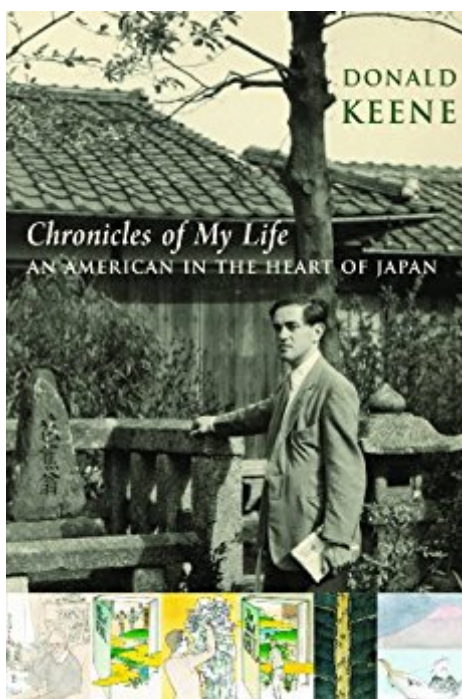


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Chronicles Of My Life: An American In The Heart Of Japan



Synopsis

"I sometimes think that if, as the result of an accident, I were to lose my knowledge of Japanese, there would not be much left for me. Japanese, which at first had no connection with my ancestors, my literary tastes, or my awareness of myself as a person, has become the central element of my life." In this eloquent and wholly absorbing memoir, the renowned scholar Donald Keene shares more than half a century of his extraordinary adventures as a student of Japan. Keene begins with an account of his bittersweet childhood in New York; then he describes his initial encounters with Asia and Europe and the way in which World War II complicated that experience. He captures the sights, scents, and sounds of Japan as they first enveloped him, and talks of the unique travels and well-known intellectuals who later shaped the contours of his academic career. Keene traces the movement of his passions with delicacy and subtlety, deftly weaving his love for Japan into a larger narrative about identity and home and the circumstances that led a Westerner to find solace in a country on the opposite side of the world. *Chronicles of My Life* is not only a fascinating tale of two cultures colliding, but also a thrilling account of the emotions and experiences that connect us all, regardless of our individual origins.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For anyone studying Japanese culture, and especially Japanese literature, the name Donald Keene is a familiar one. In a career dating back to the 1950s, Keene has published more than thirty books of translation, criticism, and history. His latest offering, *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan* (Columbia, 2008), is an autobiography that was first serialized in *The Daily Yomiuri* newspaper in 2006 as "Chronicles of My Life in the 20th Century." Keene begins the narrative with his childhood in New York City. He was a sensitive boy who cared more for music and stamp collecting than he did baseball, and except for a trip to Europe in 1931 with his father, he seemed to have had a tough time of it. The family fortunes changed dramatically in the lean years of the 1930s and this, coupled with the death of his sister and the divorce of his parents, made Keene even more studious and withdrawn. In 1938, however, at the age of sixteen, he won an extremely competitive four-year Pulitzer scholarship to Columbia University and things began to look up. At Columbia, he studied with Mark van Doren. Professor van Doren's teaching style and his emphasis on the importance of the so-called "Great Books" of Western civilization were to have a life-long influence on Keene: "Van Doren had little use for commentaries or specialized literary criticism. Rather, the essential thing, he taught us, was to read the texts, think about them, and discover for ourselves why they ranked as classics. Insofar as I have been a success as a teacher of Japanese literature, it has been because I had a model in Mark van Doren." The other outstanding teacher that Keene had at Columbia was Tsunoda Ryusaku who taught the history of Japanese thought.

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