

KOKORO *から*

"from our heart"



COVER IMAGE

The Denver Taiko Group performs at the 2025 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage in the original barrack onsite.

Photo by Mark Davis

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WYOMING FOUNDATION**

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The arrival of the big white tent at the Heart Mountain site always marks the beginning of Pilgrimage festivities!

Photo by James Goff

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www.heartmountain.org/kokoro-kara-magazine

KOKORO KARA

Volume 14, Issue 3

Editor & Designer: Kate Wilson

Have an idea for an article? _____

Would you like to be a **contributing writer**? We're interested! Write to Kate Wilson with your story ideas.

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SIGNS OF OPTIMISM DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

CHAIR SHIRLEY ANN HIGUCHI

This is a great time for the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation. We have secured two major grants that will position us well for the future. We are receiving more national and global media attention for our work, and we have conducted a series of major events that demonstrate the power of our message.

Sam Mihara, our 92-year-old board member, came to Washington, DC, in late September for a series of speaking events that exposed the stories of Heart Mountain and the Japanese American incarceration to an even wider audience.

After speaking at two local high schools, Sam traveled to Baltimore to meet with the staff of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nonprofit led for decades by our Vice Chair Doug Nelson. He was hosted by John Kim, a Heart Mountain board member and Casey's chief administrative officer.

On September 30, Sam appeared at the Japanese Information and Cultural Center, where he gave the presentation about his experience as a childhood incarceree at Heart Mountain that received the honor of being the National Endowment for the Humanities' 51st Jefferson Lecturer.

Before the presentation, Sam was welcomed by Japanese Ambassador Shigeo Yamada, who emphasized the importance of bringing Japanese American history to the people of Japan. We have applied for a grant that will enable us to take our story to a series of Japanese universities.

Sam wrapped up his Washington appearances with remarks at the annual judicial reception sponsored by the Bar Association of the District of Columbia (BADC), which I am president of this year. He urged the judges and lawyers to honor the constitution now and, in the future, reminding them of how the constitution was disregarded during the Japanese American incarceration of World War II.

He was joined by James Boasberg, chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, and Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, chief judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. They both urged the audience to remain committed to upholding the rule of law during a time when constitutional rights are routinely being compromised.

In December, the BADC honors Ann Burroughs, president and CEO of the Japanese American National Museum and a Heart Mountain board member, for her commitment to human rights and equal justice under the law. Together, Heart Mountain and BADC remain committed to the values that support our work.

Visitors to our interpretive center are moved by the power of place at the site where 14,000 Japanese Americans spent up to 39 months confined during World War II. But



Minister Kawakami, Sam Mihara, Ambassador Yamada, & Judge Blackburne-Rigsby at the Japanese Information and Cultural Center in September.



Judge Boasberg at the annual judicial reception in Washington, D.C.

it's important to take that powerful experience around the world to reach those who can't make it to Wyoming.

I joined Sam and the board in Los Angeles on October 3 to honor our oldest board member, Takashi Hoshizaki, for his 100th birthday. We celebrated with him at the Miyako Hotel in Little Tokyo, where we shared our memories of our times with him.

I remain moved by the clarity of 18-year-old Takashi's thinking in 1943, when he declared on the infamous loyalty questionnaire that he would fight for the U.S. military only when his rights were restored. His resistance came out of courage, not cowardice, and he would go on to serve in the Army during the Korean War.

The clarity and drive shown by Sam and Takashi keep my spirits high when events can grind them down. At ages when they deserve to take it easy, they press on, showing the world the power of a higher purpose. I marvel at their dedication and draw inspiration from the examples they continue to set.

Their inspiration was part of what drove the Foundation to apply successfully for a grant from the new Norman Y. Mineta Japanese Confinement Education (JACE) program from the National Park Service. The \$776,000 grant will pay for three years of traveling events and educator workshops, the rollout of our new Legacies of Incarcerated Nikkei Connect (LINC) platform and a series of professional identity seminars to be conducted at our Mineta-Simpson Institute.

We've known about this program since the legislation that created it was first discussed in 2020. Members of our leadership team and board met with allied groups, members of Congress and officials in the Biden and Trump administrations to help get the law passed in 2022. Wyoming Senator John Barrasso gave the bill the final push it needed during the December 2022 lame duck session of Congress.

Since then, we have tracked the long and confusing process of getting the program funded and put in motion. We advised the National Park Service on what the program should include and met with NPS officials to seek guidance on the best ways to structure our program.

We worked with four other confinement sites in the Rocky Mountain region—the Amache Alliance, Friends of Minidoka, Historical Museum at Fort Missoula and Topaz Museum—to put together a proposal aimed at spreading our message to a wider audience.

It was a complete team effort using our entire staff and bolstered by the alliances we've made along the way. That's what made winning the grant so rewarding.

I'm proud to work with such inspirations as Sam and Takashi and proud to lead a Foundation that strives to constantly improve and do more. We continue to buck the odds to do such great things. 🙌

Stay inspired!

Shirley Ann Higuchi

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

—Eleanor Roosevelt



Takashi Hoshizaki & Shirley Ann Higuchi.

Tracey McDaniel, Sam Mihara, & John Kim in Baltimore, MD.

TENDING TO RELATIONSHIPS


Executive Director Aura Sunada Newlin

Dear Friends, I am using my column for a bit of self-celebration: I have earned my PhD! This passion project through the department of anthropology at Case Western Reserve University was years in the making, and while my research did not focus on Japanese American incarceration, it was inspired by our community's experience of harm and our path to redress. Titled *Federal Injury, Federal Repair: Tending to the Citizen-Government Relationship in the Court of the Nation's Conscience*, my dissertation analyzed cases filed in the United States Court of Federal Claims, the institution through which U.S. persons can sue the U.S. government for monetary compensation.

Pertinent to the times, this is the court that ruled that federal employees were entitled to damages for working without pay during previous government shutdowns. This is also the court that heard the claims of Japanese Latin Americans who were excluded from the apology and redress awarded to U.S.-based incarcerated under the Civil Liberties Act. Kidnapped from their Central and South American homes to be incarcerated at Crystal City, Texas, Japanese Latin American survivors are still fighting for equal justice.



In early October, my family and I attended the Crystal City pilgrimage where we heard heartbreaking stories of pain, injustice, and family separation. We also heard stories of courage, and we experienced the beauty of cross-community solidarity captured by the pilgrimage theme of “Neighbors, not Enemies.”

A key conclusion of my dissertation—simple as it sounds—is that the relationship between a government and its citizenry needs and deserves nurturing. Doing justice to the citizen-government relationship entails acknowledging harm, paying reparations when warranted, and committing to doing better in the future. Whether through legislation, the courts, or grass-roots efforts like pilgrimages, tending to relationships is a worthwhile endeavor. I am proud that Heart Mountain embraces the challenge of building and maintaining relationships, as it is the strength of our relationships that sustain us. 

Handwritten signature of Aura Newlin.



Newlin family at the 2025 Crystal City Pilgrimage: Doug, Andy, Aura, Sheila, & Lena

WELCOME TO NEW BOARD & STAFF →



DAVID MINETA

A native of San Jose, David has spent his career in social work and mental health after earning a master's degree from San Jose State University and a bachelor's from the University of California, Berkeley. He spent 14 years as the Asian American Recovery Services Deputy Director in the Bay Area. He served as deputy director for demand reduction in the Office of National Drug Control Policy in the Barack Obama administration and returned to California to become president and CEO of Momentum for Health. Welcome to the Heart Mountain Board of Directors!

SUE SIMPSON GALLAGHER

A native of Cody, Wyoming, Sue is the co-owner of the Simpson Gallagher Gallery in Cody with her husband, John Gallagher. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in art and was the first curator of the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson, Wyoming, before returning to Cody in the early 1990s. She has served on the Wyoming Arts Council, Park County Arts Council, and currently serves as a trustee of the National Museum of Wildlife Art and on the Advisory Board of the Whitney Western Art Museum. She is a long-standing committee member of the Buffalo Bill Art Show & Sale. Welcome to the Heart Mountain Board of Directors!





CARTER REED

Welcome to Carter Reed as our **Community Projects Specialist!** Carter was born and raised in Cody, Wyoming. The grandson of white locals who homesteaded in Heart Mountain barracks after World War II, he grew up learning about the site. He has volunteered or worked at the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center during the summers on and off since 2012. We were excited for Carter to move back to Cody and join our full-time staff this past summer.

After attending Northwest College in Powell, WY, Carter finished his undergraduate education at California State University, Long Beach. He then attended the University of Nebraska College of Law. After practicing civil law back in Wyoming, Carter became a PhD candidate in Rhetoric & Political Communication at the University of Kansas in 2022. His primary research interest is in the rhetoric of national identity regarding the human and constitutional rights abuses committed against Japanese Americans during their wartime incarceration and afterwards.

Since 2023, Carter has been working summers as a project specialist with the local community. He is helping develop relationships between the Foundation and our neighbors. Ultimately, the Foundation hopes to work with our local friends to preserve the land of the Heart Mountain incarceration site. 🇺🇸

RACHYL SOLOAI



Welcome to Rachyl Soloai as our **Interim Collections Coordinator!** Rachyl earned her undergraduate degree in Technical Writing from Brigham Young University–Idaho. Her early professional experience is rooted in librarianship, having served both as a Reference Librarian at the Campbell County Public Library in Gillette, Wyoming, and as a Young Adult Librarian. These roles nurtured her passion for connecting people with information, stories, and resources that deepen understanding and spark curiosity.

She went on to earn a dual Master’s degree in Library and Information Science and Archival Studies from Louisiana State University. Her academic and professional background have equipped her with a strong foundation in archival theory, information organization, and preservation practices—skills she now applies to safeguard the artifacts and personal histories entrusted to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation.

Rachyl began volunteering with the Center in June 2025 alongside the previous Collections Manager. She was Inspired by the Center’s mission to preserve and share the experiences of those incarcerated at Heart Mountain during World War II. Rachyl is passionate about the power of history to connect generations and is deeply committed to preserving the voices and memories that shape our collective past. 🇺🇸

— Farewell! —

As we welcome Rachyl to the Heart Mountain Family, it is imperative we say goodbye to our former Collections Manager **Miranda Bickford**. Miranda was instrumental in the construction and technical outfitting of the new collections area completed in 2024. Her professionalism and experience ensured the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation has facilities that meet all industry standards. We wish her the best in her new endeavors!

Miranda helps an attendee at the 2024 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage.



Photo by Mark Davis

AUTUMN HIGHLIGHTS

Takashi Hoshizaki & Sam Mihara Headline Special Events

This fall marked three major events involving two Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation board members: Takashi Hoshizaki and Sam Mihara.

On Friday, October 3, the Heart Mountain board gathered at the Japanese American National Museum for its fall board meeting and then celebrated Takashi's 100th birthday at the Miyako Hotel.

Takashi and his son Jon were joined by the Heart Mountain board and other friends and family members. Shirley Ann Higuchi, the HMWF chair, presented Takashi with a photo book of key moments in his life and history with the Foundation.

Earlier that week, Sam gave two presentations in Washington to highlight his work in spreading the history of the Japanese American incarceration.

On September 30, he spoke to a crowd of 150 people at the Japan Information and Cultural Center, which is part of the Japanese Embassy in Washington. Sam gave his presentation about Heart Mountain that was named the 51st Jefferson Lecture by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Sam was named the Jefferson Lecturer last year, and he delivered the official lecture at JANM in February, but the change in presidential administrations led to confusion and delays at NEH that prevented him from the chance to deliver his presentation in Washington.

We thank the Japanese Embassy for making this event possible.

The following evening, Sam addressed the judicial reception of the Bar Association of the District of Columbia, a 154-year-old group of which Higuchi is this year's president. He joined Chief Judge James Boasberg of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, chief of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

Sam joined the two judges in urging for the preservation of constitutional values and a respect for the rule of law, which was absent during the Japanese American incarceration.



Sam Mihara



Takashi Hoshizaki



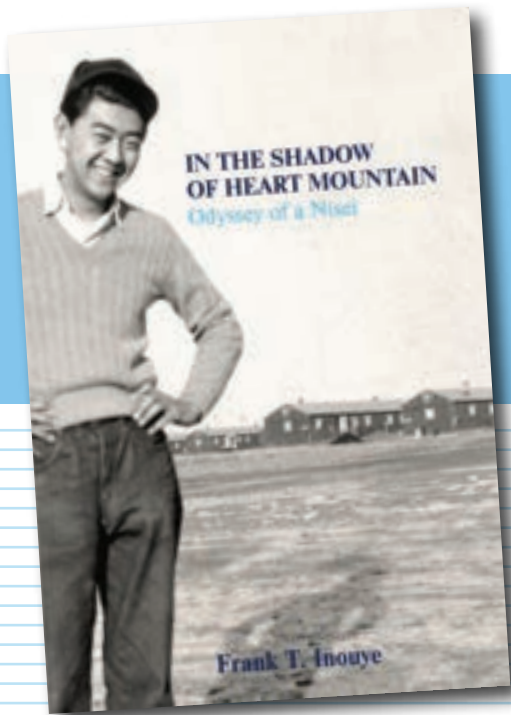
Takashi with Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation's Tracey McDaniel.



Takashi's son, Jon Hoshizaki.



Takashi Hoshizaki & Sam Mihara.



New Book Features the Memoirs of Frank Inouye

Frank T. Inouye's life spanned a childhood in the Little Tokyo and Skid Row neighborhoods of Los Angeles, studies at the University of Southern California, incarceration at Heart Mountain and leadership positions at several universities around the country.

Inouye recounts that history and more in *In the Shadow of Heart Mountain: Odyssey of a Nisei* published this summer by the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation.

In 1943, Inouye created the Heart Mountain Congress of American Citizens, the first real resistance movement at Heart Mountain. His actions inspired the creation of the Fair Play Committee, which led the organized resistance to the military draft at Heart Mountain.

In the early 1990s, Inouye started writing his memoirs, but he failed to find a publisher before he died in 1995. *In the Shadow of Heart Mountain* remained unpublished for 30 years until a partnership forged by our Smithsonian Affiliation enabled the book to become available in time for our July pilgrimage.

Heart Mountain was brought together with the Senator John Heinz History Center of Pittsburgh, a fellow Smithsonian Affiliate, after President and Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Andrew Masich, mentioned that Cookie Inouye Roberson, Frank Inouye's daughter, was looking to tell her family's story—and the Smithsonian network did the rest.

Brian Butko, Heinz' director of publications, and editor Liz Romano designed and edited

the manuscript, while Ray Locker, HMWF's director of communications and strategy, provided editing and project management. Roberson selected multiple photos from the family archives.

The result is a deep look into prewar life in the Los Angeles Japanese American community and a detailed account of Inouye's incarceration at Heart Mountain and eventual relocation to Cincinnati, where Inouye continued his studies at the University of Cincinnati and played on its tennis team.

At one point, for unexplained reasons but perhaps because of Inouye's activism at Heart Mountain, he was expelled from the university.

"In June 1944, I was abruptly and unceremoniously informed by the university that I would not be permitted to continue my schooling 'for security reasons,'" Inouye wrote. "Two other Nisei students, Seiichi Yasutake and Susumu (Bill) Shimooka, neither of whom I knew, were also expelled. Fifteen other Nisei students were allowed to remain in school. The reasons for our expulsion were never explained nor justified, and my deficiencies or failings were not detailed. Whether it had to do with my activities in Heart Mountain, or even with my family connections to the mysterious Black Dragon Society in Japan, were only matters of conjecture on my part."



The expulsion forced Inouye to return to Heart Mountain for a few months before the university changed course and allowed him to return to school.

Inouye also explored family mysteries, such as his father's mysterious deportation to Japan in 1938. Chiuji Inouye's 15-year absence caused his mother Retsu to operate the small hotels on Skid Row and Little Tokyo the family owned before the war.

"Just walking along Fifth and Main Streets was an electrifying experience for me, and one that I never tired of," Inouye wrote. "The colorful theater posters and the shouts of the barkers enticing passersby to see the sexy ladies performing live in the burlesque theaters, and the continuous smell of cooked food escaping from the restaurants contributed to a feeling of euphoria. Even the many articles of merchandise displayed in the windows of the pawnshops shone in my eyes like Christmas presents, all gleaming and polished. There was also a huge hardware store on Fifth Street close to the hotel, called Entz and Rucker, with plate glass windows, displaying camping and sports equipment galore against lifelike scenery. To my dazzled eyes, ears and nose, Skid Row was the greatest show on earth!" 🏠👉

a 30-year journey to publication

The book's publication is a testament to the dedication of Butko and Romano, who juggled working on the manuscript with their busy schedules handling other Heinz publications.

Roberson was staunchly committed to ensuring that her father's story find its place in print. She received expert guidance from historians Art Hansen and Mike Mackey. Map maker Ben Pease provided a detailed map of prewar Los Angeles that included the Inouye family properties and other landmarks.

The result is what Hansen called in a review in *Nichi Bei Times* a "majestic memoir" that "enriches the scholarship of three other books written by eminent historical authors"—Roger Daniels, Douglas Nelson, and Eric Muller. Nelson is HMWF's vice chair, while Muller was one of the creators of the permanent exhibit of the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center.

HMWF will use *In the Shadow of Heart Mountain* in its upcoming educational programming and will promote in events around the country. It is available for sale in the Heart Mountain store at our site in Wyoming and online.

Hot off the presses! The design and layout proofs for *In the Shadow of Heart Mountain*.



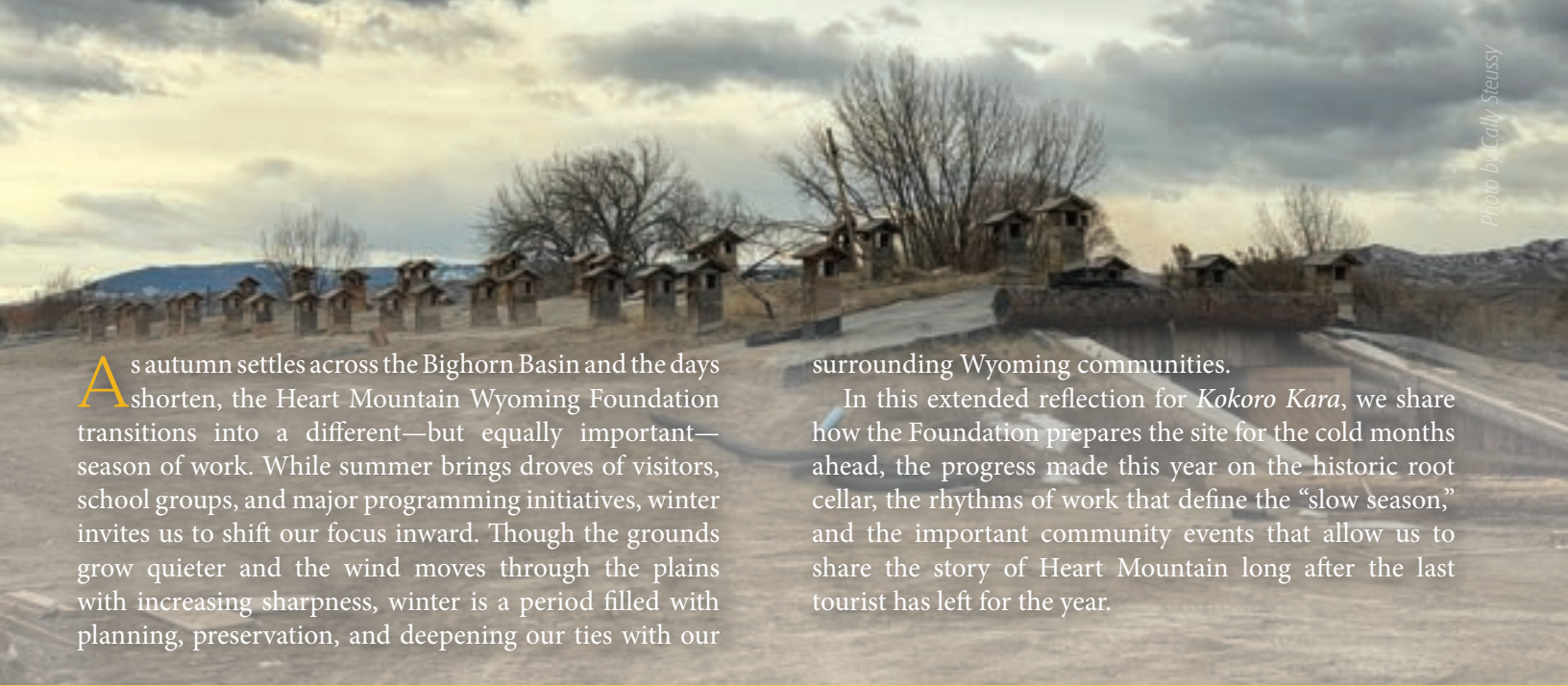


Preparing for Winter at Heart Mountain

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A Season of Reflection, Preservation,
& Community Engagement

Photo by Kate Wilson

by Logan Christie



As autumn settles across the Bighorn Basin and the days shorten, the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation transitions into a different—but equally important—season of work. While summer brings droves of visitors, school groups, and major programming initiatives, winter invites us to shift our focus inward. Though the grounds grow quieter and the wind moves through the plains with increasing sharpness, winter is a period filled with planning, preservation, and deepening our ties with our

surrounding Wyoming communities.

In this extended reflection for *Kokoro Kara*, we share how the Foundation prepares the site for the cold months ahead, the progress made this year on the historic root cellar, the rhythms of work that define the “slow season,” and the important community events that allow us to share the story of Heart Mountain long after the last tourist has left for the year.

Finalizing Work on the Root Cellar for the Season

One of the most significant ongoing projects at Heart Mountain is the stabilization and interpretation of the historic root cellar—the last surviving agricultural structure built and used by Japanese Americans incarcerated at the site during World War II. Throughout the spring, summer, and early fall of this year, our team made meaningful progress on this multi-year preservation effort.

The warm months allowed for continued stabilization of the structure’s exterior, documentation of the cellar’s shifting conditions, and assessment of long-term preservation needs. This season also involved clearing and preparing the area for future accessibility improvements so that, in time, visitors will be able to safely experience this important piece of agricultural history firsthand.

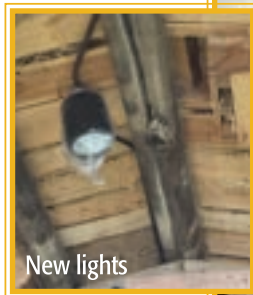
As winter approaches, we have wrapped up all work that can be safely completed before the freeze. This includes securing the site against drifting snow, protecting exposed materials, conducting late-season condition reports, and ensuring that sensitive features are shielded from extreme temperatures. With the foundation work for this year complete, our staff will turn to preparing for the renewed and final construction period that will begin when the ground thaws in spring as well as planning the installation of the exhibit inside the cellar. Each season brings us closer to honoring that story with the care and visibility it deserves.



New stairwell out the back of the root cellar



Stabilizing brackets and a glimpse at the new lights



New lights



The entrance to the root cellar

The "Quiet Season" That Isn't Quiet at All

Visitors sometimes imagine that winter is a dormant season at the Interpretive Center, a time when the site hibernates beneath snowdrifts until tourist season returns. In reality, winter is one of the most productive—and critical—times for our staff.

With fewer visitors passing through our doors, the team shifts its energy to the kinds of long-form planning and preservation work that cannot be fully pursued during the busy summer months. Winter becomes a time to:

- Develop and refine upcoming exhibitions.
- Conduct deep research to support future programming and publications.
- Plan school and teacher workshops for spring and summer.
- Review long-term preservation goals for buildings, artifacts, and digital information.
- Evaluate the visitor experience and identify strategic improvements for the year ahead.
- This period also allows our education staff to strengthen outreach efforts, build digital resources, and prepare curriculum materials that will support classrooms nationwide. The quieter months offer rare stretches of uninterrupted time to shape future interpretation with care and intentionality.



Johnny Tim Yellowtail speaks to a group of students in our barrack

Engaging with the Local Community

Though the tourist season winds down, winter brings opportunities to reconnect more deeply with our neighbors in Cody, Powell, and other communities across Park County. Without the intense demands of summer operations, we can devote more time to participating in and hosting regional events and strengthening relationships with local organizations and people.

During the winter months, Foundation staff take part in holiday events, educational forums, history gatherings, and civic discussions. These engagements allow us to share Heart Mountain's story with audiences who may not visit the site as often during the peak tourism season but who remain deeply connected to its legacy. These moments of connection underscore the fact that Heart Mountain is not only a national story of civil liberties and resilience—it is also a Wyoming story, shaped by the land and the communities that surround it.

Our participation in and hosting of local programming also helps ensure that the lessons of Heart Mountain remain woven into the cultural fabric of northern Wyoming. Whether speaking to civic groups, collaborating with regional groups, or joining community events, winter gives us time to show up, reach out, and build understanding across generations.



Miranda Bickford leads a tour of the archives and Heart Mountain collection.



A group of participants in our summer educator workshops with Heart Mountain staff



Looking Ahead to Spring and Beyond

While the winter months bring colder temperatures and calmer days, they also create space for reflection, planning, and thoughtful preparation. By the time the snow begins to melt and the first visitors of the new season arrive, the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation will have laid substantial groundwork for the year ahead.

The root cellar project will move into its final phase, new programs will take shape, upcoming exhibitions will be ready for implementation, and the site will reflect the careful stewardship that winter makes possible. This season of quiet intention ensures that we welcome each new year with clarity, purpose, and renewed dedication to preserving the stories entrusted to us.

At Heart Mountain, winter is not an ending—it is a vital chapter in an ongoing story of remembrance, resilience, and responsibility. As we prepare for the colder months, we hold deep gratitude for all who support our work and all who remain committed to carrying the history of Heart Mountain forward.

Every season at Heart Mountain teaches us something. This winter, as always, teaches us to pause, protect, and prepare—so that we may continue to honor the past while building toward a thoughtful and engaged future. 🏡



James Goff



Darrell Kunitomi



Mark Davis

2025 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage

The premiere of an animated film, a nationally honored presentation, a tribute to the memory of Senator Alan Simpson, and a reading of the names of the 148 people who died while incarcerated at Heart Mountain were among the highlights of this year's Heart Mountain Pilgrimage. The following pages are glimpses of the laughter, sadness, connections, healing, and love experienced by attendees across the three days.



Ray Locker



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Mark Davis



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Mark Davis

Hello Maggie!, an animated film adapted from a book by former childhood incarcerated Shigeru Yabu and Willie Ito, was shown for the first time during Friday's session of the Pilgrimage in the Wynona Thompson Auditorium at Cody High School. Ito, a former Disney animator, joined director Tony Tarantini for a panel

discussion after the film's showing. *Hello Maggie!* has been accepted to festivals around the world following its pilgrimage premiere. At the Spark Animation Festival in September, Willie was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award acknowledging the importance of his career in the field of animation.



James Goff



Il Kunitomi



Mark Davis



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



A video tribute to Alan Simpson, who died at age 93 in Cody on March 14, was presented during Friday morning's session. On Saturday, his widow, Ann Simpson, spoke about the importance of Heart Mountain to Al Simpson and about his lifelong relationship with Norman Mineta, the former Cabinet secretary who was incarcerated at Heart Mountain. Al and Ann's daughter, new Heart Mountain board member Sue Simpson Gallagher, spoke to her father's absence at this year's event, and the importance of this place, saying, "I know how much I've loved and appreciated my dad. And I feel your love for him, too. Heart Mountain meant a lot to my

dad. The mountain itself is a symbol of home, of place, and the camp is a symbol of injustice and racism and fear and where those things can take us. It's a lesson we can learn from, and we must work together to make sure what happened does not happen again."

Deni Mineta, Norman's widow, and David Mineta, his son, also honored Simpson and spoke about the meaning of the Mineta-Simpson Institute. David reflected on his father's passing in 2022 and the two men's connection: "the day that Al passed, it was like losing Dad all over again. And, you know, it's hard...as grateful as I am for both of them, I definitely feel their loss this year," he said.





James Goff



Mark Davis



James Goff



James Goff



Mark Davis



Mark Davis



Ray Locker



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Ray Locker



Ray Locker



Darrell Kunitomi



Haruka Takaki

Saturday's session at the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center was capped off by a presentation by Sam Mihara, a former childhood incarcernee at Heart Mountain. Mihara was honored by the National Endowment for the Humanities in February as the 51st Jefferson Lecturer. He also received Heart Mountain's Douglas W. Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award.

Duncan Ryūken Williams, a Buddhist priest and professor at the University of Southern California, led the recitation of the names of the 148 people who died while incarcerated at Heart Mountain between 1942 and 1945. Williams is the leader of the Irei National Monument for the Japanese American Incarceration, which honors the more than 126,000 Japanese Americans imprisoned at all sites during World War II. Pilgrimage attendees had the opportunity to place stamps beside the names of former prisoners in the project's Ireichō book.



Mark Davis



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Darrell Kunitomi



Mark Davis



Mark Davis



Darrell Kunitomi



James Goff



Dave Bonner, the publisher of the *Powell Tribune*, accepted the LaDonna Zall Compassionate Witness Award for his paper's honest and nuanced portrayal of the events at Heart Mountain during the war. Bonner was also the editor who opened the paper's archives to Nelson in 1968 for his research into what became the groundbreaking book, *Heart Mountain: The History of an American Concentration Camp*.

Conducted every year during the final weekend in July, the Heart Mountain Pilgrimage is an opportunity for former incarcerated, their families, friends, and interested parties to return to the former incarceration site to reflect on the history, loss, and resilience of the 14,000 Japanese Americans who spent up to 39 months at the camp. Eighteen former incarcerated returned to Heart Mountain for this year's Pilgrimage. 🏞️



We Won't Forget You

Three Unclaimed Incarcerees Honored at Crown Hill

Words & photos by Mark Davis

Japan Outreach Initiative Coordinator Haruka Takaku & Historic Site Caretaker Johnny Tim Yellowtail pray at the grave sites of three Japanese incarceration who died before the war ended and whose remains were never claimed by family members. The Heart Mountain cemetery was removed to make room for homesteaders and Crown Hill Cemetery agreed to reinter them.

Haruka Takaku and Johnny Tim Yellowtail worked alone in front of three headstones in one of the older sections at Powell, Wyoming's Crown Hill Cemetery. They brought incense and fresh garden mums, offering the silent prayers of their ancestors.

Carved in river stones found locally, the beautiful headstones are a mystery to most. The interred men are identified on the stones, but in Kanji—one of three ancient writing systems of Japan. All three were relocated to Crown Hill after the graves in the camp's Heart Mountain Cemetery were dug up and removed after the end of World War II to make room for homesteaders.

Takaku's usual friendly smile was absent due to the seriousness of the ceremony. Meanwhile, according to Apsáalooke (Crow) tribal member Yellowtail, his culture forbids him from even being in a cemetery.

"I'm not supposed to be around these graves. I'm not supposed to be around death," Yellowtail said. "It's a taboo for my culture, but I made an exception to come and take care of these three gentlemen because, if I died

alone, I would want somebody to take care of me."

He offered both prayers in Crow ancestral traditions at the familiar spot. Yellowtail, Historic Site Caretaker for the Foundation, is responsible for caring for the grave sites and he recently took instructions on how to care for Buddhist graves by Duncan Ryūken Williams, a Soto Zen Buddhist priest and professor of religion and East Asian languages and cultures at the University of Southern California. He also serves as the director of the USC Shinso Ito Center for Japanese Religions and Culture.

Takaku offered her prayers according to Buddhist traditions; Buddhism is the largest religion in Japan.

There is no way to know if the men were Buddhist at this point, but Takaku said there is a saying in Japan, "Born Shinto, married Christian, die Buddhist."

The phrase reflects the cultural tendency for Japanese people to participate in rituals from different religions during major life events, rather than adhering to a single faith, she said. Interestingly, despite the prayers being offered in silence and this being their first time together

at Crown Hill, both revealed after the ceremony they were praying that the three men “rest in peace.”

Most of those who died at camp were cremated, presumably so they could be shipped back to Japan easier. Only 25 bodies were buried in the camp’s cemetery.

Camp staff and volunteers worked after the war to contact relatives and friends of the almost 2,000 prisoners who died in the 10 confinement sites. There were 185 deaths at Heart Mountain, mostly from disease and disproportionately affecting children and seniors.

In the end, only the three bodies of the men remained unclaimed. Crown Hill, which officially opened in 1910, offered to inter the remains of Kojiro Kawakami, 62, Tomoji Inouye, 56, and Otsuhei Hatanaka, 68, and their headstones were lovingly selected, carved and paid for by Powell community members so that those who visited the graves could sit in the grass and imagine Heart Mountain protecting the men—physical reminders of all those who never lived to see the end of their incarceration.

All three of the men died during the winter of 1942 shortly after arriving at Heart Mountain. They were part of a huge wave of young men who left Japan in the late 1890s and early 1900s to seek their fortunes. Many of the Issei men made their fortunes and sent for their families to join them in the States. Others failed to make it and were relegated to minimum wage employment.

While nobody knows for sure, it is assumed the three men fit into the latter category. The *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, a newspaper published by incarcerated during the war, offered little information about the men other than it was thought they may have worked labor jobs for railroads on the West Coast and that their families could not be found.



Haruka lights incense to place on the graves.

After learning of the three unclaimed men while working at the Interpretive Center, Takaku wanted to visit the grave sites during the Japanese tradition of Obon, an annual midsummer festival in Japan to honor ancestors. It is believed the spirits of the deceased return to visit their living families for a few days in summer. Families travel to their hometowns to clean ancestral graves in *bochis* (Japanese for cemetery) and offer food both at the gravesite and at household altars. Fruit, like small melons, are often offered. Fruit is very expensive in the island nation—often six- to 10-times higher than fruit in the U.S.

The celebration includes lighting lanterns to guide the spirits and performing traditional dances like Bon Odori (which translates to feast of lanterns dance). Takaku is part of an initiative aiming to build goodwill and partnerships between Japan and the U.S. at the grassroots level. As the Japan Outreach Initiative (JOI) coordinator at Heart Mountain, she is officially at the Center to introduce her culture to the local community through workshops and activities, deepening understanding of Japan and the heritage of Japanese Americans.

Visiting the graves some 80 years after the men were moved to Crown Hill was very meaningful for Takaku.

“These three men are Japanese Issei. After 80 years, to have a Japanese person visiting these graves, feels very special,” she said. “We won’t forget them.” 🙏



Haruka documents one of three grave sites at Crown Hill Cemetery. The stones used as headstones are river rock from the Heart Mountain area.



The headstones for Otsuhei Hatanaka, Kojiro Kawakami, and Tomoji Inouye were provided by members of the Powell community. Each stone was selected to resemble the peak at Heart Mountain, a tribute to the mountain that remains important to this day to former incarcerated.





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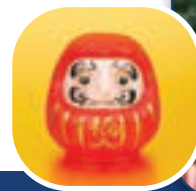
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