JA LEGACY LIVES ON


RIGHTING A WRONG:

Japanese Americans and World War II

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the United States entered a war in Europe and the Pacific, the nation was overcome by shock, anger, and fear—a fear exaggerated by long-standing anti-Asian prejudice. Ten weeks later President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, under which nearly 76,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry were taken into custody. Another 45,000 Japanese nationals living in the United States (but long denied citizenship because of their race) were incarcerated. Some forty years later, members of the Japanese American community led the nation to confront the wrong it had done—and to make it right.
A s we pause to remember the signifi-
cance of the 75th anniversary of the
signing of Executive Order 9066, we
recall the personal injustice and personal
hardship it imposed on the 120,000 men,
women and children who were affected by the
government’s implementation of that executive
order. It caused personal damage, dislocation,
physical and mental trauma, and it offended our
Constitution.

Manzanar, Minidoka, Heart Mountain,
Poston, Tule Lake, Gila River, Granada,
Topaz, Jerome, Rohwer — these were America’s
concentration camps.

Today, it is important to heed the lessons from
the incarceration experience about acting out of
fear and bigotry by targeting vulnerable groups
in defiance of America’s values.

As reported by the Southern Poverty
Law Center ( SPLC), the growth in hate groups is on
the rise accompanied by an increase in crimes
directed at Muslims.

SPLC documented 867 bias-related
incidents in the first 10 days following the
election, with more than 300 targeting Muslims
and immigrants.

There is the troubling specter of banning
immigration based on religion and the aggressive
and broad-based use of deportation that results in
uprooting and tearing families apart.

There is the failure to accurately acknowledge
history in the genocide of the Jewish population
during World War II.

America is a place that welcomes immigrants
by providing sanctuary and opportunity. It is a
place that values diversity by allowing people to
be who they are. It is a place that has the capa-
city to admit wrongdoing because we are a
country ruled by law and because sometimes we
owe it to our own sense of honor as a nation.

WE REMEMBER MANZANAR, MINIDOKA, HEART MOUNTAIN . . .

PACIFIC CITIZEN RECEIVES DONATION TO KICK-START 2017 SPRING CAMPAIGN

The Pacific Citizen’s 2017 Spring
Campaign got off to a roaring start
in February thanks to a significant
donation made by longtime supporter
and reader Tsutomu “Tom” Ige.

Ige, along with his daughter, Natalie, and her
husband met with P.C.’s staff, Editorial Board
Chair Gil Asakawa, JACL National President
Gary Mayeda and JACL Planned Giving’s
Steve Okamoto on Feb. 3 in Los Angeles to
discuss his donation and the ways in which the
P.C. can best utilize his gift.

“To me, the Pacific Citizen is the ‘eyes and
ears’ of the Nikkei community and other
readers. It gives our community what it needs
in terms of informing us what is important in
our daily lives and also the many contribu-
tors that express interesting personal opin-
ions and experiences that have a bearing in
the lives of us all,” said Ige. “I implore you
to consider supporting the Japanese Ameri-
can Citizens League and the Pacific Citizen
as part of your legacy.”

The P.C. relies heavily on donations from its
Spring Campaign to supplement operational
expenses, staffing needs and assistance with
printing and mailing costs.

“The Pacific Citizen is facing greater chal-
enges with future publications and transition-
ing to the digital format. It needs support. . .
But I also realize that not everyone has access to
digital, which is why the printed issues are still
important,” said Ige.

The P.C. gratefully acknowledges Mr. Ige and
all Spring Campaign supporters. Thank you!”

PACIFIC CITIZEN

The P.C.’s mission is to “educate on the past Japanese American experience
and preserve, promote and help the current and future AAPI communities.”

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More than ever, your tax-deductible funds will help preserve the legacy of the Pacific Citizen. Donations of $150 or more will be entered in a monthly drawing for a box of “Fugetsu-Do” Japanese manju delivered to the winner’s door.

HOW TO REACH US

Email: pc@pacificcitizen.org
Online: www.pacificcitizen.org
Tel: (213) 620-1767
Fax: (213) 620-1768
Mail: 123 Ellison S. Onizuka St., Suite 313
Los Angeles, CA 90012

STAFF

Executive Editor
Allison Haramoto
Business Manager
Susan Yokoyama
Production Artist
Marie Samonte
Circulation
Eva Ting

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change of address
(USPS Form 3575)
By Gil Asakawa

I’m proud to be on my second stint as the Pacific Citizen’s Editorial Board Chair — I served in the position for two terms in the last decade. I love the P.C. I’m proud of the P.C. and I am happy to be an advocate for it.

That’s why I’m pleased to announce the 2017 P.C. Spring Campaign. During my last term as P.C. Editorial Board chair, the Spring Campaign was started as a way to raise funds to offset National JACL’s budget woes. With your direct support, the P.C. staff was able to purchase much-needed equipment like new computers and professional-quality cameras. The Spring Campaign eventually allowed the P.C. to hire a reporter when the national budget cut the position.

The Spring Campaign funds have become an important part of keeping the Pacific Citizen going. And now, with the added mission of raising the funds to keep printing the paper version of the P.C., the campaign will add to the amount that will be designated from those of you who opt to pay the extra $17 for your membership. That surcharge was approved at the JACL National Convention last summer in Las Vegas, and new memberships and renewals starting January have included the choice to pay the surcharge — and we thank all of you who’ve made that choice!

I want to first publicly thank Tsutomu “Tom” Ige, who contacted the Pacific Citizen and has committed to give the P.C. an extremely generous gift — he’s asked us not to reveal the amount — that gives us a serious head start on the Spring Campaign this year. Tom was a longtime JACL member when he lived in the San Jose area, he now lives in Southern California and has been a nonmember P.C. subscriber. He contacted Steve Okamoto, who coordinates large gifts to JACL, to facilitate his donation.

Tom has given to the P.C. for the Spring Campaign every since it began. The P.C. staff may use his gift now to underwrite articles and other content. You’ll see his name whenever we thank him for his contribution. I would love it if you, dear reader, follow Tom Ige’s example and commit to a gift for the Pacific Citizen to help our hard-working staff (which has been working with one editor short since last summer). Make it $20, $100, $200, $1,000 or more. It will not be wasted. It will go toward maintaining the quality coverage of JACL and Asian American issues that have helped you keep up with news that isn’t covered in mainstream media. It’s the kind of journalism that led Tom Ige to get the P.C. as a nonmember subscriber (don’t worry, he’s a lifetime member now), and led Tom to donate to the Spring Campaign every year.

If the Pacific Citizen is as valuable to you as it has been to people like Tom, please consider donating to keep the P.C. healthy for the future. This biennium will be a critical test for the newspaper — the $17 membership renewal surcharge is only approved for two years. By the end of the biennium, we’ll need to have a real, double plan in place to go as far into the digital realm as possible and cut back on the print editions or find other ways to reduce the cost of the P.C. and still deliver the journalism you’ve come to rely on.

So, we’re building for the future with the gifts you provide for this year’s Spring Campaign. The funds you donate will 100 percent go toward keeping the quality of the P.C. up, but also prepare the P.C. for the next phase of its future. Please follow Tom’s lead. We thank you. Really.

To donate to the Spring Campaign, fill out the coupon included in this newspaper or give directly on the P.C.’s website at www.pacificcitizen.org.


LEGAL-EASE: AN ATTORNEY’S PERSPECTIVE

By Staci Yamashita-Iida, Esq.

For the past few months, my fiancé and I have spent our weekends house hunting. When we got particularly close to buying a home a couple of weeks ago, our escrow officer asked us, “Have you two thought about how you’d like to take title to the property?”

In our careers as a CPA and an attorney, my fiancé and I have become familiar with the basics of real property law. As we discussed the escrow officer’s question, I realized that, if not for our professions, we would be clueless on the subject.

In the overall context of purchasing a home, the manner in which you take title seems like such a minor, trivial detail. The ability to freely assign one’s interest, however, can also be a disadvantage. Valuable tax benefits are missed out on by not owning 100 percent of the property.

Tenants in Common

When two or more people take title to a property — especially if they are not married to each other — they often become tenants in common. This typically occurs when siblings, friends or real estate investors purchase property together.

The main advantage to being a tenant in common is that the co-owners do not have to own equal shares of the property. For example, Sister Yamamoto can own 65 percent and Brother Yamamoto can own 35 percent. Since Brother Yamamoto owns an undivided share, he has the flexibility to sell or transfer his interest to whomever he wants.

The ability to freely assign one’s interest, however, can also be a disadvantage. In the scenario above, let’s say Brother Yamamoto gets very sick and decides to transfer his 35 percent interest in the property to his girlfriend, Crazy Carla, before he dies. As a result, Sister Yamamoto winds up co-owning the property with Crazy Carla, a virtual stranger whom she never really got along with.

Another drawback to tenancy in common is that there is no “right of survivorship,” a concept I’ll discuss below. In short, if a tenant in common dies, then his or her interest will be subject to probate.

Joint Tenancy

Joint tenancy occurs when two or more people (spouses, family members, friends, etc.) want to own an equal share of the property — e.g., Sister Yamamoto and Brother Yamamoto each own 50 percent.

Joint tenancy bears an additional disadvantage. Valuable tax benefits are missed out on by choosing joint tenancy over community property with right of survivorship, a concept discussed below.

Community Property With Right of Survivorship

In community property states (such as California), married couples and domestic partners have the opportunity to take title as community property with right of survivorship (CPWR/S). CPWR/S shares many of the characteristics of joint tenancy (equal ownership and right of survivorship) — the added bonus is that there may be several tax benefits that only CPWR/S offers.

>> See PROPERTY on page 9
JACL NATIONAL BOARD CONVENES TO DISCUSS 2017 PROGRESS

The JACL National Board convened in San Francisco on Feb. 11 to discuss its current state of affairs, as well as to recognize the contributions of Interim Executive Director Midwest Regional Director Bill Yoshino, who will be retiring in March after more than 30 years with JACL.

In his report, National President Gary Mayeda summarized that JACL has been involved in numerous activities since July’s National Convention. Foremost among them is the 75th anniversary of E.O. 9066, and JACL’s sponsorship of the new Smithsonian Museum of American History exhibit.

Mayeda also officially welcomed new NCWNP District Governor Carol Kawase and PSW District Governor Marissa Kitazawa.

Meeting highlights included JACL’s successful implementation of the new “Youth Legacy Project,” funded by the National Park Service, which sends two groups of 20 students each year to Manzanar and Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo to learn about the incarceration experience. This year’s trips are set for July and August.

P.C. Editorial Board Chair Gil Asakawa reported that actual P.C. revenue for the year ending 2016 totaled $322,606. The Holiday Issue generated $64,740, up $2,000 over 2015. More than $18,000 in commissions was earned by JACL chapters.

Discussions also centered around ongoing efforts between JACL, National Secretary/Treasurer Alan Nishi, P.C. Business Manager Susan Yokoyama and JACL Business Manager Matthew Walters to collectively unify reporting practices by the P.C. and National JACL.

Asakawa also announced the P.C.’s intention to hire a new digital content editor in the coming weeks to shore up its staffing vacancy.

Nishi reported that the JACL’s reserve fund is $298,000, and his primary concerns for 2017 are accurate budget revenue projections for P.C. revenue, investment, income and fundraising.

VP Membership Colleen Morimoto summarized that membership was down 2.2 percent in 2016, however, compared to previous years of more than 5 percent, that figure remains hopeful.

And VP Planning and Development Matthew Farrells announced that a new fundraising campaign to generate $1 million within the next three years will launch at July’s National Convention in Washington, D.C.

National Staff then recognized Yoshino’s invaluable contributions.

I remember that during the course of the redress effort . . . I couldn’t think of anything that was more important to be involved in, and it remains the single highlight of many,” said Yoshino. “It’s been a social justice mission, and it has never disappointed me in trying to achieve that.”

The JACL National Board convened at JACL headquarters in San Francisco on Feb. 11. Pictured (front row, from left) are Gary Mayeda, Matthew Farrells, Roberta Barton, Alan Nishi, Jeffrey May and (standing, from left) Janet Komo, Michelle Amano, Michelle Yoshida, Sheldon Arakaki, Betsy Sato, Carol Kawase, Colleen Morimoto, Marissa Kitazawa and Gil Asakawa.

REIMAGINE EVERYTHING

LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER?

By Ron Mori

The old course of life where your “retirement” years meant slowing down until you stopped altogether — those days are gone. Good riddance! Today’s “retires” don’t want to be limited, labeled or defined by what they can’t do. The want to grow, learn and discover what they can do.

At AARP, we were a little surprised but very happy to discover through our research that the desire of our elders these days to be involved and contribute their time to our communities is as strong, or maybe even stronger, than that of prior generations. But — and this is a big “but” — they have time constraints and other commitments that many of their elders never had.

To ensure that we would retain the capability to recruit even greater numbers of 50-plus volunteers for AARP and for many other causes, we launched “Create The Good,” an initiative that makes opportunities to volunteer even more flexible and accessible. Our mantra is: “Whether you have 5 minutes, 5 hours or 5 days,” there are many ways you can make a difference.

The name “Create The Good” was inspired by a quote from our founder, Dr. Andrus, who said: “The challenge is to live up to our better selves, to experiment, to explore, to change and to grow, and by doing so, to help create the good.”

AARP launched the website www.createthegood.org to offer people a wide range of tools and resources for serving their communities. In addition to opportunities for volunteering with AARP, you can search for a host of volunteer opportunities with other organizations in your zip code.

“AARP’s Advocacy and education campaigns around critical state and federal legislation

• AARP’s Advocacy and education campaigns around critical state and federal legislation

• Our Tax-Aide program, which provides free tax preparation and filing

• The Driver Safety Program, which focuses on helping older adults refresh their driving skills

• Our Senior Community Service Employment Program, which helps older adults find jobs

• AARP’s educator community activities, which help children throughout the country

So, as AARP, your experience really does matter. Please check out www.createthegood.org.

Ron Mori is co-president of the Washington, D.C., JACL chapter and manager of community, states and national affairs — multicultural leadership for AARP.
Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II, which officially opened on the 75th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066.

The evening opened with a taiko performance that captivated attendees’ attention to the stage, setting the tone of the event with the familiar sounds that every Japanese American connects with. JACL was one of many organizations that sponsored this exhibit over the course of the past two years, in addition to the Terasaki Foundation, AARP and the Japanese Embassy.

Ceremony speakers included David Skorton, first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; John Gray, director of the National Museum of American History; and the four-year journey that forever defined those lives because of E.O. 9066 and World War II.

At the center of the exhibit is a large three-panel display, well lit in a glass cube, with typewritten words and a signature at the end. This was THE Executive Order 9066. E.O. 9066 put my father, grandmother, uncles and aunt in America’s concentration camps. One can’t help but stare and wonder the power of these three pieces of paper created such a stain on America’s history.

The exhibit continues to show where the camps were and what camp life was like. One can read each fascinating panel and see names and photos — I’m sure there are several, if not more, that are recognizable!

It shows how our community developed its resilience and, 40 years later, used this resilience to support H.R. 442. At the end is a large photo of President Ronald Reagan signing the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. This exhibit is filled with emotions directly relatable to both those incarcerated and the generations of descendants that followed. Exactly 30 years ago, the Smithsonian celebrated our nation’s bicentennial and showcased our constitution in an exhibit called “A More Perfect Union.”

The Japanese American internment was the example of when eight of the 10 Bill of Rights were blatantly ignored. “Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II” is an emotional and educational experience that everyone should experience.

This exhibit will be a showcase for everyone that attends this summer’s JACL National Convention, which is set for July 6-8 in Washington, D.C.

### DAY OF RECOMMITMENT

*By Gerald Yamada, Contributor*

Feb. 19, 2017, is the 75th anniversary of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s signing of Executive Order 9066, which authorized the military to evacuate persons of Japanese ancestry from the western states during World War II. Although Feb. 19 is generally referred to as a “Day of Remembrance,” I believe that this year’s anniversary should be broadened by commemorating it as a “Day of Recommitment” for the purpose of motivating a new generation to preserve the legacy created by those who suffered under the prejudice and hysteria sanctioned by E.O. 9066.

I suggest three steps for us to follow to recommit toward preserving the legacy left by those whose lives were altered by E.O. 9066.

1. Share the Family’s Story. When discussing how we or our families were affected by E.O. 9066, it is more meaningful if we are able to relate to our family’s story, both the bad and the good. My parents suffered a tragic, personal loss. When my parents arrived at the Jerome War Relocation Authority Center, my mother was pregnant. Shortly after my parents arrived, their first child, Katsumi, was stillborn.

We need also to credit good deeds. My maternal grandparents’ farm in Florin, Calif., was one of three farms that was protected by Mr. Bob Fletcher while the three families — Tsukamoto, Okamoto and Nitta — were evacuated and imprisoned in America’s concentration camps.

For his act of kindness, Mr. Fletcher incurred the racial resentment of his neighbors and had to give up the security of his state job. When my grandparents returned to Florin, they were able to retake possession of their farm without any problems.

To our family, Mr. Fletcher represented the basic decency that should have been shown by Americans who were otherwise so blindly driven by their prejudice, hatred and political ambition.

2. Articulate the Lessons Learned. When discussing E.O. 9066 and its impacts, I have pointed to three lessons that we should always remember. First, E.O. 9066 is an example of racial profiling — a governmental policy based solely on ethnicity to deprive a group of its constitutional rights.

E.O. 9066 taught us to guard against such discriminatory governmental policies and actions aimed at denying basic rights and freedoms.

The second lesson is that we must remember and honor those who kept their faith in America, even in the most difficult times. E.O. 9066 tried to deny Japanese Americans their rights as citizens by labeling them as “non-Americans,” taking their property without just compensation and imprisoning them in America’s concentration camps without due process.

Yet, no person of Japanese ancestry, residing within the U.S., was ever convicted of espionage or sabotage against the U.S. during World War II. Most of those who suffered under E.O. 9066 refused to relinquish their faith in America or their belief that America could offer a better life. They persevered in believing that their rights and freedoms would be restored.

Some answered the call to serve while their family and friends were still imprisoned behind barbed wire, guarded by armed U.S. soldiers. The Nisei soldiers served with valor and distinction in defending America.

The third lesson is the greatness of America in its willingness to admit its wrongs and make amends for E.O. 9066. E.O. 9066 was a product of failed political leadership. This record was set straight by two governmental actions.

E.O. 9066 was revoked by President Gerald Ford on Feb. 19, 1976. Congress passed, then President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (aka Redress) that apologized for the unjust imprisonment of persons of Japanese ancestry during World War II and awarded redress payments.

**See DAY on page 12**
The Smithsonian Honors the Legacy of Japanese Americans at Its National Museum of American History on the 75th Anniversary of E.O. 9066

By Patti Hirahara, Contributor


Now, 12 years later, the National Museum of American History has opened “Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II,” a yearlong exhibition about Executive Order 9066, the document signed in 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that shaped the lives of Japanese Americans during the war and beyond.

This unique exhibition, which opened officially on Feb. 17 in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery, combines original artifacts, photographs and historical information from one of the darkest periods in American history. It will remain open until Feb. 19, 2018.

Feb. 19 marked the 75th anniversary of E.O. 9066, which Roosevelt signed just two months after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. The order resulted in the imprisonment of 75,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry and 45,000 Japanese immigrants who were prohibited by law from becoming naturalized American citizens. Abruptly stripped of their homes, livelihoods and belongings, more than 120,000 individuals were housed in 10 large, barbed-wire-enclosed incarceration camps and dozens of other installations scattered throughout desolate landscapes in the U.S. from March 1942-March 1946.

More than 40 years later, the U.S. Congress formally recognized that the rights of the Japanese American community had been violated, resulting in the signing of H.R. 442 by President Ronald Reagan. H.R. 442, known as the “Civil Liberties Act of 1988,” provided an apology and restitution of $20,000 to those living Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II.

Work in opening the “Righting a Wrong” exhibit began in 2015. The museum’s Japanese American history specialist, Noriko Sanefuji, began the process of searching for artifacts and documents from across the country under the leadership of Project Director Jennifer Locke Jones. Jones had worked on the original “A More Perfect Union” exhibition, as well as the Smithsonian’s American Library Association’s traveling exhibition from 1995-99 and served as exhibit curator of its “A More Perfect Union” online site, which debuted in 2001.

“Having worked on ‘A More Perfect Union’ exhibit in 1987 and now having curated this new exhibition ‘Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II,’ I have found that collecting new objects for this exhibit has allowed us to tell more personal stories in the broader context of the history of the incarceration experience,” Jones said. “A baby bracelet helps us show the stories of the cycle of life inside the camps, and more personal family photographs give the visitor a more intimate way to connect with this history.

Continued Jones: “When families donate materials such as the Medal of Honor awarded posthumously to Joe Nishimoto, who volunteered to serve with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team after being incarcerated in the camp at Jerome in Arkansas, to the national collections, we are able to preserve these for future generations of scholars and historians and make these collections accessible on the web through digitization.

“As the National Museum of American History, we hope that visitors to the museum, including the younger generations, learn about the past and make connections to the stories of people who were often the same age as they are, and to engage in the dialogue about what it would be like if this happened to them. Connecting with youth through objects and stories of individuals who were youth when they were incarcerated gives them something to relate to and helps them understand the history of the Japanese American community during World War II.”

Jones added.

Present at the museum’s opening reception were (from left) John Gray, director of the National Museum of American History; Nobuko Sasae and the Hon. Kenichiro Sasae, ambassador of Japan to the United States; Sen. Mazie Hirono; Dr. Keith Terasaki, chairman of the Terasaki Family Foundation; Congresswoman Doris Matsui; Dr. David Skorton, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; and Gary Mayeda, national president of the JACL.
Fascinating journey to meet people from all 9066, and we were pleased to bring a unique story to tell. I wanted to make room for these stories and to ask questions about our past - so that as Americans we can reflect upon this time in American history and how it shapes us as Americans. It's only through our collections that we can tell a more complete story,” Jones concluded.

Noted Sanefuji: “Several years ago, our team noted the upcoming 75th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066, and we were pleased to hear from Priscilla Ouchida, in her capacity as the executive director of the JACL, that there was interest and support from the community to mark this anniversary. This would allow us to connect with additional collecting opportunities, across the country, to expand upon the stories that we can tell here at the museum. It has been a fascinating journey to meet people from all over the nation, with each one of them having a unique story to tell. I wanted to make sure we offered these different perspectives under a prism of shared experience through powerful objects. I do believe the objects speak for themselves.”

Leslie Soule, a representative from the Puyallup Valley Chapter of JACL, was present at the opening and gave her own perspective on the exhibition. “Thank you to all the donors and the Smithsonian for making this exhibit possible,” she said. “As I walked through the exhibit and listened to school children react, it became clear that the stories told through artifacts from camp were not merely individuals' stories. Nor were they solely part of the Japanese American story, but they were America's stories. By remembering the past, however painful, you have given future generations lessons in how to form a more perfect union.”

A key highlight of the new exhibition is the viewing of the original Executive Order 9066 document, which is on loan from the National Archives and Records Administration. Executive Order 9066 is on display courtesy of the National Museum of American History.

“Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II” has been made possible through a donation by the Terasaki Family Foundation, as well as the Japanese American Citizens League and AARP.

For additional information about the Japanese American camps and the museum’s collection, the public may visit http://si.edu/JapaneseCampsWWII and http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/ experienceindex.html.

In this photo, taken in 2015, Noriko Sanefuji admires a Sakahara Family heirloom that was worn by David Perley’s mother, Lois, in Heart Mountain. Perley’s grandfather, Dan Sakahara, was president of the Puyallup Valley JACL in 1937 and ’38, and the Sakahara family spent time in Tule Lake and Heart Mountain during WWII. The pink crocheted dress has become part of the permanent collections of Japanese American history at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History and is on display in the exhibition.
THE TIES THAT BIND

The 2017 Smithsonian Day of Remembrance bridges experiences of incarcerees and youth as well as highlights the relevance of the World War II Japanese American experience.

By Helen Yoshida, Contributor

As Americans today, we need to keep telling these stories to make our country better,” said Reed Leventis, a junior at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, Md., on the World War II Japanese American incarceration experience. Leventis was one of the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) digital storytelling students that spoke alongside Heart Mountain and Topaz incarcerees about the importance of this history at the Day of Remembrance program on Feb. 19, held at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

On the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066 — which forcibly removed nearly 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast into 10 camps across seven states — five NJAMF student films on Amache, Heart Mountain, Manzanar, Poston and Topaz debuted on the museum’s national stage.

Leventis, Carolyn Hoover, Halle Sousa and Connor Yu then joined Takashi Hoshizaki, Sam Mihara, Mary Murakami and Shig Yabu for a panel discussion with Karen Ishizuka, author, filmmaker and former senior staff member at the Japanese American National Museum.

More than 420 people listened to the incarcerees as they shared their recollections of the attack on Pearl Harbor and life behind barbed wire.

“I was at a movie theater three blocks away from my house [in San Francisco], and when I came out, the newspaper headlines said, ‘Japanese Bombed Pearl Harbor,’” recalled Mihara when asked how he found out about the infamous attack on American soil.

“I knew that whatever happened to us, I wanted to further my education,” said Murakami, who felt it was challenging to attend high school in Topaz. In 1945, she was part of a group of 50 Japanese Americans who attended the University of California, Berkeley, thus paving the way for others to enroll in the UC system, too.

Yabu regaled everyone with humorous and positive memories of Heart Mountain, including how he won his first fist fight when he arrived at camp and how he adopted an abandoned baby Maggie. Named Maggie, the bird was a fixture in the community, often mimicking sounds and words heard in the camp.

“Her favorite was the wolf call,” he said, to much laughter.

Hoshizaki brought a different perspective to the conversation. At 17 years old, he was one of 63 Heart Mountain resisters who refused to fight in the U.S. military until his civil rights were restored. When he answered, “No. When my citizenship rights are restored and land-owning rights must be cleared” to Question 27 on the War Relocation Authority’s “Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry” questionnaire— which asked if he was willing to fight in the U.S. Armed Forces — and “Yes” to Question 28 — which asked if he swore “unalloyed allegiance” to the U.S. and “foreswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization.” — Hoshizaki took a stand for what he believed in.

Although the resisters tried to right a grave wrong from within, they were all tried at the Cheyenne federal courthouse in June 1944 and sentenced to three years in prison. It still remains the largest mass trial in Wyoming history.

“You captured this story very well,” Hoshizaki said to Yu, who featured the resister in his digital story on Heart Mountain.

NJAMF, who partnered with the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation on this project, sponsored five students to participate in a Digital Storytelling Workshop led by Emmy Award-winning producer Jeff Machtky and teaching assistants Hana Marysama and Vanessa Saito Yaille at the 2016 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage. Their stories, which were aired at the Pilgrimage banquet dinner, not only strengthen the connection between visitors to the D.C. Memorial and the camps but also connect the camps to the nation’s capital and inspire people to experience the original sites themselves.

“The hardest part of [the project] was trying to maintain the honesty and accuracy of the experience,” said Hoover on her digital story about Topaz. A 2016 graduate of Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, Md., she is now a freshman at Duke University. “Preserving, maintaining and honoring what my grandparents left behind — that’s what’s important to me.” She interviewed Murakami, her grandmother, as part of her story on Topaz.

Sousa, a senior at Notre Dame High School in San Jose, Calif., explained what drew her to creating a digital story and how she wove her archaeology internship experience with the University of Denver at the Amache conference site into her project.

“No one will remember history if people don’t want to tell it,” said Sousa, whose grandparents were incarcerated at Amache.

Her words ring true.

Seventy-five years later, the aftermath of E.O. 9066 still matters today. With initiatives like the digital storytelling project, which binds this important history to today, it is hoped that this never happens again.
By Rob Buscher, Contributor

Growing up in a suburban/rural town of 18,000 in Southwest Connecticut, our family was both the only Japanese American and interracial family in our community.

When my mother moved there in the mid-1980s, she recalls walking into a diner and everyone in the restaurant stopped talking and stared at her, as if she was the first Asian American they had ever seen.

Perhaps for many present that day, she was. Like many JAs, our family is mostly located out West in California, Utah and other states in the Pacific Northwest region. After growing up in Denver and attending college at the University of Colorado Boulder, she came to the East Coast for a job in New York City and began commuting from the Connecticut suburbs.

Being half-Japanese in an era when inter racial marriages were still fairly uncommon, my mother has a kind of quiet resilience about her. She has certainly experienced her share of discrimination, living most of her life in white majority communities, but that hasn’t stopped her from engaging in aspects of our culture that keep her firmly rooted within her JA identity.

Her Issei grandmother lived until 2006 to the ripe old age of 96. While her siblings often teased my mother about being the “white child” because of her lighter complexion and brunette hair, Grandma (or Hibaachan as I knew her) never questioned her Japanese ness. In fact, it was perhaps because of her mixed ancestry that led to such a close bond between them — my mother endeavoring to prove her Japanese and Hibaachan happy to have an eager listener.

My Obaachan was almost 6 years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Like most Issei immigrants, her parents were scared of what a detention period in U.S. custody might mean for their five young children’s futures.

It was my great-grandfather whose foresight led our family to flee inland to Utah, beyond Military Zone 1 and thus avoid the incarceration. Life was tough for them during the war years, having to abandon their farm and property in California, spending the winter of 1942 in a single-room canvas tent on a frozen farm field. The following year, they were able to move into a storage shed owned by the Thorogood family, whose farm they sharecropped for many years.

Although he passed away before I was born, my great-grandfather left an indelible impact on our family’s identity as a Judo Sensei and founding member of the Judo Association of Utah. Two of his dojos still exist today in the Salt Lake City suburb of Ogden. In certain ways, he was a very progressive man, wanting to instill a sense of pride in young JAs by preserving elements of their traditional culture at a time when being Japanese was synonymous with being the enemy.

However, it was this traditionalism that my Obaachan rebelled against when she began dating and later married my white grandfather. At the time, Hibaachan hid all of the kitchen knives and other sharp implements out of fear that her husband would commit seppuku.

My grandparents had their own ordeal ahead of them, having to drive through three states before they could find a priest willing to marry them, building a new life in the unfamiliar state of Washington.

Old grudges were quickly mended by the successive births of four grandchildren, and our mixed-race family became the new norm. As a Nisei who grew up speaking Japanese at home, my Obaachan chose not to pass her language onto my mother or her siblings. For one thing, it would have been an issue with my grandfather, who did not want a foreign language he could not understand spoken by his children.

More importantly, however, by marrying my grandfather, Obaachan had realized her own American dream of finding conditional acceptance in a society that had been openly hostile for most of her life. Why risk spoiling it by teaching her binational children things that would demarcate them as even more different than they were already perceived?

Despite her lack of language abilities, my Samei mother is about as JA as they come. My sister and I grew up eating oshizushi, inari zushi and yokan. Our favorite treats were mochi ice cream, Pocky sticks and Botan Rice candy. We had a big pot of Koda Farms rice every meal.

>> See GENERATIONS on page 12

**PROPERTY >> continued from page 3**

**Trustee of a Trust**

One of the fundamental reasons to create a living trust is to prevent your assets from being probated. To obtain maximum benefit, confirm that your real property is owned by the trust (and managed by the trustee). For example, title would be held as “Pete Purchaser, as Trustee of The Pete Purchaser Revocable Living Trust.”

Holding title in the name of the trust encompasses many of the advantages already discussed: probate avoidance, freedom to transfer to any person or party upon death and increased tax benefits. All that’s required is the establishment of a living trust and its proper funding.

How you hold title can have lasting effects on you, your family and the co-owners of the property. To fully understand and plan for all of the ramifications associated with your particular situation — property tax reassessment, capital gains tax minimization, avoidance of probate and estate taxes — consult with a qualified California attorney.

Staci Yamashita-Tida, Esq., is an Estate Planning attorney at Elder Law Services of California. She can be contacted at (310) 348-2995. The opinions expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Pacific Citizen or JACL. The information presented does not constitute legal advice and should not be treated as such.

**TIPS FOR THE WISE CAR BUYER**

1. Before you leave home, visit our Auto Center at jacclcu.com to find the best deal.
2. Make your way to the dealer and purchase your new car.
3. Next call or head over to National JACL Credit Union.

Tell them you want to finance at JACLCU.

Get a better rate and up to $500 cash back.

Call us to get pre-approved.

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Use this innovative auto buying resource that connects you with comprehensive research and comparison tools. Make a smart buying decision with competitive credit union financing. Know Before You Go!

800-544-8828 www.jaclcu.com National JACL Credit Union
This event will celebrate and support the opening of the Topaz Museum.
Info: Contact Berkeley JACL for more information.

NCWNP

PSW

The Journey of Japanese Lacquer Tools
San Diego, CA
Thru April 30
Balboa Park
Plaza de Panama
1439 E. Prado
The tools of Japanese lacquer makers are implements of prolonged use and objects of remarkable beauty. Come see this exhibit first-hand to appreciate the tools that were used to create these works of art.
Info: Visit www.mingei.org/mim-exhibition/layers-of-brilliance/

MDC

Chicago JACL Inaugural 2017
Lincolnwood, IL
March 18; 6:30-9 p.m
Aron Hall
6421 Hamlin Ave.
Price: Tickets: $30 (includes two drink tickets); $20 for students with ID; pre-purchase available
Come on out for an evening featuring dinner, drinks, dancing and the inauguration of JACL board members, as well as a special “thank you” to retiring MDC Regional Director Bill Yoshino.
Info: Call Nancy Gohata at (818) 371-8013 or email nancygohata@gmail.com.

This traveling exhibition presents the work of Japanese American artists in the early 20th century.

March 19; 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m
2025 S.E. Yamhill
Come on out and support Nichiren Buddhist Temple’s annual bazaar. Available for preorder only is the special Nichiren tonkatsu bento. Also available will be chicken donburi, chicken vegetable, chow mein and tofu donburi. Baked goods, crafts and much more will be available.
Info: Contact (510) 235-8292.

Year of Remembrance
Seattle, WA
Thru Feb. 11, 2018
Wing Luke Museum
719 S. King St.
Inspired by “Glimpses of Forever Foreigner,” a book of poems by Lawrence Matsuda and artwork by Roger Shimomura, this yearlong exhibit commemorates Executive Order 9066 and features poems by Matsuda and artwork by Shimomura, as well as explores historical and contemporary issues of race, discrimination and human rights.

CCDC

Friends of the Madden Library
Talk: Karen Korematsu
Fresno, CA
April 7
Fresno State University
Henry Madden Library
5200 N. Barton Ave.
Price: Free
Karen Korematsu, the daughter of Fred Korematsu — a key figure in a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that challenged the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066 — is holding a special speaking engagement, sponsored by the Friends of the Madden Library.
Info: For more information or assistance with physical accommodations, contact Sarah Ramirez at (559) 278-5790 or email sramirez@csufresno.edu.

Art of Survival: Enduring the Turn of the Tule Lake
Fresno, CA
Thru April 30
Fresno State University
Henry Madden Library
5200 N. Barton Ave.
This traveling exhibition probes the complexity of the Japanese American confinement site in Newell, Calif. It was the only officially designated segregation center during WWII and was ruled under martial law. Through haunting images of artifacts by fine art photographer Hiroshi Watanabe, viewers will gain insight into the lives of those who were held at Tule Lake.
Info: Visit library.fresnostate.edu.

EDC

Japanese Impressions: Color Woodblock Prints From the Rodbell Family Collection
Fresno, CA
Thru April 2
The Clark Art Institute
225 South St.
This is the museum’s first exhibition that focuses on its permanent collection of Japanese prints, which span more than a century. These Japanese color woodblock prints represent three generations of artists who produced prints from the 1830s-1970s.
Info: For more information, visit http://www.clarkart.edu/

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Hoshiko, Michael Starsson Masanori, 95, Longmont, CO, Dec. 26; he was predeceased by his wife, Rose; he is survived by his children, Cecily ‘Mitzi’ (Dave) Sample, Sumi Hoshiko and Lance (Rebecca) Hoshiko; sisters, Eileen Hoshiko and Yuri Goto; gc: 5.

Ichikawa, Christie, 88, Torrance, CA, Nov. 20; she was predeceased by her husband, Robert S. Ichikawa; she is survived by her children, Robert D. (Sally), Ross A. (Lori) and Laura A. Ichikawa; sisters, Doris Sakamoto (Sidney) and Bill Ozawa (Elaine); gc: 3.

Ido, Shizuka Ishikawa, 93, Los Angeles, Jan. 2; she was predeceased by her husband, Joseph Fujio; she is survived by her daughter, Kristine (Vern) Chinen; gc: 1.

Ishida, Howard Kho, 89, Santa Monica, CA, Jan. 10; she is survived by his wife, Minako ‘Minnie’ Ishida; son, Gerald; siblings, Elizabeth Chioko (Mits) Sato and Yasushi Ishida; she is also survived by many nieces, nephews and other relatives.

Ishii, Kimi, 93, Los Angeles, Jan. 16; she was predeceased by her husband, Shig Ishii; she is survived by her children, Gary (Lasabeth) and Ron; brother-in-law, Harumitsu “Harney” Ishii; she is also survived by many nieces, nephews and other relatives.

Iwata, Sammy, 84, Beaverton, OR, Feb. 9; she was predeceased by her husband, Richard; she is survived by her step-children, John (Cindy) Iwata, Irene Iwata and Janet Conrad; sister, Annye Lee Collum; sisters-in-law, Hisa Iwata, Yoko Iwata and Bernice Yasuda; and three nieces.

Katoh, Kenneth Naishi, 82, Fountain Valley, CA, Jan. 11; he is survived by his wife, Yumi; children, Gene (Kimberly) and Sandra Kato; sister-in-law, June (Douglas) Kato; he is also survived by many nieces, nephews and other relatives; gc: 2.

Kawahara, George, 52, San Jose, CA, Feb. 14; he is survived by his wife, Tamiko; he is also survived by one niece and 1 nephew.

Kitamura, Miyoko ‘Alice,’ 93, Grimes, CA, Feb. 1; during WWII, she and her family were incarcerated at the Amache War Relocation Authority Center in Colo. She was predeceased by her husband, William ‘Bill’ Tsutue Kitamura; she is survived by her children, William David (Diann), Jon (Sally), Donald and Kendall; gc: 4; step-ggc: 4; gc: 2.

Kobayashi, Nori, 94, Seattle, Feb. 7; she is survived by her sister, Emi Mayeda; 1 nephew and two grandnieces.

Koshi, Patricia H., 77, Los Angeles, Feb. 5; she is survived by her husband, Paul; and her three children; gc: 4.

Kunishi, Hanayo, 97, Honolulu, Jan. 13; she is predeceased by her husband, Arthur Yoshito; she is survived by her daughters, Marilyn, Sharon (Mont) Oie and Carole (Paul) Fujisige; she is also survived by several nieces and nephews; gc: 2.

Kuriyama, Hideko, 84, Gardena, CA, Jan. 22, during WWII, as a child, she and her family were incarcerated at the War Relocation Authority Center in Rohwer, Ark. She is survived by her children, Bob (Lori), Cliff (Anne), Terry (Lori) and Sandy; gc: 6; gc: 3.

Kusumoto, Jane, 84, El Monte, CA, Feb. 2; she is survived by her husband, Hiro; children, Karen Kataoka, Warren (Judi), Alvin (Julie Lee), Kenneth and Janice Kusumoto; siblings, Yoshie Fujinaka, Mildred Kawano, George Hayase and Hazel Kamada (Kenneth); gc: 7; gc: 1.

Lam, Irene, 13, San Francisco, Feb. 8; she was predeceased by her father, Robert Ichinose.

Madsen, Kazuko, 81, San Francisco, Jan. 30; she was predeceased by her husband, Henry Oaki; son, Terrence Oaki; she is survived by her daughters, Carole (Harvey) Omata and Donna (Ken) Inouye; sister, Betty Masuda; gc: 2; gc: 4.

Okami, Miyoko ‘Millie,’ 98, Los Angeles, CA, was predeceased by her husband, Henry Oaki; son, Terrence Oaki; she is survived by her daughters, Carole (Harvey) Omata and Donna (Ken) Inouye; sister, Betty Masuda; gc: 2; gc: 4.

Okamoto, Kazue T., 93, Torrance, CA, Jan. 13; she is survived by her children, Joyce (Harvey) Yoshino, Joanne (Wilfred) Nakata and Jim (Lorna Aki); siblings, William (Asayo) Takigawa and Susan (Frank) Morimoto; sister-in-law, Kachan Maruyama; she is also survived by many nieces, nephews and other relatives; gc: 6; gc: 3.

Okine, Sayeko, 89, Gardena, CA, Jan. 31; she was predeceased by her husband, Makoto; she is survived by her children, Bruce (Julie) and Cynthia (Mike) Runyon, brother, Hiroshi Yasuda; she is also survived by many nieces, nephews and other relatives; gc: 2.

Peterson, Mieko Marilyn, 77, San Jose, CA, Jan. 12; as a child, she and her family were incarcerated during WWII at the War Relocation Authority Center at Heart Mountain, WY; she is survived by her sons, James (Tammy) and Robert, sisters, Charlene and Karen Yontsune; gc: 2.

Somen, Tamji, 92, San Clemente, CA, Feb. 24; he is survived by his wife, Rosa Hiroko; children, Alan, Bryan and Catherine; in-laws, Michiko, Asayo and Miguel Samashima; and many nieces, nephews and other relatives.

Takao, M. George, 77, Torrance, CA, Jan. 4; he is survived by his son, Brent; and grandchildren.

Tomita, Wayne, 83, San Jose, CA, Jan. 24; he is survived by his children, Larry (Michie), Hideko Nakasaki (George), Terrie (Fred) and Phyllis Tomita; he is also survived by many nieces and nephews.

Tanada, Yoshinori ‘Joe,’ 98, Oakland, CA, May 24, 2016; born in Pucallpa, Peru, he became professor emeritus of entomology, University of California, Berkeley, author of the 1993 textbook “Insect Pathology,” he was instrumental in the development of insect pathology in Japan.

Watanabe, Kinichi Ken, 82, Torrance, CA, Dec. 29; he was predeceased by his wife, Tamiko; children, Dianne (Rod) Shiozaki, Carl (Bebbie) and Larry (Anna); stepson, Paul Hiroaka; brothers, Kenjiro (Ruby) and Bill Yosh (Ruth) Watanabe; gc: 7.

PLACE A TRIBUTE

In Memoriam is a free listing that appears on a limited, space-available basis.

Tributes honor your loved ones with text and photos and appear in a timely manner at the rate of $20/column inch.

Contact: busmgr@pacificcitizen.org or call (213) 620-1767

MORTUARY

KUBOTA NIKKEI

MORTUARY

KUBOTA NIKKEI

MORTUARY

KUBOTA NIKKEI

MORTUARY
3. Get Involved

- The easiest way to get involved is by writing a check. Having held leadership positions in several Japanese American nonprofit organizations, I know that there is one common need: Organizations need money to fund their programs. We can show our support by donating to organizations that are keeping this legacy alive.

Another way to get involved is to look for speaking opportunities where we can share our family story and discuss the lessons that we believe must be learned from E.O. 9066 and its application to persons of Japanese ancestry. We can organize a speakers bureau that would be available to schools, civic organizations and social groups.

Despite facing resentment by his neighbors, Bob Fletcher followed his principles to protect the Tukamoto, Okamoto and Nitta farms when these families were evacuated and imprisoned under the authority of E.O. 9066. Mr. Fletcher died in 2013 at the age of 101 in Florin, Calif.

We can get more deeply involved by creating a legacy project for a local community and apply for a grant from the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program, administered by the National Park Service. To ensure continued funding for this program, the NPS needs to receive qualified grant proposals every year. E.O. 9066 is part of our history. If we are not willing to help preserve the legacy of those who suffered under E.O. 9066, their sacrifices will be forgotten, and the injustices imposed by E.O. 9066 may be repeated.

Let us use Feb. 19 not only as a time to remember what happened in the past but also as a time to recommit ourselves and the next generation to telling our story.

I n commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066 and the 25th anniversary of the Manzanar National Historic Site, Manzanar is hosting two public archeology projects from March 24-29 and May 26-30.

Volunteers will have the opportunity to assist the National Park Service in uncovering and stabilizing Manzanar’s historic administration and staff housing area. Participants will also learn about the common and contrasting experiences of camp staff and incarcerated persons, as well as the differences between Japanese landscaping aesthetics and “western” military-style landscaping.

Cherstin Lyon, author of the book “Prisons and Patriots: Japanese American Wartime Citizenship, Civil Disobedience, and Historical Memory,” and the award-winning California State University San Bernardino History and Anthropology Clubs will participate in the project from March 25-27, marking their fifth year returning as a group.

Art Williams, who lived in the administration area as a teenager and wrote the book “Reflecting on WWII, Manzanar, and the WRA,” will also present a program.

Volunteer positions are available to anyone age 15 and over who is physically able to work outdoors participating in moderately strenuous activities.

Participants will be digging with shovels and small hand tools, cutting and loading brush, using wheelbarrows, collecting rocks to reconstruct landscape features, painting rock alignments and screening sediments to retrieve artifacts.

The work will be conducted outdoors, regardless of weather. Volunteers may work any number of days or hours, but a full day or multiple days are preferred. Bring water, lunch, work gloves and wear sunscreen, a hat and sturdy boots.

Advance sign-up is required since the project is limited to 25 participants per day.

To sign up, contact Manzanar Volunteer Ambassador Katie Busch at (760) 878-2194, ext. 3312, or email katherine_busch@partner.nps.gov. For project questions, contact Cultural Resources Manager Jeff Burton at (760) 878-2194, ext. 3305, or email jeff.burton@nps.gov.

Many of my values and sense of moral obligation comes from the JA culture passed on through my mother, though I did not realize that until I was much older. Other cultural aspects like my mother’s annual classroom visits to share Japanese folk songs and teach origami were more obvious — and embarrassing to a young boy desperately seeking approval from his monocultural peers.

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We can get more deeply involved by creating a legacy project for a local community and apply for a grant from the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program, administered by the National Park Service. To ensure continued funding for this program, the NPS needs to receive qualified grant proposals every year. E.O. 9066 is part of our history. If we are not willing to help preserve the legacy of those who suffered under E.O. 9066, their sacrifices will be forgotten, and the injustices imposed by E.O. 9066 may be repeated.

Let us use Feb. 19 not only as a time to remember what happened in the past but also as a time to recommit ourselves and the next generation to telling our story.

Things were a bit more complicated for me, born with blonde hair and green eyes. Children don’t perceive social constructs such as race or gender until someone else points them out. In my case, I did not know that it was unusual to have family from mixed racial and ethnic origins, or not look like the people you were related to until it became a subject of derision from my peers.

I learned my first word from my Hibaachan. I have fond memories of watching chanbara samurai dramas with her, learning how to bake apple turnovers and can jars of preserves with peaches picked from her small orchard in Ogden.

I think most families go through some kind of identity crisis when they lose the head of their family, but for our mixed race clan, the loss of our matriarch also severed our direct connection to Japan. With Hibaachan gone, did that mean we were somehow less Japanese? No, but for a time it certainly felt like it, and although we never spoke about it, I could tell that many of my fully ethnically JA cousins felt the same.

It was this sense of loss that inspired me to begin my own journey of cultural reclamation, starting with learning the language of my ancestors. Shortly after, I decided to move to Japan, and for the past decade, much of my life has been dedicated to the study of Japan and the Nikkei Diaspora.

Up until that point, I had always considered myself to be Japanese as opposed to Japanese American. Growing up outside of the JA communities of the West Coast, my concept of identity came from the traditional aspects of Japanese culture Hibaachan imparted by way of my mother.

It was in my studies in Japan that I came to understand that JA culture is as far removed from Japan as German American is from Germany. As much as we attempt to preserve our immigrant cultures, communities living in diaspora suffer the burden of time between today and when their ancestors emigrated.

The culture of origin continues to progress and after a few generations is virtually unrecognizable to their overseas sons and daughters. That was certainly the case for Hibaachan when she visited Japan for the first time in 50 years during the mid-1980s.

Yet, JAs and other Asian Americans are constantly singled out for their foreign otherness by Americans of European ancestry who nevertheless celebrate bastardized versions of St. Patrick’s Day or Oktoberfest.

The problem is that for most of our history as the JA community, the dominant Eurocentric culture has attached a negative stigma to being Japanese. From white nativist farmers in California demanding our incarceration to Detroit autoworkers killing a man because they thought he was Japanese — our community was under the gun for most of the 20th century.

This was particularly difficult to navigate as a biracial JA child in an overwhelmingly white community with less than 5 percent people of color and not a single other JA beyond my mother or sister.

Although I had the privilege of passing for white, I grew up fighting kids on the schoolyard who called my mom a Jap, or me the son of a Saigon whore. I wasn’t allowed to play with certain kids whose grandparents fought in WWII when they found out who my mother was. Because of these negative social pressures, there was a time in my life when I was ashamed to be Japanese, and even did my best to hide it.

Today, I am not only proud of being JA, but I actively celebrate it in the work I do both personally and professionally in advancing the Asian American and Pacific Islander Movement through the arts. By moving to Japan and learning to speak Japanese, I reclaimed aspects of our culture that were erased both deliberately through governmental intervention and by the passage of time. I also came to understand my own place within the JA community.

Despite blood quantum or physical appearance, I am Japanese American. I am grateful to my elders at the JACL who accepted me as one of their own and continue to mentor me through this journey of self-discovery and quest for social justice.

Rob Buscher is a member of the JACL Philadelphia Board of Directors.