

Joy Kogawa



Kogawa wears her Order of Canada medal. Photo courtesy of [File, York's Daily Bulletin](#).

Joy Kogawa was born in Vancouver in 1935--not a good time for a Canadian of Japanese descent. After Japan bombed Pearl Harbour in 1941, Canada took action against Japanese Canadians, breaking up their families by sending them away from the coast to live in camps in the BC interior.

Kogawa's life, along with those of others of her descent, was greatly disrupted by this wartime internment process, not only moved Japanese out of their homes, but also deprived them of their other property and the means of making their living. Many families never returned to the once bustling town of Steveston where they had once lived. Kogawa was educated at the University of Alberta, the [U of T](#) and The University of Saskatchewan.

In her well-known novel [Obasan](#) (1981), Kogawa tells the story of such a family, portraying the wrenching heartbreak of a child who is too young to understand why her family is being wrenched apart, and the adult that little girl becomes. *Obasan* received the Canadian Authors' Association Book of the Year Award. It also won the Books in Canada First Novel Award as well as appearing on the American Library Association Notable Book List. In 2006, the Literary Review of Canada published a list of Canada's 100 most important books, and the novel appeared on this list as well.

Her other novels are *Itsuka* (1992) and *The Rain Ascends* (1995). In 2009 she published a memoir, [Gently to Nagasaki](#). The same year, she delivered the Asian Heritage Lecture at York University, along with the launch of the Virtual Museum of Asian Canadian Cultural Heritage. She has worked to educate Canadians about the historic injustices done to Japanese Canadians, who finally received a [formal apology](#) from the Canadian government in 1988.

Joy Kogawa is an accomplished poet with several volumes of work to her credit. She has also written books for children. *Naomi's Road* (1986) was made into an opera in 2005. This author has been showered with awards and has worked at many Canadian universities as a Writer-in-Residence. In Vancouver, Joy Kogawa's childhood home in Marpole, now called Joy Kogawa House, is currently home to writer-in-residence [Susan Crean](#).