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# Planting and Nourishing the Seed

## The Origins of West Coast Macrobiotics, Part 1

Carl Ferré

The spark that ignited macrobiotic activity in the United States was George and Lima Ohsawa's first visit to the United States late in 1959. After arriving in New York in late November and staying for about a week, Ohsawa traveled to California and gave lectures in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Tommy Nakayama was one of Ohsawa's students who moved to the U.S. in 1952. He hosted George and Lima in Los Angeles and organized lectures and cooking classes for them.<sup>1</sup> Ohsawa also searched for a reliable source of brown rice and discovered the Koda Brothers in Dos Palos, California. These introductions to macrobiotic thinking planted the seed for macrobiotic development on the West Coast.

Ohsawa returned to New York after being in California for about a week and lectured in New York for about four months. Working with some of his Japanese students already living there, the Ohsawa Foundation of New York was formed in 1960. The first macrobiotic newsletter was published with Herman Aihara as editor in May of 1960. The first Ohsawa-style camp was held that summer at the New Horizon Camp, Southampton, Long Island. Ohsawa taught at the



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camp and for a while after. According to camp records, 360 people attended the camp at one time or another and the camp served 2,128 meals during the 9 weeks of the camp.<sup>2</sup> Herman was elected president of the Ohsawa Foundation in February, 1961.<sup>3</sup>

George Ohsawa gained some popularity for predicting impending troubles for Gandhi and president Kennedy. One prediction that didn't come true, however, led to the beginning of macrobiotics on the West Coast of

the United States. Ohsawa, concerned about the building of the Berlin wall in 1961 and actions that would lead to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, advised the macrobiotic community in New York to move to a safer place in case the crisis resulted in nuclear war and fallout.

On October 1, 1961, 34 macrobiotic people arrived in Chico, California and were welcomed warmly by the town at the City Plaza. Several people in the group were celebrities and the trip garnered national attention. Teal Ames was a famous television star. J. Robert (Bob) Kennedy, Irv Hirsh (also spelled Hirsch), and Dick Smith were outstanding professional musicians.<sup>4</sup> Bob was a trumpet player in the band of the Ed Sullivan Show—one of the most popular television programs in the U.S. for many years. Bill Salant was a noted economist. Alvin Bauman was the group's unofficial leader. The group arrived a day ahead of schedule and the Chico Chamber of Commerce lodged them for free in local motels. The town of Chico held a banquet the next day in the group's honor.<sup>5</sup>

This group arranged to hold weekly meetings beginning on their first day in Chico. Their macrobiotic understanding, judgment, and en-



**BILL SALANT AND AL BAUMAN SEARCH THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY**

thusiasm inspired many people to change their lives. They understood three things needed for success—development of body, mind, and spirit. While Ohsawa had planted the seed late in 1959, it was this small group of people that nourished and helped macrobiotics grow on the West Coast.

## **FOOD FOR THE BODY**

Shortly after getting settled in Chico, the group decided to form a food company.<sup>6</sup> Chico-San, Inc. began operations in March of 1962. Chico-San provided brown rice, beans, miso, soy sauce, sea vegetables, and other staple foods imported from Japan to the group and to the local community. J. Robert (Bob) Kennedy was the president of the new company, which was staffed by members of the group—Dick Smith, Irv Hirsh, and others.

Chico-San's first company-made product was unleavened "macrobiotic" bread. Herman Aihara and others went around the Sacramento valley selling this bread and Chico-San's other products out of the back of his car. In fact, Herman made Chico-San's first sale at the tailgate of his

car. Herman often joked that the bread was worth its weight in gold and was as heavy as a gold brick!

The early years of Chico-San were a struggle. The bread and imported products were not that popular. Most of the workers had to take jobs in order to survive. The musicians in the group found places to play. Herman picked peaches in local orchards. Dick Smith worked for the highway department building the four-lane freeway through Chico. One of the reasons for Chico-San's poor sales in the earliest days was that people didn't know why or how to use the products—teaching was needed.

## **PUBLICATIONS FOR THE MIND**

While everyone contributed to the group's growth in unique ways, Herman and Cornelia Aihara and Lou and Shayne Oles developed macrobiotic teaching on the West Coast in the early 1960s. Herman and Cornelia were the main teachers, although Herman always maintained he was a student like everyone else. His ego-less style and willingness to accept his own and other people's shortcomings allowed

him to be an effective leader. While Cornelia learned and could recite Ohsawa's teachings without hesitation, Herman understood the essence more than the specifics. Herman's insights into this essence shaped West Coast macrobiotics and allowed him to remain forever faithful to Ohsawa's philosophy.

Regular meetings helped the group develop its core teachings; however, it was their publications that transmitted them to a larger audience. The magazine, *Macrobiotic News*, that began in New York in 1960 moved with the West Coast group and continued under a new name of *U.P.* for one issue in early 1962, then *Yin Yang: The Unique Principle* for the rest of the year. These early magazines contain many writings by George Ohsawa, Herman and Cornelia Aihara, and Lou and Shayne Oles.

Lou's translating and editing skills provided accessibility of Ohsawa's writings to an English-speaking audience. He also helped fashion the West Coast macrobiotic method by writing and teaching that there is much more to macrobiotics than diet. He realized that curing individual symptoms was not enough—without comprehension of the dialectic of yin and yang and the oneness of the logarithmic spiral, there is no real cure.<sup>7</sup> His urging to understand oneness is reflected in another name change by Lou as editor of the newsletter from *Yin Yang: The Unique Principle* to *Yin Yang: The Unifying Principle* at the beginning of 1963. Lou's wife, Shayne, was instrumental in presenting macrobiotic recipes and editing recipes of Cornelia and others.

Macrobiotic book publishing of Ohsawa's books also moved to the West Coast under the direction of Herman and Lou. The first macrobiotic book published in the United States was *Zen Macrobiotics* in mimeograph form in New York in 1960. By November, a revised edition of *Zen Macrobiotics* in book form was available followed by a transla-

tion of Ohsawa's 1956 French work, *The Philosophy of Oriental Medicine*. Zen Macrobiotics provided the details for a macrobiotic practice and *The Philosophy of Oriental Medicine* provided the theory. The need for both theory and practice was, and is, a fundamental principle of West Coast macrobiotics. These books helped many people begin a macrobiotic practice without needing to live near one of the major macrobiotic centers.

## CLASSES AND EVENTS FOR THE SOUL

Visits by George and Lima Ohsawa to Chico in November and December of 1962 greatly invigorated the young movement. George visited San Francisco on December 7 for a few days before returning to Japan. The Chico group led by Herman, Cornellia, Lou, and Shayne traveled to Sacramento, San Francisco, and Las Vegas spreading Ohsawa's teachings to many more people. Other lec-

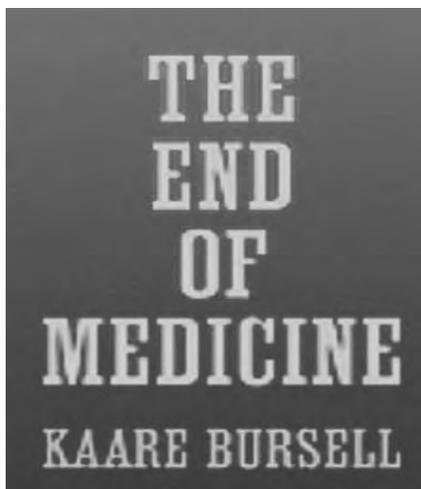


**HERMAN AIHARA RINGS UP A SALE FROM THE TAILGATE OF HIS CAR**

turers of note in those early days were Bill Nichols and Al Bauman. They also traveled to Los Angeles to meet with Tommy Nakayama and to teach there.

The West Coast group contin-

ued the tradition of an Ohsawa-style macrobiotic summer camp each year. The first camp on the West Coast was held in the Chico area from August 1-31, 1963 and was a huge success. Highlights were the participation of



**“A Macrobiotic Classic” – Michael Bauce; “Brilliant” – Christine DeRocher; “The Finest Book on Natural Healing I have read in 25 years of Chiropractic Practice” – JB Vaughan DC; “Learnt more in the first 20 pages than I have in two years of study” - student ; “I read your book very hungrily as your perception is so clear and rarely have I come across the understanding and intelligence that shines through in your writing. In that way, your book felt like a friend, a much needed friend, so thank you.-Penelope Bjorksten”; “The End of Medicine” is a beautiful book, in my opinion one of the more important books about macrobiotics written since Ohsawa” – Isobel Carr**

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George and Lima Ohsawa and several distinguished guests from Japan: Dr. Kikuo Chishima, who lectured on his revolutionary theory of cell reproduction; Drs. Chikao Narita and Moriyasu Ushio, who held daily consultations; and Mr. Kakujiro Hoshina, a well-known entertainer who performed Japanese folk songs on shamisen (Japanese stringed instrument) and the shakuhachi (native flute).<sup>8</sup>

Following this camp, the first official school on the West Coast, Center Ignoramus School of Macrobiotics, was established under the direction of Herman and Cornelia Aihara. This school would provide quality year-round instruction. In the August-September, 1963 issue of *Yin Yang*, Herman wrote about the school:

After having visited periodically with many people, having given numerous lectures and cooking classes in various communities, we have found that this is not enough for an understanding of macrobiotics. The real understanding comes from concentrated study in daily life. A month of daily attendance at a school could eliminate many months of floundering in a sea of misunderstanding.

We Japanese disciples of macrobiotics have been fortunate to study at the Tokyo Centre Ignoramus School under the direction of George Ohsawa. We think that this period of study was a key point in our lives. Our sense of gratitude makes us want to give others the same opportunity we have had.

Our school will be closely connected with Mr. Ohsawa wherever he may be and will be most precisely advised and supervised.<sup>9</sup>

Herman realized that good food, books and magazines, and occasional lectures and cooking classes were not enough. The spirit needed to help people understand macrobiotic principles on a deeper level came from interactions with other people over a

period of time. The camps provided this for short periods of time each summer. The new school provided a year-round continuation of the summer camp program.

## CONCLUSION

The primary business of West Coast macrobiotics was education. While many of the group were content with improved health, George, Herman, and Lou made certain the emphasis remained on learning the order of the universe, the principles of yin and yang, the levels of judgment, and the logarithmic spiral. George

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*“From a tiny seed planted in late 1959, macrobiotics on the West Coast began to develop.”*

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gave consultations, but only once to each student. There were no clients or patients—there were only students. And, each student was to discover for him or herself the natural order of life and how to apply it for whatever purpose he or she chose.

From a tiny seed planted in late 1959, macrobiotics on the West Coast began to develop. Perhaps the most important thing the young group did was to continue what they started. They continued producing and selling quality food to nourish the body. They continued publishing a newsletter and books on a regular basis to nourish the mind. They continued holding annual summer camps and began the first macrobiotic school in the U.S. to nourish the spirit.

Although they didn't know it at the time, the difficult days were soon to be over and better days were on their way. Their tireless work and dedication would soon begin to bear

fruit, for which everyone who practices macrobiotics today can be eternally grateful. Their story continues in the next installment of this series.

## NOTES

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5. Robertson, Phil. “Friendship Extended at City Plaza.” *The Chico Enterprise Record*. Chico, California. 2 Oct 1961: 1-2A. Print.
6. “From East to West in the U.S.” *U.P.* Ohsawa Foundation, Inc., Chico, California. Early 1962: 6. Print.
7. Oles, Lou. “Please Answer!” *U.P.* Ohsawa Foundation, Inc., Chico, California. Early 1962: 20-21. Print.
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9. Aihara, Herman. “Why the Centre Ignoramus School of Macrobiotics?” *Yin Yang: The Unifying Principle*, vol. III, no. 3. Ohsawa Foundation, Inc., Chico, California. Aug/Sep 1963: 7. Print.

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# Full Speed Ahead

## Origins of West Coast Macrobiotics, Part 2

Carl Ferré

In 1961, 34 people packed up and migrated from New York to Chico, California. They started Chico-San to make quality food available and gave lectures to the local community. However, two years later, the macrobiotic group was still relatively small. The townspeople thought the group was strange and found macrobiotic principles difficult to understand and the foods unfamiliar. The impending nuclear disaster had been averted and the excitement about the group's move had died down.

### TURNING POINTS

Events in 1963 provided a turning point that allowed the growth of macrobiotics on the West Coast. Slowly, Chico residents began to accept members of the former New York group as neighbors. Rumors about communists within the group turned out to be false. Concerns that their weird meatless and sugarless diet was lethal changed from fear to curiosity as the locals saw that the macrobiotic practitioners were not only surviving but also thriving.

Health food faddists and sick people were attracted to a macrobiotic diet, but only a few people were at-



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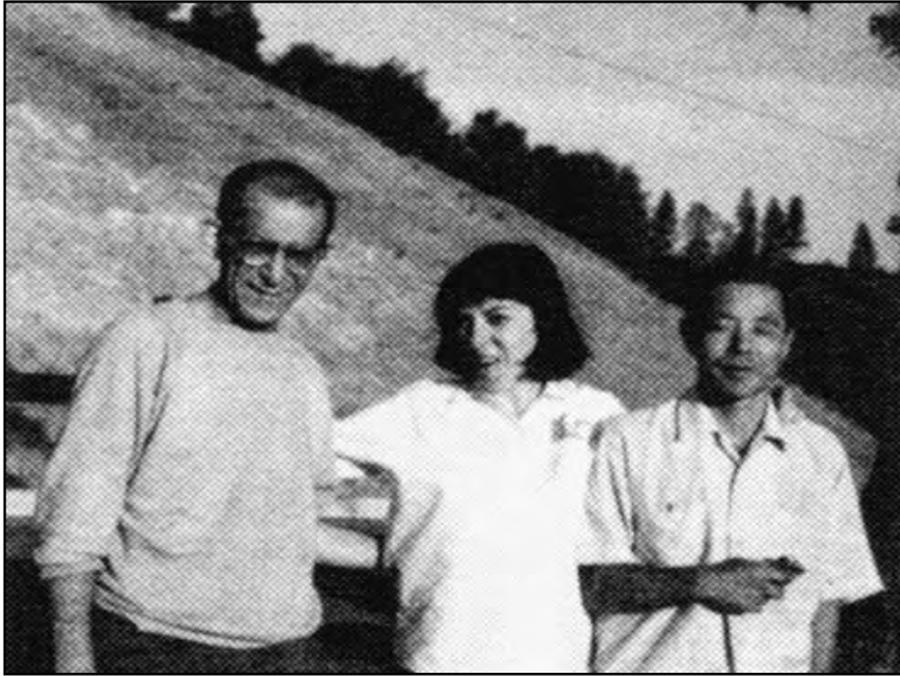
tracted to the underlying principles. The tendency was to reduce Ohsawa's universal macrobiotic philosophy to nothing more than a healing diet. This tendency gave macrobiotics the feeling of a cult or fad rather than a philosophy on which one could base his or her life. Some members of the macrobiotic group understood this and remained committed to teaching macrobiotics in a more unlimiting way.

Meanwhile, Chico-San needed to

find a product that would have mass appeal. Bob Kennedy, the company's president, asked George Ohsawa for ideas and George suggested rice cakes. George sent a rice cake machine from Japan to Chico in 1963. Later, he sent Junsei Yamazaki, one of his most promising students, to help. Junsei not only set up the rice cake machine, he also was the first person to make natural, traditional miso in America and produced some of the finest Yinnies rice syrup and candies, toasted sesame butter, and traditional tamari shoyu.<sup>1</sup>

These products, especially rice cakes, gave Chico-San a solid financial footing and helped place the Chico macrobiotic group at the leading edge of the natural foods revolution in the United States. The increased sales and visibility meant more people interested in a macrobiotic diet and philosophy.

By 1963, things were happening in Los Angeles, too. George and Lima Ohsawa and others encouraged Tommy Nakayama, one of Ohsawa's first students who had moved to Los Angeles in 1952, to open a restaurant. In 1963, Tommy and his family opened "Zen Restaurant" in Hollywood. George attended the grand opening and was very pleased. Many celeb-



**LOU OLES, SHAYNE OLES, AND JUNSEI YAMAZAKI**

rities from John Lennon, Yoko Ono, Red Buttons, Gloria Swanson, and Meredith Wilson to many other television stars, movie directors, composers, and models were regular customers. They learned about macrobiotics and the yin and yang of foods at the restaurant. Tommy also opened a tea-room next door to the restaurant to introduce Japanese culture to Americans.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1960s, Louis and Susan Remy, a Belgian couple who were long-time disciples of George Ohsawa, moved to Los Angeles from Canada.<sup>3</sup> They gave one of Ohsawa's books in French to Jacques and Yvette de Langre, introducing them to macrobiotics.<sup>4</sup> Together, Louis and Jacques opened a photography studio in Hollywood in 1964. Later that year, Louis and Susan opened the Los Angeles Home of Macrobiotics, offering a residential place for advice and consultation for beginners to macrobiotics as well as for those advanced in understanding the Unique Principle. Herman Aihara and Bob Kennedy were the first guests in November of 1964.<sup>5</sup> These activities greatly increased the visibility and

understanding of macrobiotics on the West Coast.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

For several years, the only macrobiotic books in English were Ohsawa's *Zen Macrobiotics* (early 1960) and the *Philosophy of Oriental Medicine* (late 1960). Although new and better-quality printings of these titles became available in the early 1960s, these two books were thought to contain all that was needed for successful macrobiotic practice. The early magazines published by Herman Aihara provided useful information and encouragement. Both the books and the magazines were sold mostly at lectures or passed around among friends. By 1964, the group realized that more was needed.

The primary need was a cookbook. By 1964, Cornellia Aihara collected her recipes and those of Shayne Oles and others in the Chico macrobiotic group. *Zen Cookery* was published in November as an accompaniment to *Zen Macrobiotics*. Even though the numbering system of *Zen Cookery* didn't correspond to those

in *Zen Macrobiotics*, the new cookbook provided needed instruction in macrobiotic cooking.

Lou Oles began work on a revised version of *Zen Macrobiotics* to make it more accessible to Western readers. He also worked on a new edition of *Philosophy of Oriental Medicine* and had the vision to combine these two books with a translation of Ohsawa's 1947 Japanese book, *Macrobiotic Guidebook for Living*, as a trilogy. His revised version of *Zen Macrobiotics* came out in 1965. In August of 1965, the Foundation's newsletter/magazine, *The Macrobiotic Monthly*, was made available on newsstands and in bookstores in an effort to reach out to a larger audience.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most significant publication in 1965 was *You Are All Sanpaku*. The author was listed as Sakurazawa Nyōiti (Ohsawa's Japanese name) with William Dufty, a New York journalist and an excellent writer, as responsible for the English version. The majority of the book is his reworking of Ohsawa's works—most notably *Philosophy of Oriental Medicine*. The first 50 pages are Dufty's spellbinding account of his conversion to macrobiotics and moved many people to make changes in their lives. *You Are All Sanpaku* and his most popular work, *Sugar Blues* published ten years later, helped make macrobiotic philosophy accessible to an ever-widening audience.

## **SUMMER CAMPS**

The 1963 camp held in Chico, California was the first Ohsawa-style camp on the West Coast. George and Lima Ohsawa attended and it was somewhat successful. The second West Coast camp was held near Big Sur, California from August 1-9, 1964. The camp, being located between San Francisco and Los Angeles, was attended by an average of 80 people per day with many Japanese guests. George Ohsawa attended five days and lectured each morning he

was there. Other lecturers were Alcan Yamaguchi<sup>7</sup> and members of the Chico group such as Herman Aihara, Teal Nichols, and Lou Oles. Susan and Louis Remy did the cooking for the camp.<sup>3</sup>

One of the attendees of the 1964 camp was Alex Lesnevsky. Alex was an electrical engineer who had dropped out of the mainstream to find something greater in life. He was studying Zen in Los Angeles in 1963 and attended Ohsawa's lectures organized by Tommy Nakayama. The wide range of topics and Ohsawa's willingness and ability to answer all questions using the unique principle impressed Alex. He recalls:

When he got into it deeper and deeper, I could see the logic of it. There was more to it than I had imagined. He got into all sorts of things I never dreamed of. He wasn't just talking about diet—he was talking about life. He was talking about connecting everything in the universe.<sup>8</sup>

Alex met many of the old-time macrobiotic group at the camp and a month later he went to work for Chico-San. He also recalls that many sick people attended because they had heard that George was some kind of healer. Day and night people begged for Ohsawa's advice, which he gave freely without charge. He was accepting and considerate of everyone.<sup>8</sup>

In 1965, Camp Satori was held an hour away from Chico in the Feather River Canyon. Lou Oles was camp director and reported that the event was not a happy one. First, some in the Chico group decided not to attend. Second, the enormity of teaching the Unique Principle and the Order of the Universe to people who lacked the ability to comprehend it was overwhelming. Third, many of the younger attendees were more interested in LSD and other recreational drugs than macrobiotics.<sup>9</sup>

Campers also were dissatisfied because they didn't feel they received



**JACQUES DELANGRE, TOMMY NAKAYAMA, LOU OLES, AND BOB KENNEDY**

enough answers. They simply refused to think for themselves, prompting Lou to write: "They have failed to understand the value of the true teacher in the Orient. Only in so far as he is able to provoke his students into thinking for themselves is he worthy of the title Sensei—true teacher."<sup>9</sup>

Another perspective on the 1965 camp comes from Alex Lesnevsky. He picked up George and Lima from the airport in Sacramento and drove them to the camp. The camp location was good as was the food and attendance; however, there were lots of hippies—and lots of dope. George was disgusted and blurted out during one lecture, "You have low judgment!" George told Alex that it was the worse summer camp he had ever attended.<sup>8</sup>

It is ironic that the hippies ended up providing the impetus for macrobiotic philosophy to flourish on the West Coast and throughout the United States. This rise in macrobiotic activity proves one of Ohsawa's fundamental principles, the bigger the front, the bigger the back—from the dirtiest mud comes the most beautiful flower.

## SUMMARY

Things were looking up by the beginning of 1966. Lou and Shane Oles decided to move to Los Angeles to be in a larger city with more printing services. This move also allowed Jacques de Langre with his photographic skills to be more involved. New books and new editions of existing books were planned. The remaining members of the New York group had been accepted into the Chico community. More people were familiar with macrobiotics and Chico-San was doing well.

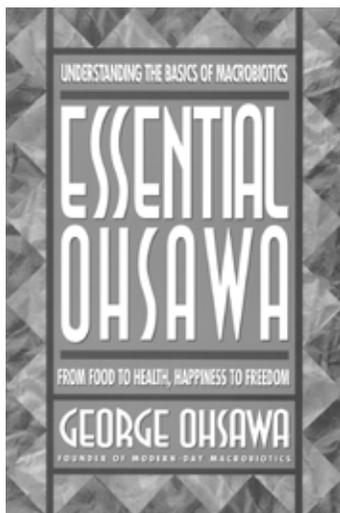
Macrobiotic teaching was developing. Many sick people looked to macrobiotics for help. Herman Aihara and Lou Oles were intent on keeping Ohsawa's macrobiotic principles at the forefront of the teaching. Herman Aihara summarized Ohsawa's teaching in the early 1960s as follows: "Ohsawa's greatest concern was that we understand and live with Oneness or Infinity. In other words, he wanted us to live without exclusivity. He wanted us to accept everything with joy and appreciation, making no excuses for ourselves."<sup>10</sup>

Ohsawa himself was busy working on Louis Kervran's theory of biological transmutation. Simply stated,

Discover what millions of men, women, and children around the world have found – the macrobiotic path to “Infinite freedom, absolute justice, and eternal happiness.”

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biological transmutation is the theory that one element can be changed to another in a person's body. Ohsawa had done some experiments in 1964, during which he claimed to have changed sodium into potassium and carbon into iron using very low heat and energy. Ohsawa felt transmutation could usher in world peace because nations would no longer have to fight over expensive elements—they could be transmuted from cheaper ones.<sup>11</sup>

Another of Ohsawa's projects involved the Olympics. He noted that there was a physical, athletic Olympics every four years and was organizing the first ever International Cultural and Spiritual Olympics to be held in Japan in the summer of 1966. The future looked bright and overall macrobiotics was moving ahead at full speed. No one, except perhaps Ohsawa himself, foresaw the major bump in the road ahead—the subject of the next installment.

## NOTES

1. Milbury, Peter. "Junsei Yamazaki: Ohsawa's Eternal Student." *Macrobiotics Today* [George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation, Oroville, CA] Nov 1988: 8-9. Print.
2. Letter from Tommy Nakayama's daughter, Toyo Furukawa, received May 29, 2011.
3. Editor. "News from Chico." *Yin Yang: The Unifying Principle, vol. IV, no. 2* [Ohsawa Foundation, Inc., Chico, California] Sep 1964: 11. Print.
4. Jacques and Yvette would start Happiness Press and publish several important books, including Jacques' own *Do-In 1, Do-In 2*, and *Seasalt's Hidden Powers*. Jacques' specialties were naturally-leavened sourdough bread and sea salt. He would later establish the Grain and Salt Society, which is still in business today, providing quality

sea salt. Jacques and Yvette's non-dogmatic style contributed greatly to the growth of West Coast macrobiotics.

5. Remy, Louis and Susan. "New from Los Angeles." *Yin Yang: The Unifying Principle, vol. IV, no. 5* [Ohsawa Foundation, Inc., Chico, California] Dec 1964: 8-9. Print.
6. Oles Lou. "Editor's Page." *The Macrobiotic Monthly, vol 5, no 8* [Ohsawa Foundation, Chico, CA]. Aug 1965: 1. Print.
7. Alcan Yamaguchi met Ohsawa in 1943 and became one of Ohsawa's students. He went to New York in 1960 at Ohsawa's request and helped establish America's first public macrobiotic eating place in Greenwich Village called, "musubi." From Kotsch, Ronald E, Ph.D. *Macrobiotics: Yesterday and Today* [Japan Publications, New York]. Sep 1985: 166-167. Print. Alcan attended the 1964 camp on his way back to Japan.
8. Milbury, Peter. "Interview with Alex Lesnevsky." *The Macrobiotic, no. 102* [George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation, Oroville, CA] Dec 1974: 2-20. Print.
9. Oles Lou. "Editor's Page." *The Macrobiotic Monthly, vol 5, no 9* [Ohsawa Foundation, Chico, CA]. Sep 1965: 1-2. Print.
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# From Tragedy to Happiness

## Origins of West Coast Macrobiotics, Part 3

Carl Ferré

Everything changed on April 24, 1966 when George Ohsawa suddenly and unexpectedly died. Lima Ohsawa was with him when he died and sent the news. Four Japanese doctors familiar with macrobiotics diagnosed the cause of death as arterial thrombosis. Theories on the underlying cause among macrobiotic followers range from overworking, sleeping only two to three hours per night, to experiments trying to make a macrobiotic herbal drink that would be as popular as beer and sugared soft drinks.

Ohsawa himself felt he had revealed too much about the Infinite world and that it was his time to move on. In 1963, he told Madame Rivière, a leader of macrobiotics in France, that he only had three years to live.<sup>1</sup> In 1965, he told Alex Lesnevsky, “I shall not live long because I have abused my body too much.”<sup>2</sup> His contracting filaria (blood parasites) in Africa in 1956 to prove the worth of the macrobiotic method to Albert Schweitzer comes to mind.

Some people felt Ohsawa’s death would mean the end of the macrobiotic movement. Actually, the opposite occurred. The growth of macrobiotics on the West Coast and elsewhere increased because of



**CARL FERRÉ**

the timelessness of Ohsawa’s teachings and the dedication of Ohsawa’s students. About Ohsawa, Lou Oles wrote, “We, who are left behind, face the future with the humility, the smiling faces, the sense of responsibility, and the deep purpose that would have made him the happiest of men.”<sup>3</sup>

The macrobiotic group faced other challenges in the early days of 1966. The biggest challenge was the death of Beth Ann Simon. After Herman and Cornelia, Lou and Shayne

Oles, and others moved from New York to Chico, California in 1961, Irma Paule ran the Ohsawa Foundation of New York. Irma was a French actress who spoke French and thus became Ohsawa’s assistant while he was in America. In the spring of 1965, Beth Ann and Charles Simon attended one of Irma’s lectures and decided to start a strict macrobiotic practice. Unfortunately, they misunderstood macrobiotic teaching and tried to balance years of LSD, marijuana, and harder illegal drug use with excess yang—lots of salt while drinking little or no water. She died in New Jersey late in 1965.

Beth Ann’s father was an influential lawyer. He attempted to cover up the drug use and to blame macrobiotics for her death. Irma Paule was accused of poisoning her but no evidence of this could be found and she was not charged. The father got the FDA involved and the FDA raided the Ohsawa Foundation of New York with hatchets in hand. The Ohsawa Foundation of New York closed, although Irma continued teaching and counseling informally for about forty years.<sup>4</sup>

The Beth Ann Simon case had a profound effect on the West Coast group as well. The FDA inspected



**LOU OLES, HERMAN AIHARA, AND OTHERS EAT LUNCH AT THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL OLYMPICS IN JAPAN IN 1966**

the Chico-San store. They made it clear that it was illegal for the same company to sell food products and to provide health claims or information about these products. Chico-San and the California Ohsawa Foundation had to be completely separated. As a result, Herman Aihara resigned from the Ohsawa Foundation and worked for Chico-San only—at least officially. Lou Oles became editor of *The Macrobiotic Monthly* and moved the editorial office to Los Angeles early in 1966.

The Foundation's move to Los Angeles separated the food (Chico-San) and the theory (Ohsawa Foundation) and satisfied the FDA. Lou discovered that macrobiotic people in Los Angeles had the mistaken notion that the Chico group had a direct link to inside information about how and what to eat and drink. Lou did his best to dispel this idea. He placed the emphasis back on each person deciding for him- or herself the best foods and preparations for him or her. Lou wrote: "Bear in mind that you must enter the Kingdom of Heaven by yourself and for yourself. No one but you can tell you how to be Macrobiotic."<sup>25</sup> These statements provide the essence

of West Coast macrobiotic teaching.

One of Ohsawa's last projects was to establish a Cultural and Spiritual Olympics in 1966. George worked on preparations for over a year before his death. The event was held in Japan as scheduled and many people from the West Coast group attended along with people from around the world. It was a true meeting of East and West as George had envisioned it. The spiritual Olympics in Japan was held instead of a West Coast camp in 1966.

Early in 1967, the Ohsawa Foundation manned a booth at the National Health Federation Convention held at the Statler Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles. They answered many questions, displayed the Foundation's publications, and served delicious macrobiotic food. Macrobiotic activity was increasing around the world during the spring of 1967. Lou wrote, "Young people from everywhere are turning to the Unique Principle as a source of guidance in a troubled world."<sup>26</sup>

The third event to shock the macrobiotic community was the death of Lou Oles on August 20, 1967. Toward the end of June 1967, Lou became ill during a meal at a French

restaurant. After becoming weaker and losing much weight over the following few weeks, x-rays were taken and an obstruction in the stomach was found. He flew to Japan to see Lima Ohsawa, arriving on July 18. He was hospitalized and treated by doctors who understood macrobiotic principles, but his symptoms were too advanced. An autopsy revealed stomach cancer that was at least ten years old, even though Lou was unaware of it, having practiced macrobiotics for the last seven years without any symptoms or perceived illness.<sup>7</sup>

The three deaths, Beth Ann Simon in 1965, George Ohsawa in 1966, and Lou Oles in 1967, were difficult to understand for people who perceived macrobiotics only as a healing diet. People who understood macrobiotic principles, however, saw the deaths as proof that the principles work. Beth Ann misunderstood the principles and tried to counter extreme yin with extreme yang. Lou mistook a lack of symptoms for real health. And, George understood the principles and accepted the price he had to pay for the life he had lived.

It was Lou Oles and Herman Aihara who kept the emphasis of West Coast macrobiotic teaching on the order of the universe and the unique principle—theory and practice. Following Lou's passing, Herman returned as president of the Ohsawa Foundation and the editorial offices returned to Chico, California in the fall of 1967. Herman wrote about the deaths of George and Lou as follows:

"Sadness is followed by joy. Without sadness, no joy, and vice versa. This is the law or justice of the universe. There is only one thing left for us to do and that is to change sadness to joy. Try to change the most disagreeable thing to joy. Our happiness exists only in this effort. Avoiding or escaping the sad or difficult never brings us happiness."<sup>28</sup>

## **UNEXPECTED BOOST**

Many young people who were us-

ing LSD and other recreational drugs attended the 1965 West Coast camp. George Ohsawa was disappointed with the drug use. However, some of these attendees would help spread macrobiotics in a huge way. The hippie movement was developing in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco in 1965 and 1966. Some macrobiotic principles, especially dietary ones, became widely accepted by 1967 within this community. While the West Coast groups in Chico and Los Angeles were dealing with the recent death of George Ohsawa and others, hippies in San Francisco were dealing macrobiotics along with marijuana and other drugs.<sup>9</sup>

Copies of *Zen Macrobiotics* were passed around and many hippies readily accepted the dietary part of macrobiotics. It was counter to a typical American diet and the food was inexpensive. The number 7 diet also offered a quick cure for every illness created by modern fast-food diets. Natural food stores and restaurants began selling macrobiotic foods. Bill Zemsky created a rice cart stand in front of UC Berkeley and by 1968 with Sandy Rothman as owner and operator, it was reported to be selling “hotter” than the hot dog stand next to it.<sup>10</sup>

The pace of macrobiotic growth quickened by 1967. Both Herman Aihara and Michio Kushi acknowledge that macrobiotics spread more widely and quickly due to the hippies from San Francisco. Many went to Boston to study with Michio and several became instrumental in the development of macrobiotics on the East Coast and around the world. Others helped Herman and Cornelia develop macrobiotics on the West Coast.

New macrobiotic restaurants in Los Angeles and elsewhere were established in 1968. That year, Herman Aihara regularly lectured up and down the West Coast from Seattle to Los Angeles and to places closer to home such as San Francisco and Reno, Nevada. In May, Michio Kushi



**THE OLES FAMILY: LOU, DAVID, AND SHAYNE**

toured the West Coast, lecturing in many of the same cities. In August, Herman traveled to Denver for lectures. Macrobiotics was growing quickly both in numbers and throughout the Western United States.

There was a summer camp announced for August of 1967, but there is no report on this camp in *The Macrobiotic Monthly*. Despite the increased numbers of macrobiotic followers, only about 30 people attended the 1968 camp held in the San Bernardino Mountains. Herman reported that this was the first camp without George Ohsawa present,<sup>11</sup> giving credence to the idea that the 1967 camp was cancelled due to Lou Oles's failing health.

In late July of 1968, the largest macrobiotic camp to date was held in France. Over 200 Europeans attended along with about 80 Japanese and people from the United States, Africa, and South America. Shayne Oles from the West Coast group attended.

The increase in macrobiotic followers meant a larger staff for *The Macrobiotic Monthly*. Twelve issues were published in 1967, and they included more substantial articles. Many of the articles became pamphlets or books. *Macrobiotic Reports*

(later called *Macro Guides*) that were completed in 1968 included *Biological Transmutation*, *Vitamin C and Fruit*, *Life and Death*, and a new translation of *Macrobiotic Guidebook for Living*. These books and other publications helped spread macrobiotics even more.

## **BE YOUR OWN TEACHER**

By 1969, macrobiotics was widely known on both coasts. Teaching on the East Coast was highly organized and more theoretical. Teaching on the West Coast was less formal and more community oriented. In February, Bill French wrote, “Studying and learning macrobiotics is somewhat less formal here and could be placed in the category of everyday living, the emphasis being on practical application. Each person is more or less his own teacher and student.”<sup>12</sup> Herman Aihara lectured in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chico each month. Jacques and Yvette de Langre, Lennie and Susan Richards, and Tommy Nakayama gave other lectures in Los Angeles.

The name of the monthly magazine changed to *The Macrobiotic* in January of 1969. In May, Herman and Cornelia moved to Carmichael, a suburb of Sacramento, for easier travel to



**HERMAN AIHARA AND MICHIO KUSHI IN THE 1950s**

Los Angeles and San Francisco. The magazine's editorial offices moved to Carmichael in June. Herman continued to travel to Los Angeles and San Francisco monthly for lectures. New macrobiotic restaurants were opened including one in Seattle.

There were two West Coast macrobiotic summer camps in 1969. The first was held from July 26 to August 2 at Mayaro Lodge in Northern California and about 40 people attended. The main lectures and nightly discussions were led by Herman Aihara with camp directors Shayne Oles and Lennie Richards and others leading other discussions. Cornelia Aihara, Shayne Oles, and others prepared delicious meals. There were cabins and thus "ample opportunity to be alone, and this was often the case."<sup>13</sup>

The second camp was held from August 16 through 25 near Big Sur and was attended by about 150 people. This location had no cabins and thus "there was little chance for privacy in the camp sites; we all inter-related, grew, and learned—from changes in ourselves, others, and in all of us as a group."<sup>13</sup> Herman Aihara and Michel Abehsera, author of *Zen Macrobiotic Cooking* who had created and operated several macrobiotic restaurants in New York City, gave

the main lectures. Costs were kept low so that many people could attend.

George Ohsawa gave his first macrobiotic lectures on the West Coast late in 1959. Ten years later by the end of 1969, macrobiotic followers were eagerly awaiting the first California organic brown rice from Chico-San. New books and pamphlets from the Ohsawa Foundation included *Rice and the Ten-Day Rice Diet* and *Macrobiotic Pregnancy*. Through the works published by Herman Aihara, Lou Oles, and Jacques de Langre, annual summer camps, and countless lecture trips on the West coast, the group that migrated to California in 1961 had created a stable and growing macrobiotic community. The group was looking forward to the 1970s and to new challenges to come.

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# Think for Yourself

## Origins of West Coast Macrobiotics, Part 4

Carl Ferré

The first ten years of the Ohsawa Foundation were filled with changes. Herman Aihara, Al Bauman, Teal Nichols, and Mary Barsamian formed the Ohsawa Foundation of New York in 1961. Herman was elected as the first president. In the fall of 1961, 34 people, including Herman Aihara and family, moved to Chico, California and began West Coast macrobiotics. The West Coast group began Chico-San in 1962 and continued macrobiotic teaching, publishing, and conducting annual summer camps that were begun in New York.

The Ohsawa Foundation of New York dissolved in 1965 after a raid by the FDA. That same year, Herman Aihara, Bob Kennedy, Lou Oles, Bill Salant, and Bill Nichols incorporated the Ohsawa Foundation of Chico. Herman and Bob were forced to resign from the Foundation because of their work with Chico-San. At that time, teaching about healthy food and selling those foods at the same time was forbidden. Lou Oles moved the Foundation to Los Angeles at the beginning of 1966.

The young macrobiotic community was stunned in April of 1966 by the death of George Ohsawa. Lou Oles died the following year. Herman



**CARL FERRÉ**

Aihara quit working at Chico-San and became president of the Ohsawa Foundation once again. From late in 1967 to 1970, there was a sharp rise in the sales of books, pamphlets, and subscriptions to *The Macrobiotic*. The Aihara family moved to Carmichael, a suburb of Sacramento, in 1969.

### **GOOD TIMES**

By the beginning of 1970, Herman was teaching regularly up and down the West Coast from Seattle

and Portland to San Francisco and Los Angeles. In the summer of 1970, the Aihara's made their first United States/Canada macrobiotic lecture tour accompanied by Alcan Yamaguchi. They lectured in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tucson, Houston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Toronto, Columbus, Chicago, Kansas City, Denver, Vancouver, Seattle, Ashland, Chico, and Carmichael.

The first French Meadows Summer Camp was held from August 14 to 23, 1970. Cornellia Aihara, Nan Schleiger, and Yvette de Langre cooked, and Jacques de Langre began the tradition of having Do-In each morning at 6:30 a.m. The main lectures by Herman and others were in the morning; afternoon classes were more optional. There were lectures and discussions after dinner along with children's campfires and goodies.<sup>1</sup>

A second West Coast camp was held August 22 to 31, 1970 at Wiley Creek Campground in the Stillaquamish Valley 1½ hours northeast of Seattle. Herman and Alcan attended this camp as well. The community in Seattle was growing fast.<sup>2</sup> By the end of 1970, Herman attributed increased interest in macrobiotic teaching to

eight factors.

1. Young adults (Herman later referred to them as hippies).
2. Increased awareness of ecology.
3. Increased awareness of organically grown foods.
4. Increased awareness of the harmful effects of cyclamates, MSG, refined sugar, and synthetic chemicals.
5. Michio Kushi's work.
6. More macrobiotic communities and educational meetings.
7. *You Are All Sanpaku*.
8. Chico-San, Erewhon, and other macrobiotic food manufacturers and distributors making good food more available.<sup>3</sup>

## ONE MORE BIG CHANGE

Things were going quite well in 1970, yet there was one more major change to come. The directors of the Ohsawa Foundation of LA were Herman Aihara, Shayne Oles Suehle, Fred Suehle, and Bernard Silver. On the November 10, 1970, Herman sent a letter to the other directors proposing a re-organization of the Ohsawa Foundation. He asked that 18 new directors, including Michio Kushi, be added. This increase would give greater suggestions and participations from more local organizations.<sup>3</sup>

Herman's proposal was rejected, after which he resigned, moved to San Francisco, and formed the George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation early in 1971. The new organization had great support and, that year, many new books were published, including *Is Acid Yin, Is Alkaline Yang?*; *Macrobiotics: An Invitation to Health and Happiness*; *Hidden Truth of Cancer*; and *Milk: A Myth of Civilization*. The Macrobiotic magazine continued under Herman's leadership.

The next 27 years for West Coast macrobiotics were more stable. However, in 1974, the Aihara's made another move—this one to Oroville, California, a small town 23 miles from Chico. They purchased a house



**HERMAN AIHARA PRINTING BOOKS IN THE EARLY 1970s**

in Oroville for the George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation and 40 acres in the hills above Lake Oroville to begin a residential learning center. Herman and Cornellia founded the Vega Institute in 1974 and both organizations were moved into the former Oroville hospital building a decade later.

The Foundation moved to a separate location in Oroville in 1995. Three years after Herman's passing in 1998, the George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation moved back to Chico—40 years after the group from New York began teaching macrobiotics on the West Coast. To this day, the Foundation continues with its mission to present macrobiotics to the general public as originally enunciated by George Ohsawa and as appended by Herman and Cornellia Aihara. The Vega Institute closed shortly after Cornellia's passing in 2006.

## SUMMARY

The essence of West Coast macrobiotics originates from Oh-

sawa's insistence that each person learn to think for him or herself. This requires that each person learn macrobiotic principles and how to use them. Each individual is unique, meaning that there is no one diet that is appropriate for everyone all the time. The ultimate goal is to realize our connection with Oneness—our true nature. Then, we can live without exclusivity and without making excuses for ourselves. We can accept everything—good and bad—with joy and appreciation. Ohsawa gave us macrobiotic principles and dietary advice to point us in that direction.

Ohsawa understood that dietary choices lead us toward this realization or away from it. Much to his disappointment, the early macrobiotic group tended to view macrobiotics only as a curative diet. This thinking led to lists of foods to eat and lists of foods to avoid. Such lists are okay as an introduction as long as people realize that the lists become secondary once macrobiotic principles are learned. Macrobiotics, according to Ohsawa, is more about elevating

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**GEORGE OHSAWA LECTURING AT BIG SUR CAMP 1964**

judgment than about eating certain foods and avoiding others. Understanding macrobiotic principles and eating good food are equally important.

The early West Coast teachers emphasized learning the order of the universe, the unifying principles of yin and yang, the levels of judgment, and the logarithmic spiral. They encouraged each student to discover for him or herself the natural order of life and how to apply it for whatever purpose he or she chooses. No one person can tell another person how to be macrobiotic. Macrobiotic practice, as a way of life, is unique to each individual and has value for that person.

The current West Coast macrobiotic objective is to present macrobiotics in as unlimiting way as possible and accepts and encourages all expressions of macrobiotics. Thus, people who see macrobiotics as a way to elevate judgment or to realize divinity are welcome. Macrobiotic practitioners who see macrobiotics only as a curative diet are equally welcome. The reason for this acceptance is simple. We can change what we eat. We can change how we feel. We can change what we think. We can change what we believe. But, we can't

change our true nature. Realizing that which does not change, leads to tolerance, kindness, freedom, peace, and love—the real essence of all universal teaching, including macrobiotics.

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