

# Book captures Okinawa's scenes

Hiroko Tamaki

Many visitors to Okinawa are enchanted by the scenery of traditional villages with sugarcane fields and the shimmering blue-green water surrounding the island. To capture these scenes some take photos, others buy post cards, but not Kelly Garcia who expressed her love for Okinawa in an extraordinary way.

She decided to write a children's book, while strolling the back roads of Yomitan with her husband who worked for the United States military. Her book coupled with illustrations would "capture the neat Okinawan scenes you see around you everyday – school kids with their big red backpacks, vistas of ocean, sugarcane fields, and vending machines," according to her web site.

Her excitement grew at the idea of writing a book about a Shisa who lived in a little village much like the one she lived in and had adopted as her hometown on Okinawa. However, she had to put her project on hold due to her busy schedule, and then she became pregnant.

But the spark of excitement returned after the birth of her son Gabriel, as she took him for walks in his stroller. During these walks local people often approached and talked to her. She was amazed at how much people of all generations loved babies and how friendly they were. "This is a place filled with love," she said.

Her affection for Okinawa grew even stronger. Her desire to capture these moments, especially for her son, in the form of a children's book was rekindled.

So in 2008, Garcia wrote the story about Takako and her brother, a pair of shisas. "When I saw the shisa on my walks, I would imagine stories for them. For the book, I liked the idea of making them characters kids could relate to – a young brother and sister who squabbled, but ultimately helped each other." The little girl shisa became her main character and

all that was left was a cute name easy to pronounce for Americans, and she chose Takako.

Although she aspired to not only write but also illustrate her book, she soon realized she needed to hire a professional illustrator for the story. After meeting with a few illustrators on the island, she met Carmen Daniel whose illustration was the best fit for her book. Daniel, who is married to a U.S. service member, walked around and surfed internet Web sites looking at many different kinds of shisas, trying to decide which one would look best as the character Takako. She drew sketches and showed them to Garcia, and upon hearing her opinions made a few changes.

Erin Blunt, also an illustrator and graphic designer, joined the team early this year to work on the book's layout. Garcia comments on the website, "She offered me more layout and typography options than I knew existed." Blunt said she enjoyed putting the illustrations and story together. "Deciding which areas of the page had the least important elements to place text over

was a challenge," Blunt explained.

Garcia's book, a labor of love for her son and the people of Okinawa, was published earlier this year in English. A Japanese edition is being prepared for market in 2010.

Before she left Okinawa with her family in July, Garcia presented a copy of the book to the mayor of Yomitan village, the village that inspired her to write the book.

"I hope in some way the book can help Americans living here to be excited about Okinawa or their children to be interested in Okinawa," said Garcia the day before she left the island. "I hope Okinawan's are interested in the story written from an American's point of view."

If you want to know more about the book, please go to [www.shisastory.com](http://www.shisastory.com).



Kelly Garcia visited the mayor of Yomitan village, her adopted hometown in Okinawa, with her husband and child to present her book before leaving Okinawa with her family in July.

ケリー・ガルシアさんは、7月に沖縄を立つ前に、夫と子供と一緒に第二の故郷となった読谷村の市長を訪れ、絵本を手渡した。Photo from Kelly Garcia