

Biography - L

Lydon, Sandy



## An Interview with Sandy Lydon

by Gordon Kobayashi

BAY VIEWS • 85

It's been a long and fruitful journey for Sandy Lydon from Main Street, Hollister to his present status as the pre-eminent historian of the Monterey Bay Region. His recently released book, *Chinese Gold* is being marketed across the country and should catapult him into nationwide prominence.

Sandy's list of accomplishments is long and prodigious. Besides teaching history at Cabrillo College he is already working on his next book about the Japanese in Santa Cruz County. After that, he plans to write about the area's Filipinos, tracing the sequence of their migration.

In addition, Sandy is the staff development coordinator at Cabrillo, chairs or is a member of several committees, and is writing a book on shore whaling and fishing for the Monterey Bay Aquarium collection. He is also on the Nisene Marks Advisory Committee, a member of various Japanese American Citizen's Leagues, and has written many ar-

ticles on local history for a variety of publications...to name a few of his diverse and interesting occupations.

### From Hollister to Here

Let's look at Sandy's life from the early days. A math and science whiz in high school, he went to UC Davis at a physics major, but changed to history in his junior year.

From there, he attended Sacramento State and the East West Center in Honolulu and developed an interest in Asian-American history. In 1969, he wrote his first book entitled *The Anti-Chinese Movement in Hawaii*.

In 1968, Sandy started teaching at Cabrillo and soon established his reputation as the foremost authority on Asian and local history. How did he develop his expertise in local history? "While I was studying Chinese history, I discovered that hardly anything had been written about local history," he says. "In order to do Chinese history, I had

to do local history first."

Through his lectures and writing, Lydon has almost singlehandedly transformed ethnic history writing from a rather narrow and dull specialty to a vibrant, comprehensive art. As Lydon says, "the problem with most ethnic histories is that they tend to be written in a vacuum. The context of that history is often left out." Successfully integrating one area of history to the overall scope, Sandy's writing shows how often important facts and events are overlooked when the historian isn't paying attention to the big picture.

### A Unique Talent

Everyone who knows Sandy has their own opinion about what makes him so special. To me, there are three things that have helped carry him to the top of his profession; his ability to communicate as a writer and as a dynamic speaker, his down-to-earth intellect, and his incredible vigor.

COVER STORY CONT. ON PAGE 3



## COVER STORY Continued

If you have ever heard Sandy Speak in a classroom or at a public lecture, you know that he is a spellbinding orator. He's dynamic, entertaining, amusing, and yes, even awesome. He can speak for hours without taking a break and like a snowball, seems to pick up steam as he goes along.

Because of this, it's easy to overlook the fact that he is an excellent writer. In fact, it is hard to say which of the two he does better. It is most unusual to find someone who is equally adept at both writing and speaking; a person who does both ambidextrously is very rare.

An ideal mixture of the intellectual and the blue-collar is Sandy's second great trait. It goes without saying that he possesses a superb intellect, and is in every sense a real academician. However, he grew up in Hollister and his father was as farm advisor, which gives him a down-to-earth quality. He consistently punctuates his most stimulating lectures with direct, straightforward comments that would make any sailor proud. Among his favorite diversions is the art of baseball. Sandy has no trouble attracting people from all walks of life.

The last factor that makes him so special is his vigor. Not many people could maintain a schedule like his and not pass out. His life is a nonstop round of activity, but he never seems to run out of energy or enthusiasm. He truly enjoys what he does.

### A Chance to Learn More

If you've ever wanted to learn more about local history no better way exists than to take a few of Sandy's classes. He teaches primarily at night and on weekends, which is convenient for most of his students.

His classes attract an interesting mix of people. About 50 percent of his classes are composed of people who were born and raised in the area, while the other 50 percent are those who moved here fairly recently. The native-born students want to learn more about their geographical heritage. Others take classes to orient themselves to the area.

Sandy teaches about four or five basic semester-long classes and a host of short-term and weekend classes of the 1 - 2 unit variety. The semester classes are more lecture oriented and the weekend classes are more field trip oriented.

From his repertoire, the two core classes are Santa Cruz

County History before 1890 and after 1890. The pre-1890 class covers the Ohlone Indians, Spanish Missions, the arrival of the Yankees, Chinese, Portuguese, Genovese and Sicilians, and the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The second class traces the immigration of the Yugoslavs, Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, the opening of Highway 17 in 1949, and the establishment of Cabrillo and UCSC.

A partial list of weekend classes includes Portuguese Shore Whaling, Nisene Marks History, Spanish Missions and many Asian History classes. This fall, Sandy is teaching a class on the Asian in Pajaro Valley on Wednesday nights at Watsonville High School.

So, has anyone ever gotten a job using this knowledge? The answer is yes, there are many. Two examples are Micki Ryan, a local historical consultant, and Stephanie Clark, and interpretive guide for the State Parks and Recreation system in Monterey. His classes have also been useful for those in real estate, planning, writing and a variety of other occupations.

By the way, Sandy will also be teaching classes on Chinese history and The Russian in California during the Fall and

Spring semesters in preparation for a trip to China which he is supervising next June.

### The Trip to China

Since 1973, Sandy has conducted a yearly pilgrimage to China. For next summer, he has constructed a very exciting and unique itinerary that includes Russia and Japan and is designed to accomodate both the first-time visitor and the veteran traveler.

The month-long excursion starts off in the People's Republic of China and includes the historic cities of Hong Kong, Canton and Peking.

The tour then swings north through Mongolia into Siberia to the junction city of Irkutsk, to board the Trans-Siberian Express east to the Amur River. From there, it's on to Japan by plane for the remainder of the trip.

The tour includes all transportation, hotels and almost all meals. The cost for the trip will be about \$3,500. For more information, leave a message for Sandy at the Cabrillo College History Department. □