

HISTORY

AGELESS LESSONS FROM KATSU GOTO

The Legacy of Katsu Goto Comes to the Big Screen

Patsy Y. Iwasaki

Special to *The Hawai'i Herald*

The more I learn about Katsu Goto, the more determined I am to share the fascinating story of his short life with others. I have been pursuing this quest for nearly half my life and I sometimes wonder why this early Japanese immigrant has so captured my heart and mind.

There is much about Goto's story that is typical of the Japanese American immigrant experience in Hawai'i: After arriving in Hawai'i in 1885 aboard the *City of Tokio*, the first ship that brought *kanyaku imin* (contract immigrants) to the Islands, Goto endured a three-year contract of hard labor at the Soper, Wright & Co. sugar plantation along Hawai'i Island's Hamakua Coast. Goto opened a general store in Honoka'a, became a community leader and was moving along on a path of success.

However, there were also aspects of Goto's life that were different. For example, Goto was not from the rural, southern Japan prefectures from which most of Hawai'i's Japanese immigrants hailed. In Japan, he had worked for the government — first in his hometown of Oiso in Kanagawa Prefecture, and later, in the thriving port city of Yokohama. He could read, write and speak English.

Goto's immigrant experience was also different in that he died violently, by lynching, just four years after arriving in Hawai'i. Goto's body was found hanging from a telephone pole in Honoka'a in 1889. He is believed to have been murdered for standing up for and helping a group of Japanese immigrants who had been accused of setting fire to the sugarcane fields in the area. Four men were



Patsy Iwasaki and filmmaker Danny Miller check out a shot in a sugarcane field. (Photos courtesy Patsy Iwasaki)

convicted of varying degrees of manslaughter following a well-publicized trial.

According to court documents, Goto, who had already been acting as a facilitator and mediator between the Japanese immigrant workers and plantation management, knew he was being targeted for the labor unrest and jealousy over the success of his store. Goto's life had already been threatened by plantation owner Robert Overend if he continued stirring things up. "I feel that my life is in danger by being here . . . but I am not afraid," Goto is said to have said when he met with the accused Japanese laborers.

His story resonates with me. As a sansei who was born and raised in Hawai'i, Katsu Goto's story of adventure, challenge, triumph and tragedy is

not just a part of my cultural heritage, but also a part of the historic and cultural legacy of Hawai'i, America and Japan.

This journey began in 1993 when I applied for and was selected for the inaugural Goto of Hiroshima Foundation study grant. It had been established by Dr. Fumiko Kaya, a medical doctor in Hiroshima, in memory of her uncle, Katsu Goto. Back then, the grant was administered by the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i. In researching the award's namesake, I was deeply touched by what I learned

about Katsu Goto. My initial research on Goto also piqued my journalistic instincts — I wanted to know more about his life. Through personal interviews with Dr. Kaya and further research, I pieced together a story that broke my heart and yet inspired me.

I wrote about my time in Hiroshima for a Jan. 7, 1994, *Hawai'i Herald* story titled, "Fumiko Kaya: Goto of Hiroshima Foundation Strengthens Ties Between Hawai'i and Japan." And, I wrote other articles on Katsu Goto in the Herald as I learned more about his life.

Katsu Goto was born Katsuzo Kobayakawa — he was the *chōnan*, the first-born son — of Izaemon and Sayo Kobayakawa of Terasaka, Oiso. As the



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first-born son, he could not leave Japan for Hawai'i unless he renounced his inheritance, removed his name from the family *koseki tōhon* (family registry) and was adopted by Masugoro and Haru Goto, who also were leaving for Hawai'i to work as contract laborers with their 1-year-old daughter, Sayo.

Goto is buried in the cemetery adjacent to the Hamakua Jodo Mission. I was told that he was laid to rest there by a small group of brave young men from the temple who had cut his body down from the telephone pole, where it had been left hanging for some time — a message meant to intimidate anyone who thought of crossing that line to retrieve Goto's body. The Hamakua Jodo Mission members defied that silent threat, retrieved Goto's body down and brought it to the cemetery, where he was buried.

Katsu Goto's murder in 1889 at the young age of 27 was indeed tragic. But his legacy does not end there, thanks to Fumiko Kaya, who was born in Honoka'a and adopted by Goto's younger brother, William Sekijiro Kobayakawa, and his wife Yuki after Kaya's parents died. Family members said Kobayakawa operated the store for about 20 years after Goto's death. He and Yuki returned to Japan when Fumiko was 5 years old so that she could receive a Japanese education. Kobayakawa believed in her and told her, "A woman has power if she can make her own way." Kaya eventually became a physician in Hiroshima. She survived the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima and became an advocate for peace and an impressive community leader.

Kaya learned of her uncle's lynching in 1985 while watching a television program on the centennial of Japanese immigration to Hawai'i in Hiroshima. Kobayakawa had wanted to shield her from the tragic story so he had never told her about his brother's demise. Dr. Kaya began conducting her own research into her uncle's murder. However, instead of responding with anger or bitterness, she chose kindness and education, establishing the Goto of Hiroshima Foundation in 1993 to benefit Hawai'i scholars and improve cross-cultural communication.



Katsu Goto's photo at the Hamakua Jodo Mission. Goto is buried in the adjoining cemetery.

Dr. Kaya never forgot her roots in Hawai'i, making numerous visits to Goto's gravesite in Honoka'a and moving the foundation forward. She also had a closet full of *mu'umu'u* purchased in Hawai'i. Dr. Kaya died in 2004, but the program continued on for a few more years. In 2008, it evolved into an annual scholarship awarded through the American Studies Department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

The lives of Katsu Goto and Fumiko Kaya inspired me to share their stories through a *manga* graphic novel titled, "Hamakua Hero: A True Plantation Story," which was illustrated by talented Hawai'i Island artist Avery Berido. It was published in 2008 by the Goto of Hiroshima

Foundation and then by Bess Press in 2010 and 2011.

In 2011, the Bishop Museum selected Katsu Goto's pocket watch as one of five treasures in its collection to showcase in an exhibit titled, "Tradition to Transition: Stories of Hawai'i Immigrants." Exhibit curator Brad Evans asked if they could display my book next to the watch, as well as mount enlarged pages from the book on columns nearby. I'd always felt that the pocket watch was representative of Katsu Goto and had featured it prominently in the graphic novel.

My discussion with Evans eventually led to our exclaiming, "Wouldn't it be great if we could show short film clips of people commenting on Goto and his impact at the display?" My brain began percolating, which quickly led to a partnership with filmmaker Danny Miller, who has produced and directed award-winning films about protecting Hawai'i's cultural and natural resources. Miller and I recorded over 10 hours of interviews with family members and others in the community from which we produced two four-minute videos for the museum exhibit. There was urgency to the project — age was catching up on some of those we interviewed, and some have passed on. With the outstanding interviews and footage, it was only natural that our thoughts turn to developing an hour-long documentary on Katsu Goto's life.

I began discussing the project with others from which new partnerships began to sprout and take root. Since dedicating a memorial to Katsu Goto in Honoka'a town in 1994, the Honokaa Hongwanji Mission has been preserving and honoring the legacy of Katsu Goto with an annual memorial service. Led by president Miles Okumura, the temple board felt the documentary would be a fitting long-term project to mark several milestones — its 110th anniversary, a 125th memorial service for Katsu Goto and the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i. On Nov. 2, 2014, a peace pole was dedi-

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cated next to the Katsu Goto Memorial.

A board resolution led to the creation of the Katsu Goto Memorial Committee in February 2014 under the fiscal sponsorship of the Honokaa Hongwanji Mission. The committee includes Miles Okumura; treasurer Maurice Kaneshiro; the Rev. Shingo Furusawa; state Rep. Mark Nakashima; the Rev. Wajiri Wansa of the Hamakua Jodo Mission; filmmaker Danny Miller; producers Baron Sekiya, founder and publisher of Hawaii 24/7; Noriko Namiki, CEO of the YWCA of O'ahu; and Bill Dorman, news director of Hawaii Public Radio. The documentary is being produced for nonprofit and educational purposes and all contributions are tax-deductible. We have previewed the documentary at numerous public outreach presentations that have led to the development of many new partnerships.

The team of scholars and advisors from Hawai'i, Japan and the U.S. mainland with expertise in Japanese emigration/immigration to Hawai'i, Japanese American studies, Japanese cultural history, Hawaiian culture and history, Japan and Hawai'i/American foreign policy, politics, history, economics and social culture have made themselves available to the production team. They include: Masafumi Honda, Erika Hori, Yoshinori Kato, Christine Kitano, Mariko Takagi Kitayama, Seri I. Luangphinit, Gail M. Makuakane Lundin, Manulani Aluli Meyer, Eileen Naughton, Junichi Noumaru, Franklin Odo, Dennis Ogawa, Gary Okihiro, Curtis Takada Rooks, Ross W. Stephenson, Wendy Tolleson and Paul Watanabe.

This documentary is meant to provide analysis, encourage discussion and exploration, and inspire hope and engagement with the world by examining deep themes and subjects in the humanities. Many people are unaware that early immigrants in Hawai'i experienced discrimination and that a race-based lynching occurred here. Awareness of history can lead to understanding and peace in the world. Katsu Goto isn't just a historical figure from the past — his life has meaning and relevance even today as we confront issues of racism, violence, immigration, social injustice, socioeconomic disparities, and living and thriving in a multicultural world.

Analysis in the film will include societal, political and economic conditions that prompted the mass emigration of 220,000 from Japan to Hawai'i by 1924; political and economic pressures on King David Kalākaua's monarchy from the sugar oligarchy, which prompted a contract with Japan



During a visit to Oiso Town last summer, education staff member Kazuhiro Sagawa led Patsy and two scholars on a search for the gravestone of Katsu Goto's younger brother, William Sekijiro Kobayakawa — only to make a startling discovery.

for laborers; foreign policy between Japan and the Kingdom of Hawai'i; societal, political and economic conditions in Hawai'i/America in the 1880s; racial discrimination and civil rights in the sugar plantation labor system in Hawai'i; Japanese immigrants and the genesis of workers' rights in Hawai'i; defining and pursuing the American Dream from a global perspective and subsequent realities and the continued humanitarian efforts born of Katsu Goto's legacy.

The Katsu Goto Memorial Committee is seeking sponsors of all types — corporate, individual, foundational or organizational — to help us complete this important film. The production team and individuals have donated many in-kind services to the film. Assistance has also been received from the Atherton Family Foundation, Ben Franklin Crafts and Ace Hardware Hawaii, Central Pacific Bank, East Hawaii Hiroshima Kenjin Kai, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, ILWU Memorial Association, the family of Dr. Fumiko Kaya, the Hawai'i state Legislature, Kosasa Family Fund, KTA Super Stores, Nippon Golden Network, University of Hawai'i at Hilo and the YWCA of O'ahu.

To date, the Katsu Goto Memorial Committee has raised 76 percent of the \$165,000 that the Legislature has required that it raise by June 1 in order to qualify for the state's \$36,000 grant. The

committee must still raise \$39,000 before the state monies can be released. Major sponsors will be recognized in the completed film and all donors will be recognized on the project's website, katsugotomovie.org, where a trailer is available for viewing.

Finally, on a research trip to Japan last summer, I learned that there was a gravestone for Katsu Kobayakawa — aka Katsu Goto — in Oiso. Two Japanese researchers, Erika Hori and Yoshinori Kato, and I had made a presentation on Katsu Goto to

Mayor Hisao Nakasaki of Oiso Town and his cabinet. They were fascinated by his story and, right then and there, education staff member Kazuhiro Sagawa offered his help.

We climbed into the municipal van and he took us to the hillside where the remains of the Gotos' extended family are interred, including those of Katsu Goto's younger brother, William Sekijiro Kobayakawa. Although we already knew about Kobayakawa's gravesite, we did not know its location, so we were especially grateful to Sagawa-san for showing it to us.

Much to our surprise, Sagawa-san continued on, "I think Katsu's gravesite is somewhere here, too." We were shocked. How could that be?

There were many gravestones on the hillside. Sagawa-san read the names, but told us each time that it was not the Goto family branch that we were looking for. Finally, at the top of the cemetery, he turned to us and said, "This is it!" It was the gravestone of Katsu Kobayakawa. It was incredible! We hadn't known of its existence.

More than anything, I was moved to see that his gravestone had been erected in a place of honor as the first-born son, right next to that of his father, Izaemon. Despite the fact that Katsu had been adopted, his father had erected the gravestone in his son's memory and had Katsu's life story engraved on the back. Katsu Goto's friend, Fusagoro Suzuki, had detailed Goto's life, how he had wanted to go to Hawai'i and how he had been tragically killed. Izaemon was saddened by what had happened, so he'd had the gravestone made and placed next to what would be his own final resting place.

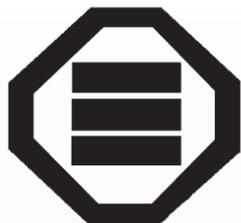
Perhaps the greatest pain a parent can experience is the passing of their child. This stone was proof that Katsu had always been a beloved son to his parents and family. Tears fell from my eyes as I took in this story. As sad as it was, I felt heartened, for this was also a story of hope and encouragement. But more than anything, it was a story of love . . . the love between a father and his son. **HH**

Hilo resident Patsy Iwasaki is a former Hawai'i Herald staff writer. She is on the faculty of the Communications and English departments at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, where she teaches journalism courses that she developed. Patsy is also working towards her Ph.D. in education. Questions about the Katsu Goto film project can be directed to Patsy — email her at patsy@katsugotomovie.org.

If you would like to support the Katsu Goto film project, make your check payable to: Katsu Goto Memorial Committee, c/o Honokaa Hongwanji Mission, P.O. Box 1667, Honoka'a, HI 96727, or make your donation via PayPal on the website, katsugotomovie.org.

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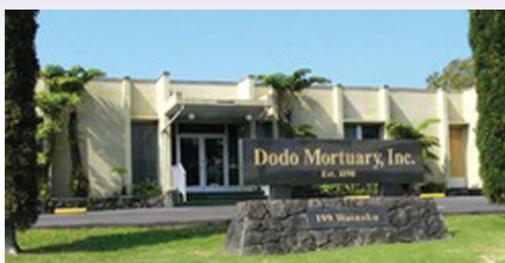
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