Kansha Project 2019
By Mari Yamagiwa, Programs Manager

This past June, JACL Chicago successfully completed the eighth year of the Kansha Project. The program brought 9 college-age Japanese Americans to LA’s Little Tokyo and Manzanar concentration camp site. The participants this year were Vinicius Taguchi, Aiko Dzikowski, Katie Howard, Forrest Matsuzawa Jove, Kristi Lin, Mia Sato, Veronica Murashige, Emma Shirato Almon, and Alyssa Nitta. I had the privilege of co-facilitating the program this year along with Kansha Alumni Leadership Board (ALB) members SJ Doi and Sara Pyne.

During the orientation in Chicago, participants engaged in identity and family history workshops. Tonko Doi, Pauline Nishimura, and Kenny Nishimura came to share their family stories from being in the camps during WWII. After the orientation, the participants joined Kansha Project alumni for food and community at local restaurant, Cesca’s.

The following day we left for Los Angeles. In Little Tokyo, our group visited the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) where we explored the Common Ground and At First Light exhibits. At JANM we also participated in a workshop led by Alison De La Cruz where we learned about storytelling, how storytelling is done in various cultures and communities, and how we can begin to tell our own stories. We then visited the Go For Broke Education Center. Little Tokyo community leaders Scott Oshima (Japanese

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American Cultural & Community Center) and Stephanie Nitahara (Kizuna) led us on a political tour of Little Tokyo.

Our second day began with a personal identity workshop followed by a panel of young Japanese American artists and activists from the LA community. Daryn Wakasa (writer, director), Sean Miura (writer, producer/curator), and Tani Ikeda (director, producer) each shared their work with the group. They also had an open dialogue with participants about topics such as their creative process, how their Japanese American identity is explored through their work, and how their art and their activism overlap. From the panel, we all began our journey to Manzanar National Historic Site!

At Manzanar, the National Park Service Ranger, Rose Masters, distributed historical records to participants who had family members in the camps. She then led our group on a tour of Manzanar, at a reconstructed communal bathroom as well as some of the gardens that were built by the incarcerees. Rose brought one of the participants, Katie Howard, to the site where her grandmother’s family lived while incarcerated. We also stopped at the cemetery where we brought 1,000 cranes that were folded by community members during the Kansha Project Crane Campaign, as an offering of peace, gratitude, and remembrance.

The next morning we returned to Manzanar, where we participated in a service project helping to clear brush at the site of the Manzanar Children’s Village, an orphanage. After working in the hot, dusty conditions for a few hours, the group was given time to explore the museum and...
campgrounds. After heading back to Little Tokyo, much of the group stopped by Tuesday Night Café, a long-running AAPI open mic that is produced and curated by Sean Miura, who was on the artist and activist panel the day prior.

Wednesday was our final day in Los Angeles. We began the day with an engaging presentation on Japanese American Redress from Dr. Mitch Maki, of the Go For Broke National Education Center. Then, Stephanie Nitahara led the group in a workshop where we created visual representations of our Nikkei identity before, during, and moving forward from our Kansha Project experience. We ended our time exploring Little Tokyo and omiyage or souvenir shopping before heading back home.

Back in Chicago at the Culmination on the 23rd, participants from the 2019 Kansha Project shared their personal projects and reflections from their experience. Over 60 friends, family, and community members attended the event. Participants were able to tell their own stories through a medium of their choosing. Projects included a style guide for writing about incarceration, calligraphy, self-published book with illustrations and reflections, and visual structures/presentations. Participants also engaged in a panel discussion with questions from community members. The powerful projects and thoughtful responses to the questions demonstrated the impact that this program has had on their personal sense of identity, community, and role moving forward.

One of my favorite things about the Kansha Project is the way that it brings people together. Many of the participants each year had not previously been connected to a Japanese American community, yet they came together over the course of four and a half days and created a new community of their own. As a facilitator, seeing each participant grow in their understanding and ownership of their Japanese American identity, story, and community has been such an amazing privilege. I am encouraged and energized by these fellow Nikkei and I cannot wait to see what they do moving forward.

Thank you to all of the community members who have generously supported the Kansha Project. This program has impacted so many of us and we look forward to continuing to provide this opportunity to other young leaders.

This project was funded, in part, by a grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program.
Each year, Kansha Project participants are asked to create a project of their choosing that expresses their reflections and personal connection to the Japanese American legacy. The following projects were created by participants from the 2019 Kansha Project.

**Wishes for Our Future**  
By Alyssa Nitta, 2019 Kansha Project Participant

I chose the theme “legacy” for my culmination project. On this journey, what struck me the most was not just how much Japanese American history there is beyond the concentration camps, but also the extent they were shaped by the camps. To represent this, I shaped an apple tree out of gold wire and red beads to honor the namesake of Manzanar (Spanish for apple orchard). The rocks represent the hardships past Japanese Americans (JAs) have experienced (with some of the hardships written on the rocks themselves) and how JAs had to start over after the war and the incarceration. Despite having everything taken away but $25 and a bus ticket, Japanese Americans were able to create a community again. Just as individual wires are intertwined to create the tree, communities are only possible when individuals commit to keeping that community together. Their hard work is why we have what we have today, and we must work to make sure their legacy lives on by continuing the work passed down to us. Inspired by the Japanese tradition *tanabata*, I invited community members to write their wishes for the Japanese American community and hang it on the tree to plant the seeds for our future.

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**Letter to My Grandmother**  
By Katie Howard, 2019 Kansha Project Participant

Dear Grandma,

Now that I’m older, there are many questions that I have. It’s been 13 years since you’ve been gone. I’ve heard about the Japanese American internment camps and wanted to learn more. I was excited that I could participate on the Kansha trip with JACL this year. We visited Manzanar where you were during WWII. I didn’t know what to expect because I knew very little about the incarceration camps and constant hardships you, your family, and thousands of Japanese Americans faced for years.

We stayed in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and took a four-hour bus ride to Manzanar. A big difference between your ride and mine was that we were able to laugh and talk on the ride. I imagine that your trip was very somber because you didn’t know where you were going, and laughter did not exist on the bus ride. When we arrived and stood in Manzanar, a powerful gust of wind and dust struck me along with a musty smell. I remember my mom telling me that you talked about how dusty it was because the camp was in the desert. Did you think the stench had a very unique odor? I was wondering how I would deal with that smell during our visit.

We toured the visitor’s center and walked over to the reconstructed barracks, which is part of the exhibit. I couldn’t believe the government built the barracks in under an hour. We learned that the rooms were often shared with multiple families. I’m used to my own room and could not have imagined sharing it with my family, let alone with strangers. How did the Miyaji family deal with the lack of privacy? We saw the spaces between the wood planks due to the hasty construction of the wood planks. Dust and dirt must have covered everything—hard to keep things clean!

The latrines were very shocking to see. I sat on one of the toilets which were placed in a row and just inches apart from one another. There were no stall walls between. Everything was in the open. No privacy. The showers were in a large room with a few spouts right next to each other. My mom told me that you found it difficult to shower with other people and strangers. She mentioned that you waited until everyone else was finished to take your own shower in privacy.

I got the chance to physically stand where you and your family lived in your barrack. I didn’t know how to feel when I stood there. But I felt a strong emotional connection with all of you even though I never met your immediate family. It was hard to believe that 75 years ago you were all living here and under these horrible conditions.

You lived in block six near the block six garden. I walked through the beautiful garden that the community built and was astonished that it was built with the limited amount of resources. The park ranger gave me a picture of the garden that great grandpa Miyaji he was a part of. I was in awe of this garden that you probably saw every day. I can see how hard the Isseis worked to bring some beauty to a very grim, depressing place.

You loved the mountains and Pacific Ocean in California. Even though you could see the mountains from a different
viewpoint at Manzanar, they were so far away. And although there was a beautiful view of the mountains, a barrier of barbed wire existed to keep you from the majestic mountains and freedom. It was disheartening to realize that you had to live behind a fence with guards in a watchtower facing guns at those in the camp. One of the dreadful results of Executive Order 9066 was that you couldn’t explore the beauty of California like you were accustomed to seeing back in Santa Monica. The mountains represent freedom, strength and serenity that were taken away from you and 120,000 Japanese Americans. One of the first questions our group had was why didn’t you fight back? But, realizing that you lived in a time of hysteria and that Japanese custom was to be respectful, you all were determined to be the model citizens of the United States. That probably developed strength of character and stamina in your life and to live with shikata ga nai.

I’m amazed how you took a bad situation and made the best of it. Even though your life was put on hold, you looked to the future. After hearing about everything you went through, I don’t know how you managed to live in the camp not knowing how long you would be there. I’m not sure if I could have been as strong as you were at my age. Your leadership and perseverance have carved the way as a role model for me and future generations to come. Your faith and devotion to God was all you could hold on to. I know family was very important to you and that you all stood together and kept your integrity and focus on the day that you would all get your freedom back as U.S. citizens. Thank you for paving the way and sacrificing your freedom for the future generations like me. I am forever grateful for your example.

Your loving granddaughter,
Katie 🌸

JA Women in Color
By Veronica Murashige, 2019 Kansha Project Participant

My idea to focus my project on some of the important Japanese American women throughout incarceration started with an identity exercise during our pre-departure orientation. When asked “Which of these factors makes you feel the most empowered?”, I gravitated towards gender. It took a lot of time to get over my internalized misogyny that I had as a teenager and what came out of it was a gratefulness to embrace and identify with my femininity. I decided on the idea of a coloring book because children and now adults like to use them to entertain themselves in a relaxing way. When we’re kids, we’re taught a very limited, one-sided perspective of history that rarely (if ever) encompasses the range of what people on the other side experienced. With a coloring book, you spend time with an image meditate on what you’re coloring in. I also like the idea of it being accessible in that one does not have to stress over what to draw since an image is already there. Because it is usually men who are honored and remembered, the goal of my project would be to have people spend time with the likenesses of these important women, become intrigued by them, and keep them in mind even after everything is colored in.

Veronica Murashige created a reflection piece with coloring pages that highlight influential Japanese American women and their stories.

Follow Kansha Project online on Facebook and Instagram: @KanshaProject
JACL Chicago held its annual Scholarship Luncheon at Maggiano's in Old Orchard on May 19. Eight outstanding scholars were honored for their academic accomplishments as well as their contributions to their schools and communities, commitment to advancing social justice, and efforts to promote the Japanese American legacy and cultural heritage. The luncheon, which is one of the highlights of the year at JACL Chicago, demonstrates the commitment the Chicago Chapter has to the youth and young adults who will continue JACL’s work in the future.

This year, awardees were seated with donors, JACL Chicago Scholarship Committee members, and other JACL members so that they and their families were able to learn about JACL Chicago’s programs and opportunities.

After a warm welcome from JACL Scholarship Program chair Christine Munteneau, followed by a delicious lunch and a report from JACL Chicago board president Lisa Doi, the following students were acknowledged:

**Anthony Del Valle**
University of Illinois at Chicago
Japanese Mutual Aid Society of Chicago Scholarship

**Kevin Kodama**
University of Washington
Iwaoka Memorial Scholarship

**Eric Langowski**
University of Chicago
Dr. Thomas Yatabe Memorial Scholarship

**Ava McLean**
Chapman University’s Dodge College of Film and Media Arts
Mas Nakagawa Memorial Scholarship

**Jack Shimabukuro**
Washington University in St. Louis
Miyasaki Family Scholarship (JMAS)

Yohta Shimizu
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Yoshino Family Scholarship

Jack Velez
Benedictine University
Mitzi Shio Schectman Memorial Scholarship

Anne Watanabe
University of Illinois at Chicago
Chiye Tomihiro Memorial Scholarship

JACL Chicago truly appreciates the generous donors who fund these scholarships, the individuals who sponsor the students’ luncheons, and everyone who attended to support the students. Thank you!

From May 17th to May 19th, as a part of the Japanese American National Museum’s (JANM) Contested Histories exhibit at the Midwest Buddhist Temple, there was a full weekend of programs called “Finding Home - (Re)Building Community in the Second City”. Programming included intergenerational events such as facilitated conversations and an open mic night!

**Intergenerational Conversations**

One of the big events of the recent “Contested Histories: Finding Home” exhibit was “Sharing Stories: Intergenerational Conversations.” Organized by JACL Chicago’s Next Generation Nikkei and Kansha Alumni Leadership Board members Anne Watanabe, JJ Ueunten, and Emily Harada, the event featured small groups consisting of former incarcerees (Nisei/Sansei), following generations (Sansei, Yonsei, and Gosei) and other affiliates.
I was asked by Jason Matsumoto, chairman of MBT’s 75th Anniversary Celebration, to help organize this program due to my participation in the intergenerational event that was part of the Tule Lake pilgrimage. With Anne and JJ leading the path, the three of us began planning in February to put together the workshop outline, attend various events throughout the city to find and ask former incarcerees to participate, hold phone meetings with other professionals for suggestions and ideas, and pre-group everyone before the event.

Facilitators came from different organizations—among them were Soji Kashiwagi (executive producer of the Grateful Crane Ensemble), Jason Matsumoto (MBT Board of Trustees and Full Spectrum Features), Sara Pyne and Brittany Wittes (both JACL Chicago’s Next Generation Nikkei and Kansha ALB), and Clement Hanami and Kristen Hayashi (both from JANM). The advance prep work and small-group setting created trust among participants to share personal stories that varied from across the board.

As opposed to a panel discussion, everyone who participated shared their own personal story, regardless of generation or affiliation, about their connection to the World War II incarceration and post-war resettlement. Former incarcerees recalled their earliest memories in or about camp, the aftermath they heard from their siblings, and illnesses that could not be cured due to poor conditions. This included not just the West Coast, but connecting stories from Hawaii and Canadian relocation camps.

There were also stories about families moving inland right after Executive Order 9066, which was possible by sponsorship or job confirmation, to avoid incarceration. Still, we heard, they continued to face discrimination and difficulties with obtaining a job and fitting in during the resettlement in Chicago.

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“I was grateful for what people had to share, and for people’s listening of each other,” says JJ. “I’m still processing all I heard. One thing that I hadn’t thought about much but that came up often from the people who were young children in the incarceration camps was the struggle to find housing after coming to Chicago. It’s not an issue that I think of as specifically affecting Japanese Americans in Chicago today, but it was a common struggle for our community not long ago.”

Many Sansei and Yonsei who came to the event explained that they were seeking their family history that they were unable to hear from their parents and grandparents. Across generations, shame and silence was a common theme shared by the Issei and older Nisei participants, as it was a difficult and ostracizing time. Still, one Nisei remarked, “regardless, I’m proud to be Japanese American.”

A common conclusion among the participants was their heightened awareness of the generational impact of the incarceration—with trauma experienced by incarcerees being passed down to their children.

However, maybe we are stepping in the right direction, as the younger generations are finding the voice that those who lived through EO 9066 could not find, and giving those who lived through it an opportunity to tell their story. Jeanne Toguri, who participated in one of the sessions, comments: “The realization of what impact it had on those who were interned and, though most of it was unspoken, it does transfer through the generations—the fear, hurt and anger of injustice. Therefore, we need to be proactive in voicing our concerns so that it does not happen again to anyone.”

Intergenerational Open Mic

With the help of star recruiter Tonko Doi, we found 8 groups who wanted to take the MBT stage: the Lane Mita, Mas Hoshi, Joey Rolla trio, 11 year old Cody Kai cello duet, Anne Watanabe on whale joke (ask her about it the next time you see her), professional storyteller Anne Shimojima, student of Alex Yu’s creative writing and screenplay workshop Nora Takagi, teacher at the JASC Keiko Takenaka on guitar and vocals, Kansha alum Colin Smith on guitar and vocals, and professional performer Peter Budd and Kathy Kudia. Tonko Doi also graced the stage as MC, while Ryan Toguri held down the sound system and mic movement, and Rich Taura monitored the liquid courage.

By the second act, I took a moment to look into the crowd, and realized every seat was taken by faces both familiar and unfamiliar! It was amazing to see so many people connected to the Japanese American community come out to admire and support the talent. Performances ranged from storytelling of the incarceration, to live music such as modern American, Japanese, and Bossa Nova, to ...lattes! I was touched to have several people come up to me and remark about how inspiring it was to watch the performances, and ask for a spot in the lineup! With the flexibility of Tonko and Ryan, everyone had a chance to shine (except for the taiko players, but you can see them at Ginza).

Jason Matsumoto remarked that this felt like what could be the next “Tuesday Night Cafe” (the oldest Asian American open mic event in the country). It was wonderful to see the community come together and express and admire the creative talent. I cannot say if there will be any in the near future, but be on the lookout. You may be next on stage!

Follow Next Generation Nikkei on Facebook:

https://www.facebook.com/nextgennikkei/
On Sunday, April 28, 2019, the Japanese American Service Committee hosted the seventh annual Chicago-area All Camps Reunion at their offices at 4427 N Clark St. All Camps Reunion was for anyone who was formerly incarcerated in the Japanese American Concentration Camps during World War II. All friends, family, and community members were also welcome! Attendance at this event was more than we hoped for, with over 100 attendees and 44 former internees in attendance.

The reunion was jointly sponsored and organized by the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, the Japanese Mutual Aid Society of Chicago, JACL Chicago, and the Japanese American Service Committee. Anna Takada of JASC filmed the program.

Attendees wore manila colored tags, like the ones internees wore when they went to camp, and were asked to wear a tag showing their family names and the names of the camps where their families were incarcerated.

Former incarcerees were interviewed about their experiences during and after the war. The Q&A session was open to all. Attendees were invited to ask any questions that they always wanted to know about camp life or pre-war Japanese American (JA) life. Below are some Q&A answers and family histories that former incarcerees shared at the event.

**Question: What was healthcare like in the camps?**

Grace Kido talked about the death of her mother at Santa Anita Assembly Center. Ritsue Doi bled to death giving birth to her 5th child. The “hospital” was like a first aid clinic. They were not equipped to take care of serious health issues. The loss of her mother is still raw for her and her siblings.

**Question: Did people outside of the JA community help you in time of need?**

Pauline Nishimura’s grandfather was a Buddhist priest. He was taken away by the FBI and incarcerated in Montana. The family did not know where he was. Father Lavery, their Maryknoll priest, and the nuns he worked with accompanied their parishioners to Manzanar. Father Lavery found Pauline’s grandfather in Montana and brought him to the family in Manzanar.

Roy Uyesugi Wesley’s family was helped by a woman in Portland, Oregon. They had buildings that would have been lost to them if not for the intervention and financial support of this woman. The properties were returned to the family after the war ended and the family returned to Portland.

Other people who spoke and told their stories are Merry Oya, Connie Yamashiro, and Hannah Hogan.

Following the Q&A, a video from the “Untold Stories” Japanese American Oral History Project jointly sponsored by the CJAHS and JASC was shown. California filmmaker Jon Osaki graciously allowed us to show his poignant film, *My Dog Teny*. It was about having to leave their family pet, Teny, behind when they were evacuated. I asked people in the audience if they had similar experiences. Many did have to leave their pets behind. We are grateful to Mr. Osaki for allowing us to show his film without obligation.

An exhibit of Mr Mitch Iwao’s artwork was on display as well as artifacts and memorabilia from the camps. Jerry Morishige brought a beautiful carving his father made while incarcerated. Hannah Hogan brought albums and historical papers from Amache.

The event came to a close at 5pm, but attendees didn’t want to leave, as they were truly enjoying themselves. Delicious refreshments were donated by the attendees. The All-Camps Reunion planning committee, consisting of Karen Kanemoto, Ryan Yokota, and Tonko Doi, are grateful to all the volunteers who helped at the event. Grace Kido, Piya Hattori, Mike Funamura, and Fred Yamanuha (Na Kupuna Ukulele club), as well as Tatsu Aoki, allowed us to use their audio equipment. Thank you to the people who helped set up and take down chairs and tables.
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### Calendar of Events

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<td><strong>Wednesday, July 10</strong></td>
<td>JACL Chicago Board Meeting</td>
<td>JACL Chicago Office, 5415 N Clark St, Chicago</td>
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<td><strong>July 12-13</strong></td>
<td>#NeverAgainIsNow Events</td>
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<td><strong>July 31-August 4</strong></td>
<td>JACL National Convention</td>
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<td><strong>Saturday, August 3</strong></td>
<td>Nikkei Community Picnic</td>
<td>Bunker Hill Forest Preserve, Grove #7</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, August 8</strong></td>
<td>JACL Chicago Golf Tournament</td>
<td>Glenview Park Golf Club, 800 Shermer Rd, Glenview</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 9-11</td>
<td>Ginza Holiday Festival</td>
<td>Midwest Buddhist Temple, 435 W Menomonee St, Chicago</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, August 14</strong></td>
<td>JACL Chicago Board Meeting</td>
<td>JACL Chicago Office, 5415 N Clark St, Chicago</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday, September 21</strong></td>
<td>Nikkei Nights: Talkin’ Bout My Generation</td>
<td>Midwest Buddhist Temple, 435 W Menomonee St, Chicago</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:30pm – 10:30pm</td>
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<td>Tickets available at MBT and online at: <a href="https://bit.ly/2OQK8IY">https://bit.ly/2OQK8IY</a></td>
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