

• JANUARY 2024 | VOLUME 30 ISSUE 01 •



**Okaeri** By Omi Strait (she/her)



This past November, I had the pleasure of attending the 2023 Okaeri conference in the Little Tokyo district of Los Angeles, California. As stated on their website, the conference was "... a gathering that centers the Japanese and Japanese American LGBTQ+ experience. The conference seeks to (1) build community, (2) educate, (3) provide support, and (4) foster understanding and inclusion for the Japanese and Japanese American LGBTQ+ community."

A year and a half ago, I visited Little Tokyo and immediately felt a special connection with the place. I've found that it's rare to be in spaces where my community is reflected - growing up, the only place I saw that was in a small town on the

#### **COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

January 1 New Year's Day

January 15 Matin Luther King Day

January 19 Unite People Meeting and Dinner Epworth United Methodist Church | 630pm

January 27 Portland JACL Community New Year's Celebration Oregon Buddhist Temple | 1pm-4pm

Feb 17 Portland JACL / JAMO's Threads of Remembrance: A History of Activism,Community and Reparations Lincoln Recital Hall, PSU | 2pm

#### Continued from Pg. 1

Big Island of Hawaii - Hilo - where the majority of the Japanese side of my family lives. Little Tokyo is the only other place I have personally been to that gives me a similar sense of home and belonging. When I saw the conference would be happening there, I felt such a strong desire to go back. Thanks to the Portland JACL fulfilling my financial request, I was able to attend the full conference hosted at the Japanese American National Museum (JANM).

The content covered in the conference was affirming and inspiring. The weekend kicked off with an opening discussion between Kris Hayashi and Cecelia Chung, two transgender activists and leaders. It felt particularly impactful to listen to their conversation, as over 500 anti-trans bills have been introduced throughout the country in 2023. I also attended workshops on boundaries, collective care and interdependence, how to build community for queer and trans Nikkei and allies, embracing and learning from our Black Nikkei LGBTQ+ community members, and I listened in on panel of queer Nikkei elders who talked about everything from what it means to survive, to coming out of the closet, to the joys of queer sex.

Attending the Okaeri conference and being around other Nikkei people gave me a strong sense of community. Discussing what it means to be queer and Japanese American helped me to understand phenomenons I've long lived with, but haven't been able to identify with words. Talking about the concepts of gaman, mite minu furi, and anmoku no ryokai, and the ways that they influenced our lives and our queerness, was deeply eye-opening and affirming.

The weekend closed out with Gia Gunn, a trans woman and drag performer, teaching us a bon dance. In the summers when my mom and I would visit Hilo, we would always go to local bon dances. I have such vivid memories of dressing in a happi coat, eating spam musubi and shave ice, and watching as my aunties played music in the yagura underneath the lanterns. And I loved to dance, especially as a kid. Ending the weekend with bon



odori felt like the universe was telling me it wanted me there, and was the moment where I really felt the spirit of "Okaeri" - of being welcomed home.

Before I left the Japanese American National Museum, I visited their gift shop to see if I could find a memento to bring home - maybe a sticker or something else small. What I found instead was much more valuable. My great aunt and her family had been incarcerated during WWII, and several years ago was interviewed for a book about the experiences of Japanese Americans who were from Hawaii. Instead of finding a cute tchotchke, I found that book, and a piece of my family's history at JANM.

The Okaeri conference was also a powerful reminder that our communities' freedom is deeply intertwined with the freedom of Palestinians. At the time that I'm writing this article, over 18,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7th. I ask that you all join me in living out the Portland JACL's mission to "protect human and civil rights for all," whether that is through marching, boycotting, or calling your representatives in Congress to demand a permanent ceasefire and an end to the collective punishment and genocide of Palestinians.



By Spencer Uemura

あけましておめでとうございます。今年もよろしくお願いします。 (Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu. Kotoshimo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.)

Happy New Year to all! Thank you for your continued connection and involvement with our chapter of the JACL. We can't do this work without you!

For this month's Kokoro Corner, I wanted to discuss the importance of values-centered living that comes from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). To briefly summarize ACT, the goal is to accept difficult feelings, clarify values, and commit to take action in accordance with one's values. When our actions are not directed by our values, we can experience fear, avoidance, as well as low mood and motivation.

In the past few months, I have noticed how my own fear has pulled me away from my values, and left me with greater avoidance and hopelessness. Specifically regarding the ongoing crisis in Palestine, I felt worse and worse as news of Israeli war atrocities increased while I continued to feel stuck. In recent weeks, thanks to kind conversation with friends and time for reflection, I've looked toward my values of Compassion, Connection, and Justice. I remember the impacts of WWII intergenerational trauma on our community, Japanese people in America and those still in Japan. Our people, too,

have felt the pain of oppression and brutality, the sting of barbed wire and the horror of mass bombings. We carry that pain in us, and that pain can flood back in from time to time. For me, that pain had left me feeling helpless and hopeless, a feeling like "shikata ga nai" or "it can't be helped", when there are very tangible ways for concerned citizens to advocate for change. By reconnecting with some of my deepest values, I've been able to care for my own pain that I'd been avoiding and see that the egregious violence upon Palestinian people is parallel to the abuses of power that our community has weathered in the past. For those curious about how Nikkei groups are pursuing advocacy for the Palestinian cause, Tsuru for Solidarity (@tsuruforsolidarity on Instagram) and Vigilant Love (@vigilantlove on Instagram) are organizations that have been co-founded by Japanese Americans dedicated to solidarity, healing, and systems change.

In this new year, I invite you to consider your inner values and how you might let them guide your actions. Whether you have a value for Love, Spirituality, Courage, or Authenticity (to name a few) there are always ways to reprioritize those in our lives.

May our lives be firmly rooted in our deepest values. \*Please note this may or may not reflect the views of other members of the Portland JACL or Portland JACL Board.



131

#### Photo Corner



On December 7, 2023, the Minidoka Swing Band played at the Oregon Historical Society to a standing room only audience. Ericka Turay (daughter Nola Sugai Bogle—former Minidoka internee) sang "Sentimental Journey". This band was formed by Robbie Tsuboi and Marilyn Loy in 2007. Photo by: Chip Larouche



On December 16, 2023, Masaru Yatabe was presented the 2023 Foreign Minister's Commendation by Consul General of Japan, Yuzo Yoshioka at the Grant House in Vancouver, Washington.Mr. Yatabe (Chairman of the Friends of MacDonald) was awarded for his achievements in promoting mutual understanding between Japan and the United States. Pictured are: Alice Yatabe, Masaru Yatabe and Consul General Yoshioka. Photo by: Chip Larouche



On November 13, 2023, twenty three veterans were honored for their services at a luncheon at Ikoi No Kai. A delicious sukiyaki lunches were served and they were entertained by the Hiro Gohan Group. Photo by: Dwight Onchi

















Photos by Rich Iwasaki





WELCOME THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON WITH PORTLAND JACL

## Saturday, January 27th 1-4pm Oregon Buddhist Temple

Mochi-pounding demo | Mochi samples

RSVP for 1pm or 2:30pm timeslots: tinyurl.com/jacl-mochi2024 61

# Gathering the circ

# Saturday, Jan 13 4-6 pm

A workshop and conversation exploring cultural heritage and its impact on identity using dialogue, drawing, and creative expression.

Friends of JAMO/JACL Members: Free | General Public: \$5 Learn more and register at jamo.org/event/gathering-the-circle/



Japanese American Museum of Oregon 411 NW Flanders St. Portland, OR 97209 ENTRANCE ON NW 4TH AVE







#### lkoi no Kai - JANUARY 2024

1333 SE 28th Ave / 503-238-0775

MON	TUES		THURS	FRI
1	2		4	5
CLOSED	CLOSED	x	Kimbap & Soup *vegetarian option available 10:45 Move On Class	<b>Yakiniku</b> Beef
8	9		11 Miso Nikomi	12
Steamed Fish w/ Mushroom 11:30am Chair Yoga 12:30pm Mahjong	Wonton Soup Pork & Shrimp Kinfe Sharpening 12:45pm Sing a Long	X	Udon Miso Noodle Soup 11:30am Aikido Stress Relief	Meatball Stew Pork & Beef Bingo
15	16		18	19
Chicken Karaage 12:30pm Mahjong	<b>Tenshin Don</b> Omelette on Rice 11am Blood Pressure 12:45pm Sing a Long	x	<b>Okonomiyaki</b> Savory Pancake 10:45 Move On Class	<b>Chicken</b> <b>Carbonara</b> 11am Blood Pressure Ohana Lunch
22	23		25	26
<b>Shogayaki</b> Ginger Pork <i>Reiki</i> 12:30pm Mahjong	<b>Nikujyaga</b> Beef Stew 12:45pm Sing a Long	x	Osechi New Year's Meal *Reservations required	<b>Miso Katsudon</b> Pork Katsu Rice Bowl
<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>		seniors \$12 / Adults \$15	
Birthday Sushi *Reservations required 12:30pm Mahjong	Chicken w/ Black Bean Sauce 11am Blood Pressure 12:45pm Sing a Long			

Cooks: Naomi Molstrom-M Kyoko Adcock-Tu Rieko Shimada-Th/F

Suggested Lunch Donation: \$9 for seniors 65+ / \$11 for adults under 65 / \$ 6 kids

**Reservations preferred** / Indoor Dining Limited

\* For reservations please call and leave a message or email:

(ph) 503-238-0775 (email) ikoinokai7@gmail.com

Seating at 11:30 am with lunch served promptly at noon



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

Edited by Chong Sim (simc0186@gmail.com)