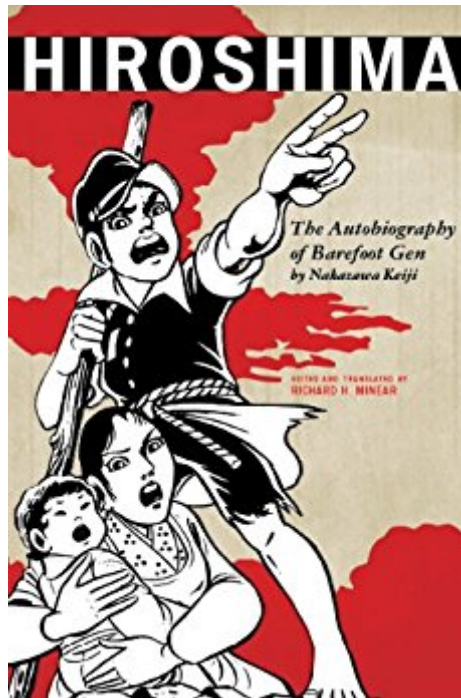


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Hiroshima: The Autobiography Of Barefoot Gen (Asian Voices)



Synopsis

This compelling autobiography tells the life story of famed manga artist Nakazawa Keiji. Born in Hiroshima in 1939, Nakazawa was six years old when on August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bomb. His gritty and stunning account of the horrific aftermath is powerfully told through the eyes of a child who lost most of his family and neighbors. In eminently readable and beautifully translated prose, the narrative continues through the brutally difficult years immediately after the war, his art apprenticeship in Tokyo, his pioneering "atomic-bomb" manga, and the creation of Barefoot Gen, the classic graphic novel based on Nakazawa's experiences before, during, and after the bomb. This first English-language translation of Nakazawa's autobiography includes twenty pages of excerpts from Barefoot Gen to give readers who don't know the manga a taste of its power and scope. A recent interview with the author brings his life up to the present. His trenchant hostility to Japanese imperialism, the emperor and the emperor system, and U.S. policy adds important nuance to the debate over Hiroshima. Despite the grimness of his early life, Nakazawa never succumbs to pessimism or defeatism. His trademark optimism and activism shine through in this inspirational work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I really enjoyed this book, and found it to help fill the gaps in the comic series. (I read all 10.) It was nice to read this text-only autobiography, because the author could get into a deeper place with the things that happened, in ways you cannot when tied to the visual medium. For instance, in the manga, the author must have a character explain openly the motives of a person, when in text, this can remain as inner thoughts, not spoken aloud. Because of this, the book felt richer in some ways than the manga. It was also good to learn exactly where the author took liberties to keep the manga flowing -- in short, I was glad to get the facts straight. I agree with a few other reviewers that the prose of the book itself was a bit lacking -- it helps to know this ahead of time and ignore it. It felt like the English translator either spoke Japanese as his first language, or got caught up with the choppy nature of translation, and didn't go back to smooth things into a more English-style of writing. Only very occasionally were there moments of "poetry" where a few lovely metaphors came through -- it made me wonder if the original was more beautiful to read. Overall, I'm very glad I read it. If you are a fan of the comics, then this is a must-read.

If you have read the Barefoot Gen books or seen the films, 1 & 2, you must have had many questions about the author, Keiji Nakazawa's, life. Was life really that tough in Japan before August 6, 1945? What was Gen's father doing home instead of fighting the war? Was it all really true, about siblings and father and mother? What did artistic license allow Nakazawa to include and leave out? Did Gen marry, have children? What does "Gen" really feel about the "Imperial system?" How difficult was it in Japan to tell the truth about what really happened to the city of Hiroshima and its people under the atomic bomb explosion and in the aftermath? Would you marry an atomic bomb victim? This is an excellent book for adults and younger people who wish to know the truth about what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And then to consider what is right for the world. This story of the "real Gen" needed to be told. Richard Minear has done a great job editing and translating. Keiji Nakazawa died December 19, 2012, at age 73.

The writing isn't stellar -- that, or the translator/editor did an extremely poor job with it. However, it's valuable and interesting as a historical document about the atomic bombings from the Japanese perspective.

You don't need to read Barefoot Gen to appreciate this book. It's heartbreaking, beautiful, passionate and a powerful salute to the human spirit. I read it in less than an afternoon and felt like

a different person when I was finished. It's THAT moving.

Great gift.

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