



Greater Los Angeles Chapter

Japanese American Citizens League

Newsletter no. 441

June 2022

VIRTUAL MEETING/PROGRAM

Sunday, June 12, 2022

1:00 pm

Program: 1:00 pm My life in a Concentration Camp, Manzanar

Speaker: Joyce Okazaki

2:00 pm or after the end of the program: Business Meeting



Joyce Okazaki

Joyce Okazaki was born in the USA, and is a citizen. She should have been protected by the US Constitution. Instead, she and 120,000 others had their civil liberties taken away because of their ethnicity. They were uprooted from their homes, taken from their jobs, made to withdraw from college, and had to get rid of their possessions on short notice in order to obey U.S. Military orders to evacuate the West Coast, because of EO 9066 and Lt. General James L. DeWitt.

She has given talks on this historical period to many middle school and high school history classes, college social science class, and many civic, social, and religious groups. Most recently, she has given a class on YouTube for a discussion on discrimination and via Zoom to high school class in Illinois.

For a Zoom link to the program, email Louise Sakamoto at

greaterlajacl@gmail.com

Hi GLA,

We had three scholarship applicants this year! That's three more than last year! And they all applied via the website using the Google Form. After reviewing and reading through each of the scholarship applications, I recommend we award each of them a scholarship. . . . I make a motion to award a \$1000 scholarship to each of the three applicants.

Here are the names of the scholarship applicants and some information about them.

Kenji Horigome

High School: Downtown Magnet High School

College: Still deciding, possibly University of Michigan

Major: Astrophysics

Isabella Wada

High School: South Pasadena High School

College: American University of Paris then transferring to USC

Major: Business Marketing

Jacob Oei

High School: Edison High School

College: UC Berkeley

Major: Psychology

Thank you, Layne Sakamoto, Scholarship Chair

GLA JAACL Heart Mountain Short Films

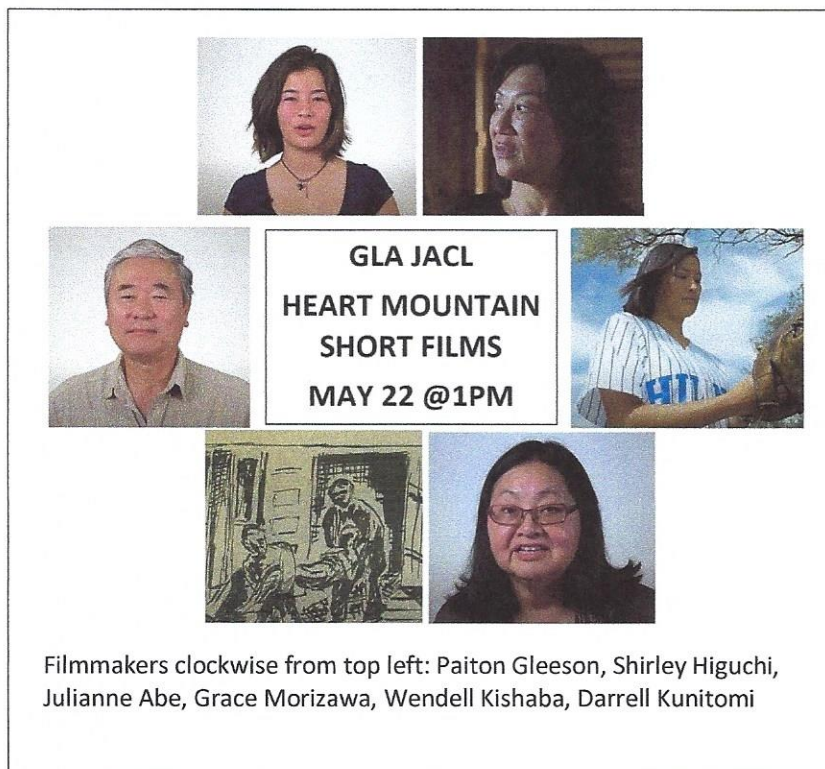
The virtual program Sunday, May 22, 1 p.m., was planned and organized by Co-President Mitchell Matsumura. Jeff MacIntyre was the moderator. The segment with Jeff MacIntyre and David Ono was pre-recorded. They were promoting Heart Mountain's Digital Storytelling Workshops.

Short Films: 2-4 minutes per film

- "I Would Like to Know" by Paiton Gleeson
- "On My Shoulders" by Shirley Higuchi
- "The Upside-Down Mountain" by Darrell Kunitomi
- "Swing for the Fences" by Julianne Abe
- "Unravel" by Wendell Kishaba
- "Knock Knock" by Grace Morizawa

Three of the films shown were made at the 6th Annual Heart Mountain Pilgrimage July 2017 and three were made at the 7th Annual Heart Mountain Pilgrimage July 2018. Though new at filmmaking, the short films were expertly made with meaningful topics. Wendell Kishaba was present at the program to talk about his film. The films are available on YouTube.

Louise Sakamoto



**GLA JAACL
HEART MOUNTAIN
SHORT FILMS
MAY 22 @1PM**

Filmmakers clockwise from top left: Paiton Gleeson, Shirley Higuchi, Julianne Abe, Grace Morizawa, Wendell Kishaba, Darrell Kunitomi

2022 GLA JACL Scholarship Awardees: Kenji Horigome, Jacob Oei, Isabella Wada

Meeting the scholarship awardees is planned for Sunday, July 10 in the afternoon at Columbia Park in Torrance.

Following, with their permission, are the well-written personal autobiographies of the awardees that were in their scholarship applications.

Kenji Horigome's autobiography

I was born in Korea to a Korean mother and a Japanese father. Throughout my childhood, I faced massive cultural adversities and often wondered what the purpose of these struggles were. No matter what country I was in or how fluent I was in Korean or Japanese, I was always an outsider because I am a "mutt." Even so, I learned to embrace my diversity and ability to understand the people and beauty of both cultures.

When I was still a baby, we moved to Japan where we spent 12 happy years until my father's cancer diagnosis. By the end of his treatments he couldn't talk at all and we lost him to the disease. Prior to his death, my father expressed his dream to move to America. With no family support, my mother and I decided to fulfill my father's American Dream. I was amazed but overwhelmed with what America had to offer; I was forced again to acclimate to another language and culture. The amazement didn't last very long because I started hearing my mother's quiet whimpers late at night. She tried to hide it, but her swollen eyes, distressed look and fake smile said it all. She could not speak English and struggled to find a job to support us.

My mother's love for me and my father enabled her to endure and I pushed myself to do all I could to help. I matured very quickly that year. I had to learn English at warp speed because I needed to be the man in the house and translate for her. Watching cartoons and movies were fun ways to learn English. Google was my best friend because I learned to find dictionaries, videos and translations that helped me to navigate my way through classes, grocery stores, Home Depot and conversations with others. Sometimes I would use the wrong words, and it was embarrassing but I never let that bother me. My quest was to learn English and to culturally acclimate by building skills. I learned to seek out all possible resources and I developed a passion for knowledge.

During my many long nights I would think about my father. I used to question why we had to struggle but now I realize that his dream gave me the opportunity to chase my own. After this realization, I threw myself into school and found my calling in the stars. In school, I learned that matter cannot be created or destroyed but only transferred; so can my father still exist in this expanding universe?

Science is the universal language that remains constant in my life. My goal is to become one of the most influential physicists in the science world. I plan to study physics' applications in space and develop a research center where creativity, innovation, and advances are limitless. I want to contribute scientific advancements that better the lives of humanity. Maybe all this knowledge will help me find the speck in space where my father resides.

Jacob Oei's autobiography

Hi! I'm Jacob Oei. I will be attending UC Berkeley in the fall. I enjoy playing basketball, having played since I was in kindergarten. In my free time, I also love to lift weights, run, and listen to music. I would characterize myself as laid-back and always down to do anything. However, I am also hard-working and know when to buckle down to do the work I need to do. I would also say I am loyal to my family and friends.

I have done a significant amount of community service through my church. Every summer, our church puts on a week-long Vacation Bible School, and I volunteer to help in the classrooms with the kids. I lead small group discussions with the students as well as take them from activity to activity. Another community service project I helped with is our annual Baja project. I went to Baja California in Mexico for a week with a group of forty volunteers to build a house for a homeless family. We started construction on Monday and finished on Friday. I had a little bit of a leadership role, as I helped with putting up the walls and directing fellow team members. Along with this, I youth coach through a program called Little Hoopsters every summer.

My mom's side of the family is historically Japanese. My grandma was born in a Japanese internment camp, and my grandpa was relocated from California to Colorado during World War 2. They eventually met in California and gave birth to my mom. Now, I am deeply involved and interested in Japanese culture. I attend a Japanese American church with numerous Japanese traditions, such as having bento boxes at luncheons and a Japanese speaking congregation. I also play in SEYO, which is a predominantly Japanese American basketball league. I have played in SEYO since second grade and have made many of my closest friends through it.

I live in a single parent home with my mom and my two brothers. My dad has bipolar disorder and has had multiple psychotic episodes that accompany his mania, and after it became too scary for us to live with him, my parents divorced. He has still been around, and every couple years, he has extreme psychotic episodes, but he does not live at home or provide any support for my mom. That is why my mom is my hero. My mom is the most hard-working and selfless person I know, and every day I strive to be more like her. She puts me and my brothers before herself and never lets how tired or stressed she is get in the way of what she needs to get done.

My career goal is to do something related to psychology. I know first-hand and have seen the devastating effects mental disorders can have on a person and their loved ones, and want to do everything in my power to help those who are affected by problems with mental health.

Isabella Wada's autobiography

My hero is my grandmother. A 5'4, resilient, creative woman, with neatly trimmed bangs and one who always brings her A game when it comes to fashion. She played a large role in my childhood, making early breakfasts, taking me out shopping, picking me up from school. But most importantly, she incorporated and connected me to my Japanese heritage.

Since I was young, she hosted a large gathering on New Year's Day yearly, otherwise known as Shogatsu. Our whole immediate and extended family would celebrate the New Year as my grandma slaved away in the kitchen making all kinds of traditional Japanese dishes from osechi to gobo. My grandma has tied the strings of my Japanese heritage firmly to my wrist as I will carry these memories and traditions with me throughout my life. In my U.S. history class, Junior year, I was flipping through the wrinkled pages of my U.S. history textbook, eagerly awaiting the section about the Japanese Internment Camps, being that my grandma was born there. I was disappointed to find just a few sentences about this very important part about my family's American history. Where was our story? My grandma's? I wanted to learn more about my family's past, our history. I wanted to know the story written by my people.

So, I approached my grandma and asked about her experiences growing up in the internment camps. My grandma brought out her photo album as she unpacked her old memories of running around with the other younger kids, or seeing the strain that was tolled on her parents. I became engrossed in her stories and my fascination with my own culture grew. From this moment, I wanted to be more connected to my own people, my own American people, my Japanese American people.

In April, 2021, Asian hate crimes were on the rise, and I wanted to do something, to help in some way. I went online and found a community center in Little Tokyo in Downtown Los Angeles. They would deliver food and care packages to the elderly Asian but mostly Japanese people living in the community, who were unable or too afraid to leave their homes. As I spent hours packaging boxes of food and wrapping hundreds of chocolates, it was rewarded by the warm greetings from each person accompanied by sweet smiles, thank yous, and comfortable small talk. The elderly spoke of their experiences and the young volunteers told stories that sounded so similar to the ones my grandma told me.

Spending more time in my community has filled a void in me that I wasn't even aware of. Through this, I have found one more piece of my puzzle that is my identity. From connecting to my culture, to my grandma, to my people, this experience has made me more curious about all of the other stories that weren't included in the U.S. history books. My journey of learning about "everyone's" U.S. history has begun.

ABCUSD Recognizes Day of Remembrance Participants



Members of the ABCUSD Day of Remembrance Committee: (Front row, from left) Iku Kiriya, Mike Hatchimoniji, Joyce Okazaki, June Berk; (second row) Richard Murakami, Janet Fujii, Kyoko Oda, Jenny Chomori; (third row) Jason Fujii, Ernie Nishii, Kay Oda. Not pictured: Minoru Tonai.

The ABC Unified School District, headquartered in Cerritos, on April 12 honored the Nisei and Sansei who have presented their personal stories on the Day of Remembrance for four years.

In 2006, Superintendent Mary Sieu initiated the Standing Ovation Award to recognize the community and volunteers who have made a difference for the students in this innovative district. She said that everyone should experience a standing ovation once in a lifetime.

The live format for the Day of Remembrance changed two years ago due to COVID restrictions but the group was dedicated to telling their World War II concentration camp stories via Zoom and managed to move into breakout rooms. Some family members made the transitions go smoothly. All interviews and discussions have been recorded for further use.

District Coordinator Audrey Rios stated that these presentations left an impact on the students. She presented letters of thanks from the teachers and students to the group. A special 50th anniversary pin made for ABCUSD was given to each person, including Manzanar Committee Co-chair Jenny Chomori and members Janet and Jason Fujii.

Kyoko Oda said, "The 80th anniversary (of Executive Order 9066) was especially important to reflect upon the Bill of Rights and the protections we value."

Board of Education Trustee H. Ernie Nishii, whose late mother was among those incarcerated, said, "We set a strong foundation for our district to educate our students to stand up for others who may be wrongfully treated with expediency."

He pointed out an Ansel Adams photo of Joyce Okazaki when she was a child in camp and put in jail for no reason. He thanked the ABCUSD Day of Remembrance Committee for "their honesty and truthfulness in their tenth decade."

Others who have participated are Kanji Sahara, Bill Shishima, Hal Keimi, and Marvin Inouye.

The ABCUSD includes Carmenita, Fedde, Haskell, Ross and Tetzlaff middle schools and Artesia, Cerritos, Gahr, Tracy and Whitney high schools.