

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dragonfly Dreams is based on a true story. When I was just out of college and on my way to Japan to teach English, my Aunt Mary in California told me that her cousin Grace had married “a Chinaman” and moved to China with him years before. China was closed at the time I learned this, but I set my heart on finding her one day. But, as it turned out, she found me.

Grace McCallie Divine (1901-1979), went to New York City from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to study music in 1928. There she met and married Liu Fu Chi, “F. C.,” (1904-1955), a Chinese engineer who had just graduated from Cornell University and taken a job at New York’s public works. They had a daughter named Ju Lan, whose nickname was “Nini.” The Depression hit, and Mr. Liu returned to China to work for the water works in Tianjin. Grace and Ju Lan soon followed.

In 1937, the Japanese invaded mainland China, but European nations owned and governed territories in the coastal cities, called “concessions.” The Lius lived in the French Concession; therefore, at first they were protected from the turmoil of the Japanese invasion. They had two more children, a daughter in 1937 and a son in 1941.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, Japanese troops took control of the foreign concessions in China. The Americans and Europeans remaining there were forced to register as enemy aliens and, eventually, moved into internment camps.

Grace narrowly escaped internment and lived in hiding with the family until the war ended in August 1945. Her family back home did not know if Grace was alive until a Marine from Chattanooga, private Giles Brooks, found her, weighing barely eighty-six pounds, and sent word home that she had survived.

Grace Liu and her family continued to live in China after the war. Her husband died of lung cancer in 1955. Grace Liu taught English at Nankai University where she was arrested during the Cultural Revolution and accused of being a spy and counter revolutionary. After President Nixon and Chairman Mao established diplomatic relations between the two countries, she wrote to her family in Tennessee and returned in 1974 with her son, William. She had lived in China for forty years.

I had a chance to live with Grace the last year of her life and become very close to her. Her son William worked at UC Berkeley. Grace began to write her memories. With a diagnosis of cancer, her two daughters came from China to help with her care. This is the way I came to know my remarkable Chinese cousins.

After Grace died in Berkeley in 1979, her two daughters returned to China where they both had families. William became the director of English language programs for Chinese interpreters at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.

The full story is told in two books: *Grace in China: An American Woman Beyond the Great Wall, 1934-1974* (Black Belt Press, 2000) and in *Grace: An American Woman in China, 1934-74* (Soho Press, 2003) by Eleanor McCallie Cooper and William Liu.

In *Dragonfly Dreams*, the family (Chinese father, American mother, and three children) and the historical dates and facts form the structure of the story, like an envelope; but the content of the story, the letter that goes inside the envelope, is fictional.

Eleanor McCallie Cooper