

Train Station

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The following is an excerpt from a one-hour solo piece called Empire of the Son. As an example of research-based theatre, this story is based on an audio interview I conducted with my father, Akira Shigematsu at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver, Canada on January 22, 2014.

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Performance note: true to the actual audio recording, when I perform this story there are long pauses before and after my father's answers.

My father never said I love you, never hugged me. Boohoo, right? I'm ASIAN. This is *not* unusual. So I'm good. Seriously. But now that *I'm* a father, I decided I'm going to take things in a whole new direction. So I *saturate* my kids with LOVE.

I've been thinking more about my dad lately because he's dying. I mean he's not on his deathbed, but between multiple strokes, Parkinson's, and type 2 diabetes which has left him completely blind, he doesn't have a whole lot of time left. So I've taken it upon myself to start recording his stories. I used to be a radio reporter, so this is kind of my thing.

My father was a 12-year-old boy in Japan during the closing days of World War II. And a memory that my father shares with many Japanese of his generation is hearing the Emperor's voice on the radio for the very first time, announcing Japan's defeat, Japan's surrender. So while everyone else is crying around him, my dad is secretly hopeful, because he's thinking, "Well now that the war is over, maybe my dad will finally come home."

Now back then in my father's small hometown of Kagoshima, the only real form of transportation still working was the train. So once a day the train would make a stop at their local station. And my father, not knowing any better, would go down to the train station to look for his dad.

I paused the recorder.

"Now dad, I'm not saying yours was a fool's errand, but you don't know if your dad is alive or dead, so you go down to the train station on the off chance that he'll just show up, and you're doing this every day, but you're 12-years old! How long can you keep this up?"

“Oh, not very long. *[long pause]* Perhaps, just over a year.”

“Why did you stop?” I asked.

“There was only one person left on the platform that day, far too old to be my father, but it was him.”

“Dad! Did you run to him? Did you hug him? Did you say I love you?”

My father scowled, “No, of course not!”

“Dad,” I said. “Father and son, parent and child, you haven’t seen each other for years, not knowing if the other is alive or dead, and you’re telling me the moment you see each other there wasn’t one expression of affection, of relief, NOTHING!?”

“I suppose it was the late afternoon when we walked home from the station, because our shadows were so long on the road. Although I cannot be certain, I suppose had my father glanced at my shadow, he may have seen a slight hop in my step.”

Bio

Tetsuro Shigematsu is a PhD student at the University of British Columbia in the Department of Education where he is a Vanier Scholar. His research interests include research-based theatre, new media, and Asian Canadian theatre. He was the first visible minority to host a daily national radio program in Canada for CBC, where he co-wrote and co-produced nearly a thousand hours of network radio programming, and over 50 pieces of radio drama.