

LOOK TOWARD THE MOUNTAIN, MOFA EPISODE 3, WHO WE ARE TODAY TRANSCRIPT

ROB BUSCHER: Welcome to *Look Toward the Mountain*, a podcast series about life inside the Heart Mountain Japanese American Relocation Center located in northwestern Wyoming during World War II. I'm your host, Rob Buscher.

ROB BUSCHER: Thanks to the support of the Embassy of Japan in the United States, the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation is presenting a special three-episode series exploring the Japanese American experience beyond Heart Mountain, and our relationship to Japan.

ROB BUSCHER: The third episode explores how Japanese American identity has been shaped by our connections to, and relationship with Japan and Japanese culture.

INTRO THEME

ROB BUSCHER: Japanese Americans are unique compared to many other Asian ethnic groups in the United States. According to the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey, 73% of Japanese Americans reported being born in the US. Compared to the overall average of 43% American-born across all Asian ethnicities, Japanese Americans are nearly twice as likely to have been born and raised in this country. Although there has been additional immigration in the postwar era, the *Shin-Nikkei* or "new Japanese diaspora" is much smaller by

comparison to the multigenerational Japanese Americans whose families immigrated prior to the Immigration Act of 1924.

ROB BUSCHER: This means that the majority of Japanese Americans are descendants of people who were directly impacted by the forced removal and mass incarceration in American concentration camps during WWII. From the postwar era onwards the relationships that Japanese Americans had with their ancestral culture vary greatly. Most Japanese Americans stopped speaking the Japanese language after the Nisei - second generation, in part because of the stigma of wartime incarceration. Despite the loss of language, many persons of Japanese ancestry practice other aspects of traditional culture in their daily lives. Some families maintained this relationship during the postwar resettlement period, while others whose families intentionally assimilated, now struggle to make meaning of traditions that were lost to time.

ROB BUSCHER: Another divergence from a singular cultural narrative is caused by the widespread intermarriage that both Shin-Nikkei and multi-generational Japanese Americans have engaged in. Past census data shows that only 36% of Japanese Americans report being married to someone of the same ethnicity. 55% reported marrying a non-Asian with an additional 9% marrying non-Japanese Asian. This percentage increases dramatically with each subsequent generation. The Yonsei, or fourth generation, which I belong to, is estimated to have an intermarriage rate of nearly 90%.

ROB BUSCHER: Sansei Darrell Kunitomi is a board member of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation whose family were incarcerated in Wyoming during the war years. Kunitomi reflects on the Japanese American community's place in our country.

DARRELL KUNITOMI: The weird thing about being Japanese American in America, is that we're a fading culture. Our birth rate is low, our outmarriage is high. We've moved out of the cities and into the burbs. My generation, the great Sanseis of the 60s, 70s, and 80s began to become so acculturated that many of us became pretty white. That's just the way it is. So we're a fading minority. We've been a very important minority. We've been a part of the fabric of the country. I think our lives have told some of the greatest tales of American history.

ROB BUSCHER: As the Japanese American community continues to diversify through inter-ethnic and interracial marriages, this raises questions about whether a community that was once thought to be culturally homogenous will continue to practice Japanese traditions at all. If so, what do those traditions look like today, and what might they look like in the future?

ROB BUSCHER: This episode has been compiled from a dozen interviews with Japanese Americans spanning three generations in an effort to gauge to what extent Japanese culture is currently being practiced by our community, and how our relationship or lack thereof with Japan has informed this practice. If you have been a regular listener to this series you will note the format differs somewhat from previous episodes. This is done in an effort to present the interview subjects

in much greater detail. I will also share details of my own family's history and personal relationship to Japanese identity throughout the episode.

ROB BUSCHER: My interest in this topic comes from my family's rather unique connection to Japan. Few Yonsei have the privilege of knowing their Issei forbearers. My maternal great grandmother Asako Marumoto or Hibaachan as we called her, lived to the age of 95 - until I was 18 years old. I was blessed with this direct connection to an Issei immigrant that few others in my generation have experienced.

ROB BUSCHER: Having an Issei matriarch in my life who told us firsthand about where she grew up in Hiroshima and our relatives in Japan gave us a more direct understanding of our lineage and ancestral culture of origin than many other Japanese American families. This was not entirely a positive thing, since Hibaachan lost cousins to the atomic bomb and carried with her a burden of survivor's guilt that was transmitted across generations.

ROB BUSCHER: Although our family was forcibly removed from their home in Gardena California where they worked as tenant farmers on the Kurata Ranch in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, they avoided wartime incarceration by fleeing inland to Layton Utah, where my great grandfather Masaichiro Marumoto had a cousin who worked on the railroad. Masaichiro was a Judo sensei who was trained by Kano Jigoro, the founder of Judo. Although he passed away before I was born, his presence in my childhood was felt whenever we visited Hibaachan and through the stories my mother told about him.

ROB BUSCHER: I have spoken at length about Masaichiro with my Obaachan, Yukari Mikesell, who shared some memories with me.

YUKARI MIKESELL: My father, you know, was born under the sign of the tiger. My romantic view is that a tiger cannot be caged. So that's why we moved. The thing was, they had to have the equipment to start their life over again when they moved from California to Utah. And my mother made sure she carried the *usu*, is it, the steamers. When we packed our car and trailer to move to Utah, that was one of the things she had in the trailer. She took things that were important.

ROB BUSCHER: Although my family were forcibly removed, by managing to escape the wartime incarceration, resettling during the so-called voluntary evacuation left an indelible mark on our family's identity as Japanese Americans. Although they were very much traumatized by the experience of forced removal, I credit Masaichiro and Asako's decision to flee California as the reason that we have maintained our relationship with Japanese culture to the extent we have.

ROB BUSCHER: While some members of our extended family were incarcerated at Crystal City and Jerome camps, I believe the Nisei elders in my close family felt a sense of survivor's guilt from knowing they did not have to go to Camp when the vast majority of their community did. That guilt was transmitted across generations to the extent that for many years I felt unsure where our family's place was in the Japanese American story whose dominant narrative continues to be the wartime incarceration.

ROB BUSCHER: It wasn't until I met Karen Korematsu, the daughter of Fred Korematsu, at the 2018 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage and told her our family history that I was able to relate my family's experience to the broader narrative. When I told Karen our story, she said, "oh your family were resisters and that's really cool." By reframing my great grandparents' decision as part of the resistor narrative, I began to recognize their practice of cultural maintenance as an act of resistance as well.

ROB BUSCHER: My hibaachan taught me my first words in English and Japanese, introduced me to Japanese cuisine, and sparked my interest in Japanese cinema - something that has driven the direction of my entire professional career. She was deeply involved in her Buddhist temple community and for our family at least, fulfilled the role of cultural bearer and wisdom keeper. Although I never met Masaichiro, his commitment to passing on traditional Japanese culture was apparent in his practice as a Judo sensei. As a *go-dan* - fifth degree blackbelt, Masaichiro was the highest ranked Judo practitioner in the state of Utah who co-founded the Judo Association of Utah. My Obaachan, Yukari Mikesell, elaborates on her father's judo practice.

YUKARI MIKESELL: The father's of the boys wanted to have judo taught and they knew that my father knew judo. If they built a dojo, he said he would teach. And so that was the rules they went by. When the dojo opened up, my father arrived at the dojo. The kids were running all over the place having a great time. Their shoes were all over the place. He walked in and looked at that, and he went about gathering all the shoes, laid them in front of the door in a nice neat row. He went

into the middle of the mat, sat down with his legs crossed, and waited. Pretty soon the kids figured it out. They knew they were running around, like kids would be, and they saw their shoes all lined up. So they came and sat down in a line, in front of him. That was the first day. The second time that they had their judo lesson, when father walked in they were already sitting in a nice neat line and they were ready for him.

ROB BUSCHER: Knowing that his students were mostly Nisei and Sansei boys who had come out of Topaz Relocation Center in Utah and other camps, it was clear that Masaichiro wanted to instill a sense of pride in their Japanese heritage at a time when Japanese culture was deeply stigmatized. It seems to me that this was a conscious choice by our Issei progenitors to maintain our connection to Japan, despite the intense pressure to assimilate in the postwar era.

ROB BUSCHER: But speaking with other community members it seems that the Marumotos were somewhat of an anomaly. Especially among families who endured the wartime incarceration, it is more common to hear stories where people consciously attempted to assimilate. Some became Christian converts, others joined the military, and some people married into white families. Like my family, some people also maintained a kind of cultural connection, but typically stopped speaking the Japanese language in their homes and gradually lost touch with that aspect of the culture.

ROB BUSCHER: Miru Osuga is a multi-ethnic Yonsei of Japanese and Taiwanese descent whose family was incarcerated at Heart Mountain. Their paternal

grandfather James Osuga was a Nisei veteran of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and later became a Christian minister. Miru shares some of his story from the postwar resettlement.

MIRU OSUGA: Through the GI bill, he was able to get the rest of his family out of Camp after he served in the war and relocate to Ohio. And after that he started becoming a minister.

MIRU OSUGA: I would say my grandpa really worked his whole life to be more American. I can't say for sure that's his intention, but from what I know about him like you know, he would wear his, "I served in World War Two" hat everywhere he went even to restaurants and his my grandma would always ask him to take it off because it was impolite but he was always wearing this hat to show what he'd done for the country.

MIRU OSUGA: I did ask my dad like you know if my grandpa did ever talked about his experience in the camps or in the war and he did say that in some of his sermons he would talk about his experience in camp, but he didn't talk about it too much because his congregation was almost all white if not all white and so, in some ways it would feel like pointing a finger at them.

MIRU OSUGA: But he did talk about it, and he was someone who did talk about justice in a very emotional way, I think. I remember coming across one of his sermons. They're all typewritten out.

MIRU OSUGA: One of them, I saw was talking about incarceration and kind of talking about, not the, not Japanese incarceration but incarceration of like different other communities and jail. It basically was pointing towards abolition as well, or part of pointing towards the problems with the criminal justice system. And I think knowing that that was a sermon that he probably, a sermon that he gave in front of an all white congregation in rural Ohio feels pretty powerful to me, and I think reflects on kind of the values that he tried to embody, in the ways that he could.

ROB BUSCHER: An incarceration survivor from Heart Mountain, Sansei Prentiss Uchida remembers the impact that the camp experience and subsequent resettlement had on his own life.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: I was born in 1940. Just turned one when Pearl Harbor happened and was in San Jose California. Originally I think we went to Tule lake because my father was from Sacramento and I think that's where we're living at the time. From there, I think in 1943 we transferred to Heart Mountain because that's where my mother's families were. But most of my family was in Heart Mountain. I have probably 35 relatives - uncles, aunts, grandfather, grandmother, cousins in Heart Mountain and so it's quite a large group.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: I guess my whole family as a whole, we cover the gamut. We have I think three members who were in the 442nd. One, my uncle George was a resistor from Heart Mountain. I had one uncle and his family after Pearl Harbor, instead of going to Camp they went to Japan. So that was a totally different

experience for them. They didn't come back until 1958. Actually the kids, the two kids were school age when they went over and it came back they're out of school one got married over there, and so there was a kind of a differentiation there in the family.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: Like many families, the Japanese I mean it was a conscious decision not to speak, Japanese. Although the only time we had to or wanted to was with respect to my grandparents because they spoke no English and so... you know as kids we had very little relationship with them, although because we're on a farm I did work with my grandfather, irrigating strawberries, I remember.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: But the Center of the Japanese community was really in Japantown which still exists there, so the nihonmachi is one of the few, I think one of the two or three left and it still exists. From the country we moved into the city or into San Jose when I was 11. You know I think a third of the students were Japanese basically there and a lot from around town and so that's what I grew up with.

ROB BUSCHER: Although Uchida grew up surrounded by Japanese Americans, he felt a lot of the Japanese culture was lost with his parents' generation.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: I'm a product of assimilation on steroids. I married a Caucasian and so my kids are Hapas right, and they married Caucasians, and so my grandkids are what I coined a new term Quapas. They're a quarter. My kids are in their 40s approaching 50, but they were always... grew up in a white community. White

neighborhood, white community, etc. Association with Japanese was when we go to San Jose visit my mom and dad when they were alive. There's some connection there, more than with me with them. They had a real connection with the grandparents, really loved them and to the extent that all my grandkids are named after my mother and father, the Japanese names. So there was a close relationship there, but what they instilled in them I don't know, I'm not sure.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: I always think they skipped through me. I'm not sure I gave them much to be honest with you, it's really my mother and father if there's anything. That way of thinking and doing rubbed off on the kids. I don't know how the grandkids are going to be. I thought that my kids also, that they were totally Americanized or whatever you know.

ROB BUSCHER: Yonsei Jason Matsumoto is a Chicago-based filmmaker and taiko artist whose family resettled in the Midwest after being incarcerated at Tule Lake, Gila River, and Rohwer. Like all Japanese Americans who endured the incarceration, the wartime experience had a profound impact on their identities. Chicago was the city with the largest Japanese American resettler population in the postwar era, which may have insulated the Matsumoto family from some of the pressures to assimilate. Jason reflects on their experiences.

JASON MATSUMOTO: They have narratives and stories that kind of follow along the lines of like the general population of Japanese Americans. Maybe a big split was that all of them stayed in Chicago. It's been really interesting to me because within my four grandparents, I have one who was unbelievably outspoken about

the experience and about how unjust it was. He did not build a career or anything that was like activism related, but he was not shy in sharing the story.

JASON MATSUMOTO: My grandfather became a very central Community figure in Chicago. He came to Chicago early and was very involved in setting up youth programs as all these young people from the camps were being released early. There is all kinds of social pressure right like these leave clearance forums where you were literally signing these documents that said, "I won't build Community. I won't speak Japanese," all this stuff.

JASON MATSUMOTO: And it's really interesting to see years and years later, how this kind of prescribed assimilationist type of strategy actually played out in Chicago in a fairly different way. It was those early 1943 to 47 years where most of these organizations that are like heavily JA legacy community organizations were developed and created. You can do as much as you can, as the government to push people to not become and create communities when they, these people just need simple social services and the ability to understand a new city's policies in Japanese.

JASON MATSUMOTO: All these different like functions that were incredibly important to the Community they ended up like really actually building and developing a Community here, so I always look at that it's like this moment of unbelievable resilience, although probably felt, just like they were trying to ensure that, like other people who look like them and who were having a similar experience like landing in the city. There was like maybe three 400 Japanese

Americans living in Chicago before resettlement into the city, they were like 20,000 within four or five years right?

JASON MATSUMOTO: Learning about this stuff, you know as an adult and then like looking back and thinking about how I'm personally impacted by certain things that happened to my own life not nearly as traumatic or terrible as losing everything and being locked up and then being asked to just like recreate your own life.

ROB BUSCHER: Sansei Masaru Ed Nakawatase was born in Poston camp and grew up in the rural farming community of Bridgeton New Jersey, where his parents worked for Seabrook Farms. Similar to the experience of those who resettled in Chicago, the approximately 3,000 Japanese Americans who came to the region were somewhat sheltered from the stigmatization of Japanese culture and identity that many others faced in the postwar era. Nakawatase remembers the role that the Seabrook Buddhist Temple played in preserving traditional aspects of Japanese culture.

ED NAKAWATASE: The Buddhist temple, they had a role I think of cultural maintenance, you know I mean they offer Japanese language school. It's a much more directly connected, you know, to the Japanese culture. One thing that I loved and I wish we could do it again was new years. It was an open house in which friends and neighbors would come over. They would eat - you'd have tempura and you'd have sushi, char siu, and various other traditional Japanese

foods served, and then there was booze, sake and other things, and it was good...
I love the food.

ED NAKAWATASE: I wish we had this again. I mean I liked a lot, the process of you know, getting the food together and all that, I mean I'm sure that I would like it less if I had to do it all myself, but that made me feel good about being Japanese or at least feeling like I was Japanese.

ED NAKAWATASE: There also used to be mochi making and early on we had a Community House and my recollection is that there was space allocated to a family that made tofu behind the Community us. And I'm not sure that I mean I don't know if there are any people around Seabrook now that remember that. I mean food is an association I make with the Community.

ROB BUSCHER: Although both of Nakawatase's Nisei parents spoke Japanese fluently, they did not pass on the language to their children.

ED NAKAWATASE: Yeah, I think, for a number of us, you know and I'm not proud of it, but it was a kind of Americanization. Even, as you know, that was taking place and we wanted to embrace it in various ways. And you know it's now a source of some regret, I mean it would have been very handy, very useful on all levels to know the language.

ROB BUSCHER: While most Japanese American families stopped speaking Japanese after the Nisei generation, some among the younger generations are

attempting to reclaim this aspect of their culture. Yonsei Kristy Ishii grew up participating in summer camp programs that taught Japanese traditional culture. Ishii recounts how her early childhood experiences led to an interest in Japan from a young age, which later served as inspiration to study Japanese language.

KRISTY ISHII: I am fourth generation on my mom's side and fifth generation on my dad's side. From my grandma's recollection the family, like burned, a lot of photos and they used to have like a whole set like a hina matsuri doll set and like that was gone when they came back to the house. And it just it sounded like a lot of the culture was kind of buried. Of course they continued to make I think like Japanese food at home, but like as far as artifacts and stuff, culturally significant things, there's nothing to my knowledge that was like preserved.

KRISTY ISHII: The one thing that did have like a semi I don't know if it was a large impact, but there was this thing called the hikari no gakko which is kind of like john kinfolk echo that like cultural kind of summer camp thing that is in like nor cow. And it was two weeks, out of the summer every summer and I went from like first grade until I graduated and left the hometown.

KRISTY ISHII: And it was like a first through sixth grade program where each grade was like themed and we would do things that were like traditionally Japanese so like our grandparents age when they came to America. Their image of Japan was basically put into like a Japanese summer camp, so that I don't know so the offspring could like learn about very traditional things so like the much it's icky stuff like taiko, Judo, kendo, so like although, like you know physical like martial

arts stuff plus making like a Bamboo flute i'm making washi paper like doing the green tea ceremony, like everything you can imagine, and then in sixth grade is when we learned about the incarceration of Japanese Americans, and that was the first time I was introduced that concept.

KRISTY ISHII: But it was very brief, it was like this activity with a suitcase you know, on a paper, and they would say, "can you imagine if this happened to you what would you bring," and so it was a little bit of a like fun kid game it didn't really resonate it didn't mean a whole lot at that time till I got to high school and then we did actual things related to people.

KRISTY ISHII: What we also do we would sing Japanese songs they would read it out in romaji and like so in English, and we would read off of that have no I had no idea what the song meant half the time most of the time it was just that we were all these like Japanese American kids. None of us really knew the words we just were singing it based off of sound and copying the teacher and I look back on that because now that I speak Japanese I think wow Is that why I can pronounce the words well, not knowing even the meaning but I grew up with that, like two weeks thing every summer.

ROB BUSCHER: Erin Aoyama is a mixed race Yonsei whose paternal grandparents were incarcerated at Heart Mountain. Her family went more of the assimilation route during the postwar era, which included the loss of their Japanese language.

ERIN AOYAMA: We grew up sort of very like Americanized idea about who we were in by we I mean my siblings and I and our identity, but all of us in different ways, have sort of I think reached back to try to understand those connections, I think a lot of this is that, like We grew up not seeing people around us who were Japanese American not learning anything about this history in school. Partly because we were on the east coast, but also because of how we learn history. As we've gotten older it's been this process of trying to understand that connection and realizing like the pieces of our childhood and of our dad and of you know, our extended family that are still very much tied to Japan are tied to this like 1880s version of Japan because that's sort of like what came to the United States and where where culture is. But it's been a fun learning process, I think, in a fun realization that like there's always more than what we think even about ourselves and our families.

ERIN AOYAMA: That, I think, has just been a fun good way to approach like meeting other people or learning about history or being part of communities it's like there's just always more layers and more nuance and more complexity than just the simple like, yeah my grandmother was super traumatized and wanting to assimilate and didn't want her kids to experience what she had experienced which I'm sure was part of it, but you know also this sense of just this is what happens when you've been in a country, far from your you know the birthplace of your parents. The loss of language I'm sad about that, because my dad speaks no Japanese, but like both of my grandparents grew up speaking Japanese, so there is that very definite break there.

ERIN AOYAMA: Even when they went to Camp my grandmother was 20 years old, and she listed herself as Christian. The rest of her family listed themselves as Buddhist so a kind of interesting piece of even before going to Camp my grandmother had made certain choices that were different from her family and who knows why. It seems had a different experience and relationship to Japanese her Japanese-ness both before camp, but then definitely afterwards.

ROB BUSCHER: Reflecting on her biracial heritage and its impact on her identity, Aoyama shares that it was actually her white mother who maintained many of the family ties to her Japanese American relatives.

ERIN AOYAMA: My mom did so much to make sure that we stayed in touch with our grandparents on both sides and all that so she really I think thought a lot about how, at a time when conversations about raising biracial children probably weren't happening in the same way, I think she thought a lot about that. And that we didn't look like my mom is blonde, and so there were a lot of instances growing up or it was always a shock to see us with our mom and it was like, "are you the nanny?" or whatever. So I think we couldn't help, but have some of those conversations.

ERIN AOYAMA: My siblings and I really grew up without a lot of connection to our Japanese culture, without a lot of explicit understanding of where those pieces came in, I think, as I've gotten older I've looked back at things and then like, "Oh, this was something that only our family did like none of our neighbors or friends did." But I think like so much of how we grew up was this mix between my mom

and my dad that I love and appreciate now but also makes it harder to sort of locate the pieces of Japanese identity.

ROB BUSCHER: As a multiethnic Japanese-Taiwanese American, Miru Osuga shares similar issues with their identity that stem in part from the loss of Japanese language.

MIRU OSUGA: I think language always feels like a big part of cultural connection. I'm both Taiwanese and Japanese and knowing a little bit of Chinese and Taiwanese makes me feel a lot closer to that part of my identity and knowing no Japanese feels like Japan is more strange.

MIRU OSUGA: And I think the same is with my dad - I think if I would ask him if he felt more Japanese or American it'll probably be, "I'm Japanese American not I'm not Japanese," you know? He never learned the language, because my grandma never knew the language. My earliest memory of being Japanese American or being aware of being my Japanese American identity is actually the conflict between Taiwan and Japan.

MIRU OSUGA: You know Japan's colonial history is a colonial history. And you know Japan colonized Taiwan in the marriage between my mom and dad was for the most part, accepted, and I know that Taiwanese people now have a very rosy understanding - people of this generation, of my generation have a much more rosy view on Japan now. But people of my grandma's generation definitely, some

people held a lot against Japan, so my mom's aunt was really upset by her marrying a Japanese person.

MIRU OSUGA: So even if my dad didn't feel like he was the Japanese that's still his perception, his last name is Osuga - my last name, my first name is Miru. There's a lot of indications of my Japanese-ness. The funny thing where I think my mom made a joke, where she was like you know, like haha like the two parts of your life kind of at odds with each other, and I think at that moment, I was just like haha and also you know, there is a colonial legacy there and it's just like something that is part of my reality.

ROB BUSCHER: The transnational experiences of Japanese Americans have also shaped the identities and Japanese cultural practice among individuals who have worked or studied abroad in Japan in the postwar era. Like my family, Nisei Floyd Mori and his family were able to avoid wartime incarceration because they lived outside of the Military Exclusion Zone in Utah. Mori credits his upbringing for instilling a knowledge of Japanese language and culture, but it was not until college that he began identifying more strongly with his heritage.

FLOYD MORI: Like many people during that era being Japanese you know it's a little bit self conscious. I wasn't really happy to be Japanese because of how I saw depicted in movies and cartoons and things like that so being Japanese was not something I really enjoyed. So all through my years as a child and as an adolescent going through high school. I didn't really embrace the Japanese culture.

FLOYD MORI: My freshman year of college, I went to southern California and there lived with my brother and in the West LA portion of Los Angeles, where there are a lot of Japanese and in school and college, I met some Japanese Americans, I began to pal around with Japanese Americans and for the first time really dated some Japanese American girls and so my attitude began to change, I felt very comfortable in that atmosphere.

FLOYD MORI: And then later I became a mormon and I served a mission for the mormon church and I was asked to go to Hawaii and, again, there was another reawakening for me, because the majority of people in Hawaii are Asian and my mission president at that time saw that you know, maybe I could be some value in visiting Japanese home, so I spent a lot of my mission visiting Japanese homes, and again I got reacquainted with the culture and in Hawaii the Japanese were very powerful.

FLOYD MORI: In many ways, business, one of the leading business people, you know I happened to meet Dan Inouye on the street, when he was campaigning to be Congressman and so you had this kind of a change, and so my, I guess pride and be Japanese American group and it moved me to when I went back to college and I went to Brigham Young University they had an Asian Studies program that's one of my majors was Asian Studies.

FLOYD MORI: I was very active in the Japanese club, we had a Japanese club it was became very large very significant that we did a lot of things on campus as a Japanese club so a lot of my associations, where I didn't have any as a teenager

and as a kid, now from college became very embedded in the Japanese community.

ROB BUSCHER: Mori would go on to do business in Japan over several decades spanning the bubble period of the Japanese economy. He recalls some of his experiences navigating the culture.

FLOYD MORI: I majored in Asian studies and my dual major was economics and so my dream job was to do something in international business. In Asia, particularly Japan, so that was always in the back of my mind. I had an interview to teach college in California and so I took the job and started teaching college in the Bay area. One thing led to another, and you know I got involved in politics. And when I became a State assemblyman it was an era when Japanese business in the United States was at its peak. The 60s and 70s saw large growth of Japanese business in California, particularly it's there where you know SONY, Kyocera, Hitachi - all these manufacturing companies, besides the banks and the trading companies.

FLOYD MORI: So in that process, as a politician, I'm the Asian face and I got to know some of these Japanese business people and, in fact, I coerced Governor Brown into forming a Japanese Business Council of Japanese business people, because Japanese businesses were coming to California so let's get acquainted with them and for the Japanese business people, this is great now they got to meet with the governor a couple times a year directly, and so it was a win-win situation on both sides.

FLOYD MORI: So that allowed me to become acquainted with many high level Japanese businesses when I was a State assemblyman in California and whenever somebody from Japan came like the former prime minister, a couple times, Governor Brown invited me down to be in the meeting in the conversation he had with those political people, as well as business people, so that was my grounding and getting acquainted with Japanese businesses, Japanese politicians.

FLOYD MORI: And with my friends and contacts in Japan, I was able to go to presidents and high level vice presidents and they gave me access to the banks and the training companies and some of the other companies that I worked with so that's how I evolved from being a college Professor to politics and then into the consulting business, I spent you know about 20-25 years of my life traveling Japan working mainly to tie American companies or help American companies find partners in Japan. Subway was one of my projects, another major project that I worked on was with Itochu and it was in the petroleum business.

FLOYD MORI: Being Japanese myself, the Japanese side trusted me and confided in me and you know, I was able to talk to them where my American clients would have a much more difficult time talking to them, so you know I spent a lot of hours at two o'clock in the morning here in the United States talking to my Japanese counterparts in Japan because they had trust and developed trust in what I could do, and so those friendships from you know my California days led to broaden my connections and friendships in Japan, and since I had friends of high caliber other people trusted me. You know that's the Japanese way, right.

ROB BUSCHER: Prentiss Uchida also had longstanding business relationships in Japan, where his company was active during the bubble economy.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: At 28 I started this company with two other guys. Vector General, and we made interactive computer graphics systems. These were three dimensional images on screen, and this is a time when computers were just lights and switches but we had 3D images on the screen. Our kind of claim to fame was that we were in the original Star Wars movies. We did the real time sequences in the Star Wars movie cockpit displays, that sort of thing, it wasn't a big deal but that's where we made hay and we had customers from all over the world Boeing and Ford to Nijmegen in Holland.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: One of the things was that we wanted Japanese distributorship, not to leverage me being Japanese but you know just business as usual began, we have also had a distributor from Europe. But along came Hakuto and they came over. I forget how we got introduced to them, but they wanted to look into representing us, etc, and that sort of thing, and so their middle management guy came out, hooked up and then finally, next person out was Takayama who's the founder-chairman. He came out.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: I believe that yeah that they found out that I was Japanese American and so he wanted to come out and see if this was the real deal or whatever, I don't know but anyway, they took us on. And we struck up a pretty good real friendship, kind of like a mentor father figure, he was 20 years older than me or thereabouts.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: To be honest, I had no interest in any of that, I mean you know, the fact that you know it's like... I realized that yeah part of the reason that we got the business where he took us on was that I was Japanese. The other thing, I was in my early thirties and I was like 32-33 years old right, CEO of the company. And my counterparts, people my age or the young guys they're you know, in the hallways smoking you know and I'm with all these old guys.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: So that was unusual. For them to see me basically was unusual. I dressed a little funky, I mean I was kind of from the hippie era so you know, had very loud clothes, etc, although suit and ties. Long hair, so I looked quite different from everybody else over there. But I was very close to a lot of those people and even talked about the war. I remember this person Vice President Nishida and we're talking about the war and I guess, he was in Tokyo at the time when they got bombed and firebombed etc, and that sort of thing.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: You know I was kind of talking a little bit cavalier about the war and you know, being in Camp. And then one remarkable thing he said to me kind of just set me back, he says, "Uchida-san, have you ever been hungry?" I don't know, yeah I've been hungry, you know, late to dinner or something like that and he says, "No, have you really been hungry?"

PRENTISS UCHIDA: And what he's talking about is I guess you know, during the firebombing you know they had to leave Tokyo up in the mountains, away from

the fire and nothing to eat, you know, and I guess eating whatever they can find rats or whatever that sort of thing and so.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: Compared to... I didn't think the Japanese Americans here going to a concentration camp here was easy, it wasn't easy. But it wasn't like that. You know what I'm saying? They got bombed by the Americas and not like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but Tokyo got firebombed. A lot of people lived and so they had to flee, and so what did they do?

PRENTISS UCHIDA: So anyway, there is that aspect because there's this whole generation of people there that were older than me. They were kind of like the Niseis here, you know that era. So that was an interesting part, kind of getting the history. To be honest with you, I wasn't totally into it at that time, I wish I was. Because I would have got a lot more if I was into it, but I wasn't.

ROB BUSCHER: During this same time period my Obaachan, Yukari Mikesell was making her own connections back to Japan in a different and unexpected way. As the only docent of Japanese ancestry working at the Denver Natural History Museum, she was asked to guide a group of Japanese museum curators through their exhibit displays. A miscommunication about their schedule nearly prevented them from meeting.

YUKARI MIKESELL: In the 70s the Japanese museums were renovating and they were visiting, the directors were visiting the different museums that were doing very well or were of high quality or whatever, to see what was going on that made

them successful. They came to the Denver Museum and they had come in the middle of the night, because evidently their secretary set them up with the wrong time. And instead of being 8 o'clock in the morning, it was 8 o'clock in the evening. And so I had been trying to figure out where they had been all day long, because I thought they were going to be there at 8 o'clock in the morning. At 8 o'clock at night I finally figured out that they got the time wrong. So I did my analysis on the thinking of Japanese and I thought, "well they would probably stay in the best hotel in town."

YUKARI MIKESSELL: So I called the Brown Palace Hotel and I asked them if they had any Japanese-speaking guests there. And they said, "yea we have several men that have checked in." And I said, "can you put me through to them?" So that's how I got in touch with them. I spoke broken Japanese at that time so I struggled through that, and they only had one man who could speak a little bit of English and that was Mr. Sasaki-san, so we made that connection there. And the next morning they were going to leave for the next museum. So I opened the Denver Museum of Natural History, had a guy come and open it at 4 o'clock in the morning so that we could visit the museum and talk about what it was like, why it was at such-and-such, the eye level of the exhibit for the viewers, etc. So they left and Sasaki-san kept my name and we started corresponding and that's how I started with the museum people in Japan.

ROB BUSCHER: Sasaki-san would remain lifelong friends with my Obaachan as they visited several times when she accompanied my grandfather overseas on business trips to Japan, which helped shape her identity as a Japanese American.

Her younger sister Seiko Kikuta retained her Japanese culture through the more traditional practice of bon odori. For the last three decades Seiko has been the dance instructor for Eugene Oregon's Obon.

SEIKO KIKUTA: 28 years ago someone was leading it and then the second year somebody asked me to take over and I thought, "why me." I don't know, but she said, the person said, "well, would you like to lead the dancing?" And because I liked Obon dancing so I said, "yeah, why not," so I started. Thank god for YouTube! We did a few basic dances like you know, the tanko bushi, we should get some other dances that group from Salem Oregon came and taught us, so I had a basic about five dances and sell and looks and then I had a connection with the Ogden Buddhist church and there was a good friend of my mom's, and so I asked him well, would you send me some videos are you dance instructions so she did that. This is VHS tape, then there was no DVDs. So she sent me some, I've learned off of.

SEIKO KIKUTA: Later on, we used YouTube to do dances and so now we have a repertoire about 18 dances we do, but I tried to get new ones every year to change out so that's how I got started as I've been teaching for the last 25-26 years. But it's been fun because I enjoy it and. You know, somehow you get more Japanese when you're doing Japanese dance.

ROB BUSCHER: Jason Matsumoto was already deeply connected to Japanese culture through his upbringing in the Chicago Japanese American community, as a taiko artist he has been able to deepen his understanding of the differences

between Japanese and Japanese diasporic culture as two divergent paths of the same origin. Matsumoto comments on the cultural exchange with contemporary Japan through taiko.

JASON MATSUMOTO: There's a Japanese company called Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten. They create like you know, the \$10,000 like Cadillac drums you know. They're one of the official makers of the omikoshi, the portable shrines. I remember, I went to this guy's shop and got you know all these like workers who are like hand carving these things and he's like this thing it's about the price of a Ferrari like, "oh my God it's crazy," like all handmade like lacquered you know, and they are like the official instrument providers to the Emperor of Japan. Like a 160 year old company. Pre-capitalism company.

JASON MATSUMOTO: The son, who is about 45, his name is Yoshi. He is now the head of the company and there's a lot of things that he can do underneath the banner of Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten that is supporting tradition. Ensuring that these you know, like rich traditions of like Japanese culture, like the national theatre, Noh, Kabuki, other stuff are being maintained and being supported and resourced. And then he created this other company called Kadon, which is this online platform that is intended to spread some of the best Taiko instruction across the world online. I work as a consultant for Kadon.

JASON MATSUMOTO: What is so fascinating is that, I think Yoshi kind of embodies this vision of what Taiko can be. He's not just thinking about US versus Japan and

like Japanese American culture versus Japanese culture but he's looking at it across this entire lens of the globe.

JASON MATSUMOTO: And right now what's happening is like Europe is kind of exploding with taiko, there's like 70 groups in Germany, just in Germany alone, you know. And so we're watching this take place, and this is even more fascinating because when I go to Europe to engage with these communities. There's no connection at all to Japanese American culture and it's so jarring for me. I'm like, whoa just a bunch of white people like Germans playing taiko and what's the connection, you know.

JASON MATSUMOTO: Yoshi is really interested in trying to unlock the essence of whatever it is like Spanish culture and these unbelievable traditions that come from music makers and art makers in these different places and what happens when you infuse that with taiko. It's this mentality that's coming from a very particular Japanese like company that you would expect to be it's this or nothing.

JASON MATSUMOTO: But he's building this platform to be like, no taiko, it is something meaningful to anybody and it's up to them to kind of form and shape and build something. And the way he sees it like there's artists in Japan who are doing amazing things that are so deeply tied to their particular region's history and legacy and culture and he's like, "I'm not worried about us losing the Japanese-ness, that's for the Japanese taiko players to discover and develop and to continue working on."

JASON MATSUMOTO: He totally understands, like this is a completely different meaning to the Japanese American Community and that has to be supported. Because, like why would you tell them no, that this can't be something that they have found meaning in for 70 you know for so many years and it's wrong? What's the point of that? This is a platform that can be used, and so I subscribe to that mentality, because A) it lets me be free. But also it's something that you know I've seen the firsthand impact of you know, San Jose taiko and Kinara, and these like 45 year old organizations who've been the bedrocks of Japanese American Community taiko playing and they're still around and they're still doing their thing and they're still leading. I have no concern about this as it gets reformed and reshaped and it gets reinvented... our confidence in our story as Japanese Americans is going to center and create foundations for the artwork that we create.

ROB BUSCHER: In my own extended family, my cousin Sheldon Marumoto and his brother Mike are somewhat unique with their relationship to Japan. Although their father Hiroki was the Nisei brother of my Obaachan, their mother Shizue was a Shin-Issei Japanese immigrant. Sheldon reflects on his upbringing in Utah and the lack of connection to Japanese culture there.

SHELDON MARUMOTO: The funny thing is from my mother at least, the connection to Japanese culture wasn't exactly overtly encouraged. My missionary service in Japan was the time where I learned the Japanese language. Aside from some you know some studies on my own, for you know the usual let's let's learn hiragana, katakana, Japanese phonetic alphabets and for a like a single year of

elementary Japanese studies at university, that's where I learned to speak, where I learned to converse, and this is not for lack of trying actually.

SHELDON MARUMOTO: This was a conscious decision or effort on my mother's part in that you know she was a native of Japan lived there for 40 years you know of course she's fluent. I asked her you know teach me, Japanese and she outright refused. Interestingly enough, she said, "you live in America. You will learn English and, if you want to learn Japanese you can learn it either at university or you can go to Japan and learn it on your own." But this is a topic of conversation to come up every once in a while, "I want to learn Japanese," "no you're not learning Japanese, you're learning English. You live in America, you'll learn English."

SHELDON MARUMOTO: Which I later learned to understand, one of the polarities of the Nisei experience right. Some Issei parents will try to strive to keep a sense of Japanese identity and their children and others will go completely the other way and say, "you're not Japanese anymore you're American, and you learn American things, do American things, and you learn English," and all this other stuff and my mom was definitely that way. Of course, the other polarity being, as a Nisei you have a fundamental identity crisis that's kind of baked in right.

SHELDON MARUMOTO: I feel like I'm an American I feel like you know I'm among all of these Caucasian people, but I don't look the part and so. A person can either dive into the culture, dive into the expectations, the stereotypical studios, don't make waves, don't make trouble that's the way I went or you can go and you can try and out American the Americans and that's the way of course Mike went.

ROB BUSCHER: Like Floyd Mori's sons, Sheldon and his brother Mike were raised as Mormons in Layton Utah and also spent time in Japan during their mission trips. Sheldon reflects on his time in Japan, and the impact that his Japanese American Mormon upbringing had on his relationship with Japanese-ness.

SHELDON MARUMOTO: Being in Japan, just being in the locality gave me a sense of where to go and who to ask for these sorts of things and it just so happened that I was able to strike up a conversation with Masaichiro's younger brother Kenji Marumoto who lived in Tokyo at the time. Nobody knew where he was.

SHELDON MARUMOTO: I sent letters to to all of our relatives saying, "hey, I know that Kenji is in Japan somewhere in Tokyo somewhere, do you have an address, do you have a phone number, do you have any contact information?" Nobody knew where he was. They'd lost contact with them, so I had to actually look through the Tokyo phone book.

SHELDON MARUMOTO: And if you can imagine, the Tokyo phone book right? Fortunately, our family has a fairly uncommon name in Japan. And the actual kanji used is the rarer of two variants that can be used for Marumoto. He informed me of a lot of things, including the Marumoto kamon. This was kind of the beginning of my experience and my cultural experience into the family and my origins, you know my roots, so to speak.

ROB BUSCHER: I also had the opportunity to live abroad in Japan for half a year in 2008 and again during the summer of 2010 when I was studying Japanese language as part of my undergraduate and later graduate studies. As a mixed race Yonsei, most people in Japan do not identify me as Japanese, a reality that I understood prior to living there. Still I found myself grappling with my identity as a result of my time in Japan.

ROB BUSCHER: Kristy Ishii shares some of these challenges, although as a woman who is fully ethnically Japanese, she faced different challenges of her own while living in Japan over a much longer period of time where she worked as an English teacher. Ishii recalls her first trips to Japan, which made her interested in moving abroad.

KRISTY ISHII: So I had been to Japan once in high school, it was a sister city exchange and I remember, I was a freshman in high school and I went with a group of folks from Salinas. We went to Kagoshima, super rural area but that's where a lot of people came from that I think settled in Salinas. I had zero knowledge of Japanese and I was one of two people on that trip, who were Japanese American. Everyone else was like different backgrounds and I just remember feeling so embarrassed like this didn't hit me until later, but like I remember, was really embarrassed and I was really shy.

KRISTY ISHII: But even above that I just felt this very strong connection to the obon like it was called the Sannosa matsuri, but it was like their local summer festival, and I just remember like looking down the street, and it was this huge

festival, and I was like, “wow this is a huge version of the small one, we have in Salinas.” I used to go to the Sacramento Obon too, which was a bit larger, but it was not like a full street right, with the whole city involved and so. I remember looking at that street like as a freshman so I was like 13 years old, or something. I think I was tearing up because I was like wow like this is what like the real thing is almost like that was kind of like the emphasis or that's like where my mind was.

KRISTY ISHII: And I just remember people throwing like mochi balls out of like the little like tower thing, and I was like, “wow this is so cool,” and wearing a yukata. For me at that age, it was like it was just experiencing that there was no language attachment, it was just like seeing that and in real life was like, “wow that's amazing.” I look back on that and I was like wow that was a really raw, pure, American girl going to Japan.

KRISTY ISHII: Then I had a chance to go in college through the JACL Kakehashi trip, and that was wildly different. At that point, I had been starting to study Japanese a little bit. And I had met a couple like Japanese friends that were doing exchange at UCLA. I had this strong affinity for Japan, and I was so excited to go. I had no idea, no expectations, when I got on that trip that was one of the first pilot ones in 2014. So I was a sophomore I think in college sophomore junior and that trip, for me, was like I literally thought, like it was my destiny, by the end of that trip to be a connection between Japan and the US.

KRISTY ISHII: They did a really good job and that should make me feel really special and like you had a significance in society, all I didn't realize at the time how

curated that was. That was just my experience of being in Japan as a tourist with a group of Americans and so it was a very limited touch point to Japan, but that was something that I held on to strongly so in my mind, every time I went to Japan, I felt so happy, so excited. The food was amazing, the people were so nice and like I had that very touristy image of Japan right.

KRISTY ISHII: And then the last thing was going through the GPI US internship it was hosted by ISA which is a travel agency and they do English empowerment programs in Japan. So what they do is they pluck out like university students from the US, from Ivy Leagues and the UCs and we would go to five different schools so each week we would go with a different host family we'd meet them on Sunday.

KRISTY ISHII: We hang out with the kid like the student, it was a freshman in high school and walk them through like an English empowerment program it was like leadership skills and development and stuff and so we would watch kids transform from like Monday to Friday with this immersive like morning to evening program where we're talking about how to be more confident all these kinds of things, and it was a very they're very privileged schools, it was not a cheap program.

KRISTY ISHII: And that was my experience of teaching English in Japan. Was like inspiring kids to follow their dreams, that was such a niche thing and that was why I wanted to do the JET program.

ROB BUSCHER: Like many Japanese Americans who have spent significant time abroad in Japan, Ishii came to realize that she would never be able to fully integrate with Japanese society. She recalls,

KRISTY ISHII: I thought students saw me as a Japanese person, so I thought I could do this, kind of thing in disguise, where I'm like yeah you can like you know we're like similar like I just I saw myself in these kids somehow, and I think that made me like wants to go there and be a role model for someone.

KRISTY ISHII: I left America thinking, mistakenly, that I was going to find that missing link or that I was going to feel connected to Japan or the people. Somehow during that experience during JET I was supposed to find things and pick up on things that would connect me to my childhood, and that's the mindset that I went into Japan with.

KRISTY ISHII: Not advised obviously, but that's just how my experience started, and so it was initially oh my God I love Japan. I'm so excited to go every time I go it's even better than the last time. I had never lived in Japan, it just like visited right on these curated programs, and so I didn't have any questions about my identity happened when I was on these trips like it was just like you're obviously American and we speak to you in English and there's a lot of forgiveness around if you can't speak Japanese.

KRISTY ISHII: But then when you go obviously on something like the JET program and you start to live and work somewhere without full knowledge of the

language. Yeah very different experience, and so I was definitely not just culture shocked, but like expectation shocked I guess and identity, just like flew out the door. Like there's so much about that I don't know how much I can share, but like I also remember writing, I have a bunch of blogs about this, but I felt like I had a Japanese face and, like the American in me was erased and like it was such a rough patch in my experience in Japan.

KRISTY ISHII: I lost agency to my American identity while looking for my Japanese-ness in Japan and I couldn't reconcile that until somebody I met in Japan, it was my friend's dad, he told me, "you can just be yourself in Japan, you don't have to subscribe to all the things and all the viewpoints that people have of you as a woman, that looks Japanese in Japan."

KRISTY ISHII: And I was like, "really? I didn't know I could do that," and so, even if you tell yourself that it's kind of hard to put that into perspective. Especially at that age it's like post-grad, so I think a lot of other things are playing into that experience but it was happening in Japan, so I ascribed, like all these experiences to like, "Japanese people are so judgmental," or like, "Japan like such a difficult place to live like why would I come here, right after graduation," and a lot of doubt, like crept in. So totally different expectations and different experiences. And so my viewpoint of Japan has changed a lot over the past four years kind of like in waves like undulation yeah.

ROB BUSCHER: For Japanese Americans who have spent time living in both the US and Japan, the knowledge that we will never be fully accepted in either country

contributes to our complicated relationship with Japanese identity. Among some of our elder generations who lived through the worst of the anti-Japanese racism, it is sometimes difficult to identify Japanese-ness as a positive. Prentiss Uchida remarks on the changing attitudes towards Japanese culture.

PRENTISS UCHIDA: To be Japanese is hip now right? It's like a hip thing with anime, and all this kind of stuff and ninja stuff, it's like okay to be Japanese is hip. They got no idea when you're Japanese, and people are calling you names, you know well, maybe today with a little bit of the hate, but that they are not even up on that you know.

ROB BUSCHER: As Japanese popular culture has become mainstreamed over the past several decades, some Japanese Americans find it difficult to reconcile the cultural popularity with historic conflict both here in the United States and abroad. Miru Osuga provides their perspective on why they have abstained from engaging with contemporary Japanese culture.

MIRU OSUGA: I feel like I've rejected a lot of specifically cultural markers of Japanese-ness because they feel so loaded. And because I don't want to be essentialized based on something that is physical, a physical reminder of Japanese-ness it, I think, because Japanese-ness so easily commodified and commercialized that it feels like a risk to put anything down that feels physically Japanese, especially when I don't even know what I'm perpetuating sometimes. Because of my distance from Japan, I don't always know what I'm perpetuating when I put down a cultural marker.

MIRU OSUGA: You know, like the rising sun is often or like a red sun is sometimes being used in Asian American spaces when it's, in fact, a super violent marker of Japanese imperialism. But I've seen it on earrings that my friends have worn, who are not Japanese.

MIRU OSUGA: And it reminds me that, I do have some, maybe more understanding than I give myself credit to understanding, like the ways that different markers of Japanese-ness can be more nefarious than we realize. I think it's always interesting to see also how folks who have an ancestry that has been colonized by Japan come back and embrace Japanese culture. I think that is like a portion where I'm like, "you know what just take it like we did this like take it, take it back, and you know colonize the colonizer." I don't mean that super seriously, but I think it's like an ironic moment. It just makes me smile a little bit.

MIRU OSUGA: I think there is an aspect where I'm much more interested in connecting with folks who have lived experience of being of Japanese ancestry not in a way to like consolidate Japanese pride or anything like that, but just to kind of have a get a pulse on like what people's experiences around their own lived experiences have been. Those stories, I think, become important and informing how - what the Japanese American Community looks like at all, and the ways that it's informing our ethic or different people's ethics and values around our navigating our quote, unquote place in America, whatever that means.

ROB BUSCHER: Although difficult at times to reconcile the past with the present, Japanese Americans seem to share a pride in our common ancestry. How that

manifests currently, and to what extent these traditions will be carried into the future depend greatly on our ability to overcome the stigmatization of Japanese cultural practice.

ROB BUSCHER: As a new generation emerges, we have an opportunity to instill a sense of pride in being Japanese American once more. That is why I gave my Gosei son his Japanese middle name - Masaki, and why I am teaching him to speak a language that I do not fully understand myself. Whether he chooses to identify as Japanese in the future or not is up to him. But he will be given a choice to embrace the culture of our ancestors, knowing the sacrifices they made that enable him to do so.

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ROB BUSCHER: This concludes our special three-part series sponsored by the Embassy of Japan in the United States. Stay tuned for updates on new episodes, and extras.