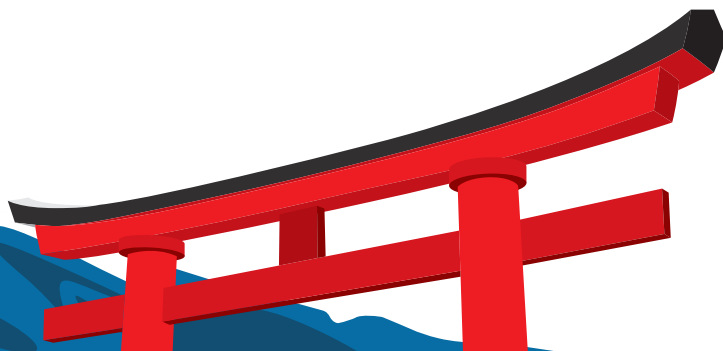




# PORTLAND JACL NEWSLETTER

Portland JACL – Supporting Civil Rights Since 1928



• JULY 2021 | VOLUME 27 ISSUE 6 •

## Board Member MESSAGE

The official release of the “Go for Broke, Japanese American Soldiers of World War II,” was June 3, 2021. In communities throughout the United States, recognitions were held to honor the soldier’s sacrifice and heroism. The USPS named the stamp after the motto of the U.S. Army’s 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team, but which now refers to all of the American men and women of Japanese heritage who served in the war. Most served in the 100th/442nd RCT, Military Intelligence Service (MIS), 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion, Women’s Army Corps (WAC), Cadet Nurse Corps, and Army Nurse Corps. Portland celebrated at the Oregon Historical Society with its first live event since the pandemic.

The stamp features the image of U.S. Army Private First Class Shiroku “Whitey” Yamamoto of Hawaii.

Dr. Linda Tamura, Hood River native and author of the book, “Nisei Soldiers Break Their Silence,” led the efforts to plan the event along with support from the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, Mary Yamaguchi Fund, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon Nisei Veterans, Inc., and the Portland JACL. Jeff Selby a former US Army combat veteran served as emcee.

Dr. Tamura told us heartbreaking stories of the continued racism and prejudice the Nisei soldiers encountered once they returned home. Decorated, combat soldier, George Akiyama

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

### Independence Day

July 4

### JACL Virtual National Convention

Registration open to all

July 15-18

### Hiroshima/Nagasaki Remembrance

Limited in-person and live streaming at Japanese American Historical Plaza and art exhibit at JAMO annex space (former ONLC)

August 6

6 pm

### Ikoi No Kai scheduled to open

With safety precautions

August 9

### Signing of Civil Liberties Act of 1988

August 10

### Nikkei Community Picnic (TBD)

August 15

Edited by Chong Sim (simc0186@gmail.com)

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**Continued from Pg. 1**

Walked into the local barbershop in Hood River but was rudely denied the service, The barber angrily told George that he wanted to slit his throat. It's hard for us to believe today the hatred and vile language that was directed at Japanese Americans in the 40's.

The Portland dedication event featured words of congratulations from Governor Kate Brown, former Governor Ted Kulongowski, and Executive Director of the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, Lynn Fuchigami Park. Special guest was Japanese Consul General Masaki Shiga. Four Nisei soldiers were invited but only one, Yoshiro Tokiwa was able to attend this event, Commander Ron Iwasaki represented the Oregon Nisei Vets. Heidi Tolentino's grandfather was a medic with the 442 and Nicky Ballinger, a fifth grader's great grandfather who also served represented two generations of children of the veterans.

Actor, Ken Yoshikawa read a letter to the Hillsboro Argus that was written by Art Iwasaki, a member of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team who was awarded the Bronze Star while serving in Europe. Actor, David Loftus read an excerpt from Harold Okimoto's diary, the 522nd Field Artillery

Battalion; and Alton Chung presented former U.S. Rep. Al Ullman's tribute to Frank Hachiya of the Military Intelligence Service.

Musical tributes were provided by the Minidoka Swing Band, Portland Taiko and the Portland Jazz Composers Ensemble.

This stamp is the result of years of effort by three Nisei women in California: Fusa Takahashi, Aiko King and the late Chiz Ohira along with support from JAVA (Japanese American Veterans Association), Go for Broke National Education Center, Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF), Nisei Veterans Legacy, Friends of Minidoka and many others. The effort began in 2005 after viewing an exhibit about the Nisei soldiers at the Japanese American National Museum. Mrs. Takahashi related "I felt we needed a broader audience to know what the soldiers did and try to figure out the best way to get to a broad audience ... We thought of this stamp."

Over 33,000 Japanese American men and women volunteered their service during World War II. The top secret Military Intelligence Service has been recognized as being critical to the Allied victory in the Pacific and is credited with shortening the war and discovering critical military information. About 18,000 men served in the 442 Regimental Combat Team. Those soldiers earned 9,486 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor and an unprecedented seven Presidential Unit Citations which is only given to those soldiers who have shown extraordinary bravery in battle. This is just one of many stories of our immigrant parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

The Japanese American community is the only community of color that has been able to get Congress and the United States government an apology for our unjust treatment. Learning about the bravery and sacrifice of our Nisei soldiers helped turn the tide of public opinion in support of the redress movement.



**Standing L to R:** Governor Ted Kulongowski, Linda Tamura (Chair), Yoshiro Tokiwa, Jeff Selby (M/C), Lynn Fuchigami Parks, Setsy Sadamoto Larouche, Chip Larouche, Heidi Tolentino. **Kneeling L to R,** Ron Iwasaki, (Commander ONV), Mia Kazuko Ballinger. (Photo by Rich Iwasaki)

*Celebrating the 25th Annual*

# MOCHITSUKI

**2021** *Japanese American New Year*



Mochitsuki is Portland's annual Japanese New Year celebration and has been a premier event in the local community since 1996. Held on the last Sunday of each January, it is a community-centered, volunteer-run, non-profit event for families and adults with a goal to celebrate tradition by sharing Japanese and Japanese American culture. In 2020 we had over 50 community groups at PSU's Viking Pavilion joining the event. It was attended by more than 3,000 people.

Mochitsuki has five components: a live stage program, food court, cultural demonstrations, hands-on activities, and vendors of various related items.

### Searching For:

- Event Coordinator\*
- Assistant to Event Coordinator\*
- Food Vendor Coordinator\*
- Stage Manger\*
- Secretary
- Graphic Artist
- Social Media Lead (Facebook/Instagram)
- Volunteer Coordinator, Assistant to Volunteer Coordinator (2 positions), Volunteer Team Leads (multiple positions)
- Volunteers under Website/Web design committee

(\* Position has small stipend)

**Deadline: July 31st or (or until positions filled)**

**For more information**

Visit [www.mochipdx.org](http://www.mochipdx.org)

- OR -

Contact Lisa Uzunoe, [coordinator@mochipdx.org](mailto:coordinator@mochipdx.org).

## ❖ Breaking the Bubblegum Code ❖

By Lauren Yanase

At 87 years old, there are few things my paternal grandmother does not have an opinion on; fewer still that she is not ready to share. From skirt lengths to savings bonds, rest assured that Bobbie has something to say about that. One topic spared from commentary from my no-nonsense grandma? Her four-year stint in an internment camp as a young teen.

Eleven-year-old Bobbie Kato, daughter of Japanese immigrants, native of Merced, California, existed separately from the wartime Japanese Americans in history books. She had grown up in a universe parallel to that of Executive Order 9066, never in my mind affected by the horror of internment. Barbara Shirota, Mom to two, Grandma to three and Auntie Bobbie to many more, did little to dissuade me of my fantasy of her bubblegum youth.

Her reluctance to speak about her adolescence made it all the more romantic to me. I envisioned shiny saddle shoes, first kisses over chocolate malts, and glass bottle sodas with nickel movies. The reality, I later learned, was not necessarily devoid of those Americana stereotypes, but warped through the lens of shame and fear, behind barbed wire fences and guard towers.

A fifth-grade project on my pre-war immigration legacy made me an involuntary expert on internment. My classmates' interest revealed my naive understanding, and, embarrassed, I started to push for answers to the unasked questions in my family. With the doggedness of an investigative journalist and the precociousness of a nine-year-old, I set out for The Truth. So began the nearly decade-long journey of relearning Bobbie Shirota (nee Kato)'s past. After avoiding the topic for half a century, she and her siblings were more susceptible to a granddaughter or a great-niece's curiosity. Still, even that fell short of convincing them to talk openly about their experience. Their careful, coded recollections

compel me to remember their story, and their silence commands that I not let it be forgotten by time.

I cannot and will not fault Bobbie's resistance to see her youth as a cautionary tale from the past. The liability of her lost childhood now mirrored in the fate of others lies not only in the hands that directed it but also in those who did not protest it.

Last year, news broke that the federal government was holding immigrant children in detention centers built on the bones of a Japanese 'relocation center' used during World War II. I asked Grandma what she thought of the report. No response. Finally, she briefly opined on the general horrors of family separation and locking up kids. Then she asked if I had found a job yet.

This year, the Japanese American Citizens' League was among the first to speak out when Iranian Americans were detained and interrogated at the Canadian border. I know if I ask Grandma, she will say what she always says: that it's not right what is happening, that they are Americans, Lauren, and more importantly, people. Then she will ask if I am seeing anyone. I can and should be savvy to my grandma and her peers' quiet pleadings to our generation. She asks if I'm registered to vote (then advises me to double- and triple-check). She tells me to read today's paper and notes that the headline is "kind of interesting, hmm?". She sends books and documentaries and notable names who wrote or performed or talked on the internment camps, the Asian American experience, the plight of immigrants.

**If I let myself listen, I find that she has a lot to say, after all.**

## ❖ About the Author ❖



Lauren Yanase is a lifelong Portland, OR resident, and is in her second year at Bennington College, in Bennington, Vermont.

An avid storyteller, Lauren has published creative fiction and nonfiction accounts of the Japanese

American internment and has been recognized regionally and nationally for her writing. In 2019, she earned the Girl Scout Gold Award for her documentary about the Japanese American internment. This is a prestigious honor, with fewer than six percent of Girl Scouts worldwide earning this award.

Her documentary, *Shikata Ga Nai: An Inconvenient American*, follows the story of the Kato family during World War II as Japanese Americans along the West Coast were forcefully relocated into internment camps. John Golden, a TOSA in Portland Public Schools, says that this film, "sheds a light on a forgotten and shameful chapter in American history... and presents a story that is compelling and should be essential viewing for all high school students." This film and other works can be found at her online portfolio, *From Grandma's House*.

When she is not enjoying a mid-priced coffee or semi-athletic endeavors in the mountains, Lauren is studying and working in education and public policy.

### Current Board Members

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Chris Lee

**Co-President**  
Amanda Shannahan

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Jeff Matsumoto

**Treasurer**  
Jillian Toda-Currie

**Secretary**  
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Setsy Larouche

**Board Members:**  
Sachi Kaneko  
Lynn Fuchigami Parks  
Connie Masuoka  
Marleen Wallingford  
Jenny Yamada

If you would like to contact the Board, their email address is **First Name@pdxjacl.org**



## ❖ On the Importance of Teaching Equity ❖

On June 12th, both JAMO and the JACL represented the Japanese American community at a rally advocating for the importance of teaching equity in public schools. The rally was a nationwide event organized through the Zinn Education Project by a group of local educators to protest recent legislature in a number of states banning teachings on racism, sexism, heterosexism and oppression throughout U.S. history. It was also organized in protest of the many educators and school board members who are being attacked and/or called to resign for their commitment to telling the truth.

Misnomered by many media outlets as a fight for Critical Race Theory in public schools, educators counter that they are in no way trying to teach college level curriculum to K-12 students. Instead, they are trying to address historical issues of oppression and connect them to the current day, without the façade that these issues have been resolved. In short, providing students a comprehensive view of the world they live in, as well as a level of consciousness that can help them be more aware of their role within these systems. It is also a way to acknowledge the experience of many students of color, offering a more inclusive educational environment.

### **According to Education Week,**

*"As of June 10, legislators in 20 states have introduced bills that would restrict [teaching equity] or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an Education Week analysis. Four states have signed these bills into law" (Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack).*

### **JACL Board Member Sachi Kaneko delivered the speech below on the day of the event:**

There are many ways to describe the land we stand on. It's the Willamette River Basin- the largest watershed in the state and a habitat for deer, beaver and otter. It's Kalapuya land with a history of settler colonialism that drove the indigenous occupants from their traditional livelihoods. It's close to the site of a Japanese American memorial in remembrance of the many Japanese Americans that were relocated into Concentration Camps due to racist mandates. These are all important pieces to describing this land and omitting one leaves an incomplete story.

In 1942, Executive Order 9066 sent my grandparents to live in the Japanese Concentration Camps in Jerome, Arkansas for almost three years. I was always encouraged to ask about their experience, serving as a living memorial for their time in the Camps. In the way that my Obachan, or grandmother, tells it, there was no overt violence in the day to day, but the looming of the guard towers around the Camps and the barbed wire fences were an ever present promise to the possibility of it.

Even after getting out of the Camps things were hard. It was difficult to find someone who was willing to employ someone of Japanese descent. Money was tight and the community was made insular from being surrounded by a racist atmosphere. My Obachan rarely acknowledged what she felt about that time. Rather it was a series of events, a telling of what was, without much judgement. So it was surprising to me that after one such talk, over making my Obachan's famous chirashi, that she regretfully mentioned, "that's why I feel so sad about the Muslim community- they are going through the same thing that we had to."

As the rice for the chirashi steamed into our faces, I marveled that my 89 year old grandmother could make the connection that many legislators fail to make. The racism that the Japanese American community faced during WWII, and again as Asian Americans during the pandemic, was not isolated, but rather the manifestation of a system of racism within this country. It is the same system that lead to attacks on individuals in the Muslim community, the Muslim ban, the dispossession of the indigenous people, the inhumane treatment of undocumented individuals, the same system that enslaved a community of people for the color of their skin and continue to make them a target for police brutality. How do we break the cycle?

The opposition worries that the education will be divisive to the student body. But hasn't the last year, with the death of Breonna Taylor, with the death of George Floyd, Daunte Wright and many others, shown us that we are already divided? The solution is not to sweep these things under the rug, but to come to a place of understanding and empathy. It is a privilege, not an imposition to our curriculum, to learn the kind of history that centers the liberation of Black People, the reclamation of power by the Indigenous Community.

In the Japanese American community we say "never again" to the experience of the Concentration Camps. "Never again, never again, never again," and yet in the last couple years we have been detaining migrant children in the remnants of the Japanese Concentration Camps at our Southern border. "Never again" is

now. So the best that we can ask of you, is don't forget. For my grandparents. For the people who helped build this land, but never had a statue made of them. For that, we need education.

If I ever have children, I want them to know about the land that they grow up on- the biome that they live in, their role as colonists on this land, the history of Black slavery and Black liberation, the importance of including the South Asian community in AAPI work, and their legacy and connection to the Concentration Camps. I want them to know these things not as some endless string of facts, but with the knowledge that their own liberation is connected to the liberation of others.

It was indigenous activist Lilla Watson who said, "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." All of us, Black, Brown, White, Asian exist within these structures of racism placing us on a pointless hierarchy. We need to learn about each other in order to learn how to work together against this. This is a call to continue to educate our children about systems of racism within our schools. A commitment to telling the truth. The first step to dismantling the racist systems that we could all use liberation from.

**A big thanks to David Scholten, a fifth grade teacher at Abernathy Elementary School, for all the educational material and providing the opportunity to speak.**

## ❖ Ikoï No Kai Makes Plans to Reopen ❖

After sixteen months of being closed, we are pleased to announce a tentative reopening date for Ikoï no kai for **August 9, 2021!!!** Our opening date is based upon the State of Oregon protocols for reopening. We have missed you all and look forward to seeing you once again. As we open our doors we will begin with serving lunches only. We will be asking for lunch reservations for the opening period until we are fully operational. Please look for more details in the next JACL newsletter. We look forward to seeing you all soon.



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## ❖ 2021 Henjyoji Shingon Buddhist Temple ❖ Art Award



This award was established by the family of the later Rev. Kazuko Wake Henjyoji in recognition of her lifetime of service strengthening cultural ties between the United States and Japan. She was devoted to education, teaching Japanese and Americans alike both the art of Japanese tea ceremony and the art of Ikebana, flower arranging. This year we are proud to announce that Matthew Aizawa is the recipient of our award.

Mathew practices Shorinji Kempo which is a Japanese martial art considered to be a modified version of Shaolin Kung Fu. The name Shōrinji Kempo is the Japanese reading of Shàolín Quánfā. It was established in 1947 by Doshin So, a Japanese martial artist and former military intelligence agent who lived in China for many years before and during World War II. Mathew began practicing Sorinji Kemp when he was in kindergarten and attained a black belt in 2015.