

"According to *Road of Flowers*, Mr. Kawashima's life has been a tremendous one."

-Hakubu Shimomura, *Minister of Education*

"I hope as many people as possible read his book to gain a better understanding of courage and to dream of a better future."

-Tadao Chiba, *Denmark-Japan Social Living Institute*

"Describing his life full of vicissitude, *Camino de Flor* is, so to speak, an autographic story and persuades us that nothing is impossible for a person who has a strong will."

-Dr. Gregory of Tokyo University

Life is a drama. Each person has their own drama and lives according to scenarios bestowed upon us by God.

God bestows a simple life to some and tremendous drama to others. Whatever scenario a person faces, as long as we give all effort, we are all equally successful.

In my case, being innocent and naïve, I was faced with tremendous drama throughout my life. These experiences made me into the person I am today.



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ROAD
of
FLOWERS

MASAHITO
KAWASHIMA

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MASAHITO KAWASHIMA

RECOMMENDATION

from DR. GREGORY

The Book and the Hazard

Once, searching in a certain library, a book entitled *Camino de Flor* (*Road of Flowers*) attracted my attention. The note on the back cover described an ample vision of the courage, force, and determination needed to succeed in getting out of difficult circumstances.

I started reading, caught by the eloquent sincerity and the lingual frankness shown by the people who had experienced and left poverty-stricken lives. Therefore, I was impressed with the story of Masahito Kawashima, a young man who decided to immigrate to Argentina at the age of nineteen.

Turning over the pages, I began to unravel the tangled threads of the life story describing above all the ups and downs of life of a person secluded in the two geographically remote regions of Japan and Argentina.

Camino de Flor is practically a testimony you can read as a report of adventures. It is also the voice of a survivor for whom life was meaning-

ful when he could follow his own will. However, this may go together with sacrifice, silence, and the possibility of defeat.

The Reader and the Author

When I was chatting with a girlfriend one evening in a coffee shop, the name Masahito Kawashima came up. He was her acquaintance. This unexpected fact permitted me to know the author of this book. I finished reading. Then we resumed our ordinary conversation.

Thanks to this friendship, I learned about other details surrounding that young man's decision, at the age of nineteen, to prematurely terminate his preparatory studies, intending to get into the world.

In those days, Kawashima had no knowledge of Spanish or Latin American life. However, he embarked on a voyage of forty-two days from the port of Yokohama to Buenos Aires.

He boarded the "Argentinamaru," together with a group of young people who also sought a distinct future. They confronted the stern realities of life in Japan because of unemployment and shortage of materials after the war.

Like any start, when he reached his destination, he found nothing easy. As an apprentice

he had to get accustomed to the tiring work of cultivating flowers in the sun. He learned basic Spanish words and the principles of coexistence between laborers and owners. Accordingly, he began to understand a vision of the world.

At the age of nineteen, he cherished a strong desire to overcome the difficulties and, among other things, a grandiose determination to achieve his dreams. Thus, he decided to learn the culture and the language of the country where he landed. He entered a night school he had to attend by walking many kilometers because no one helped him commute.

He was not defeated by exhausting work of digging holes in the fields every day. At that time in Argentina, flower culture was a prosperous business. This first work gave him a handful of possibilities his parents and many Japanese people of the same generation could not exploit because they were left in the depth of distress after the war ended in 1945 under the attack of A-bombs.

start of the journey

His father had migrated to China, where at that time two million Japanese were working. However, they were compelled to go back to Japan after the lost war. In these circumstances, Masahito was born as the second son and the third of

five siblings. In Japan the nationality of the parents determines that of the children instead of the birthplace. His father also had left Japan in the hope of making a fortune and now returned, together with his newly formed family, forced not only by the military and political defeat of their country but also by the moral defeat by which they were left to overcome mentally. Because of this, his father was too depressed to recover his strength and undertake his business. Accordingly, his mother had to assume the responsibility to raise her children, settle her repatriated family, and seek a job. She began to cultivate and sell seashells at the bay of Inage, Chiba prefecture, near Tokyo.

Under these circumstances, Masahito grew up and received primary and secondary education through his mother's assistance. The young man excelled in sports and was an honor student and entered Chiba Preparatory School. However, he realized it was too difficult for him to proceed with college education because of insufficient family finance.

He obtained information that some young men were preparing to leave Japan in order to realize their dreams in other countries. Among other things, he chose to take an intensive course of three months to learn some agricultural techniques and migrate to Argentina where farmhands were needed.

But he tested his physical strength going on a walk from Chiba to Hakone through Tokyo, a distance of two hundred kilometers. He took no money and had to survive by himself with only three onigiri (rice balls) as nourishment. It lasted five days and he slept outside almost always out in the open. This not only proved his physical fortitude but also ascertained the constancy of his will. This meant his destiny was fixed. He narrates: "Walking in the mountainous zone of Hakone, I could see how Mount Fuji showed its splendid beauty and practically appointed my bright future."

The long voyage of the ship "Argentinamaru" permitted him to know some ports. Los Angeles (He could visit China Town, the theater and the luxurious zone of Beverly Hills on a tour), Panama Canal (Some beautiful girls in bikinis got his attention), and La Guaira and Caracas (He was very fascinated with many young ladies with dark eyes). In this way, he narrates the details of each port where the ship anchored; Curazao, Belen, Rio de Janeiro, and finally Buenos Aires.

The Flowers Demonstrate the Road

The adventure of his trip, full of ups and downs, is the gateway to what awaited him in the farm where he passed his first three months. He passed working days of severe apprenticeship. There he realized the meaning of the elementa-

ry Spanish expression "from dawn to dusk."

At that time, in 1965, the population of Argentina was twenty-five million. Its territory is about eight times as large as Japan and about thirty thousand Japanese descendants were living there, engaged mostly in flower cultivation.

The first Japanese immigrant cultivator, Doctor Seizo Itoh, graduated from the Agricultural School of Sapporo in 1910. He settled in the province of La Pampa, where he acquired a ranch and later received Japanese immigrants. The registration of immigration notes that he is the first immigrant on the record. Seicho Araki was born in 1911, formally the first Nisei Argentine, son of an Okinawan. A little later, other portions of immigrants got jobs in the laundry industry, which also resulted in lucrative businesses.

During the Second World War, the prices of wheat and beef showed a sudden rise that demanded Argentina increase their production and brought an economic prosperity. Consequently it facilitated the investment to public enterprises like streets, buildings, and the expansion of Buenos Aires' subway, which opened in 1913 with three lines. Then a multitude of Italian immigrants arrived under the auspices of the first cabinet of Juan Domingo, an Italian descendant.

All these factors helped to impel the national welfare. The wealth was manifested in the demand of flowers. Flowers are used for many occasions, festival decorations, and gifts. All these enabled the Japanese immigrants to make great businesses until other necessities appeared and flowers began to change into a luxury.

After many vicissitudes and various discouraging episodes, Masahito Kawashima could continue his labors in another plantation named "Tanimura" farm. But he could not find what he wanted. His wish consisted in earning enough money to become independent and initiate his own work. Then he tried his fortune applying as a mariner on a small prawn ship. He couldn't get his sea legs and suffered from severe nausea. He found a better job on a new farm; therefore, he resumed his flower culture labor. He transferred to the "Ebi" farm in Mar del Plata where he could contract to undertake the work as a mediator—that is, to utilize the land of owner to take care of sowing and later distributing the crop. This option turned out better and he made a first step toward his dream of being a landlord. With the passing of years and thanks to various sacrifices, he succeeded at last in earning enough money to buy a piece of land and start his own business. A little later, his brother Hiroshi followed in his older brother's footsteps and arrived at Argentina. But he did not have an aptitude for farming. His vocation was the

ROAD of FLOWERS

martial arts, especially judo, which soon enabled him to become a judo instructor—after some hazardous episodes—and earn money satisfying his liking.

When the sale of flowers began to fall, Masahito thought of seeking other vocations. He went to Buenos Aires with his brother and the dynamic capital attracted them so much that a little later they decided to abandon the farm, judo, and the flower business. He took the opportunity to contact some Japanese he had acquainted in other circumstances. Then he succeeded in getting a job as a vendor of batteries of "Hitachi" brand, which found its way in the Argentine market, while his brother Hiroshi managed to earn his own living in a foreign trade enterprise.

Five years later, Masahito decided to return to Japan, leaving to Hiroshi the responsibility of selling the land. All the money he had saved working in five years was spent for his return ticket.

traditional home

Soon after the family reunion in Inage, he began to fulfill other occupations as vendor of pearls and a guide of Latin American tourists, and he was contracted as interpreter of a sports delegation accompanying a Mexican boxing champion. The feeling of being Mexican was contrast-

ing to what he had learned about the Argentine idiosyncrasy. And this attracted his attention. He wanted to undertake a new adventure and decided to learn the art of acupuncture.

A little later he decided to go to Mexico. He once dropped by Los Angeles where his brother Hiroshi had migrated. Once Hiroshi got tired of his life in Argentina, he sold the land his brother left him. He stayed in Los Angeles for a while. There he became a chauffeur of wealthy people and went through hard experiences with eccentric people connected to the entertainment business. He also met some inexplicable people living a hippie life. He could not adapt himself to these kinds of extravagant and banal lifestyles. Then he decided to pursue his original plan. He made a bus trip of three days to Mexico City. After visiting his Mexican clients and appreciating the atmosphere of the capital city, he decided to travel toward Argentina with the idea of applying the acupuncture techniques he had recently acquired.

He worked in Buenos Aires but he stayed there for a short time. Although he obtained the clientele, the situation had changed completely and he could not enjoy himself. Therefore, he returned to Japan again. He continued his work in a travel agency meanwhile he could apply for a course at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan which was looking for personal assis-

tants for the embassies abroad. This experience took him again to Mexico to work at the Japanese Embassy. There he lived a delightful and adventurous life. He witnessed violent actions, met with a traffic accident which nearly drove him to death, and got acquainted with Michiru Onishi, coming from Aichi prefecture, whom he married. When he finished his work in the embassy, he proceeded with his job as a tour guide and eventually became an organizer of boxing matches. In Mexico, his first son Daichi was born. Then he moved to Guadalajara with his family, where he worked as a manager of a taco shop and experienced a miserable life because of the earthquake which hit Mexico City in September 1985.

He returned to Japan several times to work always as a tour guide, visiting Japan's most emblematic places, where he guided his tourists proudly. Going back and forth between Mexico and Japan led to many incidents which all served for his apprenticeship. Before closing his testimony, he says metaphorically, "What we need most in Japan is the heart. The largeness and calmness of heart are needed to us extremely. If we have a sound mind, we can act as a true leader of the world. This consideration of the Japanese is what is solicited most by the people of many countries."

Describing his life full of vicissitude, *Camino de*

Flor is, so to speak, an autographic story and persuades us that nothing is impossible for a person who has a strong will. Masahito Kawashima attained his wish to graduate from university as his long-cherished desire. Kanda University of International Studies granted him the degree of bachelors in Hispanic studies. Nowadays, at the age of 68, he lives in Inage, Chiba prefecture. He is not retired yet from his business of storage and cargo at Narita airport. He recently became a grandfather, but his energy has not dried. He travels often and he is a voracious reader of newspapers in order to be informed of the incidents of Japanese politics and wishes to start studies in philosophy. Smiling, he remembers his own occurrences and has a childlike temper, prepared to set about a new adventure.

Camino de Flor was published originally in Japanese and then diffused in series by a local newspaper. The Spanish version was published in the year of 2000 in Mexico and this is its English version, published in 2015.

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<http://gregoryzambrano.com/>