



## A Sky of Infinite Blue: A Japanese Immigrant's Search for Home and Self

**Kyomi O'Connor**

She Writes Press (Sep 6, 2022)

Softcover \$17.95 (301pp)

978-1-64742-227-1

*Quiet, meditative, and graceful, the memoir A Sky of Infinite Blue intertwines a spiritual journey with the personal pursuit of freedom.*

Kyomi O'Connor's elegant memoir *A Sky of Infinite Blue* is about an immigrant's grief; it spans two continents and cultures.

The memoir begins with O'Connor tending to her husband, Patrick, during his final hours at their home in Southern California. Practicing the rituals they'd shared as devoted members of a Buddhist teaching soothed her during the death process. But after Patrick's funeral, O'Connor faced inner conflicts: "on the one hand, I felt I should accept Patrick's death; on the other, I felt compelled to deny the fact entirely. These warring feelings were tearing me apart." In response, she unconsciously activated the psychological armor that she had relied on all her life.

From there, O'Connor's story leaps backward to her childhood in Japan, explaining how her "armor" grew to protect her from generational trauma. It ultimately limited her relationships as a young woman, too. The narrative's leap is effective at creating suspense about why O'Connor emigrated to the United States, and about how she came to meet Patrick.

Moment-by-moment scenes of O'Connor's interactions with her loved ones are balanced with efficient summaries that provide context for the relationships. Dialogue is a strong point in the memoir; individual people are distinguished from one another by how they speak, in addition to what they say. Dialogue attributed to O'Connor's mother, for example, uses repetition that adds a plaintive tone to her complaints.

O'Connor's frequent use of metaphors and similes adds vibrancy to her scenes. When her husband becomes disappointed with a job, for example, she tells herself that "lotus flowers can bloom out of muddy water—what is sacred can flower out of the mundane." The book benefits from O'Connor's bicultural perspective, which brings complexity to her family relationships and rituals, along with a rich library of images.

The recursive nature of spiritual practice is an overarching theme, too: in the teaching that O'Connor follows, meditation is a precursor to action, with the understanding that practitioners will not always live up to the guidance they receive through their meditations. People learn how to be compassionate in meditation, they try to act with compassion, they fail, and they learn more and try again. The process is reminiscent of how long-term relationships like marriage require continual reconnection and recommitment. It's also reminiscent of the process of personal growth.

Exploring how human beings retreat into familiar yet unhealthy relationship patterns in the contexts of childhood, marriage, and grief, the memoir *A Sky of Infinite Blue* stands as a testament to the power of self-examination and spiritual practice.

MICHELE SHARPE (April 25, 2022)

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