

From the Stage to the State: AMD Staffer Seema Sueko-Low Shares Her Life In Theater

Renowned thespian Seema Sueko-Low remembers the moment the allure of the stage captured her interest. She was about 12 or 13 years old and watching her older sister in the lead role of a University Laboratory School / Mid Pacific Institute performance of the musical *Little Mary Sunshine*.

The “painfully shy” sister transformed into a confident performer on stage. “The audience was mesmerized by what she did, especially folks who knew how shy she was. I just thought, ‘Wow, this is an amazing art form that is so transformative. Watching the audience be so enthralled by her performance – and everyone’s performances - was when I realized how powerful theater is.’”

When Sueko-Low entered University Laboratory School, she signed up for a theater elective. She says she's grateful to the late theater program teacher Camille Almy, choir director Nola Nahulu, and English teachers Bill Teter and Lanning Lee for nurturing this spark in her.

She continued her theatrical pursuits while pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in politics at the University of Puget Sound, but had to shelve it when she enrolled in graduate school at the University of



Chicago. “That's when I realized how much theater meant to me, because in grad school you can only focus on your one subject, right? There was no space for theater.”

With that epiphany, Sueko-Low made the choice to become a professional theater artist. After earning her master’s degree in international relations with a focus on Middle East politics, she started working as an actor.

“Chicago's a great theater training ground. I worked with so many excellent directors and fellow artists,” she recalls. She did that for about five years, then moved with her then-husband to Spokane, Washington, followed by San Diego, California.

That’s where, with her best friend from Lab School Kim Richmond (who now works for the Hawai’i Department of Education’s Executive Office of Early Learning), she co-founded a theater company called Mo’olelo Performing Arts Company, which she helmed as the executive artistic director for nine years. “We won national recognition from the American Theatre Wing which is the creator of the Tony Award. They gave us a National Theater Company Grant,” she shares. Many other national awards followed for this small Actor’s Equity Association theater.

For the next seven or so years, Sueko-Low's life volleyed back-and-forth between coasts, taking jobs that had her moving across the (con’t p 9)

(con't from p 8) Seema Sueko

country every few years; specifically, the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. and Pasadena Playhouse in Southern California. Both are Tony Award-winning, historic performing arts venues, and being connected to both was prestigious. Working at Arena Stage was her “dream come true,” she adds.

Her life, like so many others', changed drastically with the pandemic. She was working as the deputy artistic director at Arena Stage when “the pandemic happened, and I was part of the Great Resignation,” she divulges. Sueko-Low began freelancing for various theater companies, think tanks and nonprofit organizations across the country as a stage and film director, writer, speaker or consultant.

Throughout her career, Sueko-Low sought ways to advance the field. She created the Green Theater Choices Toolkit, codified Consensus Organizing for Theater, explored the connections between theater and empathy resulting in published research, launched the Theater Artists Marketplace in the early days of the pandemic, and organized learning circles about solidarity economy for the theater community.

She also has some fun name-dropping anecdotes: she directed Ashley Park and Hal Linden in *The Fantasticks* at Pasadena Playhouse; she acted in *West Side Story* in Seattle with Cheyenne Jackson; and she acted in *The Intelligent Design of Jenny Chow* at The Old Globe with Zachary Quinto. She served as president of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation and on the executive board of its sister union, Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, through which she was a Tony Awards voter.

But it was time to take care of her aging parents. Finally, after 32 years living on the continental US, she moved back home. She built an accessory dwelling unit next door to her childhood home, where her parents, Carol (née Matsumoto) and Saleem Ahmed, continue to live. “What a pleasure and privilege to care for my parents. I love them so much,” she smiles.

Sueko-Low took a job as a US Postal Service letter carrier at first, then the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts gave her an 89-day hire position. In 2025, she took a permanent role as the Administrative Services Assistant (ASA) at DAGS' Automotive Services Division. She enjoys her job and the stability it brings, since her life is very focused on caregiving right now.

She keeps a foot in the theater world. Seth Gordon featured her in his 2025 book *Crossroads in the American Theatre*, and she's adapting the book *Song of the Exile* by acclaimed Native Hawaiian writer Kiana Davenport into a play with jazz music.

“I've observed since coming back to Hawai'i that everybody here ‘arts.’ Almost everyone I know in Hawai'i is involved with some art form. They're makers, tattoo artists, dance in halau, sew, sketch, play music, you name it. Many people in Hawai'i have their jobs and then they do something artistic or creative on the side. It's a real asset; we have creativity baked into growing up here,” she states. “However, while everybody arts, very few get paid doing it.”

About theater, Sueko-Low adds, “We have great theater programs in our local high schools, robust community theaters, but a minimal professional theater sector. What happens to all that talent and love for theater?”

She wants to find out. “Who are all the theater people of Hawai'i? Not just the artists, artisans and technicians, but also the advocates. board members, audiences, parents of theater kids — anyone who considers themselves a ‘theater person’. How many theater people live here? How many Hawai'i theater artists are in the diaspora, working outside the state?” She believes that finding this out, (con't p 10)



(con't from p 9) Seema Sueko mapping the theater people of Hawai'i, could help build the field better.

Sueko-Low is willing to start right here at DAGS. If you fit that bill – if you consider yourself a ‘theater person’ – contact her via this form on her website:

<https://www.seemasueko.com/about>.

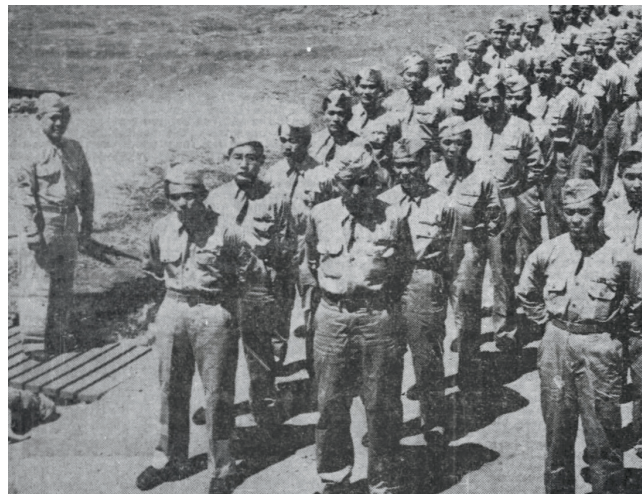
The arts still have her heart, so Sueko-Low now joins the community of people she just described: someone who is an ASA by day and “arts” by night.

More on Sueko-Low at www.seemasueko.com.

Hawai'i State Archives Receives Rare War History Artifacts



L to R: Jan Sadoka, Dr. Adam Jansen, Jot and Marietta Turner, Kirsten and David Turner, Kathi Hayashi at the handover ceremony. Sadoka and Hayashi are with Club 100. The Turner brothers are grandsons of LTC Turner.



September 1944: The men of the 100th Infantry Battalion, home from Italy for furlough. Courtesy US Army Signal Corps

The Hawai'i State Archives is now the proud custodian of a significant series of letters that document a key piece of Hawai'i's role in World War II. The 100th Infantry Battalion Veterans Educations Center, also known as Club 100, donated the packet of correspondence in March at an official handover ceremony.

They are all letters written to Lt. Colonel Farrant L. Turner, the first commanding officer of the 100th (con't p 11)