



KOKORO KARA

HEART MOUNTAIN WYOMING FOUNDATION

"from our heart"

Summer 2016

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Children of Survivors:

Chair Shirley Ann Higuchi

How do you honor a person's memory? Recently, I have been thinking about my dear friend, Esther Lardent, who passed away on April 4 after battling a long illness. Esther supported me unconditionally through some of the most difficult challenges facing our Foundation at its inception and during the creation of our Interpretive Center.

Esther's parents met in a displaced person's camp in Europe where Esther was born. Her parents were the sole survivors of their respective families murdered at Auschwitz. Esther often remarked that we had much in common because we were both "children of survivors." When I noted that the atrocities her family suffered were greater, she said that it didn't matter how much they suffered; it mattered that they did. She was a personal inspiration and helped fuel my passion for Heart Mountain.

Never knowing her actual birth date in April, Esther, who was born 68 years ago, passed away that same month this year. Esther's worldview was informed by her parents' experience and she created and ran the Pro Bono Institute where she became known as the "Queen of Pro Bono"—using her legal skills to improve the lives of the poor and disadvantaged in the country that gave her parents refuge. Similarly, my family's experiences shaped the way I think.

I often asked her: "What drove you to work so hard?" She always replied by referencing her parents' recollections of survival in Auschwitz. Although we cannot pick and choose our life's experiences, it is what we make of those experiences that defines who we are. With all the trauma that Esther faced, it is what she became that gave her life meaning.

A few weeks ago, I spoke about Heart Mountain at the Kehila Chadasha Congregation in Bethesda, Maryland, soon after Esther's passing. My experiences that day became all the more meaningful when Rabbi David Shneyer chanted the Jewish memorial prayer in Esther's honor. Additionally, in the showing of *The Legacy of Heart Mountain* film, the irony of an all Japanese American battalion's involvement in liberating the prisoners of Dachau while their families were incarcerated back home was not lost on the congregation—as one of the survivors of the death march from Dachau noted in the film.

Seven years ago, Esther met with HMWF Board Members Doug Nelson and Eric Muller at my home to coordinate an effort to better engage the legal community to support Heart Mountain. Following up on Esther's sage advice, Eric contacted his former law student, Walter Eggers, a partner at Holland and Hart whose firm has now been our pro bono legal counsel for more than five years. Our extraordinary relationship with this firm has resulted in thousands of hours of invaluable, donated services to the Foundation, and they have hosted and supported our board meetings in Salt Lake City, Washington DC, and Jackson Hole.

During her life, I drew courage and strength from Esther's friendship. Now, I do so from her memory.



Shirley Ann Higuchi

* * *

In the spirit of working together, one of HMWF's highlights this year so far, has been the Confinement Site Consortium held in Washington DC, on May 12–14. Supported by a Japanese American Confinement Sites grant to our Foundation, the three-day events included a reception hosted by the Embassy of Japan where Secretary Norman Mineta thanked National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis for his efforts to preserve the history of the World War II Japanese American incarceration experience. The main event was the Confinement Site Consortium planning meeting held May 13 and attended by over 60 confinement site representatives and national organizations deeply invested in preserving the physical sites and the history of the World War II experiences of Japanese Americans. I thank the confinement site representatives and national stakeholders for their contributions to the success of these events.

On Saturday, Dr. Franklin Odo, founding director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center and National Japanese American Memorial architect Davis Buckley spoke at the National Japanese American Memorial. The Memorial Foundation leadership announced six high school scholarship winners who will travel to our Pilgrimage to participate in our first digital storytelling workshop this summer.

Our 2016 Pilgrimage will also feature our new friend and playwright, Luis Valdez. And in an effort to address many of your requests about a discussion group, our board and advisory council will conduct a multigenerational forum giving participants an opportunity to express their views on the incarceration on the Friday afternoon of the Pilgrimage. To read more about these events and more, see the Pilgrimage story on pages 3–4.

We look forward to seeing you there as we celebrate the fifth year anniversary of the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center!

Shirley Ann Higuchi

ON THE COVER

Rev. Alfred Tsuyuki blesses the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center during the Grand Opening in August 2011. Read more about the Foundation's achievements since then on page 5. (Photo by Kevin Miyazaki)

A Year of Anniversaries:

Executive Director Brian A. Liesinger

This is an historic year for the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, as we mark anniversaries of 5, 10 and 20 years. In 2011, the inaugural ribbon was cut to open our award-winning Interpretive Center. In 2006, the Heart Mountain site was designated a National Historic Landmark. And in 1996, the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation was formed, which paved the way for all we have been able to achieve since. As I reflect on these accomplishments, I am awash with gratitude.

With many significant achievements, we also have so many people to thank for allowing us to do this important work. Together, we have: helped save the hospital smokestack, an iconic symbol of the camp; built a memorial walking trail; rescued an original Heart Mountain barrack and returned it to the site; preserved the Heart Mountain Honor Roll, bearing the names of those who served in World War II from Heart Mountain; and served more than 60,000 visitors from all over the world.

We continue to evolve, preserving a root cellar built by incarcerated that illustrates their industriousness and impact on Wyoming. We have translated our film and exhibits into several languages. We continue to grow our collections, create new exhibits and educational materials, and have developed a research center. We push ourselves to ensure that this history is more strongly represented in the larger American narrative that defines our nation.

The response from both the surrounding communities, as well as supporters from all corners of the country has allowed us to achieve significant preservation and education goals. We are engaging people meaningfully about the history of the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans and the reverberations of that history today. We are reaching a more diverse audience and an widening range of people working toward an improved understanding of this history and its still-relevant lessons.

Recently, myself and several of the HMWF leadership had an opportunity to connect with many others working toward similar goals at the Confinement Site Consortium meeting in Washington DC in May (see story on page 5).

And a recent visit from journalist and

ceramic artist Setsuko Winchester, reminded me of the unique, organic connections people are making with the confinement sites and the rich history they contain.

Winchester, a *Nisei*, set out on a personal pilgrimage to all ten of the War Relocation Authority camps. She traveled with her immigrant father, Makoto Sato, and her husband, best-selling author Simon Winchester. At each of the sites, she set up impromptu art installations of 120 yellow ceramic bowls in varying patterns. Each bowl represents 1,000 incarcerated Japanese Americans, and the yellow represents "The Yellow Peril" as they were referred to at the time. Once all 120 tea bowls have been placed, Winchester photographs the "ceramic essay." She explained the project as an attempt to use art and beauty to examine something ugly, and she hopes to create an exhibit and corresponding book to help raise public awareness of a forgotten part of American history.

She is among a recent wave of artists expressing a meaningful connection to Heart Mountain. A textile arts group, called the Textile Artists of the Greater Yellowstone, recently created a series of textile art pieces in response to their visits to the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center. The pieces have been assembled into an exhibit that is now on display at our Center and that has been graciously donated to us.

In addition, George Takei, of Star Trek fame, used Heart Mountain as the inspiration and setting for the play "Allegiance," which ended a successful run on Broadway earlier this year. Takei was incarcerated with his family first at Rohwer in Arkansas and later at Tule Lake. He is planning a visit to Heart Mountain this summer with other members of the "Allegiance" team.

Similarly, Luis Valdez, a renowned activist, playwright and film director (of *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba* fame) also made Heart Mountain a centerpiece of his acclaimed stage production "Valley of the Heart."

Amid a younger generation finding a connection with the National Historic Landmark, Gabriel Tajima-Pena, a Minecraft fan, created a world based on Heart Mountain for the popular online, interactive game. Both Tajima-Pena and Valdez will share the stories

that inspired their projects this summer at the Heart Mountain Pilgrimage. Valdez will serve as keynote speaker and Tajima-Pena will demonstrate his Heart Mountain Minecraft world. In addition, a digital storytelling workshop will be conducted in conjunction with the Pilgrimage to engage a yet another group of artists. (See story on pages 3-4).

Heart Mountain is more than a historic site. It is a place to learn and reflect on the lessons of our past, as well as create new meaning. What Setsuko Winchester, George Takei, Luis Valdez, Gabriel Tajima-Pena all have done—and what future visitors will do—is help us own and interpret the past in a way that has a profound impact on the present and future.



HEART MOUNTAIN WYOMING FOUNDATION

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THE 2016 HEART MOUNTAIN PILGRIMAGE

By Claire Cella

The annual Heart Mountain Pilgrimage is a time to celebrate community and progress while honoring the past. This year the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation (HMWF) celebrates several milestones, including the fifth anniversary of the Interpretive Center.

It was August 2011 when nearly 2,000 guests attended the Grand Opening ceremonies for the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center, with distinguished speakers, such as the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye and NBC News Special Correspondent Tom Brokaw. This year, we again invite former incarcerated, their families, new friends, and loyal and steadfast supporters to celebrate with us and commemorate our collective

achievements as we also look toward the Foundation's future endeavors.

"As our most important event, the annual pilgrimage serves our mission by educating the public about the history of Japanese American confinement and connecting them with former incarcerated at this important National Historic Landmark," said Brian Liesinger, HMWF Executive Director. "This Fifth Anniversary Pilgrimage promises to be an especially memorable event for all in attendance."

On Friday, July 29, the HMWF will host its first ever silent auction at the Cody Holiday Inn, which will feature Japanese collectibles, including antique woodblock prints, pottery, textiles, and artwork. Many of the items for sale came from a generous donation by Cody resident Dan Roblyer.

Among the woodblock prints are framed and authenticated late-19th Century works by Chikanobu, Nobukazu, Gyosui, and others. (Images of many auction items are available for preview at shopheartmountain.org/blogs/2016-pilgrimage-silent-auction).

The evening banquet this year will feature a presentation of Heart Mountain stories done by participants from a digital storytelling workshop done earlier in the week. Participants in the digital storytelling workshop will arrive on July 28 and work for two days crafting unique digital narratives under the direction of David Ono and Jeff MacIntyre, creators of *The Legacy of Heart Mountain*. It is a rare opportunity to take a story about a the incarceration experience and create a compelling video from it. There are a few remaining workshop slots available, at the cost of \$250. To find out more and to register, visit www.heartmountain.org/TellYourStory.

On Saturday, the Pilgrimage program will continue at the Interpretive Center, where honored speakers will include U.S. Senator Alan K. Simpson (ret.) and former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta—two men who met as boy scouts at Heart Mountain and who maintained a friendship ever since, uniting over their dedication to public service and to ensuring the longevity of the HMWF and its mission.

Saturday's keynote address will be given by renowned director and playwright Luis Valdez, after which Valdez will field questions from the audience. (See sidebar on opposite page for more information on Luis Valdez and his Heart Mountain connection).

Attendees will also explore Heart Mountain virtually through a version of the computer game Minecraft. On Saturday afternoon, 15-year-old Gabriel Tajima-

Pilgrimage Schedule of Events

Friday, July 29

- Registration & Silent Auction
- Multigenerational Discussion Forum
- Evening Banquet, Slideshow & Digital Storytelling Presentation
- Dessert Reception & close of Silent Auction

Saturday, July 30

- Opening Ceremony with remarks from Secretary Norman Mineta (ret.) and U.S. Sen. Alan K. Simpson (ret.)
- Keynote Address by Luis Valdez
- Lunch Buffet
- Two special exhibits: Fifth Anniversary and Fabric of Memory
- Explore Minecraft: Heart Mountain 3.0
- Honor Roll Memorial Walking Tour

Peña, along with his mother, Rene, will talk about “Heart Mountain 3.0.” Gabriel built the game in 2013 and will deliver a special workshop allowing attendees to play, explore, and learn about Heart Mountain through the interactive, online project. In addition to being fun, the game provides a great example of using technology in education, providing an avenue to teach not only about the history of the camp but also such themes as civil liberties, democracy, and race.

There will be time to explore the rest of the Heart Mountain site as well. Even return visitors will find yet another compelling piece to the evolving historic site, which includes a historic walking trail, the World War II Memorial Honor Roll, and the recently returned Heart Mountain barracks. The barracks will be new to many attendees, since it was recovered in August 2015. It serves as a visual and physical testament to what the Foundation has achieved, with the help of many supporters.

On Saturday evening, our Memory and Justice Endowment donors will be treated with a special reception at the Center to thank them for contributing to the sustainability of the site. The HMWF continues its growth of this permanent fund, dedicated to the operation of the Interpretive Center in perpetuity. “As we celebrate five years of successful operation of the Interpretive Center, we are also looking ahead,” said Liesinger. “We cannot know what the next five, ten, or 50 years will bring, but with an endowment in place, we assure the public that we’ll be celebrating several successive anniversaries and Pilgrimage for years to come.”

Register Now!

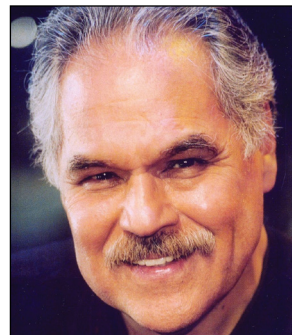
For more info and to register online:
heartmountain.org/pilgrimage.html

Or register by phone:
 307-754-3008

LUIS VALDEZ

One of the most important & influential American playwrights living today

Luis Valdez founded the El Teatro Campesino (The Farm Workers’ Theater), in the midst of the United Farm Workers (UFW) struggle in 1965. The group traveled throughout California, performing in churches, town squares and fields, bringing attention to the struggles of migrant farm workers and the Chicano movement. Valdez spent his childhood working in the fields with his family, an experience that led him to organize alongside Cesar Chavez and the UFW. To this day, his work embodies the spirit and themes of these movements—unity, faith, heritage, justice, and equality.



Valdez is renowned for his “workers’ theater” and film direction, which has included *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*, and he continues to write and produce plays true to his vision: addressing the immigrant experience in a meaningful way. He is the recipient of several honorary doctorates, was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Theatre at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship. He has also taught at the university level and authored numerous articles and books.

His most recent play, “The Valley of the Heart,” is set during World War II, and the narrative travels from California to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. It details the romance between children of two immigrant farming families in California—one Japanese American, one Mexican American. Although

fiction, the play’s plot draws largely from Valdez’s recollections as a child growing up in the San Joaquin Valley on his parents “rancho.”

As a young boy, Valdez made the connection between the family ranch and the war being waged overseas. Before World War II, the ranch had been owned by a Japanese American family, but when they were forcibly removed from the property following Executive Order 9066, Valdez’s father, as a worker on the ranch, was encouraged to take over and grow crops for the Army. Soon after the war, Valdez’s family

lost the ranch, as the rest of the country slid into a depression. When his family moved to Earlimart, Valdez met Esteban—a young boy like himself whose father was Mexican American while his mother was Japanese American. Their friendship exposed Valdez to Esteban’s Japanese American culture. Valdez’s experiences were enriched by Esteban’s mother’s cooking. When the family moved away, Valdez never saw his friend again—but the memories remained so strong that Valdez felt compelled to craft them into a tale for the stage.

While it is a personal tale taken from Valdez’s memory, it is also part of broader history and the current national struggle to define just what being “American” means—and, more importantly, who is included in this definition.



Confinement Site Consortium: An “All Camps: Effort

Seventy-four years after President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, leading to the incarceration of nearly 120,000 West Coast Japanese Americans in “War Relocation Centers,” the historic sites representing that confinement stand as a reminder of the power of fear, war hysteria, and racism. On May 13, 2016, representatives from each of the “camps” and other supporting institutions gathered in Washington, D.C., to share a vision of collaboration for preserving, interpreting, and educating the public about this history and the historic sites that represent.

“We are trying to build a base of support and a network of people working toward ensuring this important history is more widely known,” said Brian Liesinger, Executive Director of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation. “It was inspiring to have the leaders of the confinement sites and other stakeholders gathered with a concentrated effort and purpose.”

While informal and collegial connections between the sites have existed for years, the distance between them makes it difficult at times to collaborate. Each site is at a different stage in development, and each organization has its own regional audience. However, the sites share similar challenges as they labor to preserve the physical sites, structures, and artifacts, as

well as the stories of those affected.

Representatives from all 10 of the original “War Relocation Centers” were in attendance, including: Gila River and Poston (Arizona); Rohwer and Jerome (Arkansas); Manzanar and Tule Lake (California); Amache (Colorado); Minidoka (Idaho); Topaz (Utah); and Heart Mountain (Wyoming). They shared the table with representatives from organizations such as the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, Densho, Japanese American Citizens League, Japanese American National Museum, National Veterans Network, and the National Park Service.

Former Secretary of Transportation and Commerce, Norman Mineta, who was incarcerated at Heart Mountain was present as well. Mineta serves as an advisor for the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and as of Chair of the Japanese American National Museum. He spoke during the meeting on May 13, affirming the importance of the Consortium. “We are not only reaching new heights, but bringing new generations into the fold,” he said.

This Japanese American Confinement Sites Consortium project was funded, in part, by a grant from the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Japanese Confinement Sites (JACS) Grant Program. This was the second of two meetings

included in the project, with the first taking place last August at Heart Mountain.

“When the grant program was established there was a hope that groups interested in preserving these sites and sharing this history would come together to increase awareness and impact to a greater cross-section of our nation,” said Tom Leatherman, Superintendent of several National Park Service sites and representative for the JACS program. “The consortium is a realization of this vision and the National Park Service is interested in being involved in helping to further these efforts. Only through working together can we ensure that something like what happened to the Japanese American community during World War II never happens to another group again.”

One of the major outcomes of the meeting was the creation of a steering committee that will help define the consortium’s future structure and key activities. This committee will help drive the continued effort forward.

“With the creation of this Consortium we will foster a culture of communication, inclusiveness, and engagement by future generations to ensure that this history is not forgotten,” said Shirley Ann Higuchi, Chair of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation.

HONORING A HEART MOUNTAIN CHAMPION



Dr. Gregory Amidon (right) presents Dr. William Higuchi with a plaque of recognition, with his daughter and HMWF Board Chair Shirley Ann Higuchi, at the March 19 celebration in Salt Lake City, Utah.

On March 19, the family of Dr. William I. Higuchi hosted an event in Salt Lake City, Utah, to celebrate the 85th birthday of Dr. Higuchi and the fifth anniversary of the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center.

With many of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation’s supporters in attendance, the Denver Consul General of Japan, Makoto Ito, read a proclamation that commemorated the Center and recognized Dr. Higuchi’s achievements as a business man and philanthropist. The proclamation was fitting as Dr. Higuchi was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon by the Emperor of Japan in 2012. This award, given to individuals worldwide, recognizes lifetime achievement and commitment to excellence, and in particular, positive contributions to mutual understanding and friendship between the U.S. and Japan. In 2013, Dr. Higuchi received an honorary Doctorate degree in Science from the University of Michigan for his contributions to the science of drug formulation and delivery. During the March celebration, University of Michigan professor and President of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS), Dr. Gregory Amidon presented Dr. Higuchi with a plaque recognizing his work in the field.

Heart Mountain was invited to participate as benefactors of Dr. Higuchi’s generosity and goodwill. He was incarcerated at Heart Mountain with his family during World War II. Though he did not know it at the time, his future wife, Setsuko Saito, was a classmate behind barbed wire. They would reconnect years later in California, get married, and start a family. Their support has been instrumental to the development of the Heart Mountain historic site and the Interpretive Center. Dr. Higuchi was one of the first to join the HMWF, and the walking trail at Heart Mountain is named in honor of the late Setsuko Saito Higuchi.

Unearthed History: Heart Mountain

Artifact Recognized Among Wyoming's Best

By Claire Cella

A piece the Heart Mountain artifact collection that was once buried in the ground is now receiving the recognition it deserves. A large river stone on which Taketaro Azeka carved a poignant haiku poem was recently selected among the top 25 of "Wyoming's Most Significant Artifacts." It is now a candidate for the top ten. An online public vote will determine the finalists.

Known as the "Haiku Rock," it measures roughly 19 inches high, 17 inches wide and 16 inches deep and weighs about 200 pounds. It is currently within a glass case near the exit of the Interpretive Center exhibit, and most visitors to the Center are attracted to it because of its size and the ornate Japanese characters carved on its surface and painted red.

Upon closer examination, the stone becomes even more captivating. It was hand-carved in 1942 by Azeka, who applied to it his pen name "Shikai." Azeka was born in Japan in 1890 and was incarcerated at Heart Mountain with his family during World War II. He was 52 years old at the time, and incarcerated with his wife, Tokiwa, and their American-born daughter, Mickey. They had come from Los Angeles.

The poem reads: "*Mountain peak at my shoulder, Thousand barracks under an autumn moon.*" With so few words, Azeka depicts a dark scene and a deep sense of how confounding the incarceration experience must have felt.

After carving the rock, Taketaro buried it, hoping it would be discovered one day and that his history—and the history of the over 120,000 Japanese Americans—would be remembered. Years later, the Solberg family, homesteading on the same patch of land,

found the rock and kept it safe over 50 years. They donated the rock to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation.

The "Most Significant Artifacts" project began in 2015 in celebration of the 125th anniversary of Wyoming's statehood—it was admitted as the 44th state in the U.S. on July 10, 1890. As part of the commemoration, the Wyoming State Historical Society and the University of Wyoming Libraries teamed up to create the program, "Wyoming's Most Significant Artifacts," to increase the recognition of cultural institutions that preserve and provide access to artifacts that enhance the enjoyment and understanding of Wyoming.

As part of the annual program, archives, historical societies, libraries, and museums across the state submit proposals for the inclusion of items from their collections they believe to be significant to Wyoming's history. An independent panel of judges selected the top 25 candidates. Now, the public will select the top ten through an online vote.

At the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center, the Haiku Rock is not only a heralded artifact but also a powerful reminder of our mission: to preserve the stories and artifacts that symbolize the fragility of democracy and to educate the public about the history of the illegal imprisonment at Heart Mountain and its impact on the state and nation.

The Haiku Rock was carved in the state by an man who was unjustly incarcerated at Heart Mountain solely because of his heritage. It was then buried in Wyoming soil with specific intent—to be found, to be read, to be remembered. It was found by Wyoming homesteaders—who came to the West to settle the land and create a society of landowners, farmers, and ranchers who helped shape the state. By voting for this artifact, you help ensure that its history, our history, Wyoming's history, is never buried again.

Vote for this artifact online to ensure it receives the attention it deserves. Voting is open until July 15, 2016. Visit www-lib.uwyo.edu/wyoming/top_ten_historical_artifacts/home_wyoming_artifacts.cfm to vote.

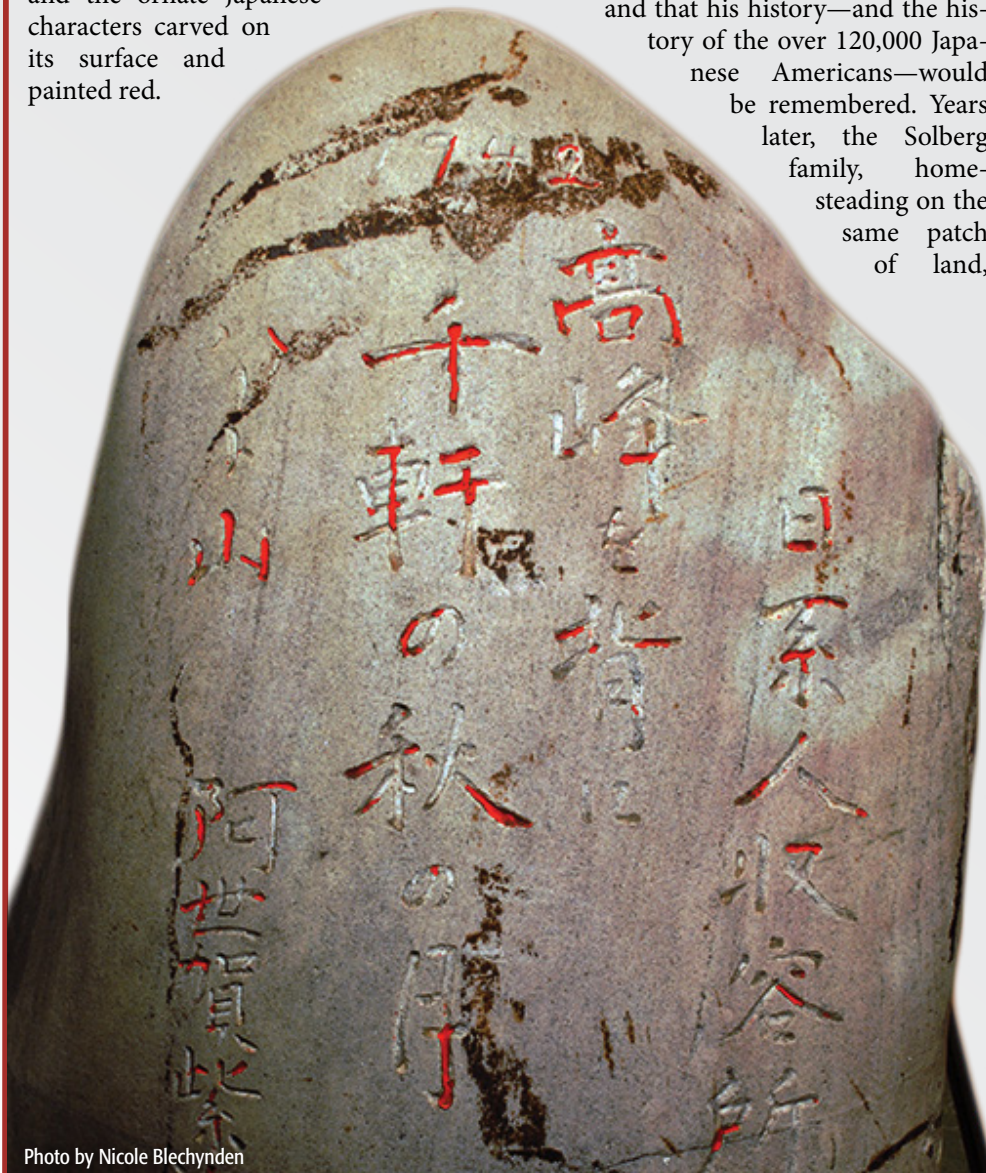


Photo by Nicole Blechynden

HANDS IN HISTORY

In the early 2000s, Marianne Vinich, an art teacher at Riverton High School, set out to create a series of projects for students to teach about the painful consequences of injustice and intolerance. Among the projects she developed was the glass casting of 87 former Heart Mountain incarcerated hands.

By Claire Cella

It's not often we can say our lives were changed in an instant, but Marianne Vinich's was. It was a day just like any other at Riverton High School in 2003, where Vinich teaches glass art, when she received a call from a man named Bob Gates—a man promising to bring her a check for \$50,000. With the money, Mr. Gates, who worked for the Wyoming State Department of Education, asked Vinich to develop creative art lessons to pair with other subjects such as history, reading, and writing that could be uploaded to the internet and used by rural school districts in Wyoming. Vinich, whose father was an Orthodox Jew, had always been compelled to expose what bigotry, hatred, and misunderstanding for the color of someone's skin or their religious beliefs, does to people. And she believed more could be done to provide for greater understanding, compassion, and tolerance of others.

"I thought, there's only one way to stop it, and that's through education," she said.

With the first portion of the grant, Vinich developed a curriculum about the Holocaust—bringing in Holocaust survivor, George Brown, to travel throughout Fremont County, speaking at schools. Following the success of this program, which garnered attention from CNN, CBS, and other news stations, she launched lessons on Gee's Bend—a town in Alabama where African American slaves traveled through as part of the Underground Railroad. Although still debated by historians, there are stories of quilts hung within the town to serve as



The glass mosaic made by Marianne Vinich in honor of James and Toshi Ito, which she has donated to Heart Mountain.

signs, directing slaves to safe houses.

With a little over \$16,000 left, Vinich started to wonder what to do next. That's when she overheard a conversation about Heart Mountain, which made her curious as to how well her students and colleagues knew about the World War II "Relocation Center" between Cody and Powell. The results shocked her—only three people knew what Heart Mountain was. So she decided, again, to use education to correct this.

When Vinich reached out to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation in 2005, she was invited by Pat Wolfe, a Foundation leader, to the ninth Heart Mountain reunion in Las Vegas. Vinich made plans to attend,

along with eight students, and colleague Leanne Adels. They brought plaster and casting supplies—envisioning that the project would involve casting the faces of the Heart Mountain incarcerated. Once at the Riviera Hotel and Casino, however, she realized this would be impossible, as she did not want to risk ruining the formal attire of the attendees, who had dressed for the occasion. Vinich remembers thinking, without hesitation, "I'll do hands." So, at the back of the ballroom, Vinich and her students set up. And waited.

For half an hour, no one came. Until a smaller, older gentleman approached and said he would have his hand done—on one condition: "If my wife can do it with me." This man was James Ito and his wife was Toshi. The couple and their families had been incarcerated at Heart Mountain during World War II, where they met, fell in love, and eventually married. That afternoon in Las Vegas, they sealed this love in plaster, one hand on top of another. After the Itos cast their hands, Vinich remembers looking up, and seeing a line across the ballroom of other incarcerated hands now waiting to do the same.

For four long days, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., she and her students diligently cast hands, taking breaks only to buy more plaster and dental alginate. In the end, they cast 87 hands. With the molds, Vinich returned to Riverton, cleaned them, and attempted to cast the hands in glass herself. Without success, she reached out to the Bullseye Glass Company in Portland,

“This project has changed lives, and the students,” Vinich said. “I am so grateful to these people who had such a horrible experience, and yet they are forgiving and they have no hate. That is the lesson... Unless you have forgiveness in your heart, you cannot go on with life.”

Oregon, for help. Two master glass casters, Jeremy Lepisto and Mel George from Australia, volunteered to complete the work, for free. The best casts were sent to Oregon, and Vinich anxiously awaited their return. When the box arrived months later, Vinich, her principal and colleagues slowly opened the box. “You do not know how hard we cried,” she recalls. “It was just unbelievable.”

In September 2007, Vinich and Adels returned to the tenth Heart Mountain reunion with a wooden case to display the cast glass hands for the former incarcerated. While setting up in the ballroom, and bent over unpacking a box, Vinich noticed fingers reaching down and picking up a red heart from the floor—leftover confetti from a wedding reception the previous night in the ballroom. The fingers placed the heart in the crevice between the displayed glass hands of the Itos. When Vinich looked up, she saw the fingers belonged to Toshi and both she and James were there, crying.

“One of the most beautiful moments, and it has lasted for years,” Vinich said, “was how the Japanese American internees that we met opened their hearts to us as if we were their children and they accepted us with every bit of their being. Their love and their kindness was immeasurable.”

In 2010, Vinich donated the glass hands to the care of the Interpretive Center, and in 2016, she donated the plaster molds. Currently, the pink Ito hands and small red heart greet visitors near the front door as they enter. The Ito hands were the only ones cast in pink, a hue that comes from the rare earth element, erbium. Lepisto and George chose pink after hearing the stories James told as his hands were cast—



Photo by Bacon Sakatani

(L-R) Marianne Vinich with Dorothy Hashimoto Akiyama as Vinich prepares to cast her hand at the ninth Heart Mountain reunion in October 2005.

how those hands worked in the earth of Heart Mountain farm fields; how the lack of proper food compelled him to write to friends around the world asking for seeds he could grow.

The stories stuck with Vinich and her students long after James uttered them that afternoon. So much so that two students, twins Brittany and Kresha Worton, wanted to commemorate the experience and James. With Vinich's help, they made an elaborate mosaic representing James' memories from camp—a deep purple mountain rising into a blue sky, bordered

by colorful vegetables. The mosaic was created using smalti glass from the finest glass company in the world, Orsoni Mosaici in Italy. Vinich recently donated the mosaic to the HMWF, and it will be on view at the Interpretive Center beginning this summer.

“I know this project has changed lives, and the students,” Vinich said. “I am so grateful to these people who had such a horrible experience, and yet they are forgiving and they have no hate. That is the lesson... Unless you have forgiveness in your heart, you cannot go on with life.”



HMWF Collections, HM Reunion IX Yearbook, Accession 2006.014

(L-R) Marianne Vinich and her students carefully coat Albert Keimi's hand with plaster at the ninth Heart Mountain reunion in October 2005.

Heart Mountain Will Steward George Sunada's Military Legacy

By Darlene Bos

In a large, climate-controlled room at the back of the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center is a treasure trove—where collections are kept when not on display, being researched or curated. The items housed here are painstakingly cared for.

“The collections at Heart Mountain tell the story of historic events that took place here, the families that lived here, and the individuals affected by their experiences,” says Archivist Nicole Blechynden. “We take great care to ensure that they are preserved for future generations.”

Heart Mountain collections include a great variety of objects, documents, artwork, and artifacts. They are as varied as the experiences of the people to whom they once belonged. All of these items have come to the Center through the generosity of donors, who entrust them to Heart Mountain and allow their family history to be preserved and shared.

It was with these intentions that Sheila (Sunada), her husband Doug Newlin, and her daughter Aura (Matsumura-Sunada) Newlin donated several items that once belonged to Sheila's father, George Sunada. The family story provides a rich and unique history related to incarceration at Heart Mountain, to service in the military, and about the few Japanese Americans living in Wyoming at the time.

Artifacts donated to the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center by the Newlin family include George Sunada's 442nd Class A Army uniform jacket with six patches, four medals, and six ribbons all honoring his dedication, bravery, and service to his country.

Sunada was a Japanese American, and a Wyoming native who served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the U.S. Army.

Sunada was born and raised in Green River, Wyoming, and was living there when Pearl Harbor was bombed. He met Susan Matsumura, a Japanese American fleeing incarceration, when she left Los Angeles for North Dakota just days before her family was forcibly removed.

Her train stopped in Green River, leading her to George.

Sunada and Matsumura traveled to the “Heart Mountain Relocation Center” in February 1943 to visit Matsumura's parents who were incarcerated there. They were married in March.

Sunada served in the Wyoming State Guard, and in July 1944, he was inducted into the U.S. Army. Sunada served honorably in the 442nd Anti Tank Company, fighting in France, Italy and Germany. He was wounded in combat and honorably discharged on October 5, 1945. One month later, the Matsumuras were released from Heart Mountain. The

Matsumuras and the Sunadas went to live in southern California. In 2003, George and Susan returned to Wyoming. George passed away in Riverton and was buried with full military honors at the Mountain View Cemetery. Forever loyal to the 442nd, he requested the unit's ‘Go for Broke’ torch be engraved on his headstone.

“Grandpa George's hand-painted sign with the iconic bucking bronco and the script, ‘We're not foreign—We're from Wyoming!’ was displayed on my grandparents' front porch for as long as I can remember,” said Aura, who also serves as secretary of the Board of Directors for the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation. “As a veteran born in Wyoming and whose in-laws were confined at Heart Mountain, Grandpa would have been extremely proud to know that his uniform and other 442 relics are now in the care of the Interpretive Center. We, his family, feel that there is no more suitable place to honor his memory, his service, and his Wyoming roots than here. We hope that the display of his belongings—with their juxtaposed symbolism of displacement and home, betrayal and honor—may further enrich visitors' experiences at this powerful site.”

“As a veteran who was born in Wyoming and whose in-laws were confined at Heart Mountain, Grandpa would have been extremely proud to know that his uniform and other 442 relics are now in the care of the Interpretive Center.”



Photo by Claire Cella

(L-R) Aura and Sheila Newlin unveil George Sunada's 442nd Class A Army uniform jacket.

HEART MOUNTAIN HOSTS PANEL DISCUSSION ON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT



(From L-R) Former U.S. Sen. Al Simpson (ret.), Bertine Bahige, Wyoming Rep. Tom Reeder, and Suzan Pritchett, University of Wyoming law professor receiving questions from Wyoming PBS's Craig Blumenshine.

By Darlene Bos

With Heart Mountain as the backdrop, a distinguished panel of guests discussed an important and timely subject. The Wyoming Humanities Council (WHC), in partnership with Wyoming PBS and in collaboration with Northwest College, held a panel discussion on refugee resettlement, broadcast live from the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center in March.

The panelists included: Bertine Bahige, a Gillette, Wyo., "Teacher of the Year" and former child soldier and former refugee; Suzan Pritchett, University of Wyoming law professor and co-director of UW's Center for International Human Rights Law and Advocacy; Representative Tom Reeder, a member of the Wyoming House of Representatives and co-sponsor of a bill that would have changed Wyoming refugee policy; and U.S. Senator Alan K. Simpson (ret.), who is also an advisor to the HMWF.

"This topic involves emotion, fear, guilt and racism," Simpson said during the 80-minute program held in the Center's Ford Foundation theater. He addressed misunderstandings of the difference between immigrants and refugees, which cloud the issue. "An immigrant is someone who comes here and has a sponsor and there is no taxpayer responsibility. A refugee is a person who is fleeing persecution," he said.

The participation of Bahige, a refugee who found refuge in Wyoming, brought the conversation to life. He escaped the Democratic Republic of Congo where his family had been murdered, and he had been forced to be a child soldier. He spent

five years in a refugee camp, and after a difficult process, he was given a rare opportunity to enter a refugee resettlement program in Maryland. There, he worked hard to learn English and support himself. He eventually earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics education from the University of Wyoming and a master's degree in education leadership from South Dakota State University.

"I was one of the less than one percent of refugees around the globe who are fortunate enough to be considered for resettlement," Bahige said. "I knew that if I worked hard—that's what America is all about—I knew I could do something with my life." He married a Wyoming girl, started a family, and has built a career as a highly-respected high school math teacher. "I love Wyoming. It gave me a home. It gave me hope for my children," he said.

Bahige noted that the refugee issue is particularly complex because Wyoming is the only state without a refugee resettlement program. Due to his unique experience and his concern about the negative perception of refugees, he felt compelled to join the WHC discussion series, which aims to bring conversations about refugee resettlement to the state's residents. When a panel was planned for northwest Wyoming, Heart Mountain was an ideal choice.

"As the location of a World War II confinement site, Heart Mountain stands as a testament to the nation's historic reactions to racism and fear," said Brian Liesinger, Executive Director of the HMWF, in a welcome message to the audience. "We

are facing the largest global refugee crisis since World War II. Every other state in the union is formally contributing to refugee resettlement. It stands to reason that if we dare call ourselves the Equality State, we need to consider our contribution."

The discussion was moderated by Craig Blumenshine of Wyoming PBS, who read questions submitted by the public. The conversation echoed national concerns about improperly vetted refugees becoming national security threats. Among other issues raised were concerns about the impact on Wyoming's economy and about the effectiveness of the process for approving refugees for resettlement. Simpson stated that a formal refugee resettlement program would be funded by the federal government, not the state. However, Reeder believed it would ultimately have an impact on the state budget.

Pritchett estimated that an initial launch of a refugee resettlement program in Wyoming would likely mean less than 20 refugees coming into the state.

In the end, the consensus from the panelists was that more honest and civilized discussion was needed—before any action could be taken. "Let's put the facts on the table. Because what I get on Facebook and email has nothing to do with fact," Bahige said, referencing hate mail and a call to his superintendent requesting he be 'run out of town.'

"There are so many issues that we have to deal with," he said. "The most important thing we can do is to have honest conversations and break down these barriers."

The entire broadcast of this panel discussion can still be viewed online on the Wyoming PBS website:
<http://video.wyomingpbs.org/show/wyoming-perspectives>



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