

# Essay on bitter sweet love

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Hotel on the Corner of bitter and sweet is a famous historical fictitious story written by Jamie Ford. This book talks about friendship, love and devotion between a Chinese boy Henry Lee and a Japanese American girl Keiko Okaba. Henry Lee is forced by the father to embrace the Chinese heritage by putting on a button like the one Fords father used to put on written “ I am Chinese “. He wears it in school and this makes him bullied and mistreated in school by the American students. The character I have chosen to analyze is Henry Lee who is the protagonist in the novel. I was so much impressed with Henry’s character as we see him working while in school, something that many young people can never do in their lives. The novel talks about his life when he was a child until he becomes an adult, all the hard times he went through and how he struggles in his life. Henry Lee is a character to be admired in this novel. He is determined to do what he thinks is right for him. He works very hard in the school kitchen so as to pay off his scholarship fee. I do identify with this character since I had to go through what he went through while I was in high school. I had to work in the school canteen during the lunch hours and go home very late in the evenings. I had to work extremely hard to help my mother pay my school fees and buy books since I was raised by a single mother.

At the beginning of the novel, Henry is revealed as an old man. We see him investigating a crowd he meets while walking past the Panama hotel. His memories are rekindled when he sees an umbrella with a Koi painted on it when the owner of the hotel shows to the public the Japanese –American belongings that were left there. He decides to search for Kaiko’s family belongings. He involves his son in the search.

Henry appears an innocent man who is being forced by the father to embrace the Chinese culture by putting on a button written I am Chinese. Ford describes him as hardworking. Henry works very hard in the school canteen during the lunch hours in order to pay off his scholarship fee. Henry is a very committed young boy who never cared of the outcomes of his commitments. He committed himself to love Keiko even at her absence and never cared about being disinherited by his parents. He never cared if they will learn of his relationship with a Japanese girl all he cared about was his love and the commitment they had made for each other. Lee's commitment is seen through his conversation with Keiko. " How long will you wait for me? "" As long as it takes. I don't care what my father says". All he cared for was the love they shared together. He never gave up on the love of hi life " Hope can get you through anything." He wrote her letters continuously despite the fact that he received few replies.

In this novel, the character changes from childhood to adulthood. Henry Lee's first change occurs when he meets Keiko a Japanese girl and befriends her. They met while working together in the school kitchen and together they confronted their situation of being bullied in school. Falling in love with the Japanese girl alienated him from his father. His father was against him but he defended their love by being close to Keiko despite his father's harshness. He hoped that one day, he will spend the rest of his life with his love Keiko. " Hope is all I got. Hope gets you through the night."

However later in the story, Henry had to accept the changes that he is going to live without Keiko since they were evacuated to camp and later left after her parents were imprisoned. Although he continuously mails Keiko, he

receives few replies from her because his father confiscated the letters behind his back. Henry Lee's father never wanted something to come out his relationship with Keiko because he hated the Japanese and how they had mistreated the Chinese. Henry represents the type of person who has a forgiving heart and is determined to get what he wants in life. Even though the love he shared with Keiko was put on a test when Keiko's family was evacuated, he continuously visited her in the camps as much as it was risky for him. Lee was determined to help Keiko despite his father's hostility towards the Japanese. Lee is loyal because he could not throw away what they shared with Keiko, he kept the friendship despite their separation. He kept writing her letters until the mail clerk noticed his devotion to this special girl.

Lee defies his parents by confronting the identity his parents wanted for him. This is seen where he listens to jazz music. This is also seen where he hides some of Keiko's family belongings in their house including the Oscar holden record of jazz that Keiko gave him. He treasured it so much that he went against his father who never wanted anything to do with the Japanese and their belongings in this house. " Henry was learning that time apart has a way of creating distance- more than mountains and time zone separating them. Real distance, the kind that makes you ache and stop wondering. Longing so bad that it begins to hurt to care so much" (Ford 156). He ever forgot about Keiko and he missed her a lot.

Lee is forced to move on with his life after losing contact with the love of his life Keiko. Keiko's parents were imprisoned and this forced her to leave. Henry later marries Ethen a Chinese girl so as to get over Keiko but lack is

not on his side because his wife dies with cancer. Although he married Ethen, he never forgot Keiko, this is seen in his statement “ I try not to live in the past but sometimes the past lives in me”( Ford 201). Henry’s loss of his wife forced him to change and focus by starting a new life with his son Marty. He has to reconcile the loss of his wife, tighten his relationship with his son since he is a widower and also he was disturbed with his past experiences.

At the end of the book, Jamie describes Lee’s life, how he lost his lovely wife and how his love for Keiko is rekindled by his son’s girlfriend. “ But college also seemed to keep him out of Henry’s life, which had been acceptable when Ethel was alive, but now it made the hole in Henry’s life that much larger — like standing on one side of a canyon, yelling, and always waiting for the echo that never came” (Ford 114)

### **Even though Henry’s relationship with his son was strained after his wife’s death, we see him mending it.**

I was moved by Henry’s mourning of his wife and in that state, he finds out that there were Japanese belongings in a hotel basement and this made him very emotional because it reminded him of his past and the love of his life. “ Feelings can only be hidden so long from those who really pay attention. page” (Ford 141)

I loved this story because it is character driven. The book lived up to my expectations because I once knew that the Chinese hated the Japanese but I never knew the reason behind it. Through this book, I learnt that it was because the Japanese invaded china’s mainland and killed a number of Chinese. This book reminded me that there is always room for forgiveness and redemption. Henry learnt that his father had confiscated letters sent to

her by Keiko so as to separate them but he was never mad at him. Through this book, I have learnt that one has to fight for the person they love. I have also learnt to forgive

### **Works Cited**

Ford, Jamie. *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2009. Print.