



Last Boat to Yokohama: The Life and Legacy of Beate Sirota Gordon

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Women's rights activist Beate Sirota Gordon's passion for bridging cultures is clearly evoked through this fascinating tribute to her work.

Nassrine Azimi and Michel Wasserman pay tribute to Beate Sirota Gordon, champion of the arts and part of the American team who developed Japan's postwar constitution under General MacArthur. Gordon's story highlights her sustaining belief in making human connections. With a prismatic approach that includes remarks from Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, an interview with Gordon, journal entries by Gordon's mother, and other sources, *Last Boat to Yokohama: The Life and Legacy of Beate Sirota Gordon* gathers respectful reflections that shed light on a specific moment in history and on one woman's remarkable career.

At the age of twenty-two, Sirota Gordon penned the words that would mark her as a beloved figure among Japanese women. *Last Boat to Yokohama* quietly emphasizes the importance of the constitutional article that granted legal rights concerning marriage, divorce, property, and inheritance that hadn't existed in the once-feudal society. When the authors note how Japan's postwar constitution has inspired other countries emerging from war, the impact of Sirota Gordon's efforts is especially felt.

Amid the story of Sirota Gordon's unlikely role working under the occupation lies an intriguing glimpse at her childhood in Japan, her parents' experiences during the war, her father's path as a concert pianist, and Sirota Gordon's later involvement in bringing Asian performers to the US. Threads spanning the 1940s are particularly compelling for their portrayal of foreigners' daily lives in Japan. The clear, well-paced writing maintains the focus and interest of a solid, extended magazine profile.

Despite the elegiac nature of such a compilation, the book does not dwell on hardship and consistently reveals its subject's optimism. Sirota Gordon's passion for bridging cultures is clearly evoked through accounts of her travels. *Last Boat to Yokohama* offers just enough detail to inspire readers to seek Sirota Gordon's own biography, *The Only Woman in the Room: A Memoir of Japan, Human Rights, and the Arts*.

KAREN RIGBY (Summer 2015)

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