

Author Spotlight with Cynthia Chin-Lee



Was there a woman in *Amelia to Zora* who struck a chord with you personally?

There were many women in the book who struck a chord for me. Rachel Carson and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi were two women who stood out for me because they made such personal sacrifices for their families. As a single woman, Rachel worked full-time, wrote part-time, and supported many members of her family financially and emotionally, including at times her mother, sister, and her sister's child. Suu Kyi kept her commitment to her homeland despite being separated from her children and husband for many years. She did not see her husband while he was ill and dying of cancer so she could stay in Myanmar.

You are an avid journal keeper. Why is it important for you to keep a journal, and what effect does journaling have on your professional career as a writer?

I keep a journal as a way to vent, really! When I get frustrated, upset, or even lonely, keeping a journal helps me to stay sane. Sometimes writing an entry is just something I do while I am waiting for my son at kung fu practice, or while I am sitting at an airport. I get ideas while I am journaling, so it has helped my career as a writer. For instance, I got the idea for *Amelia to Zora* when I was writing a journal entry.

You've written three other books formatted to fit the alphabet, *A is for Asia* and *A is for the Americas*. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this format to write nonfiction?

The advantage is having a format to follow without having to think about it. The disadvantage is that the format forces you to come up with ideas for letters like Q, X, and Z, which are huge challenges.

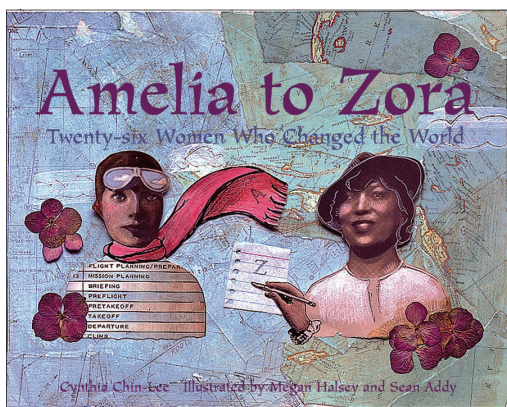
You were raised by a doctor and an artist. Did the combination of your parents' choice of professions—science and art, or rationalism and creativity—have an influence on you and your work?

My father's work in the community as a doctor in Washington, DC's Chinatown has made me more aware of Chinese American history and community. My mother's work in art has helped me appreciate visual arts. My mother also encouraged us to participate in music and dance of all kinds, both Eastern and Western.

You've done a lot of traveling during your career. Is there one place that resonated with you more than others? Is there a place that you would rather not revisit?

I've had the opportunity to visit my ancestral homeland of China many times. My grandparents emigrated from China in the late 1800s and early 1900s, so my family is rather "Americanized." But I have a great interest in Chinese language and arts, so it's quite fun for me to go to China to practice my language skills. Last year I felt very fortunate to go to China for an extended business trip. I also decided to celebrate my 50th birthday in Japan, a country I had always wanted to visit. Places I would not want to revisit? That's a hard one. I think I've enjoyed or learned enough from every place that a second visit would be worthwhile. Of course, I would probably gain more from a second visit if I knew the language. For example, I've gone to Mexico a few times, but I'm sure I'd get more from it if I learned some Spanish.

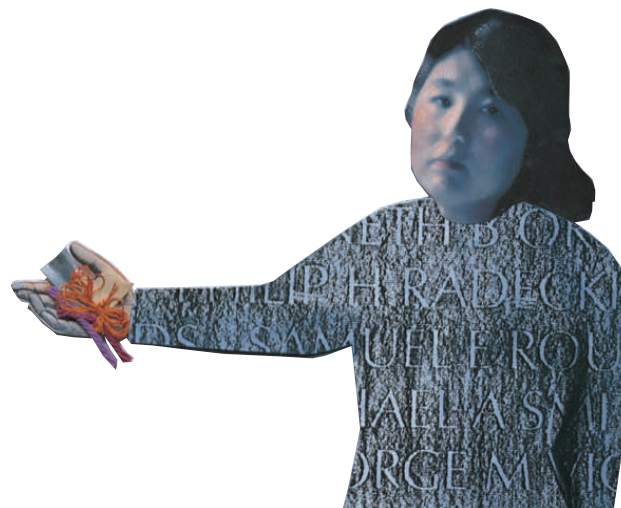




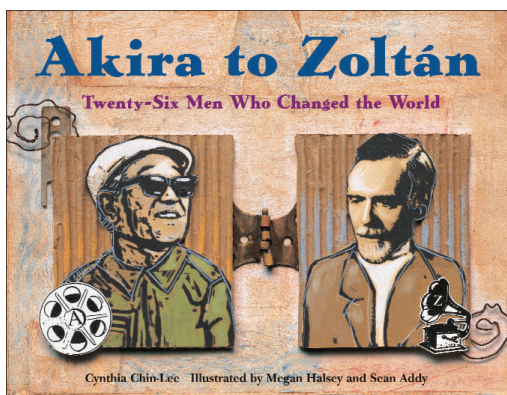
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A companion to *Amelia to Zora*, *Akira to Zoltán* features twenty-six contemporary men. Diverse in occupation as well as ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds, the book showcases positive role models for kids. Each biography offers a childhood anecdote, an amazing accomplishment, and an inspiring quote.



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