

A well-known historian reflects on the childhood experiences that shaped his life

Child of the Sun

Memories of a Philippine Boyhood

By Lonn Taylor

Foreword by Edith Uunila Taylor

Historian Lonn Taylor built a career as a curator in history museums, including the Smithsonian Institution. In retirement he wrote weekly columns on the people and places of Texas, signed the “Rambling Boy,” that were distributed widely in print and on the radio.

This book stands out from his numerous other books on historical and literary topics: it’s the only one he wrote about himself and the last book he wrote before he died in June 2019. It describes how his experience of growing up in the Philippines from 1947 to 1955 shaped his entire life by teaching him the destructive power of war.

In the Philippines, his father was employed as a civil engineer building and rebuilding roads and bridges in the war-devastated islands. “I lived most of my daily life in a well-protected bubble of white colonialism,” he says in this memoir of his youth, “and thought nothing about it.” Despite that “well-protected bubble,” Taylor was aware of the ruins all around him, the ravages of bombs and artillery shells, and of his Filipino neighbors unbowed by their loss of wealth and privilege, or their confinement and starvation in Japanese internment camps. The manifest strengths and resilience of a society blended of Malay, Chinese, Spanish, and American cultures made him a lifelong believer in the benefits of multiculturalism—even as he bore witness to the islands’ postcolonial woes: a feudal agricultural system maintained by landlords with private armies, corruption so endemic that even post office clerks expected tips for selling stamps, and deadly outbreaks of personal violence.

As an American child in the Philippines, and then, inevitably, an outsider in the postwar America he returned to at fifteen, Taylor honed a keen and varied sense of difference in class, culture, and language. This nuanced understanding can be heard throughout *Child of the Sun* as Taylor reflects on his innocent years, conveying with hard-earned worldliness and wisdom all the beauty and lasting conflict of a lost world and time.

Lonn Taylor (1940–2019) was a historian and curator at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. He is the author or coauthor of several books, including *Turning the Pages of Texas*; *Texas People*; *Texas Places: More Musings of the Rambling Boy*; *Texas, My Texas: Musings of the Rambling Boy*; and *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Making of an American Icon*.

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