



## Manzanar Trip May 5-6, 2018

### *Participant Reflections*

**ERIN SHIGEKAWA, from San Francisco, CA, cousin of Emily Cook, grand-niece of Chieko Inouye**

In an isolated valley with mountain ranges looming on both sides, Manzanar felt both completely open and completely closed in. “It’s so desolate.” I found myself repeating those words, almost involuntarily, as I walked through the incarceration camp for the first time. The wind whipping against my face and whirring up dust; the sun beating down on my shoulders; dust and gravel shifting noisily beneath my feet.

The sites were jarring. As the bus pulled in from Highway 395, seeing the reconstructed guard tower felt like a punch in the gut—the gap between knowing something exists and seeing it for yourself. Walking through the barracks, I imagined the people who lived in this space – perhaps with a partner or family members, but also with dozens of strangers. Ordered to bring only what they could carry, they lived with barren accommodations: a canvas sack filled with hay for a mattress and tar paper walls. When I had first glanced at the trip itinerary, I found it odd to see a photo of toilets. Stepping into the latrine, it hit me. Ten toilets – two rows of five, uncomfortably close to one another and without partitions. Next door, several showerheads faced the center of a single room, again without partitions and so close together. Later, I read recollections from people who were incarcerated—they often couldn’t go to the bathroom or shower without touching other people; some women tried to use cardboard boxes to cover themselves for some semblance of privacy. I cannot imagine how dehumanizing and demoralizing this must have been. Those who were actually incarcerated said that, in reality, the conditions were even worse than what the reconstructed spaces suggest. At times throughout our visit to Manzanar, I felt fury and a profound sadness well up inside of me. As I’ve continued to reflect on the experience, these feelings have been joined by a deep gratitude, awe, and admiration.

I feel admiration for the Issei, my great grandparents’ generation, who immigrated to an unknown country for opportunity; who were subject to racist immigration laws which barred them from becoming citizens or owning land; some of them spent the last years of their lives unjustly incarcerated. I feel gratitude and admiration for the Nisei who endured such a terrible period, some of whom had young children or brought babies into the world within the barbed

wire confines of an incarceration camp. Both generations were portrayed by political and thought leaders as an unwelcome invasion, sometimes less than human: a Yellow Peril.

I feel love and adoration for my Sansei family, both blood related and chosen family. In the mess hall, I came across a photo of mochitsuki – the tradition of making mochi for Japanese New Year. I asked Grace, incarcerated at Manzanar as a child, what she remembered from eating in the mess hall. “The tables were covered in mochi every new year,” she said. “I have no idea how it happened, but it happened every year.” I felt a renewed appreciation and pride for the mochi making tradition of my family and friends back in North Carolina: for the mochi in my ozoni soup that signifies a new year, the sweet adzuki bean paste filling, the welcome laughter as our hands get sticky and mochiko flour inevitably dusts every surface.

I feel a deep gratitude for the activists of every generation who lobbied to rebuild and preserve Manzanar, and who continue to tell these stories.

There are others who shepherd and protect these stories: the National Park Service staff who have dedicated their careers to preserving history, who pulled the incarceration records of my family members and relatives. Seeing the assigned family numbers of my great aunts, my grandmother and other relatives was surreal: another example of something I knew had occurred but had not connected so viscerally to my own family. I think of my great Auntie Chieko as a spunky and frank almost centenarian with a biting sense of sarcasm– not as a number.

The Japanese phrase “shikata ga nai” was a recurring theme at the camp, a phrase that was often expressed by those imprisoned. It means, “It cannot be helped,” or, “nothing can be done about it.” I did not live through the incarceration, but if I had, I might have also lived by this phrase in order to survive. I can only imagine that the anger, bitterness and the weight of loss would be crushing: the loss of freedom and agency, of livelihoods, of property, of identity and culture, of dignity and of normalcy. The loss of everything for which they had worked and sacrificed. It would have been too much to carry.

As a yonsei Japanese American, I sometimes wonder what my role is and what the role will be of any future children who will be gosei: 5<sup>th</sup> generation Japanese Americans. I feel it is our duty to keep these stories alive, not only as a way to respect and honor our families, but also as a way to amplify the voices of those targeted today. Japanese Americans are not a primary target of the most prevalent racism and prejudice today, but we have a duty to speak out on behalf of those who are.

The injustices that continue today, though unique and different from the incarceration of Japanese Americans, are fueled by some of the same basic principles: disregard for the humanity, dignity and rights of others. Disregard for black and brown lives, neglect of the poisonous water that remains in Flint, mass incarceration, inhumane deportations and immigrant detention centers, and the chilling de ja vu of Executive Order 13769 (the “Muslim travel ban”).

Our tendency as a nation is to be deeply ahistorical – to view history as neatly packaged and resolved events – preserved with black and white photographs, and carefully curated quotes – events from which we have moved on—events that do not impact our present reality. But there is so much to learn from our history and the rippling effects that exist from generation to generation. We must have an unflinching, un-sanitized, messy, complex and unpacked view of history. It is uncomfortable and painful to acknowledge that humans can be so cruel to one another. But our history is also a story of resilience and renewal.

## **ELAINE SUNOO**

In 1942, the evacuation and internment of 120,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry residing on the west coast of the United States, was the result of calculated political action based on racism, economics, and war hysteria.

A generation later, many continue to pray, hope, and work diligently (through activism and education) to make certain that history does not repeat itself. However, in the past 1-1/2 years, hope and faith that this will never happen again have been dangerously threatened.

My eyes were “wide open” upon arrival at the Manzanar for our WLAUMC weekend trip. And my eyes were further opened throughout the weekend . . . the vision of God’s presence became crystal clear, uncomplicated, overwhelming and brought me to tears (behind my sunglasses!).

God’s presence appeared in Rose Honda and her friend Hope Kelly as they both shared a heartwarming story of Rose writing a letter from Manzanar to her childhood friend back home. Over the years, they had lost touch, but Hope kept Rose’s letter in a safe place. After 75 years, Hope came across the letter and with some assistance, she was able to contact Rose and have a reunion with her! Maybe it was the historical nature of a 1942 letter from an incarcerated

childhood friend that encouraged Hope to look for Rose. . . or maybe it was simply warm memories of a dear friend that was enough to move her to search for Rose.

For 17 years, Manzanar's Ranger Rose has learned and internalized stories of the internees and she compassionately shares these stories with Manzanar's visitors of all ages. Ranger Rose gives us hope.

Rev. Gary served gracefully and graciously as our spiritual leader. His words (and actions) reminded us that “. . . through God's love and grace, the internees at Manzanar were strengthened, their spirits renewed, and their hope sustained.” God's love, indeed, was a vision to behold in Rev. Gary and all who attended our Sunday morning worship.

We worshipped in this windswept, barren, yet, beautiful site, surrounded by majestic mountains. The irony was sometimes suffocating: Barbed wire and guard towers, yet, remnants of ponds and rebuilt bridges of once beautiful, calm gardens; they were incarcerated, yet, there was a basketball court, a baseball diamond where a 1000 fans would cheer for their “home” team; and there had been classrooms for the children and social dances with a jazz band for the young adults. God's presence was palpable.

On the ride home, my eyes were heavy – a bit tired from the busy weekend and perhaps from too much heat and sun, but my heart was full with renewed hope, reassured that a loving God is present, always and everywhere.

### **MIKE AND CAROL LAU from Honolulu, HI, cousins of Bart Maeda, niece of Sumio Maeda**

On behalf of Carol and myself, we would again like to thank everyone for making this weekend's trip to Manzanar such a spiritual and enlightening experience. Even though we were “outsiders”, your warmth and welcoming us to the WLAUMC ohana was very much appreciated. We especially enjoyed speaking to so many of you, including hearing the personal stories about life in Manzanar (thanks Rose, Grace, and Eleanor!)

While we didn't get a chance to see the Eastern Sierra Museum, we appreciated the extra time on Sunday we were afforded to go back to the Manzanar Interpretive Center and to have lunch in the mess hall.

We already knew a lot about some of our relatives who were interned. Carol's cousin married Keith Tanimura, son of Charlie Tanimura. Keith had told me that his dad and his other uncles and aunts were interned at Poston, AZ. Before the war, their family had already established a small farm in Salinas, CA. When the war broke out and they were forced to relocate to the camps, their neighbors hid their tractor and other farm equipment so it wouldn't be confiscated. So when the Tanimura family returned to Salinas after being released from the relocation camps, the neighbors returned all their equipment. I'm not sure, but I thought I recall hearing from Keith that the other farmers may have pooled their resources and provided some land to the Tanimura family so that they could restart their farms. But in any case, while there was prejudice against the Japanese families, the neighbors (all Caucasians) helped out the Tanimura family. Today, Tanimura & Antle are one of the largest farming conglomerates in the Salinas.

The park rangers (Rose, Mark, and Sarah) were so informative and helpful. Through their efforts, we were able to retrieve new information on the Tanimuras, and a friend's dad, information that we didn't know about.

While we got back to Honolulu this morning (and I went straight to the office), the memories of the Manzanar trip will not be forgotten anytime soon. We hope to see you again in the future—perhaps on another Manzanar trip.

Aloha and Mahalo.

### **SONIA DIXON**

My Manzanar memories include a deep gratitude to all that continue to support and share their life stories to insure that the injustices, sacrifices and positive human spirit and resilience is not forgotten. Today I got a deeper appreciation and a better understanding of my Japanese American heritage and this is one of the many special gifts that WLA UMC provides to its community.

I learned that the interned adults made a meaningful decision to focus on the children and made it a priority to make interned camp life a positive experience. Basketball, baseball, dance parties, marbles, etc. allowed children to be children within the barbed wires. From talking to people that were interned as children, they did not seem to have any horrific memories to tell so it seems the parents did their best jobs. I believe the interned adults experienced the worst burden of personal indignities, shame, disappointment and the pain of this injustice. However even though they lost everything and had to start over with only \$25, they persevered as best they could when freedom was granted years later.

I learned that the lack of privacy was a major complaint whether it was using the latrine or group showers or a small barrack room shared with family and strangers. I learned that lamb or mutton was the meat specialty and not “Spam”

and that Manzanar was self- sufficient in providing food for its people and did not have to depend on the US Government that put them there.

From a personal perspective I learned for the first time via a chance Instagram of my trip in progress, that my grandmother's sister and her family were incarcerated at Jerome from Kauai. I had no idea that my Grandmother's sister's husband, Kenichi had lived in Japan for a little time before marriage and the Government found things in their home that forced their evacuation when no other family members in Kauai were required to go. This had a major impact on Kenichi's personal life after internment and he internalized his feelings and anger throughout his lifetime.

I learned that the 22 minute Manzanar introduction was recently released and many believed it was the best film to date. The introduction, as well as Rose Honda and Hope's personal stories made it so special and so very memorable. Manzanar with its dedicated staff and Manzanar devotees continues to expand and improve and we all look forward to continued trips to participate and share in its journey in history.

### **KENJI AND JANICE-NISHIDA MAYEDA**

Our trip to Manzanar went very well. Even though our group was large, everyone got along well and were accommodating to everyone else. When things didn't go quite the way we planned, we shifted things slightly and actually made some good changes. One example was when the museum was closed on Sunday, we discovered the lovely outdoor desert garden with its winding paths. Also we left members at the visitors' center while a smaller group went to Alabama Hills and hiked around. Also a good change was eliminating the water bottles and having everyone bring reusable bottles. We also liked the change in hotels – the Best Western is better than the Comfort Inn. The rooms are larger and the breakfast had lots of hot items like the waffles and eggs and sausage. The only problem was parking the bus, but with the carwash closed, we were able to get on and off the bus easily.

Kenji learned for the first time that some of the orphans in Manzanar came from non-Japanese homes and so had to leave their families behind to be placed in the relocation camp. I was grateful to have my father's family records printed out so that I could see when the Tsurutani's came to Manzanar and when they left and where they were going. They couldn't find any record of my maternal grandmother being at Manzanar, and this was puzzling. Mark was able to check the federal records of all relocation camps and found her at Amache in Colorado. This made sense because my mother had always said that she regretted not getting my grandmother out of camp since my mother was able to move to Minnesota where my father was in military training. It is so great to see areas of Manzanar being reconstructed like the women's bathroom and the paving of the main road. I heard someone saying on the bus home how it is depressing to imagine how the Japanese lived during the relocation times. I find it empowering to know that I come from a lineage that survived some dire conditions and who made the best of a bad situation. They found the strength to be creative and make beauty out of a desolate place as shown in the many gardens all around. All in all we had a fantastic trip!

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### **MIKE ELLIS**

State of Grace. With beautiful weather, we encountered a wonderful determination of the spirit to rise above hatred and prejudice and show true human dignity in the ability to care and improve any conditions that may arise. A truly terrible and heart wrenching period of time, but seeing people that were actually there, some in tears at loved ones lost, still brave and kind and honest, makes one believe in the human spirit again.

### **BETSY HITESHEW, friend of Rose Honda**

This was my second trip to Manzanar, the first being 10 years ago. Both were unforgettable in different ways.

On the first trip I was just taking it all in, and astonished at the strength of all those who endured and created a rich community life despite the harsh weather, beautiful yet desolate landscape, and primitive living conditions.

This time I was still awed by all the above, but my primary reactions were those of anger at the injustice perpetrated against my fellow citizens, a sense of shame that these actions were taken in my name, and a realization that I need to be a witness to these shameful acts so that they never happen again.

Thank you for always welcoming me into your caring community.

### **JOHN HELEEN, friend of Rose Honda**

I realized how important it is to keep the memory of Manzanar alive, especially now with all that's going on in our country. I was thinking that it seemed to me their sense of "community" helped them make the best of a bad situation. I felt that sense of community from the warm and friendly folks on the bus.

It also made me realize how I need to become more involved with community. I was thinking of attending one of your Sunday services. It must never happen again.

### **ROSE HONDA**

The journey to Manzanar was very special for me. My childhood friend Hope Sterling Kelly kept a letter I had written to her dated October 1942 from Camp. In the 75 years since, she had been trying to contact me. We finally met in August 2017. Hope, her friend Yolanda and I were together (May 5th & 6th) on the trip to Manzanar. I was thrilled and excited that this was possible to be with a long lost friend after 75 years.

Secondly, the highlight was the wonderful group from 2 year old Joceyln to 97 year old Massie Yotsukura and all ages in between were energizing and inspiring.

### **MIDORI OVERZYL**

Thank you so much for having me in the bus trip during this past weekend. I had such a great time in learning history and meeting great people. I totally appreciated the hospitality from the members of the church. I was also very impressed how organized everything was throughout the trip.

Thank you again for everything to you and the bus trip committee!!

“今回は初めてバスTripに参加させていただきありがとうございます。Bishopにはもう何度も行っているのに、Manzanarがその途中にあることさえずっと知らず、もちろん行ったこともなかったので、とてもこの機会が有り難かったと思っております。百聞は一見に如かずといいますが、実際の大きさの建物に入り、またManzanarで生活をされていた方々からお話をきかせてもらったり、とても貴重な体験をさせていただきました。Churchの素晴らしい皆さんともお会いできてとても嬉しかったです。またバスTripがとてもOrganizeされており、Steveそして教会の企画Committeeの方々にも感謝しております。本当にありがとうございました。”

### **ADAM KIM, 14 years old**

I think my 3 most memorable part is having all the people who were interned there during the war, like Rose Honda and Keiko Kano, for example--except not specific to them because there were many stories about the camp and place--how it was during the war. That was a very memorable part. Another memorable part was the lunch and the Alabama Hills where we rock climbed and hiked over rocks and such, and for the second or third time [in my life], I felt wind that strong. And the lunch because of the great food and how we talked to Hope about how she felt about visiting the camp and how nice the park service was to let us eat in the cafeteria that they built as a replica, and let us use for our lunch.

### **BENNETT KIM, 14 years old**

The trip to Manzanar with the church was a great experience. Talking to Rose about what it was like for her at that time because we can't have the same experience from just visiting now. Another fun part was going inside the barracks and eating in the mess hall. This gave a better sense to me what it looked like originally. The stories told on the trip were great too. Probably my favorite part was the garden in Manzanar. It showed me just what the people kept in there could accomplish. Even in their state of mind and harsh conditions.

### **TOSHIO AND KEIKO TAKAHASHI**

Thank you for your leadership to Manzanar trip. This is our fourth time visitation to Manzanar. Toshio's great-great? uncle and wife were there. We found their names.

The scenery from there was very beautiful but we feel that it was a tough life. These pictures are taken at Manzanar National Historic Site. If you take a look these images, no need to explain how their everyday life was going on.

## **SCOTT NAKAATARI**

Throughout the trip to Manzanar I felt a strong sense of community in all aspects. I felt it when the bus stopped by the Japanese Institute of Sawtelle and pulled down the window shades in the bus. I felt it when we ate lunch at the mess hall at the Manzanar internment camp. Viewing the pictures and photos at the Manzanar museum of interned Japanese American families and friends, I can only imagine the importance of community in helping them survive in those difficult times.

## **MAKIKO TOHMATSU**

As a Japanese who lives in this country, especially in this community, I appreciate all of you having me on this memorable trip and sharing your experiences. There were so many thoughts during this trip and all thoughts ended up with simply "Thank You".

この国、そしてこのコミュニティに住む日本人として、皆さんと一緒に今回の旅に参加できたことはとても貴重な経験となりました。沢山考えさせられる旅でしたが、全ての思いは感謝のひと言に尽きました。本当にありがとうございました。

## **REI KURATA**

Jaylah and I had a great time together with the church group.

You are so much fun and perfect for us for the perfect trip!

Although I know I could never understand the pain they had, I got to that the sense of solidarity they had made through the hardship, which I always feel from our church community too. It comforted me a lot and gave me a great hope that we can get over many things if we're together.

Jaylah's 3 picks of the trip were:

1. staying at a nice hotel
2. had fun with Eliza
3. Gary - I asked why, and she said "he hugged me." Jaylah is a very spiritual child. I am pretty sure she feels a great love from Gary and everybody in the group. Jaylah loves the church community and she brings a lot of joy to us. I am very happy to see it.