

Cherry Blossom book introduction 2006
By Jake Rajs

For six weeks, I had the opportunity to follow and photograph the short-lived life of cherry blossoms, it felt like I had the best job in the world, and it was one of the most thrilling nature shoots I have had. I began in Washington D.C. in early spring, and I remember walking the Tidal Basin, where the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. Then the wind rose, and blossom petals were swept into the air—and suddenly, it was snowing blossoms. It was a beautiful moment.

The cherry blossom season is only a few weeks long. In early springtime, following each cold winter and after the snow melts, the cherry blossoms make their appearance before any of the other dormant trees even begin to turn green—a small touch of color among the other featureless trees. They blossom early and quickly: the perfect image of nature's rebirth, and perhaps proof that there is nothing more beautiful than what is created by the miracle of nature.

The blossoms themselves were fascinating to photograph. Due to their incredibly fragile, translucent quality, the cherry blossoms were so visually changeable, even from minute to minute. A cherry blossom can appear red, golden, white, pink, orange, or gray at a given time depending on the colors of nearby trees, or what the weather is like, or what the sun's position happens to be in the sky.

The cherry blossom has a very rich history. For centuries, the Japanese have revered the *sakura* tree as blooming poetry, a spiritual and naturally occurring art form. The ornamental cherry tree is the ideal symbol of life itself for the Japanese, and they are planted everywhere as an enduring reminder that life is fleeting. In the U.S. we were lucky to receive as gifts from Japan the beautiful *sakura* trees, which are on display at the Tidal Basin every spring. The spread of the *sakura* trees across the U.S.—and the obvious popularity surrounding their blooming season—reveal that we find them as captivating as the Japanese do.

The fruit cherry tree is also lovely in its own right. What better harbinger of spring than the fruit tree, blossoming and then bearing fruit? While the *sakura* and fruit cherry trees are different, they are both wonderful examples of how nature completely envelops us; and it's not surprising how spending time looking at these charming trees can affirm the gift of nature and its renewal year after year.

Tracking and photographing the blossoms was an incredible experience, almost Zen-like in feeling. Watching the flowers bloom had both a calming and inspiring effect. Cherry blossoms are a reminder to appreciate each moment, to celebrate the beauty that nature creates, and to acknowledge that the blossom season will never again be exactly like this.