

Amy Tan  
Writer (1952-)

Born in Oakland California two and a half years after her parents immigrated to the United States, Amy Tan has emerged as a powerful literary voice. Amy's father, John Tan, was a Baptist minister and electrical engineer who came to the United States to escape the horrors of the Chinese Civil War. The early life of her mother, Daisy, inspired Amy's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*.

When she was fourteen years old both her father and brother died of brain tumors; it was also at this time that Amy learned her mother had been married to a man in China and had three other daughters. After the deaths of her father and brother, Amy moved to Switzerland with Daisy and her other brother.

After graduating from high school in Switzerland, Amy studied at eight different colleges, eventually earning a master's degree in Linguistics from San Jose State University. The relationship between mother and

daughter nearly collapsed when Amy left the Baptist college her mother had chosen to follow her boyfriend, Louis DeMattei, to San Jose. In 1974, the two were married and settled in San Francisco.

While working toward her PhD in linguistics, Amy became fascinated with the myriad problems surrounding the developmentally disabled. In 1976 she left her doctoral program in order to become a language development counselor.

With a business partner, Amy started a writing company, preparing speeches for salesmen and executives. Eventually she left the partnership to become a full-time freelance writer and though she prospered economically, she found the work unfulfilling and sought creative relief in many different forms including jazz piano lessons and fiction writing.

Her first short story 'Endgame' gained her admittance into the Squaw Valley writer's workshop,

but just as her new career path seemed bright, her mother fell ill. During this time, Amy made a promise that if her mother recovered she would take her to China to see the daughter she had left behind. The trip to China turned out to be a revelation for Amy, shining new light on her relationship with her mother as well as supplying her with the inspiration needed to finish her collection of stories that would become *The Joy Luck Club*. *The Joy Luck Club* garnered Amy Tan first the L.A. Book Award and then the National Book Award; her novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* solidified her reputation as a powerful literary voice.

Some thoughts from Amy Tan:

"How can you say luck and chance are the same thing? Chance is the first step you take, luck is what comes afterwards."

- Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991)

“She said that if I listened to her, later I would know what she knew: where true words came from, always from up high, above everything else. And if I didn’t listen to her, she said my ear would bend too easily to other people, all saying words that had no lasting meaning, because they came from the bottom of their hearts, where their own desires lived, a place where I could not belong.”

- Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)

“I did not lose myself all at once. I rubbed out my face over the years washing away my pain, the same way carvings on stone are worn down by water.”

- Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)

“I always *thought* it mattered, to know what is the worst possible thing that can happen to you, to know how you can avoid it, to not be drawn by the magic of the unspeakable.”

- Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)

Amy Tan’s works include:  
*The Joy Luck Club*  
*The Kitchen God’s Wife*  
*The Bonesetter’s Daughter*  
*The Moon Lady*  
*The Chinese Siamese Cat*

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“You see what power is---holding someone else’s fear in your hand and showing it to them!”