

for consultation. Was there somewhere in the town where the American officers had sought solace in their exile? Could I find it? Discreet inquiries of the camp carpenter, a little rat of a man, supplied the answer. His sister would be honoured to make all the arrangements.

We arrived at four thirty p.m., early for an Occidental, apparently normal time for entertaining in Japan. The rendezvous was a second-class hotel, which I knew later to be the most notorious brothel in the town, and there were many competing fiercely for this honour, as this was a seaport, catering primarily to the needs of seamen.

We were introduced to the carpenter's sister and two girls of no great beauty or talent to amuse. We produced "prezents" of chocolate, biscuits and cigar-

ettes—keys that opened all doors. Tea was brought in, followed by small bottles of hot sake. One drink of this was the signal for the women to make lewd gestures and try out equally lewd English phrases learned from their late American G.I. patrons.

The carpenter's sister was a blowzy, bawdy creature of forty-odd, with not one outward redeeming feature, quite unlike the women I had hitherto met. Until now I had considered her merely an agent for the others, but when the time came to separate and worship at Eros' inner shrines, I realized with a certain amount of horror that she was to be a participant in the final rites, and had allotted herself to the young lieutenant.

Some time after, I went to the home

of the carpenter on matters relating to work required in the camp. He was not at home, and his sister invited me in to wait. She left me to make tea, and I glanced around the room. In the alcove were four small plain wooden boxes, and one larger one. They held the ashes of her husband and four children; according to the inscriptions all had died on the same day, August 6, 1945.

All my revulsion for this woman melted into compassion. There is no place for moral judgment when all about which one's life was centred and which gave it meaning was disintegrated in one vast blinding flash; when one became, with a quarter-million other Hiroshima inhabitants, a terrified guinea pig in a monstrous, amoral experiment.

A brave story of a brave people

UPON THEIR SHOULDERS, by Shelly A. Ota. Published by Exposition Press, New York.

IF YOU WANT to write a novel," laughingly says Shelly Ayame Nishimura Ota of Milwaukee, a graduate of the University of Hawaii, "have four children. Seven might be better."

Mrs. Ota is the author of *Upon Their Shoulders*, a cultural conflict novel based on the Japanese in Hawaii. Exposition Press, New York, will publish it in early June.

"For children," explains Mrs. Ota, "give you direction and purpose. And lo, between dishwashing, the laundry, the ironing, housecleaning and earning a living—you'll find you've written a novel. An editor inquires about it, accepts it, and says nice things about it."

Her husband, the late Dr. Robert Ota, was on the staff of Marquette Medical School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is the mother of three boys and one girl.

Upon Their Shoulders is a thematic novel—that the Niseis stand on the shoulders of the Isseis. The theme was particularly chosen by Mrs. Ota, because she felt that a worthwhile story should have the quality of universality. "After all, this not only holds true of us but for all groups, that they are indebted to the courage and vision of their forebears. Thus, I feel *Upon Their Shoulders* is more than the story of the Japanese—it's life itself."

Roughly, the story is of Taro Shimada in conflict with the fatalistic philosophy of Japan, at odds with the paternalistic system of the sugar plantation of Hawaii, and his struggles with the white group and his own class. It's a story, also, of the psychological explanations of life versus the Japanese feeling of destiny in the life of man.

Mrs. Ota feels that with our present involvement in the Far East such a story is especially timely. And the question of Hawaiian statehood makes it increasingly important.

"It's high time that an American of Japanese descent should write a story woven out of the color and drama of Japanese life."

In *Upon Their Shoulders*, Mrs. Ota portrays dramatically the tragedy of the old life, the challenges of the new, the heartbreak and labor that accompany both.

She makes skillful use of the Japanese language and idiom, customs and religion.

When her manuscript was accepted for publication, the publishers wrote: "You have written a brave story of a brave people, a story with national and international implications, but a story essentially, of human beings. . ."

Mrs. Ota's next novel, based on the "Eta" problem, is roughly finished, and she hopes to put the finishing touches on it as soon as *Upon Their Shoulders* is fully launched.



Shelly A. Ota