



BIJAC

Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community

FALL 2019
www.bijac.org

Minidoka Pilgrimage and Grand Opening of New Visitor Center

By: Joyce Nishimura Contributor: Ellen Sato Faust



Photos courtesy of Joyce Nishimura

As the first of many Japanese Americans to be forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated during World War II, Bainbridge Islanders are inextricably linked to Minidoka, formerly a 33,000 acre parcel of mostly farmland operated as the Minidoka Relocation Center from August 1942 until October 1945. After an initial stop at Manzanar in California's Owens Valley, within a year Bainbridge Island families were allowed to move to Minidoka to be where the majority of families from the Seattle area had been relocated. In 1942, close to 13,000 people of Japanese ancestry—many of whom were American citizens—were removed from their homes in Washington, Oregon, and Alaska, and sent to the desolate "incarceration camp". The irony was the camp's stark, arid prairie in contrast to the untamed beauty of Shoshone and Perrine Coulees Falls on the Snake River, just minutes away in nearby Twin Falls, Idaho.

The Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee (www.minidokapilgrimage.org) is an



Lilly, Steve, and Joyce enjoy a social evening with Cristobal Borges and NPS Directors Julie Fonseca de Borges and Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong.

all-volunteer organization based in Seattle who organizes an annual trip to the former Minidoka Relocation Center, now a National Parks Service Historic Site. The Pilgrimage is meant to honor the prisoners of Minidoka and share their stories with younger generations.

A Bainbridge Island contingent attended the Minidoka Pilgrimage this summer and provided a synopsis of their trip and reflections on the experience.

July 5-8, 2019

Lilly Kodama, Joyce and Steve Nishimura headed out on an early morning bus for the 17th annual Minidoka Pilgrimage on July 5-8 in Twin Falls, Idaho. The speakers and breakout sessions were heart-felt, informative, and meaningful. Most importantly, it was nice to see old friends and make new ones.

The highlight of the pilgrimage was the official opening of the new Visitor Center and Issei Memorial Exhibit. Lilly and other survivors cut the ribbon to the doors of this facility, a facility that reflected years of thoughtful planning and community workmanship. At the entrance of the Center was Frank Kitamoto's quote, "This is not just a Japanese American story, but an American story with implications for the world." The Visitor Center tells the Issei generation's story including reference to Yama on Bainbridge and the names of all the first generation incarcerated—those who perhaps suffered the most, but didn't have the chance to tell their own stories.

It was a great experience to go back to the Minidoka Historic Site and meet the many people who work so hard to preserve and develop this site as a reminder of a terrible wrong.



Clarence Moriwaki and Val Tollefson, pictured at the entrance of the new Minidoka Visitor Center with NPS staffers, flew in dodging storm clouds to make it to the event.

Generations

History Comes Full Circle for IslandWood Grad Student

By: Carol Reitz

The year was 1957, and Lilly and Mitsuhiro ("Mits") Kodama were in Bellevue looking to purchase their first house. "Joe", as he was called by his co-workers, got his nickname when he enrolled in first grade at a Catholic school where the nuns spoke Japanese to help youngsters integrate with life in Seattle. The nuns decided to change his name from "Matsuhiro" to "Joe"—Matsuhiro was not a proper Christian name.

Lilly and Joe were excited and on the verge of closing on the purchase of their new house in the Eastgate neighborhood of Bellevue when they received a call from their real estate agent. The sellers talked to the prospective next door neighbor, and the neighbor did not want to live by Japanese people, so the offer was rescinded.

Heartbroken, Lilly and Joe searched further south and were able to secure a house in unincorporated Skyway, nestled between Seattle and Renton. It was a fortunate move. Not only was Joe working for Boeing at the nearby Renton plant, but eventually the young couple would meet their new neighbors, Art and Mako Segimoto. The Kodamas and the Segimotos had a lot in common. Each couple had 4 children who went to school together and, as Lilly says, Mako would become her *soulmate*, the very best of friends.

Art and Mako were both CPAs, and Mako came from a very large extended family. Mako's father emigrated from Fukuoka, Japan and settled in rural Wyoming where he could farm. A friend of Mako's father offered that he had twin sisters back in Japan and suggested one of them become his wife. One of the twins was well-educated, and the other one was the "strong one". So, the strong sister was chosen to be sent to America to marry Mako's father and work on the farm. Since the family lived so far inland during WWII, they were not sent to the internment camps as the West Coast Japanese Americans were. They would go to visit those incarcerated at Heart Mountain, WY on the weekends.

Lilly and Joe and their four kids were treated like part of Art and Mako's extended family and were even invited to spend one memorable summer at the Wyoming family farm. Lilly remembers bringing tofu and other Japanese foods packed on dry ice to the farm, since those items were difficult to get in rural Wyoming.

* * * * *



Lilly Kodama (back L) and Mako Segimoto (back R) with their bowling team at the Skyway Park Bowl near Renton, ca. 1965.



Lilly Kodama (L) and Lara Ruegg (R) at IslandWood

Photos courtesy of Lilly Kodama

When Lara Ruegg decided to continue her education by earning a Master's Degree in Environmental Education, she selected the program at IslandWood here on Bainbridge Island. Lara grew up in Napa, CA, earned her undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and Sociology from Whitman College, and spent a year teaching in a small town in southern Minnesota.

When she told her parents she was going to be living on Bainbridge Island and attending school there for a year, they were very excited – her parents are Lori and Roger Ruegg of Yountville, CA, and Lori's mother (Lara's grandmother), Mieco, is Mako's sister! Of course once the family heard Lara was moving to Bainbridge Island, they encouraged her to get in contact with Mako's dear friend Lilly.

At the September 4th, 2019 BIJAC meeting, members in attendance were honored to meet and welcome Lara Ruegg. Now that she is here on the Island commencing her studies at IslandWood, she has connected with long-time family friend Lilly, who invited her to become involved in BIJAC. Lara is excited to learn more about the Japanese American Exclusion experience and acquaint herself with Bainbridge Island's history and traditions. High on her list is participating in her first Mochi Tsuki this coming January 4th.

She did remark, as she gazed at the old bowling photo of Lilly and Mako, that her family has a tradition of its own. Whenever one of the relatives gets married, while the bride and groom get ready for the wedding, the entire extended family goes... bowling!

Peace Pagoda Ground Purification Ceremony



Photo courtesy of Joel Sackett

By: Clarence Moriwaki

Designed to inspire peace and unity among all races, nations, religions and creeds, a Buddhist ground purification ceremony was held on August 24, 2019 for the Pacific Northwest Peace Pagoda—the first on the West Coast—to be built at the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, just a few feet away from the boundary fence of Naval Submarine Base Bangor in Kitsap County.

“The appearance of a Pagoda touches the hearts and minds of all people. Those who venerate this pagoda absolutely reject nuclear warfare and firmly believe that a peaceful world will be manifested. The vision of the Peace Pagoda has the power to bring about a spiritual transformation. It illuminates the dawn of a spiritual civilization.”

*Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii (1885-1985)
Founder, Preceptor, Nipponzan Myohoji*

For more than six years, the peace pagoda project has been a labor of love by two beloved BIJAC friends, Buddhist monks Rev. Senji Kanaeda and Rev. Gilberto Perez, who led the effort to make the dream of the Peace Pagoda a reality.

Buddhist monks and religious leaders traveled from around the nation and world to participate in the traditional Buddhist and Shinto ground purification ceremony, which asks permission from the local guardian god or spirit to occupy the site, purify the ground, ensure safety during the construction and ensure

eternal peace and prosperity. At the end of the ceremony, the monks invited all guests to ceremoniously turn shovels of dirt and sprinkle sacred sake and rice onto the ground.

A moving program followed the purification ceremony. Invited to be among the eight featured speakers were three Bainbridge Islanders: Eagle Harbor Congregational Church Rev. Dee Eisenhower; Johnpaul Jones, architect of the peace pagoda; and BIJAC President Clarence Moriwaki.

Rev. Eisenhower was heartened by the multi-faith leaders and cultural representation present, which included members and leaders from the Native American, Jewish, African American, Latino and Japanese American communities.

Johnpaul Jones shared stories about his Native American values and heritage, which served as the touchstone inspiration for stepping up to be the *pro bono* designer for the peace pagoda.

Clarence Moriwaki shared that a grandfather and several aunts and uncles that he never knew perished at the bombing at Hiroshima, and that preserving civil liberties and human rights for all is fundamental for lasting domestic and world peace.

Inspirational instrumental and vocal music closed the ceremony, followed by a delicious lunch prepared by friends of the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple on Bainbridge Island.

Mochi Tsuki 2020

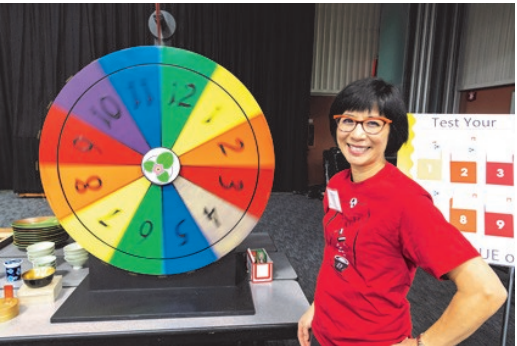
By: Carol Reitz

What started as a family tradition in the 1970’s has turned into a beloved Bainbridge Island community celebration. Fueled by a Cultural Funding Grant from the City of Bainbridge Island, an infusion of new energy from our member base, and unprecedented levels of participation from partner organizations on the island this year, we were able to successfully transition the event to a larger venue, Woodward Middle School. This past January marked a very special occasion, the 30th anniversary of the community Mochi Tsuki. The community responded in record numbers estimated at more than 3,000 attendees!

For the many BIJAC members who recall the days of the Okano family setting up Mochi Tsuki at the dry cleaners, or the more intimate events at the Filipino Hall or Island Center, the success of Mochi Tsuki is overwhelming. Now arguably one of the largest annual community events on the island, Mochi Tsuki promotes the original goal of sharing Japanese American tradition with the public, and it demonstrates BIJAC’s fundamental philosophy of inclusion. Broad participation reinforces BIJAC’s role in the cultural fabric of Bainbridge Island.

New and Fun

New this year was the Trivia Wheel, designed, constructed and donated by Dennis and Ellen Faust. It was a crowd favorite and a fun way for people to learn facts about the impact of Executive Order 9066 on Bainbridge Island Japanese Americans in 1942. Look for it again this year. (Hint: all the answers are “true”.)



Sherri Egashira hosting the trivia wheel

Photos courtesy of Jim Reitz

Also popular was the new “Mochi Tsuki for All” t-shirt originally created for kids, but ultimately available in ladies’ sizes as well. An original design by Bainbridge Islander Julie Schick, the mochi t-shirt illustrated the vast diversity of mochi (they’re not just plain, white balls) and invited All to share in the joy of mochi. For those who missed out due to the quick sell-out, the “Mochi Tsuki for All” t-shirt will again be available at Mochi Tsuki 2020, along with a new t-shirt design and our all new BIJAC baseball cap in black or blue.

Kay Sakai Nakao Turns 100 & Sonoji Sakai Intermediate School Turns 20! Please Join the Celebration!



UPCOMING EVENTS

MOCHI TSUKI 2020



Saturday, January 4th
11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Woodward Middle School

Made possible by our donors and partners:

- Town and Country Markets
- ACE Hardware, Bainbridge Island
- Bainbridge Island Rotary Club
- City of Bainbridge Island Cultural Grant
- Bainbridge Island School District
- Anne LeSage, Emergency Mgmt, COBI
- Tracey Loeffelholz Dunn, graphic design
- Julie Schick, graphic design

What’s New in 2020?

Organizers are deep in the process of planning for Mochi Tsuki 2020. The event will again be held at Woodward Middle School, but with lessons learned at last year’s event, work began immediately on refining the layout and logistics. If you attended last year, you will find it much easier to navigate the activities this year with an expanded layout utilizing more of Woodward’s spaces. There will also be maps available at the venue.



Theresa Song Ichien
teaching origami

With over 100 volunteers needed to run all the activities, we’ve recruited managers this year to oversee the 22 different areas and ensure that things run smoothly. Managers were recruited based on their interest and experience. Many are long-time Mochi Tsuki volunteers from the community who deeply understand the tradition and are talented at teaching the public and providing interesting anecdotes. Others are the powerhouses who know the operational side of the event inside and out. Managers received training in September and are ready to work with their volunteers. New this year, all volunteers will be offered a special orientation the night before the event. They will be invited to learn about new activities, become familiar with the layout, practice forming mochi, and enjoy appetizers and camaraderie.

Look for new kids’ activities, as well as all the traditional favorites—Seattle Kokon Taiko, origami, form-your-own mochi, and mochi pounding in the usu.

Passing of the Kine

Shoichi, beloved pounding master, will be officially retiring this year, so we will be acknowledging his years of service and passing the mallet to the next generation. Tony Egashira has been working under Shoichi’s watchful eye with assistance from Mike Okano and is prepared to take over as the new pounding master. There will be a ceremony just before the start of the first taiko performance at 12:30 p.m.

Look for updates and a detailed schedule in the coming weeks at www.bijacevents.org. Interested in volunteering or sponsoring? Contact CarolReitz@msn.com.

Please mark your calendars and join the celebration at Sonoji Sakai Intermediate School gym on **Saturday, January 11, 2020 at 11:00 a.m.** There will be a program that rededicates Sakai School honoring Bainbridge Island Japanese Americans. Kay Sakai Nakao will be recognized as she turns 100 in December with a birthday cake celebration hosted by sons Bruce & Bill Nakao. At 12:30, a screening of Cameron Snow's film, *The Sakai Family of Bainbridge Island* will be hosted by Bainbridge Multicultural Advisory Council in Sakai library. Cameron will introduce her film.

In 1996, Bainbridge Island voters approved the building of a new school to meet the unique needs of 5th & 6th grade students. Our community was invited to nominate names for the school. BIJAC, as represented by Frank Kitamoto, Junkoh Harui, and Don Nakata, nominated the name of Sonoji Sakai Intermediate School. The Sakais were thought to be especially appropriate because the Sakai family owned and farmed valuable property on Madison Avenue. In the late 1940s, the school district approached Sonoji & Yoshiko Sakai and asked to purchase their farm property. Mr. & Mrs. Sakai generously offered their property at the price they paid for it (it was unimproved, forested land before they turned it into a profitable berry farm). The Sakais said that they appreciated the quality, public education that their 6 children received on Bainbridge Island. Thus, BIJAC felt that the Sakai name would be the most appropriate school-name choice to honor all Bainbridge Island Issei.

— Johanna Vander Stoep
Principal Emeritus, Sakai

Education, Tours, Events

PROGRAMS AND VISITATIONS

Is your group interested in a tour or educational program? Email tours@bainbridgehistory.org to learn more.

January, 2018

- Mochi Tsuki - ~2502 adults, ~498 youth
- Temple B'nai Torah - 50 adults
- History Walk/Talk Bloedel Mansion - 8 adults
- Langley Public Library - 40 adults

February, 2019

- History Walk/Talk-Bainbridge Gardens - 4 adults
- The Arc of the Peninsulas - 10 adults
- Longview Public Library - 80 adults
- Yakima Valley Museum - 60 adults
- Nature Nuts Program - 2 adults, 12 youth
- Japanese Student Group - 2 adults, 19 youth
- Whatcom Comm. College - 40 youth
- IslandWood Docents Program - 21 adults

March, 2019

- Ordway Elem. School - 6 adults, 22 youth
- Sequim Family - 4 adults
- Leaving our Island - 32 adults, 275 youth
- History Walk/Talk EM Story - 12 adults
- Olympic College - 1 adults, 11 youth
- Community & Service Day
- Educ. Program- Ehime Univ - 10 youth
- Docent Training meeting
- Olympic College - 1 adults, 15 youth
- Kingston HS Sister School Exch - 12 youth
- Russian Educ. Exchange Tour - 8 adults
- Kitsap Youth Rally - 300 youth
- Historic Main Street Now Nat. Conf. - 50 adults
- Ordway Elem. School - 6 adults, 22 youth
- Odyssey - Liz Finin class - 2 adults, 12 youth
- 77th Anniversary Ceremony - 200 adults
- Luncheon for Survivors - 50 adults
- Bearing the Unbearable, NPS film - 110 adults
- Within The Silence, Living Voices performance - 90 adults
- Reunion w/442nd Soldier and 442nd Bainbridge brothers - 7 adults

April, 2019

- EnvironSocial Justice College Students, Antioch - 2 adults, 16 youth
- History Walk/Talk-Trees-Crystal Springs
- Holy Family Parish School - 8 adults, 21 youth
- Senior Services for South Sound - 19 adults
- Wilkes Elem. School - 19 adults, 66 youth
- NPS Minidoka Focus Group
- Hope Lutheran Middle School- 10 adults, 24 youth

May, 2019

- Liberty Middle School
- NPS Minidoka Focus Group
- Karen Little's White River Tour - 24 adults
- Pine Creek School 20 youth
- Burlington Public Library
- Sultan Public Library
- Olympic College - Bruce Hall - 20 adults
- Central Skagit Library

- Blakely Elem. School - 18 adults, 66 youth
- Northstar Middle School
- Culture Celebration
- Napavine Middle School - 1 adults, 9 youth

June, 2019

- Walton Verona HS
- SeaTac Senior Prgm History Group - 30 adults
- Global Intercultural Circle
- Bainbridge Waldorf Madrona - 3 adults, 10 youth
- Dennis Sekine Family - 4 adults, 10 youth
- Reid Hansen Magic Bus History Tour - 15 adults
- Quilcene High School Research tour - 3 adults
- Cornerstone Presbyterian Church - 30 adults
- UW Research Interviews - 2 adults
- Global Intercultural Circle - 25 adults
- BI Interfaith Council guests - 8 adults

July, 2019

- Wing Luke - National Endowment for the Humanities - 30 adults
- St. Peter's Episcopal Church - 30 adults
- Lights for Liberty Event - 600 adults, 200 youth
- Miyao/Shimose and Densho staff - 4 adults
- Sudo Family from Minneapolis - 2 adults
- Cliff Bar staff - 10 adults
- Blue Dolphin English School - 17 adults
- Sara Bryant and Jodi - 2 adults
- Japanese Baptist Church - 25 adults
- Treasure Island - 2 adults, 9 youth

August, 2019

- Olympia JACL
- Holocaust Center for Humanities - 30 adults
- PNW Peace Pagoda Ceremony - 100 adults
- IslandWood Graduate Students - 24 adults
- Women's Group PEO - 10 adults

September, 2019

- UW Osher Lifelong Learning Institute - 40 adults
- Olympic College Exchange Student Group - 30 adults, 10 youth
- Seattle Parks and Rec Sound Steps and Fitness - 18 adults
- Mark Saruwatari Senior Group - 24 adults
- Kyushu Junior College - 20 adults
- Mallory Hatch Family group - 6 adults
- Japanese Baptist Church - 45 adults
- B. I. Historical Museum at the Library - 40 adults
- Wing Luke Museum - 65 adults
- NPS Tours
- St. Martin University - 40 adults

October, 2019

- Bellevue College Japan Week - 75 adults
- St Martin University - 40 adults
- Greenwood Senior Center
- Mountlake Terrace Library
- Washington Corrections Center
- St. John's Lutheran Church

Connecting the BIJAC Story to the Younger Generations

By: Kevin Mahé, Park Ranger, National Park Service

For the last two years I have had the privilege of serving as the Park Ranger at the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, helping to share the community story with our visitors. One of my goals has been to connect the site with the future stewards of our stories and important places, so that the Memorial's importance can live on for generations to come. This year, we debuted the site's Junior Ranger program. Junior Ranger programs are a staple of National Park Service sites. NPS activity books are aimed at younger visitors and help connect them with our Nation's important places.

Over 90 visitors have participated and earned a Junior Ranger badge at the Memorial. We were also fortunate to receive a Community Engagement Intern funded by the Japanese American Citizens League and the Northwest Youth Corps. Madeline Vinh helped me staff the Memorial in July and August. Madeline was born and raised in South Seattle and currently attends Colby College in Maine. While working at the Memorial, she brought passion and a fresh perspective as she interacted with visitors and our new Junior Rangers. Madeline's internship project included creating an Island guide that linked the Memorial with other historic Japanese American sites on Bainbridge Island and hosting a group from In My Backyard, a program that connects Seattle-area high school aged students with public lands and historic sites. Madeline led the group through the Memorial grounds and then presented her guide to the Island's history. This prepared the students for follow-up dialogues and work groups to discuss the significance of the Memorial and sites that protect our important National stories. As we go forward in preserving the story of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, I hope we are all able to follow in



Intern Madeline Vinh on-site at the Exclusion Memorial

Madeline's example to channel our passions and reach the next generation of stewards and story keepers.

Exclusion Departure Deck Update

By: Clarence Moriwaki

As of the writing of this article, the Exclusion Departure Deck is moving forward. The various environmental, cultural and anthropological analyses required for approval of the building permit are in progress

As envisioned, the Exclusion Departure Deck will be built at the end of the Memorial Wall at the very site of the historic former Eagledale Ferry dock, where Bainbridge Islanders became the first of 120,000 Japanese Americans to be forcibly removed and exiled from the West Coast. The Exclusion Departure Deck will complete the visitor experience, evoking the sense of physically leaving and being separated from our island home.

The 50 foot long deck will be cantilevered over the bank and shore of Eagle Harbor, conceptually with wood railings only on the sides, replaced at the end of the deck by wire railings. From a distance the wire railings will visually disappear. This is meant to represent the range of apprehension, fear, and loss of security and protection that was experienced during the forced removal.

Get Involved!

BIJAC welcomes new community members like IslandWood student Lara Ruegg (p.2) and NPS Ranger Kevin Mahé (above), and old friends alike. From training to be a docent at the Exclusion Memorial to volunteering at Mochi Tsuki, BIJAC has a role for you. Our meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 6:00 pm at the Bainbridge Island Historical Museum. Or email us: info@bijac.org.



BIJAC

P.O. Box 10449

Bainbridge Island, WA 98110

Return Service Requested

Mochi Tsuki 2020, January 4th, Woodward Middle School!

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