

May/June 2013

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JACL Chicago Chapter

JACL *en*

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Dr. Thomas T. Yatabe “Grandfather of the JACL,” Grandpa to Me

By Tom Yatabe, Chicago JACL Board Member

I lost my father to cancer this last August. While sorting through belongings and clearing out years of papers, I found myself getting to know my father and his father, Dr. Thomas T. Yatabe, in ways I never knew possible. I’ll save my father’s story for another day. Many may know that Dr. Thomas T. Yatabe was one of the JACL founders, the first National President, and was known as “The Grandfather” of the JACL. To me, he was just Grandpa. Many do not know that with the help of four others, he also formed an early precursor organization called The American Loyalty League. Born in San Francisco in 1897, from an early age Grandpa knew what it was like to be treated differently for not having a white face. In 1906 the then mayor of San Francisco, Eugene Schmitz, attempted to segregate the public schools by forcing Asian students to attend schools in Chinatown. The non-citizen Issei parents refused and eventually the situation made its way to the White House where it was settled by an angry President Teddy Roosevelt. I have no doubt that this experience helped Grandpa develop a strong community-minded duty with an emphasis on education.



DR. THOMAS T. YATABE

Fast forward a few years to 1918 when Grandpa graduated from The University of California Dental School. He was one of a handful of older Nisei and was looked to as a leader. The first informal American Loyalty League meeting was held in a YMCA and was less about civil rights and more about education, specifically how to teach the rest of America that Japanese Americans (JA) were Americans too. Grandpa was named the first president. Early goals were not only to get the JA community to vote, but actually how to register and how to vote. They had to go so far as to teach the JA community what political parties were. You cannot get much more “grassroots” than that. By 1923 membership had grown to about 300. Though not large enough to effect a change on a national level, they did their best to be heard and did learn to function as an organization.

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KANSHA Project Culmination

June 30th

Mark Your Calendar

JACL

Japanese American Citizens League

CHICAGO CHAPTER

Securing and maintaining the civil rights of Japanese Americans and all others who are victimized by injustice and bigotry.

The JACLER is published by the JACL Chicago Chapter for its members, supporters and friends. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

For More Information

For information about the JACL Chicago Chapter, call 773.728.7171, or log on to www.chicagojacl.org

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Dr. Thomas T. Yatabe continued

In 1929, members of The American Loyalty League met with Nisei from the Pacific Northwest and after long arguments, disagreements, and discussions it was decided that they would reorganize and change their name to The Japanese American Citizens League. When in 1934 it came time to select the first National President, Grandpa was chosen, all while continuing to work his successful dental practice, being a good husband, and as a father to his four year old son. Over the next eight years the major issues were campaigns to win naturalization privileges for the Issei and representations against various discriminatory laws.



DR. AND MRS. THOMAS YATABE, NOVEMBER 1949

In 1942 the issuing of Executive Order 9066 paved the way for the forced removal and subsequent illegal incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans. JACL leadership was at the center of this storm and met with the staff of General John Dewitt, best known for his support for the illegal incarceration. Nothing good came of this meeting. Some of the most difficult decisions affecting the future of Japanese Americans had to be made, some not so popular within even the Japanese American community. Grandpa, as well as most other JACL leaders, believed that American justice and fair play would prevail. Grandpa was quoted as saying "We had to think responsibly, not only of the immediate welfare of our people, but of the future welfare of generations to come." The decision was made to cooperate with the government's removal and incarceration orders. This decision brought an attempt on Grandpa's life. At an emergency JACL council meeting in Salt Lake City he was attacked with a pair of shears. While later downplayed, this assault confined him to doctor's quarters for a month.

At this point many would have had enough and walked away. In 1943, after being released from the Jerome, AR incarceration camp, Grandpa, Grandma, and my father relocated to Chicago with the hope of restarting the dental practice and creating a new life. Instead, Grandpa was asked to take charge of the Chicago JACL office. He couldn't refuse, even with a protesting family, and accepted the \$125 per month salary. That's an annual salary of \$20,184 in 2013 dollars. Grandpa went on to tackle public relations to

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Maggiano's Little Italy Restaurant (Old Orchard Shopping Center)

Sunday, May 5th, 12:00 p.m.

Tickets \$45 each

Through the kindness of supporters, the JACL Chicago Chapter is able to award numerous scholarships.

Come meet this year's winners.

Call 773.728.7171 to make reservations.

KODOMO NO HI Children's Day Festival

SATURDAY, May 18, 2013

10:30am – 4:00pm

MATTHEW BIESZCZAT VOLUNTEER
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6100a N. Central Ave., Chicago, IL 60646

Admission: FREE

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lead the way for those arriving from incarceration camps across the country. Between 1942 and 1943, Grandpa went on two extended speaking tours. Cooperating with The War Relocation Authority, The American Friends, and other civic and church agencies, he spoke before groups at factories, student bodies, churches and civic organizations. He followed the same principle of education that he had applied from the early days of the American Loyalty League to break down barriers to employment and housing for arriving former internees.

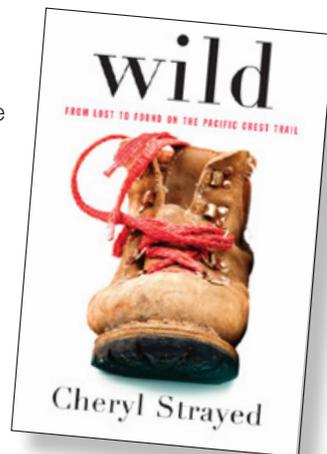
After getting the Chicago JACL chapter started, Grandpa re-started his dental practice and was successful. Over the following 30 odd years, he prospered and went on to be the elder statesman to the national board, that is, when he wasn't on the golf course.

Grandpa died in 1977 after a short battle with cancer. Recalling the memories of a young child, I can only describe his funeral as an event. There were hundreds in attendance. It wasn't a somber memorial, but more of one honoring a life well lived, the life of a hero. 🐻

Left Out of the Wild

by Christine Munteanu, JACL Ford Program Coordinator

I recently read *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, a memoir by Cheryl Strayed. *Wild* tells the story of Strayed's 1,100-mile solo journey along the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), a hiking and equestrian trail running from Mexico to Canada along the ridge of the Sierra Nevadas and Cascade Mountains. Devastated by the death of her mother and reeling from the implosion of her marriage, Strayed spends the summer of 1995 on the PCT searching for healing and redemption. Strayed's 3-month journey takes her from California's Mojave Desert to the northern border of Oregon; from a woeful beginning with an absurdly overweight backpack she can barely lift (which she affectionately calls "Monster") to being hailed as the "Queen of the PCT." Through chance encounters with kind strangers, fellow PCT hikers, and the occasional bear, Strayed ultimately finds herself again (while losing a few toenails along the way).



Wild has met with wild acclaim. The memoir was named Best Nonfiction Book of 2012 by *The Boston Globe* and *Entertainment Weekly* and chosen as the Book of the Year by NPR, spent 38 weeks on the New York *Times* bestseller list, and is an Oprah's Book Club pick. Strayed's brutally honest voice and her story of

vulnerability, loss, love, and courage clearly resonates with a lot of people.

Overall, I enjoyed *Wild*. Strayed's writing was engaging, at times laugh-out-loud funny and other times deeply moving. I was touched by her raw emotional account of losing her mother, and thrilled in seeing her growing stronger and more competent in navigating the travails of the PCT. Yet as I read, I felt a rift emerge between the author and me. I finished the book feeling a strong sense of alienation from Strayed's narrative, that whoever she was talking to, it wasn't to me.

About 3 weeks into her hike, record snow levels on the High Sierras force Strayed off the PCT. She makes an unanticipated stop in Lone Pine, California to bypass the snowed-in portion of the trail; she had originally planned to push on to Independence, 50 trail miles to the north. I felt a rush of recognition as I read those town names. Between Lone Pine and Independence, in the shadow of the High Sierras, lies the site of Manzanar concentration camp, where over 11,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II. I had been to Manzanar last summer, stayed at a hostel in Lone Pine and walked along the same main street Strayed did as she figured out her next move. So I was incredibly disappointed that Strayed made no mention of Manzanar at all. She learns from another character that Lone Pine was the set of the movie *High Sierra* with Humphrey Bogart, but of the historic site that once held so many wrongfully imprisoned Americans a few miles north, there was nothing.

It hurt, knowing that a significant landmark of my community's history—of American history—was so close, yet so completely forgotten and invisible, undiscovered and unacknowledged. It

Continued on page 4

was a painful reminder of the way Asian Americans continue to be marginalized by being pushed slightly out of frame, whether due to ignorance or because we are considered irrelevant to the conversation. Perhaps Strayed saw no reason to weigh down her bypass storyline with a tangent about Manzanar. But it does a disservice to all Americans to suggest that Asian Americans aren't part of the broader social and historical fabric of our country, or that our stories hold no meaning outside our self-contained community. Of course it is not the responsibility of an author to tell everyone's story, particularly in a memoir. Yet by leaving Manzanar out of the narrative, Strayed bypassed an opportunity to build a richer context and a more inclusive story.

The Manzanar bypass represented a broader issue I had with *Wild*, which was Strayed's utter blindness to her own white privilege. Her lack of critical consciousness regarding her race was especially disappointing given how acutely aware Strayed was of the dangers of being a woman hiking alone in the wilderness. Near the end of her journey, she reflects, "All the time that I'd been fielding questions about whether I was afraid to be a woman alone—the assumption that a woman alone would be preyed upon—I'd been the recipient of one kindness after another... I had nothing but generosity to report. The world and its people had opened their arms to me at every turn." Indeed, Strayed's journey was filled with kindness of strangers. She is picked up for rides while hitchhiking between the PCT and campgrounds; she is invited into people's homes to eat, shower, and rest; she is given free food and shelter when she runs out of money.

Strayed does not bother to analyze her reception beyond marveling at the open generosity of those she meets. While she

occasionally concedes that being a woman is advantageous for her in some ways, she totally fails to acknowledge the ways in which her whiteness mitigates the risks posed by being a woman. She remains oblivious to the impact the intersection of her gender and race had on her experience on the PCT.

Halfway through her hike, Strayed refers to her backpack, Monster, as "my almost animate companion... I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And, most surprising of all, that I could carry it." Yet part of the reason Strayed could survive with just the contents of Monster was because she also carried the "invisible knapsack" of white privilege, described by Peggy McIntosh* as "an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks." Being white granted Strayed access, and provided her a sense of certainty that the world is made for her and will accommodate her.

Perhaps it is a unique conceit of writers to think their individual, unique stories showcase universally applicable truths about human nature. But it is troubling when the very foundation of a story rests on a privilege not afforded to everyone. Had Strayed been a woman of color, her journey along the PCT would have been a very different experience, and *Wild* would have been a very different book. 🍷

**Peggy McIntosh is an American anti-racist activist and feminist, currently teaching at Wellesley College. Her article "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" is considered a seminal work on white privilege.*

Japan's New Consul General Posts Message on Website

Message from the New Consul General of Japan at Chicago, Mr. Masaharu Yoshida

My warmest greetings to all of you. I am Masaharu Yoshida. I arrived in Chicago at the end of January as the new Consul General of Japan. I'm delighted to make my new home in Chicago with its stunning architecture and natural beauty as well as its world-class culture, universities, and sports. I am most eager to bring the best of Japan to the Midwest.



This March, two years will have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. I deeply thank the United States and many

organizations and individuals here for providing generous support to the people of Tohoku. In commemoration, various Japan-related organizations, in cooperation with the Consulate, will present a special photo exhibition and seminar that spotlight the recovery. I sincerely hope that such overseas events will greatly encourage the people in the affected area. Japan is now creating a new Tohoku.

In recent years, the world has been changing rapidly, including Asia. This places new emphasis on the importance of our already strong Japan-U.S. alliance. Recently, with President Obama being reelected and Prime Minister Abe assuming office for the second time, our two countries are now moving toward a new level of cooperation. It is essential for all countries including Japan and the U.S., which share the same values based on democracy and capitalism, to maintain a very close relationship. That is why I truly welcome the opportunity to serve in Chicago and the Midwest.

Many organizations here such as the Japan America Societies, Japanese Chambers of Commerce, Japanese citizens associations, and Japanese American organizations along with many individuals do so much every day to champion our Japan-U.S. partnership. As Consul General of Japan, I am most enthusiastic about what we can achieve together for our Japan-Chicago, Japan-Midwest, and Japan-U.S. partnership.

Sincerely,
Masaharu Yoshida
Consul General of Japan at Chicago



2013
Inaugural
 DINNER COCKTAILS

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2013 6:00PM - 9:00PM



Fun was had by all at the 2013 Chicago JACL Inaugural dinner held at Marigold Restaurant. The Chicago chapter inducted its 2013 Board of Directors, and David Igasaki received the JACL Sapphire Pin for his many years of service to our organization. The night was filled with delicious food, karaoke, and new and old friends.



Photos: Robert Brown

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Midwest District Council Meeting Report

by Christine Munteanu, JACL Ford Program Coordinator

Representatives from throughout the Midwest attended the Spring 2013 JACL Midwest District Council meeting hosted by the Chicago JACL. The Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Hoosier, Houston, St. Louis, Omaha, Twin Cities, and Wisconsin chapters were all represented, leading to a lively and diverse meeting. We were even joined by some new faces, with Steve Rutherford, recent participant of the JACL/OCA leadership conference, and his daughter, Nami, of the St. Louis chapter, joining the MDC for the first time.



Photo: Christine Munteanu

MIDWEST DISTRICT COUNCIL DELEGATES MET AT THE JACL OFFICE APRIL 13TH AND 14TH.

The main order of business for this meeting was to conduct elections for the 2013-2014 MDC Board, and the following people were elected: Colleen Morimoto (Houston) as Governor; Betsy Sato (Cincinnati) as 1st Vice Governor; Steve Mitori (St. Louis) as 2nd Vice Governor; Steven Rutherford (St. Louis) as Secretary. Both the Youth Representative and Youth Chair positions are currently vacant.

In addition to the regular business of a district meeting, there were several additions to the agenda. Matthew Farrells, National JACL Secretary/Treasurer, presented on JACL's current financial situation and 2012 budget. Christine Munteanu facilitated a workshop that explored attendees' racial and ethnic identity. Christine also conducted a focus group around Asian American experiences with discrimination that will aid in the development of a new anti-Asian racism training module.

The next district meeting will be hosted by the Houston Chapter in the fall. 🍁

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Toshi Dorothy Mayeda)*

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Inaugural

Michael Takada & Susan Oliver

General

Melissa Sheridan
*(in memory of Tom Watanabe and
in honor of Daniel J. Woehrer)*
Alvin & Jenny Tamura
Glenn & Harriet Itano
Tsune Nakagawa
(in memory of Chiye Tomihiro)
Steven Hamlin
(in memory of Chiye Tomihiro)

KANSHA Project Culmination

Sunday, June 30th, 12:00 p.m.

Location to be announced

Join us for the second annual Culmination of the KANSHA Project. Project participants will share their insights, experiences and answer questions.

Check the Chapter website,
www.chicagojacl.org
for more details and updates.

SAVE-THE-DATE

2013 JAACL National Convention

Renaissance Hotel Downtown
Washington D.C.
July 24-26, 2013

This year's convention will focus on 25th anniversary of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (The Redress Bill), which provided for an apology from the Congress and the President of the United States along with some reparations for the grave injustices committed against Japanese Americans during World War II.

Planned events include a National Archives Reception with the original Regress Bill on display.

Go to: www.jacl.org/2013
to register and for more information.



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The Japanese American Citizens League is a non-profit human and civil rights organization dedicated to preserving the civil liberties of Japanese Americans and of all Americans.

We welcome your participation.

Calendar of Events

Sunday, May 5	Chicago JACL Scholarship Luncheon 12 PM, Maggiano's Little Italy Restaurant, Old Orchard Shopping Center
Saturday, May 18	Kodomo No Hi Children's Festival 10:30 AM, Matthew Bieszczat Volunteer Resource Center, 6100a N. Central Ave.
Wednesday, May 8	Chicago JACL Board Meeting 7 PM, Chicago JACL Office
Thursday, June 6	JASC "Living our Culture" Fundraiser Floating World Gallery, 1925 N. Halsted
Wednesday, June 12	Chicago JACL Board Meeting 7 PM, Chicago JACL Office
Sunday, June 30	Kansha Project Culmination Location TBA
July 24-26	2013 JACL National Convention Renaissance Hotel Downtown, Washington, D.C.