectively, those who had known him hailed Elder Hanks as a genuine "Man for All Seasons"—an author and scholar, a remarkable humanitarian, an accomplished athlete, an advisor to five U.S. presidents, a Boy Scout in the truest sense, a general authority for five decades, a mission president, a temple president, a *New Era* editor, a counselor to and leader of governmental and international service organizations—the list could go on. He personified what being a disciple of Christ means: reaching out to embrace and lift the poor and downtrodden, standing up to the proud and the mighty, sharing testimony of Christ at all times and in all places, rendering service whether recognized or not, giving liberally to worthy causes.

But my recognition of Duff Hanks' legacy is personal and intimate: how my life was influenced by 63 years of association with the man. In the fall of 1947, I entered Salt Lake's West High School and grudgingly enrolled in early morning seminary. While completing his law degree at the University of Utah, Duff (as we always called him) was our teacher, and it was his first year on the job. From the beginning, all of my reservations about seminary—and those of my callow comrades—evaporated as our teacher worked to know us each personally, treated us like peers, and talked thoughtfully and poignantly of the Savior and of prophets, both ancient and modern.

I could be a firebrand, and one day I accosted a sociology teacher about his alleged affiliation with the Communist Party. I think Duff thought my aggressive behavior was juvenile, but during the next class, he commented on it in such a way that I felt validated for being willing to take on an established authority figure when I sincerely perceived a threat to our way of government.

But he also challenged me in subtle but enduring ways. One day, he told us about a family of African-Americans who had joined the Church prior to his arrival in Cincinnati as a missionary. Perceiving that their attendance caused a conspicuous decline in participation by white folks, they had stopped coming to services. Each Sunday thereafter, Elder Hanks and fellow missionaries traveled to the family's farm outside of town to hold sacrament meeting with them. As I listened, a keen feeling settled on my heart that something *was not right*. In telling the story, Duff said nothing derogatory about the Church nor its members, but I sensed that he had been quietly protesting. Duff's powerful, unadorned tale of good faith and steadfastness in the face of injustice would encourage and console me years later when my disagreement with the Church establishment on blacks and the priesthood came close to open rebellion.

Naturally, my intense, constant relationship with Duff at West High diminished significantly when I moved on to the University of Utah. But later, he became part of that era's fabled University of Utah Institute of Religion faculty, along with Lowell Bennion, T. Edgar Lyon, and George Boyd—a group of L.D.S. Church teachers that Sterling McMurrin considered the finest ever assembled. Although Duff's classes were invariably overenrolled, I managed to gain entry to a few. But the demands of university teaching and "General Authoritying" in his life, along with my growing involvement in university life, meant that our paths crossed less and less frequently.

The years passed, and I moved around the world—to the mission field, military service, graduate school, four different work locations outside of Utah, and a mission presidency. My contact with Duff was occasional and usually brief, occurring when he would tour a mission in my locale, preside at a stake conference in my area, or address a professional group with which I was affiliated. No matter how brief or intermittent the contact, however, Duff always treated me with the same graciousness and dignity that I remembered from those West High seminary days.

Through the years, Duff became a well-known and highly respected person within the Church and throughout the world. His general conference talks were eagerly anticipated, and requests for his time and talents came from all quarters. The special competence he demonstrated in many fields over the years, and the relatively young age (31) at which he had been called as a general authority, led many to expect that he would one day ascend the Church ladder and become an apostle, much as had Richard L. Evans, whom Duff had succeeded among the seven presidents of the Seventy in 1953.

But it wasn't to be: Duff was released to emeritus status around age 70, the now-prescribed retirement time for Quorum of Seventy members. Though it was never verified, a rumor grew in Church gossip circles that Duff had incurred the displeasure of one or more of those at the top of the Church hierarchy



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by challenging certain orthodoxies.

The last time I met with Duff was in the lobby of the Joseph Smith Building (formerly Hotel Utah). He was well past retirement and showing signs of age. He told me of many of his experiences with other Church authorities, remarking that in the years before blacks had been given full fellowship in the Church, many of his Church colleagues had struggled as he had with this gross inequity, hoping and praying for its resolution. He described the deep personal satisfaction he'd felt at being able to represent the Lord in many places, under a wide range of circumstances, to diverse people of all races, social strata, nations, and religious persuasions.

As we parted, I had the temerity to ask him why, in his view and considering his great influence and longevity as a general authority, he had not risen to a more prominent Church position. He smiled, and mildly chastened me with a statement that "one serves in the Lord's Church where and when one is called, and for long as one is called."

Then, after a pause, and with a twinkle in his eye, he ventured that the Lord had not selected him for further advancement because "He knew me too well and loved me too much." I do not know whether it was the Lord who chose not to elevate Duff in this mortal context, but I am certain to my core that among those who are chosen to be known and loved by the Lord, Marion Duff Hanks is among the first.



CHIEKO NISHIMURA OKAZAKI

Coming Home

by Paula Jensen Goodfellow

PAULA JENSEN GOODFELLOW, one of the founding mothers of the DAM Women Retreat (www.rockymountainretreat.org), recently completed an MA in speech-language pathology. If Mormon tchotchke makers sold bracelets that read "WWCD" (What would Chieko do?), Paula would totally buy one

IN THE EARLY 1990s, I lived in Westminster, Colorado, a suburb of Denver. In those dark days of dial-up modems and primitive web browsers, we felt relatively isolated from events in Utah. Despite this disconnection, I began to hear news from friends about the new Relief Society presidency. They were feisty, independent, well-educated women. My friend in New Mexico said that Sister Okazaki, the new first counselor, had visited her stake and that she was an incredibly strong speaker with a very personable manner.

A few months later, I heard that Sister Okazaki was coming to our stake. I was sure there would be a big crowd, so I arrived early. Very early. Early enough that I actually crashed the leadership meeting before the main meeting.

I saw Chieko standing at the pulpit: a tiny woman wearing a simple fuchsia dress. During the question and answer session, it became clear that her outward appearance masked an intelligent, caring, and strong woman. When male leaders asked questions, she didn't use the cloying, high-pitched, unsure Relief Society voice; she didn't defer to them. Instead she told the leaders directly, clearly, and strongly what they should do. When a Relief Society president asked for guidance on working with her bishopric, Sister Okazaki told the woman to go back to her leaders and tell them what she needed from them and to explain how it should be done.

At one point during the main meeting, I was startled and pleased to realize that she was quoting from *Exponent II*. And as she spoke, she leaned forward, gripping the podium, stating her message forcefully. Her talk was grounded in the teachings of Jesus, emphasizing kindness and love. She urged us to not be so hard on ourselves. She was pleased with us as we were.

Listening to this woman speak, I felt as if—having been trapped for many years on another planet—I had finally received the message that it was time to come home. I

felt more hope for women in the Church that day than ever before.

A few years later, she came to the Rocky Mountain Retreat for LDS Women. Although she was there as the keynote speaker, she didn't hold herself apart from the rest of us. I saw her spending hours talking with the women there, listening to them, and sharing her own opinions.

Sister Okazaki made the Church a better place because she was not submissive and deferential but took herself seriously as a daughter of God. She amplified her talents much as did the faithful servant in Jesus's parable. Here's to many more Mormon women like her.

Breaking Free of Cookie-Cutter Mormonism

by Mary Ellen Robertson

MARY ELLEN ROBERTSON is Sunstone's director of outreach and symposia and was the first LDS woman to complete the women's studies in religion MA program at Claremont Graduate School.

CHIEKO OKAZAKI'S SEVEN-YEAR tenure in the General Relief Society Presidency (March 1990–April 1997) coincided with my progress into adulthood—my last two years of college, my post-graduation wanderings, my acceptance into Claremont Graduate School's women's studies in religion program, connecting with like-minded Mormons via email lists, and figuring out life as a single LDS woman.

Chieko's talks were always a highlight in general conference—engaging, instructive, and, for me, the equivalent of a window being thrown open to air a stuffy room. Likewise, her books were a source of inspiration and instruction, liberally seasoned with humor, grace, and realism.

Six months after her release from the General Relief Society Presidency, Chieko spoke at a four-stake women's conference in Pasadena, California. This was my first and only experience hearing Chieko speak live—and uncorrelated. The chapel and cultural hall were packed with women eager to hear her.

The conference theme was "Discover the Joy," based on D&C 42:61: "If thou

shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”

Chieko began by holding up four cookie cutters and asking the congregation what they thought cookie cutters had to do with joy. Many associated them with the warmth of cooking and raising children.

Chieko said we get many promissory notes at Church: If we have family home evening, our kids will get along. If we're obedient, we'll be happy. If we work harder, do better, or do things more times, we'll be blessed. She pointed out that the scripture the conference theme was based on focused on gospel basics—not all the things we're *supposed* to do.

She described things that are supposed to bring women joy. Mothers, for example, are supposed to find total joy and fulfillment in bearing and raising children; single women are supposed to find joy in preparing to marry and have families; widows like herself are supposed to find joy in enduring to the end.

Chieko compared these ideals to a café's Blue Plate Special and worried that women in the Church are too often presented with a meal or a message that may not fill their actual needs. The problem with messages delivered like Blue Plate Specials is that they don't treat women as individuals. Chieko wondered if others felt as she did sometimes—she doesn't *want* one more Blue Plate Special and feels like she'll gag on what someone else is trying to feed her. (At this point, it was difficult for me to restrain the impulse to stand and cheer).

Chieko returned to her original analogy, saying that we sometimes try to live cookie cutter lives, and a time can come when those boundaries don't feel good anymore. That's when we need personal revelation from our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. We shouldn't lop parts of ourselves off in order to fit someone else's prescribed shape.

In other words, cookie cutters are for cookies—not human beings; we should not try to live someone else's life or pray someone else's prayer. She tossed the cookie cutters into the audience for people to keep and remember the message: women are individuals with individual needs.

She said that if any of us felt useless, worthless, unloved, or sad, to get help from the Lord, the Relief Society president, the bishop, family, or a therapist—make a change. You *are worth* rearranging the envi-

ronment for, she insisted.

I spent the conference taking notes, trying to keep up with Chieko's brilliant stream of ideas. A few days later, I typed the notes and emailed them far and wide. Such wisdom deserved wide circulation.

The feedback was immediate from all quarters:

“This summary is something I can pass on to three women friends in need *today*.”

“What a relief to hear something beyond ‘have faith’ and ‘write in your journals.’”

“Chieko speaks right where women are: none of this ‘humble yourselves and follow the formula’ stuff, because she knows that women need a much different message.”

“What a stunningly beautiful and powerful address. I've been trying to think why it hit me so hard. That rare combination of honesty, good sense, and the gospel?”

When news of Chieko's 2 August 2011 passing began to circulate, a friend wrote to say she remembered my notes from this talk and lamented that Chieko was gone.

I attended Chieko's memorial service in Salt Lake on 10 August 2011. I felt her loss keenly, as I'm sure thousands of LDS women did who had been spiritually fed by her life's work. I was grateful that she conveyed through her words and by her example that there is more than one way to be an LDS woman and that joy comes from developing a firsthand, personal, intimate, daily relationship with Jesus Christ.

The First and Last Time with Chieko

by Phyllis Barber

PHYLLIS BARBER is most recently the author of *Raw Edges: A Memoir* (University of Nevada Press). Her essay, “The Knife Handler,” published in *AGNI* 71, was noted in *The Best American Essays 2011* and *The Best American Travel Writing 2011*.

IN 1997, AT the Snow Mountain Retreat near Granby, Colorado, I met Chieko. For the first and last time. Even though this was my single encounter with this graceful, elegant, almost mystical woman, the meeting made a large imprint on my mind.

We were both speakers at the Denver Area Mormon (DAM) Women's Retreat. At the time, I considered myself a misunderstood, rebel/fringe item who was in a

like/dislike relationship with my Mormon, all-encompassing, surround-sound upbringing—and my public remarks reflected that state of mind, that uncertainty, that internal debate.

Sometime after my speech, I stood looking through a window at the outlines of the black pine trees stark against the sky as the sun slipped past the horizon. Chieko came up to me, having heard my words and read my writing. The gently observant woman said something to the effect of: “You have some issues with Mormonism, don't you?”

“Yes, I do,” I said bluntly, having long ago given up any pretense.

“But you're not bitter or anti. You have a deep yearning for the truth and for God. And it's all right to take issue with Mormonism. I, too, have my differences.”

This conversation had taken a turn from what I'd expected from someone who'd been in the presidency of the General Relief Society. (Later, though, I heard Chieko voice her discouragement with the way the Church approaches homosexuality, and better understood her words.)

She continued, “The Church needs you, needs your mind and your perceptions. Don't go away. Stay.”

I looked into her eyes, and for one moment, felt *déjà vu* trickling through my veins. Somewhere, long ago, on some high misty mountain in Japan, perhaps. A wise woman with long gray hair falling over her shoulders; small wooden sandals that sounded in the quiet; a purple obi tied around her long kimono. A fleeting image in the shifting mist. We both turned to other people waiting to have conversations, but I felt as if a thread had tied itself to me, a thread that connected us.

Chieko's words have returned to me many times when I've felt there was no place for me on the pews of my ward or on the Church's membership rolls; words spoken in the high mountains of Colorado as the sun set behind jagged peaks.

