

PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY



Author / Owner of Studio 904

KEIKO KAY HIRAI

Keiko Kay Hirai is the founder of Studio 904 Hair Design, an award-winning salon that utilizes innovative business concepts to best meet the needs of her valued customers. As a respected business owner and philanthropist, she provides a helping hand to those in need, especially women, children, and animals. In addition to *Sheer Determination*, she is the author of *Yumi's Life Lessons* and *Keiko's Journey*. To learn more about Kay's life and work, visit www.keikokayhirai.com.

You have written two other books, *Keiko's Journey* and *Yumi's Life Lessons*. What motivated you to write *Sheer Determination*?

I had been thinking about writing a book about my business for a long time. My memoir, *Keiko's Journey*, was written first because I felt that writing about my childhood would provide a strong foundation for *Sheer Determination*. *Yumi's Life Lessons* was something I wrote on the spur of the moment after she passed on at the young age of four. I didn't want to forget her sweetness and how she pushed me to live a happier life.

In *Sheer Determination*, I wanted to document my experiences because I knew that it would help me to feel more secure and complete as a person. I didn't want to forget the ups and downs of going through the lifelong journey of building my business and the lessons I learned along the way. Additionally, I want the "real" news about small businesses to be heard. Most people believe in the "fake" news, i.e., starting one's own entrepreneurial enterprise instantly leads to enormous wealth. Instead of focusing on "get rich" schemes, I want to help women and men who aspire to be in business, who are already operating their own businesses, or who are looking for a sense of purpose in their lives. I want to help them uncover the core values that lay deep within each one of us, waiting to be stirred and awakened. The bottom line is that it is essential to find what truly motivates each one of us. If we don't find out what that is, we will live our lives without a sense of direction or purpose.

How did you come up with the title for your book? What was the inspiration behind it?

I struggled with finding the right name for a long time and wrote down hundreds of names in the process. None of them, however, seemed to convey the heart and soul of my story. One day, while talking with my editor, I said that I felt like I was swimming upstream in a downstream world. He surprised me by replying "That's it! I really like what you just said!" So, we decided on "*Sheer Determination, Swimming Upstream in a Downstream World*" for the title. It references the fact that it took a lot of resolve on my part to succeed when there were so many obstacles that were thrown in my path. I also like the title because it is so simple and easy to remember.

As the owner of a small business, Kay Hirai has dedicated her life to running an ethical business that helps her employees, customers, and the community. In her third book, "*Sheer Determination*," she details her 40-year journey of self-discovery and perseverance to create a salon that is widely admired for its cutting-edge business philosophies. Recently, Kay took some time from her always busy schedule to discuss the book with staff of the North American Post.

Interview conducted by Randy Tada

The title, "*Sheer Determination*," describes you beautifully. Where do you think your personal strength and resilience comes from?

The title means exactly what it says. This concept is what life is all about. Just think about your daily life and the unexpected things that come your way. We constantly have to punch through the paper tigers that emerge and stand in our way. At times, we can enjoy swimming in the peaceful flow of the water, but the tide can change very quickly and then we are swimming with all of our might against the force of the water.

In the second chapter of my book, a video tells the story of my narrow escape from the atomic bomb. When you watch it, you will see how I grew up following the hardships of life in Kokura, Japan, during and after World War II. The video illustrates the kind of willpower it took just to survive.

What has been your biggest challenge as an author so far?

It has definitely been the fact that I am exposing the truths about myself to the world. I have constant nightmares that vultures are metaphorically flying down to pick apart the weaknesses in my character. One of the things that I often think about is whether sharing my trials and tribulations are going to be useful or appreciated by the readers. My concern is that many of them may be just as happy leading the lives that they are now living without hearing about my journey.

Writing a book is an ambitious project. How difficult was it to actually finish this book and how long did it take?

I always had a strong desire to write the book, so my motivation was never in question. The hardest part was finding the time to write it while simultaneously running my business and attending to my community responsibilities. It was tough, but I made up my mind that the only way I could see it to completion was if I committed myself to writing from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. each morning before I went to work. After sticking to this regimen for 16 months, I was finally able to finish my book.

What was it like to revisit the history of how you built your business?

After completing many of the chapters, I could hardly believe that I had actually taken on some of the things that I had written about. I asked myself, "Was I crazy to take such risks? What was I thinking?" I have never considered myself to be a big risk taker, but after writing about some of the things I did, it taught me a lot about myself and showed that I was up to making many decisions with uncertain outcomes.

What advice would you give to a small business owner so that they can increase their chances of long-term success?

I would say this to them... "If you are in business to make tons of money in a short amount of time, your chances of being successful are not that good. After working long hours, you will soon feel cheated when you find out that your take-home pay won't even come close to compensating you for the hours that you are putting in. Once your rationale for being in business transitions from maximizing the amount of money you make to living a life of passion and purpose, you will be amazed at the amount of energy you have to go through the trials and triumphs of your journey."

I heard that your book includes some innovative features. Can you tell me what makes your book different from the regular books that readers might normally think of?

One thing I really wanted to do was to connect and develop a relationship with my readers. Developing this strong association involves more than just written words on the pages of a book. To achieve my goal, I inserted six unique videos in certain parts of the book to explain, in more detail, my heartfelt feelings about the events in those specific sections. In addition, readers will find three free downloadable gifts. These gifts can be downloaded by using a QR Code app on your phone. The best thing is that you don't have to be a technology geek to participate. I provide step-by-step instructions on how to use the QR code in my book and I hope that my readers will step into the future with me and try it out.

What message do you hope readers will take away after reading *Sheer Determination*?

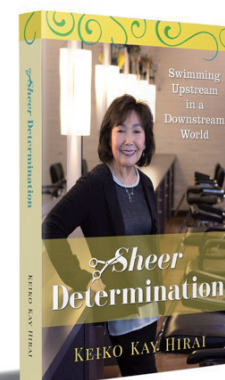
Most of us work hard to make good things happen. We work to sharpen our skills. We put in long hours. We put ourselves out there and do our best to serve others. Perhaps most importantly, we try to see the good in the world. Yet, it is easy to forget the core values that lie deep within us, waiting to be awakened. It is essential to dig deep and uncover those values. If we don't make that effort, there is no passion, joy, or purposeful direction to our lives and we end up feeling lost or unfulfilled. It is my wish that after reading my new book, *Sheer Determination, Swimming Upstream in a Downstream World*, readers will try to implement some of the ideas that I share on how to awaken your passion, build your business, change the world, and love your life.

Are you planning to write any other books in the near future?

As I approached the last few chapters of this third book, I remember saying a few things like, "Oh, I can hardly wait until this book is finished. Then, I can feel how great it feels to have the burden of publishing my book lifted off my shoulders. When the last word is finally placed on the last page, I can celebrate and relax forever!" As it turned out, that didn't happen. Even before the last chapter was finished, I had a new idea for a book that I wanted to write. I won't say what that book will be about right now, but I feel the message just has to be shared. I will keep my readers informed as I get closer to revealing the ideas for my next book.

When will *Sheer Determination* be available and where will people be able to purchase it?

The launch date for *Sheer Determination* will be on Thursday, May 11, 2017, on Amazon. The regular price is \$14.95, but on that date only, the purchase price will be only \$10.00. I hope that readers will plan to be a part of my book launch on that day to help move it to the top of the rankings on Amazon. Amazon ranks their books based on how many are purchased on one specific date, so with their support, I think that *Sheer Determination* has an excellent chance of hitting #1! In the coming weeks, I will also be scheduling a number of book signings in the community, so I would love to meet the people who have supported me on this journey.



< *Sheer Determination* will be launched on May 11th and become available on Amazon.com.