



Author Spotlight with Scott Goto

You originally graduated from college with a degree in secondary art education from the University of Hawaii, Manoa, before deciding to pursue a bachelor of arts degree at Art Center College of Design. What made you interested in going back to school for art, and how did you decide to become to be a children's book illustrator?

Actually, my original plan was to go to art school straight out of high school. However, my parents wanted me to go to a regular university first and get a backup degree, just in case things didn't work out with my art. They said that after I went to the University of Hawaii they would pay for my education at art school. Even though I wasn't happy about the situation at first, how could I pass an offer up like that! I learned later, after graduating from Art Center College of Design, that my mother, a retired high school teacher, actually wanted me to have a well-rounded education on top of having a backup degree. In the end it really was the best thing to do for many reasons. The main reason was that there were things I learned at the University of Hawaii that I never would have learned at Art Center, like local, national, and international politics and philosophy.

Becoming a children's book illustrator was one of those things that just developed and evolved at school, but was never really planned. When I first went to Art Center College I thought I was going to do really dark and edgy editorial work and didn't even think about picture books. It wasn't until my later semesters that one of my instructors suggested I seriously look into pursuing that field. He felt that the style of my work at that time would work with picture books.

You have illustrated many books for young readers, but *The Perfect Sword* is the first book you've also written. What inspired you to delve into writing?



I have many people to thank for that, because a lot of people would ask me if I ever thought about writing when I told them I illustrated picture books! A few people were very big influences. The first person was Emily Easton, the current publisher at Walker and Company, who also gave me my first big break into illustrating picture books. She and I have worked on several books together, and after a while she encouraged me to write. The other two big influences on me were Susan Sherman, the art director at Charlesbridge, and Randi Rivers, an editor at Charlesbridge. I was illustrating a book for Charlesbridge and both of them, like Emily, encouraged me to start writing. I am also very grateful to Susan, Randi and Yolanda LeRoy of Charlesbridge for giving me the opportunity to attend a writing intensive workshop at Chautauqua, New York, which further inspired me to improve and develop my writing.

***The Perfect Sword* takes place in the Tokugawa period in ancient Japan. What sort of research did you do to ensure that both your art and writing were accurate?**

I used many different sources to research the costumes and settings of the early Tokugawa era, including a combination of books about traditional Japanese costumes, paintings, and history; various sites on the internet; and a lot of different movies and TV shows! In Hawaii, they show TV dramas from Japan called Taiga, which, like *The Perfect Sword*, are historical fiction. These shows usually have very elaborate and quite accurate costumes from the eras being depicted. Of course, like many other illustrators, I did take some artistic license here and there to accommodate the composition of my drawing style. But overall, I tried to be as accurate as I could.



In your freetime you enjoy creating costumes. What is the most elaborate costume you've made?

The most elaborate costume I have made would be my Star Wars TIE Fighter Pilot costume. I was able to purchase a commercially available helmet, but everything else was made out of fiberglass, plastic, wood, and lots of cans of spray paint!

When you were growing up, your family stressed the importance of being American, but they also raised you in a somewhat traditional Japanese household. Was it easy to merge the two?

It was very easy, because I never viewed the two as separate, nor noticed any of it until I was much older! My parents received the importance of being American from my grandparents, and then they just subconsciously passed it on to me. My family always stressed the importance of voting, getting an education, and being as responsible a citizen as possible. And I didn't realize how much of a traditional Japanese household I came from until much later in life, when a couple friends of mine teased me about how Japanese I was! (In Hawaii, because of all the different ethnicities, teasing between good friends about each other's ethnic stereotypes is not uncommon! Definitely not politically correct, and should only be done with someone you're close to, but I think it helps one be able to laugh at his or herself. We also never do it in an insulting way.) The traditional aspects of my upbringing were mainly due to being very close to my grandparents, who still held onto a lot of the traditional ways.

Books by Scott Goto



978-1-57091-697-7 • HC • \$15.95
Ages 7–10

Young Michio is apprenticed to the master swordsmith. He watches and learns not only the skills to make a fine sword, but also lessons in humility, hard work, and compassion--elements of Bushido, the samurai code of honor. When he and Sensei create a sword that rivals all others, warriors from around Japan come to claim ownership of it. But only one can be worthy.

Rich, symbolic art captures the Tokugawa period in ancient Japan. Includes an author's note about the history of Japanese samurai swords and a glossary of Japanese terms.