TOM IKEDA

Things They Left Behind

By Bob Young

SOS
Office of the Secretary of State
Legacy Washington

Tom Ikeda

Things They Left Behind

The Day of Remembrance for Japanese Americans was born in Seattle, conceived in 1978 by playwright Frank Chin and a small troupe of activists. The idea behind the event was to think about, talk about, and even dwell on the injustice that so many wanted to forget, or bury, or not lay on their children. President Franklin Roosevelt, a famous liberal, had imprisoned 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. For no reason other than their ancestry.

Forty-two years later, on a blustery Sunday in February, several hundred Japanese Americans gathered outside the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement center in Tacoma, where more than a thousand immigrants were being held for deportation processing. Protesters spanning several generations braved cold rain and biting wind to loft signs that said, "Never Again Is Now."

After rowdy chants aimed at the federal facility, a slight man dressed in black stepped onto a makeshift stage. Tom Ikeda was once a shy engineer who worked on artificial kidneys and cutting edge computer science. Now the soft-spoken Ikeda held a microphone in his role as executive director of Densho, a Seattle-based organization dedicated to preserving Japanese American history.

Densho has long focused on sharing the true details of what textbooks called Japanese American "internment." Ikeda was now in Tacoma for a different purpose. He wanted to lend his support to those inside the detention center—support his parents and grandparents didn't have when they were rounded up and sent far from their homes, instructed to bring only what they could carry. No one had marched or demonstrated for them. Only a few attorneys rushed to file lawsuits for them. They felt abandoned.

"Now," Ikeda told the crowd, "as a community we're reaching out to be allies we didn't have back in 1942." He said he could see the hills of Tacoma behind the crowd. "Seventy-eight years ago, imagine hundreds of Japanese Americans walking down those hills to go to the train station, to disappear from their community. That happened here."

Since he helped create Densho 25 years ago, Ikeda has been on his own long walk. While you still might catch him reminiscing about "hollow fiber membrane technology" in hemodialyzers, his life's path was altered by the history he's unearthed—much of it through personally interviewing more than 250 World War II camp survivors.

At the age of 63, he took part in his first act of civil disobedience. It was June 2019. He went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma to protest plans to confine 1,400 immigrant children at the U.S. Army post.

The place stirred a chilling memory. A decade earlier, Ikeda interviewed a man whose father, Kanesaburo Oshima, was picked up by the FBI at the start of World War II only because he was a leader in his Japanese American community. The elder Oshima became so distraught about being behind barbed wire at Fort Sill,* that one day he scaled a fence, saying "I need to go home." A soldier shot him in the head. Oshima, 58, died on the spot.

"If Japanese Americans had courageous allies in 1942, incarceration wouldn't have happened," says Ikeda, above, protesting the confinement of immigrant children at a U.S. Army post. *Tom Ikeda*

Ikeda hopped a Friday red-eye flight to join two dozen other Japanese Americans in Oklahoma. Those who had been scapegoated as a "yellow peril" saw danger signs in the government's caging of brown children. "Yes, 77 years have passed," said Paul Tomita, a Seattleite who was sent to an Idaho prison camp when he was four years old. "The people look a little different than us. But the fact remains, it's the same shit as before."

At one point, cameras and recorders caught a military police officer yelling at the Fort Sill protesters to leave. "What don't you understand?" the burly officer barked. "It's English: Get out."

Ikeda, the onetime millionaire technologist, never imagined he would be involved in anything like this when he left Microsoft in the early 1990s.

"The stories change you," he says.

* Fort Sill was a U.S. Department of Justice facility where the FBI detained Japanese Americans suspected of disloyalty after Pearl Harbor. Hearings were held to determine if prisoners could be released to the 10 internment camps run by a different federal agency, the War Relocation Authority.

WRA-137

UNITED STATES WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
CITIZEN'S INDEFINITE LEAVE

This is to certify that Paul Hirayoshi Tomita a United States citizen residing within Minidoka Relocation Area is allowed to leave such area on July 4 1943 and, subject to the terms of the regulations of the War Relocation Authority relating to the issuance of leave for departure from a relocation area and subject to any special conditions or restrictions set forth on the reverse side hereof, to enjoy leave of indefinite duration. The holder's first destination is Denver, Colorado

12403

(Project Director)

RETURN TO INDUCTION, RECORDS

Like thousands of other Japanese American children, Paul Tomita of Seattle was imprisoned during World War II.

THOMAS KEVIN IKEDA (pronounced ee-ked-eh) was born in Seattle, a full decade after the prison camps closed and World War II ended. His father, Victor Junichi Ikeda, was an administrator for the U.S. Department of Labor. His mother, Mary Kinoshita Ikeda, was a stay-at-home mom. He was the middle child sandwiched between his four siblings, all of whom graduated from college—much to the joy of their mother, who wasn't able to go herself.

He spent his early childhood in Seattle's Beacon Hill neighborhood, where roughly half of his elementary school classmates were Asian American. He rarely felt the sting of prejudice. There were some taunts about his eyes and a few dolts called him "Ching-Chong Chinaman." But he and his pals could field eight-on-eight street football games with just Japanese American kids. "It felt the norm. I didn't know any different," he recalls, sitting in Densho's video studio for a role-reversing oral history of his life.

His two main passions were sports and reading. One of his favorite hangouts was a drug store a few blocks from Beacon Hill Elementary, where he could stand and thumb through new comic books without buying them all. He devoured the science-steeped Danny Dunn mysteries, and biographies at such a clip one summer a librarian asked if he was really reading the books in the few days he had them.

Old Ossie Corner:

Tom Ikeda Scores 23 Points

By PETE LAMB

Tom Ikeda was ready and waiting for Old Ossie at Rainier Playfield yesterday.

Tom had been working on his place-kicking and Steve, who placed second in the Asa Mercer Junior High School Ossie contest. The boys have an empty lot near their home and take advantage of the open space. Tom, who attends Hawthorne Elementary School, totaled 23 points to capture the crown.

The champ, 11, has a coin collection including separate books of dimes, nickels, pennies, and silver dollars.

"The penny book and the dime book are almost filled, and I have 14 silver dollars," said the sixth-grader.

Finishing second was Boyd White, with 20 counters. His brother, Alfred, was third, with eight.

Tom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Victor J. Ikeda, 3820 45th Ave. S.

Terry Anderson, Jon Hayashi, Raymond Norgord, Kary Levine, Steve Byers, Kevin Kuwakara, David Easley, Curtis Row.

'PHYSICIST' SUCCEEDS — Craig Russell, who hopes to become a nuclear physicist, tackled the problem of a wet football successfully. He scored 12 points to win the in[illegible]ugural Old Ossie event a[illegible] [illegible]way Elementary School [illegible] [illegible]nton.

Craig, 11, says his cousin, David Pehl, a physicist in Berkeley, Calif., has given him several books on the subject. Craig's sixth-grade class is studying the physics principles involved in airplane flight, balloons, and rockets.

Craig had his first airborne experience this past summer when he and his mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, of 12620 84th Ave. S., flew in a Boeing 727 to California.

"I knew a little of how the plane worked, but I was still scared," confessed Craig.

The runnerup at Skyway was Danny Feighner, with seven tallies. Third went to Don Rimbey, with six.

Ken Bronson, Scott Breen, Tim Croswhite, Jack Fleming, Corey Gibson, Burt Glazier, Robert Hansen, Peter Melchoir, Paul Millett, Chris Murakami, Jeff Wintermyer, Jaime Bruton, Ron Dolley, Gene Jackson, Mike Kivalaho, Rickie Kusrow, John Lee, Mike May, Tim Stoker, Mark Murakami, Terry Truscan, Mike Skagen, Phil Arbuckle, Steve Arnold, Allen Berger, Roland Chaffin, Kris Fosnaugh, Dans Gregory, James Hesketh, Jeff Huseby, Brian Hulse, Eric Murakami, Bill Needham, Doug Orn, Allen Peabody, Craig Russell, Steve Spicknall, Robert Watson, Phillip Wintermyer.

TOM IKEDA

Sports and reading were Ikeda's chief boyhood passions.
The Seattle Times

At 11, he earned a headline, along with a handsome photo, in *The Seattle Times* sports section for winning a punt-pass-and-kick competition. By then, his family had moved from Beacon Hill down to the Rainier Valley and the Genesee Park neighborhood, where fewer Asian Americans lived. Almost all of his

youth football teammates were African American. That's when he started to learn more about race in America.

His team, the Rainiers, was playing a game in North Seattle against white kids. Reigning city champions, the Rainiers rolled to a big lead by half time. Out came the starters, including Ikeda, and in went the second string. It wasn't long before one of the subs came to the sidelines fighting back tears. He told coach James Greenfield that opponents were calling him the n-word.

Greenfield, who was Jewish, yelled at his first stringers to huddle around him. Ikeda vividly recalls his coach's message: "He said, 'They're calling us the n-word and that's not acceptable. Get back out there and show them who we are.' " The first team had already proven it was better than its opponents. Now they'd show no mercy. "We just blew right through them," Ikeda says, "because, we were, at that point, angry too."

HIS PARENTS DIDN'T TALK much about what happened to them, and other people of Japanese descent, or *Nikkei*, before and during the war. That tendency among the *Issei*, or first generation of immigrants, and *Nisei*, their children born in the U.S., was not uncommon. Treated like potential traitors to America, although they hadn't been unpatriotic or broken any laws, many Japanese Americans felt shame and guilt. They figured they must have done something wrong. Or, there must be something wrong with them. "In that kind of environment, you're not going to talk about it. You're going to keep it stuffed," Ikeda says.

As he later learned, his grandfathers both came to the Seattle area as laborers around 1907. (His dad's father came to avoid being drafted into Japan's Imperial Army.) And both grandfathers soon returned briefly to Japan to marry brides they brought back to the U.S.

Tom's father, Victor, (standing) with his sisters and parents. *Densho*

If his grandfathers had tried to come a few years later they would've been denied entry to the U.S., Ikeda says, because of an early kind of

San Francisco officials justified school segregation in 1906 to save white children from "association with pupils of the Mongolian race." *Harper's Weekly*

immigration ban. The governments of Japan and the U.S. had struck a deal, known as the "Gentlemen's Agreement," formalized in February 1908. It came about because a wave of anti-Asian agitation had led the San Francisco Board of Education to segregate Asian children into a separate elementary school in October 1906. The school board justified segregation as a way to "save white children from being affected by association with pupils of the Mongolian race."

This faraway school policy worried President Theodore Roosevelt. Japan was an emerging world power he didn't want to antagonize. This was a half-century before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were illegal. Roosevelt couldn't wield federal law as a big stick. As a compromise, he proposed stopping "all immigration of Japanese laboring men" in exchange for reinstating Japanese students in California public schools. The deal did allow Japan to issue passports to laborers who had temporarily come back to their homeland to find brides. It also permitted passports to the "parents, wives and children of laborers already resident" in the U.S.

Ikeda's paternal grandfather, Taijiro "Tom" Ikeda, held different jobs, including working at a salmon cannery on San Juan Island. At the start of World War II, he managed a hotel in Seattle's International District. Ikeda's maternal grandfather Suyekichi "Fred" Kinoshita became a dapper bell captain at the exclusive Rainier Club, where Seattle's white power brokers puffed on cigars, plotting the city's future.

Ikeda's dad, Victor, was 14 years old, and a high school freshman, when Imperial Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Victor and his family were at the Atlas Theater, a Sunday afternoon ritual, when the movie stopped abruptly. The lights went up and a military officer announced that all servicemen needed to report to duty. The show

was over. The war was on. Victor, like his two sisters and parents, didn't know what it meant for Japanese Americans. "But we figured whatever happens wasn't going to be very good."

He was one of roughly 300 Japanese American students who would soon disappear from Seattle's Broadway High. His future wife, Mary, was also 14 when her family was uprooted. Both would end up behind the barbed wire and guard towers of the Minidoka camp in southern Idaho. They now lived in American purgatory, along with some 13,000 other Nikkei expelled from Western Washington.

Tom's mother, Mary, (second from right) with her sisters.
Densho

RACIAL PREJUDICE AGAINST people of Asian ancestry in the U.S. festered for almost a century before World War II.

A rash of intolerance took hold after Chinese men came to America to work in the wake of the 1849 Gold Rush. As the gold ran out, the Chinese—who tended to toil in service industries such as laundering—were seen as unwelcome competitors. Mounting resentment against the hard-working foreigners fueled racist stereotypes. Chinese were "innately treacherous." Their "leprous evil" was a threat to the "imperial Saxon race," said the *San Francisco Post*. Such animus led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, prohibiting immigration from China.*

In time, industries such as logging and canning recruited Japanese to perform some of the grueling work that had been done by Chinese. Soon, some called the Japanese a "yellow peril" and "a menace to American women."

After World War I, when veterans struggled to find work, a Seattle area businessman, Miller Freeman, gave a speech to grocery, laundry and retail store owners titled, "This is a White Man's Country." *The Seattle Star* newspaper published a huge "DEPORT JAPANESE" headline across its entire front page, with a story

* Immigration from Japan was completely barred in 1924. The 14th Amendment, ratified after the Civil War, extended citizenship to any child born in the U.S. and to people of African descent. But it left in place an earlier law that otherwise limited citizenship to "free white persons." That law wasn't fully overturned until 1952.

just below laying out Freeman's complaint that Japanese people had gained too much economic power and would eventually—by rapidly multiplying—force out the whites.

The Seattle Star

LATE EDITION

DEPORT JAPANESE

SAYS BURLESON IS "TRUST" LACKEY

DEMANDED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS' COMMISSION

NEW RATES OF NO EFFECT HERE; SAYS OFFICIAL

Below *The Seattle Star*'s hostile headline was a portrait of Miller Freeman, a businessman, with the caption: "Sees menace in Japanese here." Freeman later founded the Anti-Japanese League of Washington. *The Seattle Star*

Freeman, the founder of the Anti-Japanese League of Washington, insisted he wasn't prejudiced. (He would later be considered a founding father of the city of Bellevue.) But he consistently called for keeping Japanese people "on their own side of the fence" and gradually deporting them. "The Japanese cannot be assimilated," he claimed. "Oil and water do not mix."*

Freeman pushed for an Alien Land Bill in 1921 that would bar Japanese immigrants from owning or leasing land in Washington state. Backed by labor and veterans' groups, it sailed through both chambers of the Legislature by a combined vote of 107 to 21. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the law the following year. While the first waves of Japanese immigrants could not become citizens, or own property, their children born in America, like Ikeda's parents, were entitled to citizenship rights including property ownership.

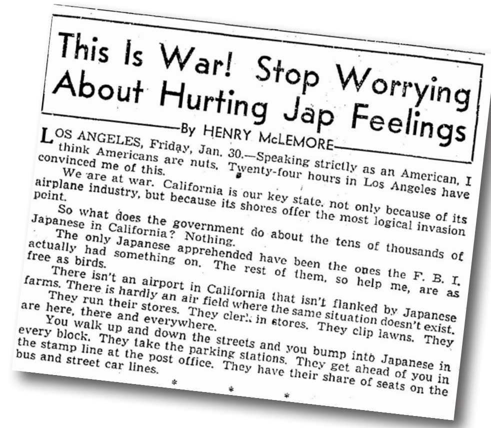
And many Issei farmers got around the new land rules by putting their property in their children's hands, notes David Neiwert's book about Nikkei farmers, *Strawberry Days: How Internment Destroyed a Japanese American Community.*

Citizens or not, Japanese Americans still found Seattle and its suburbs sharply segregated by Jim Crow-like restrictions that kept "non-whites out of most jobs and neighborhoods, even out of stores, restaurants, hotels and hospitals." It "was such an eye-opener," Ikeda says, to learn "there was so much racism on the West Coast, but

* As of 2015, 1.4 million people of Japanese descent lived in America, making them the sixth largest of Asian-origin groups in the United States. They were better-educated and had higher incomes than Americans as a whole. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/

directed more to Asians and Asian Americans than to African Americans."

After December 7, 1941—a date Roosevelt said would "live in infamy"—smoldering conspiracies were stoked to full-fledged panic. Immigrants were servants of Japan's emperor, awaiting orders to commit sabotage, some said. The front page of *The Seattle Times* blared that Japanese American farmers in the Port Angeles area set their fields ablaze in the shape of an arrow, so that the flames pointed incoming Imperial bombers to Seattle shipyards. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* followed suit the next morning. But investigators found the fires had been set by white men clearing the land. Another rumor claimed a barking dog was sending signals in Morse code to a spy ship just off the coast.



This Is War! Stop Worrying About Hurting Jap Feelings

By HENRY McLEMORE

LOS ANGELES, Friday, Jan. 30.—Speaking strictly as an American, I think Americans are nuts. Twenty-four hours in Los Angeles have convinced me of this.

We are at war. California is our key state, not only because of its airplane industry, but because its shores offer the most logical invasion point.

So what does the government do about the tens of thousands of Japanese in California? Nothing.

The only Japanese apprehended have been the ones the F. B. I. actually had something on. The rest of them, so help me, are as free as birds.

There isn't an airport in California that isn't flanked by Japanese farms. There is hardly an air field where the same situation doesn't exist.

They run their stores. They clerk in stores. They clip lawns. They are here, there and everywhere.

You walk up and down the streets and you bump into Japanese in every block. They take the parking stations. They get ahead of you in the stamp line at the post office. They have their share of seats on the bus and street car lines.

* * *

The Seattle Times published a columnist in 1942, who wrote: "If making one million innocent Japanese uncomfortable would prevent one scheming Japanese from costing the life of one American boy, then let the million innocents suffer." *The Seattle Times*

Politicians seemed particularly susceptible to calls for locking up the "dirty Japs." Newspapers fed the frenzy. *The Seattle Times* ran columns by Henry McLemore, who called for "immediate removal of every Japanese on the West Coast." McLemore added, "Personally, I hate the Japanese. And that goes for all of them."

Karl Bendetsen, an Aberdeen attorney and U.S. Army colonel, claimed he "conceived, drafted and processed Executive Order 9066" authorizing exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. *Densho*

In this climate, an Army officer from Aberdeen, Karl Bendetsen—who hid his own Jewish heritage to get into a Stanford University fraternity—came up with the strategy for removing Japanese Americans from swaths of the West Coast. Bendetsen, who was promoted from major to full colonel in less than a year, argued their expulsion was a "military necessity." While no Japanese Americans had committed sabotage in the months before or after Pearl Harbor, Bendetsen helped write a report that said in puzzling logic, "The very fact that no

Because of Bainbridge Island's proximity to U.S. Navy facilities, its Japanese American residents were the first to be evicted from the West Coast, on March 30, 1942. Residents had six days notice to sell their properties, store belongings and find homes for pets. *Associated Press*

sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken."

U.S. intelligence suggested otherwise. A Navy investigator reported that Nikkei on the West Coast were "increasingly Americanized" and were seen by Japan as untrustworthy traitors. Top military officers scoffed at the idea that Japan would invade the West Coast. J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director, was known for overstating the threat from alleged subversives, particularly communists. But in every case the FBI investigated involving Japanese Americans, Hoover found "nothing other than hysteria."

Bendetsen's rationale was bogus. Court cases some 40 years after the war revealed that "government lawyers withheld crucial evidence that disputed the claim of 'military necessity.' " Nevertheless, members of Washington's congressional delegation, including Democratic Senator Mon Wallgren and Representatives Henry "Scoop" Jackson and Warren Magnuson, supported the eviction of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the removals, on February 19, 1942, his own day of infamy.

The first to be evicted under Roosevelt's order were residents of Bainbridge Island; in all, 276 were exiled. By year's end, 110,000 Japanese Americans were expelled from their homes. Cars, pets, furniture, work equipment and more were left behind. What could be sold fetched a fraction of its real value from buyers who knew the Nikkei were in no position to haggle. Businesses were crushed, educations interrupted, faith shattered.

Although their homelands were also at war with the U.S., no mass removal or detention in any part of the country was ordered against American citizens of German or Italian descent.

A commission created by Congress in the 1980s found that three main causes were behind the imprisoning of Japanese Americans: wartime hysteria, racial prejudice, and failure of political leadership.

PEACE-LOVING QUAKERS are the mascots at Seattle's Franklin High, built in 1912, with classic Ionic columns and a hilltop majesty that make it an official city landmark. Just off Martin Luther King Jr. Way, the school has bred its share of idealists and crusaders.* Larry Gossett, later a civil rights leader, led a famous 1968 student sit-in at Franklin after the principal sent two girls home for wearing Afro hairstyles. Gary Locke, who would become Washington's 21st governor and the first Chinese American governor in the U.S., graduated from Franklin that tumultuous year.

Franklin High alumni include Jimmie Sakamoto (second from right, with family members at the Minidoka camp). Sakamoto founded the Japanese American Citizens League, and urged "cheerfully" cooperating with FDR's 1942 eviction order. *National Archives*

Ikeda enrolled in the bell-bottomed, black-light postered, "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" fall of 1970. But fighting The Man wasn't his sport.

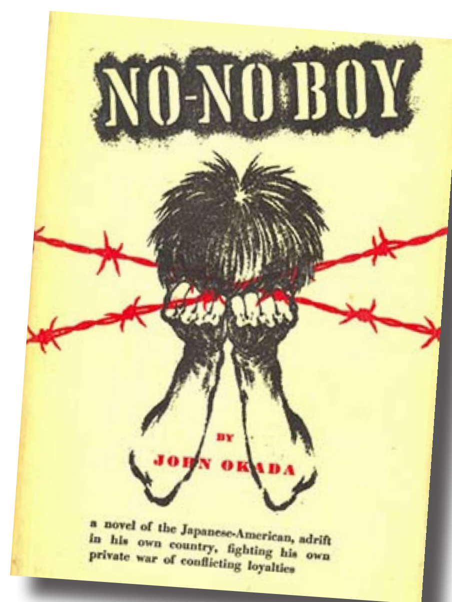
He was a captain of both the swim and track teams at Franklin. And, although just 135 pounds, he was a football running back until he dislocated a shoulder. Despite his prowess, sports were his second priority. He was voted "smartest" in his senior class, which included two future MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" winners: author and cartoonist Lynda Barry and choreographer Mark Morris (as well as four valedictorians who earned straight As).

No matter how bright you were at Franklin, though, one thing you weren't taught about was Japanese American internment. "It was not part of the curriculum," Ikeda says.

His honors-level language arts teacher thought he needed to know more. Elaine Kimiko Wetterauer was born in a World War II prison camp. One day Wetterauer approached Ikeda and gave him *No-No Boy* by John Okada, an obscure writer with an emerging cult of readers. Set in 1946 Seattle, the novel centers on a young Japanese American who resisted joining the U.S. Army during the war. His kind were dubbed "no-no boys" because they refused to sign two unwavering oaths

* Alumni include Noah Purcell, the Washington solicitor general who filed a lawsuit that stopped President Trump's first so-called Muslim travel ban, and Victor Steinbrueck, the preservationist architect who saved Seattle's Pike Place Market from a wrecking ball.

of loyalty to the U.S.—including a pledge to serve in the military. Okada takes an unfiltered look at the long-standing rift in the Nikkei community between those who fought for the U.S. and those who refused. Called "the very first Japanese American novel," *No-No Boy* bristles with profanity, booze, adultery, insanity and to-the-bone war injuries.



The first edition cover of *No-No Boy*, published in 1956, and later called the "first Japanese American novel." *Densho*

Being a good student, Ikeda sponged up the novel's 221 pages. Awakened to some of the local history, he asked his parents about their wartime experiences. As their answers became less and less forthcoming, he had a sense why they didn't want to encourage further questions.

Even though Ikeda was somewhat better informed, he was still a high-achieving conformist. (Thanks to Wetterauer, who gave him a "B" in a class on multiculturalism, he didn't make valedictorian at Franklin. She said the grade would do him good.) He went to the University of Washington aiming to take pre-med classes. Until, that is, he saw his oldest brother, a medical school student, nod off at the family dinner table because he hadn't slept in two days. Ikeda decided to switch majors.

His future wife, Sara Yamasaki, was in a writing class with him at the UW. She was smitten by his storytelling, particularly a piece he wrote about his summer job teaching swimming to children in Seattle's Central District. She later wrote:

> His stories impressed me. Especially the one about him as a lifeguard, watching an exuberant little boy tear through the hallway and fling himself into the pool, his arms circling like propellers, splashing and getting nowhere. Tom smiled as he read this … I noticed the way his bottom lip tucked softly under his front teeth when he was thinking, his boyish face pensive, his eyes absorbed in thought. The cadence of his voice, his insights, the gentleness

> of his words—all opened me; yet I dared not let him know because I was in a relationship with his friend, and he was in a relationship with mine. That's why I made it a point to hurry out of class. Every day.

IKEDA LEANED INTO CHEMISTRY and engineering, not arts and letters. And soon after graduation he was working in Walnut Creek, California, for a subsidiary of Dow Chemical. Developing artificial kidneys had its rewards. But after two years, Ikeda began to wonder: Is this all there is?

In the wandering tradition of the young and restless, he hit the road, looking to find himself—or something—while sleeping in his car and meandering across the vast country he had never explored. He recalls feeling that "there must be a larger purpose or something, it was just sort of gnawing at me."

He made his way to the Washington, D.C. area where he interviewed for a job with NASA and got an offer to work in materials research. Then, newly elected President Ronald Reagan froze federal hiring. The NASA offer was rescinded; Ikeda's contribution to the space shuttle aborted.

Ikeda and his wife Sara Yamasaki had crushes on each other years before they had their first date. *New York Spirit*

Instead, he pursued a master's degree in business at UW. He was interning at IBM in downtown Seattle when a new batch of personal computers arrived one day. He pulled PCs out of boxes, seeming to sense their impending significance. Adept at basic programming, he was soon giving demonstrations to co-workers, showing "what this little thing could do." It was 1981. He thought PCs were going to change the world.

A professor allowed him to earn credits in entrepreneurship by starting a company, which became Compufair. *The Seattle Times* called it the largest trade show for computer products in the Northwest. Ikeda enlivened the show by bringing in Timothy Leary, Frank Herbert and other speakers known for fu-

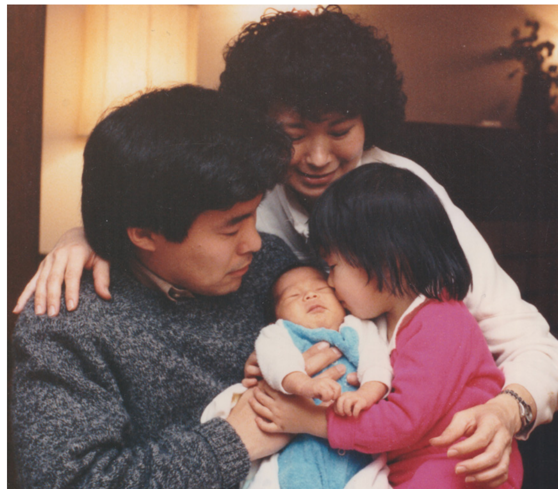
turistic thinking. His expertise led to contract work at Microsoft. In the late 1980s, Microsoft wanted to make him an employee. The company's pitch included stock options, now legendary instruments of change in the Puget Sound region.

The options granted techies like Ikeda the right to buy company stock at a fixed price over a limited time. If the stock soared during that time—and Microsoft's climbed in the 1990s like a NASA rocket—a few thousand options could translate to major money. Some 10,000 millionaires were created in the Seattle area before the stock tumbled and the gold rush fizzled at the century's end.

Ikeda moved up to become a product group general manager in Microsoft's multimedia publishing group. His team was putting large amounts of text, graphics and audio on compact discs and trying to convince publishers such as the Encyclopedia Britannica to adopt the technology.

After three very demanding years as a Microsoft employee, Ikeda was ready for a break. ("If you were awake, you were expected to be thinking about Microsoft," one executive said, describing the company's all-consuming culture.) Ikeda could've banked more "zeros" by hanging in for five years until his stock options were fully vested. That's what his dad urged. But he chose to walk away with about $2 million. He felt his life priorities were askew.

WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, he wanted to be a stay-at-home dad. He coached youth sports, which helped him get closer to his son Casey and daughter Tani. While coaching baseball, basketball and soccer his mantra was "everyone plays" because, as he'd explain, in the working world everyone has to pull their weight. His philosophy irritated some parents and players, but he stuck to it, even when his "ragtag" Little League team, the Ducks, won only one game during a season.



The Ikeda family—Tom, Sara and daughter Tani—welcome baby Casey in 1989. *Tom Ikeda*

He couldn't get entirely free of Microsoft. One weekend he got a call from Scott Oki, another Franklin High alum. Oki had risen to the very top echelon of Microsoft executives, supervising 3,000 employees, before retiring to become a philanthropist and golf-course owner. (His

title on his business cards became "Chief Volunteer.") Oki was especially keen on helping start-ups that needed his expertise, not just his signature on checks.

Like Ikeda, Oki hadn't reflected much on Japanese American history as he ascended career ladders, from Seattle to Silicon Valley, and back. Then he saw a powerful exhibit about the World War II incarceration at Seattle's Wing Luke Museum. His father, like Ikeda's, had been sent to a camp in Idaho. He and Ikeda agreed it was important to do something community-oriented.

In 1995, a group of 20 Seattle-area volunteers, mostly Japanese Americans, met to consider a Nikkei oral history project. During a planning session, Ikeda stood at the back of the room, his arms folded, feeling as skeptical as he looked. Folks in Seattle's Japanese American community were talking about distributing interviews of camp survivors on VHS video cassettes, or just compiling the stories in a printed book. It was old-fashioned thinking that didn't begin to grasp modern technology.

Densho was inspired, in part, by a meeting Ikeda (left) and philanthropist Scott Oki had with Steven Spielberg. *Tom Ikeda*

Oki told Ikeda about the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, a project started by Steven Spielberg after he directed "Schindler's List." Oki, who had headed sales at Microsoft, arranged for Ikeda and other Japanese Americans to visit the foundation in Los Angeles. In offices on the back lots of Universal Studios, the Seattle group was introduced to a sophisticated, well-funded process for recording oral histories of 50,000 Holocaust survivors.

Shoah trained interviewers and videographers using broadcast-quality cameras, audio and lighting. Each interview was tracked in a database and digitized, its content indexed and catalogued. The upshot was that a person could go to one of the foundation's workstations, type in a search term or word, and see a list of relevant interviews. Shoah was using mainframe computers, a massive storage system, and fiber optic cables connected to individual workstations on a local area network. It cost far more than the group of Seattle volunteers could afford.

Ikeda and Oki believed they could do much more with personal computers and the Internet—and do it with a fraction of Shoah's budget. Although technology wasn't yet up to what Ikeda envisioned, he knew it would get faster and cheaper. Advances were coming so quickly that every two years you could buy twice the

Densho couldn't afford to replicate Spielberg's Holocaust project. But Ikeda saw the potential for creating an online Japanese American museum via personal computers and the Internet. *Tom Ikeda*

computing power and storage for half the cost. And the World Wide Web was emerging as a network for transmitting multimedia content to the public.

Still, it was the gripping power of the Holocaust survivor interviews that persuaded the reluctant Ikeda to join the Nikkei oral history project. Oki's sales pitch had paid off.

The Seattle volunteers named their group Densho, a Japanese term meaning "to pass stories on to the next generation."

VICTOR IKEDA TRIED TO DISCOURAGE his son from excavating history, saying he was going to turn up unpleasant things, rip scabs off old wounds, and rekindle friction.

While he was in the Idaho camp, Victor had played ball, attended school, and played more ball with an inseparable gang of Seattle boys. They volunteered for the "hubba-hubba" dish-washing crew so they could see all the girls at mealtime. They gave each other nicknames like Junks and Gypo and Boner. They took up smoking cigarettes to offset the stench of the 10-hole outhouse they had to use.

But after the war, the old gang was split in half, torn apart by one's willing-

Children playing among the 36 residential "blocks" of the Minidoka camp, about 15 miles north of Twin Falls, Idaho. At peak, the camp held 9,397 prisoners. In 1942, the low temperature there was 21 degrees below zero. *Densho*

ness to fight for Uncle Sam and the hypocrisy of incarceration. Seven of the guys, including Victor, had joined the military; seven others had refused. After the war, Victor said, some of the guys would avoid gatherings if they thought the others would show up. He had friends in both groups and tried to get them together. But it was just impossible.

Tom's father eventually sat for a Densho oral history interview in 2007. Financial reparations and a presidential apology had given Japanese Americans a new sense of self-respect and willingness to discuss the past. He told stories of growing up near Pioneer Square, playing softball on the streets until the ball rolled on to a brothel's property and the madam would seize it; shrimping from the waterfront docks and selling the catch to buy a greasy chili burger; sliding on metal lunch trays down snowy hills during school recess.

With his dad, Victor, Tom Ikeda holds Seattle's 2015 Mayor's Arts Award for cultural preservation.He has also won the Humanities Washington Award and the Washington State Historical Society's Robert Gray Medal. *Tom Ikeda*

But Tom's mom still couldn't bear to talk about her experiences. Ikeda suspected her apprehension had to do with her older brother Francis, known as Bako.

Bako was the first in his mom's family to go to college. He was handsome, athletic and seen as a young leader in the community. He was a proud UW Husky before he was incarcerated in Idaho. In time, the U.S. government said it would allow Japanese Americans to volunteer for the military. Bako was one of the first to step forward.

He joined the Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated unit of Japanese American infantrymen usually led by Caucasian officers. The 442nd would become known as the most decorated outfit of its size, nicknamed the "Purple Heart unit," Ikeda says, because of the astounding number of it soldiers wounded in action. While the 442nd never counted more than 4,500 troops in its ranks, it racked up 18,000 medals in all, despite its late entry into the war.

Staff Sergeant Francis "Bako" Kinoshita was thrust into some of the 442nd's

While in the Minidoka camp, Ikeda's grandparents received a ceremonial flag honoring their fallen son, Staff Sgt. Francis "Bako" Kinoshita, who was killed by a German sniper while fighting facism during World War II. *Densho*

first action, in Italy. A German sniper's bullet killed him on July 9, 1944.*

Ikeda knew a little of this history. During his childhood, his parents took him to Washelli Cemetery in Seattle every Memorial Day so he could put flowers on the tombstones of Uncle Bako and other Japanese American soldiers. But it was years into his Densho experience before he glimpsed a crucial bit of Bako's legacy.

He was visiting his mother one day when she pulled out a photo album, sat down next to him, and said she wanted to show him something. She flipped through pictures of her chubby-cheeked childhood, telling him stories about each photo. There was a gap during the war years. Then she turned a page to reveal an arresting black-and-white image.

It showed a ceremony at the Minidoka camp with an audience of Japanese Americans seated in the background. In the foreground, Ikeda's grandfather stands, wearing a three-piece suit, his hands clasped. His wife is next to him, in a black dress and hat, head bowed. Her eyes appear closed. With her palms up, she holds an American flag, folded into the triangular shape customary for a military burial. The flag honored her fallen son, but no American military officials were in sight; none attended the event.

"To this day," Ikeda says of his mom, "she really can't talk about it."

WHILE TIME WAS AN ALLY when it came to technology, it was a relentless enemy bearing down on Densho's human subjects.

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* Five days earlier, another Seattleite in the 442nd, William Nakamura, died in fighting that earned him the Medal of Honor. For more on the 442nd see Legacy Washington's "The Rescue of the Lost Battlion." https://www.sos.wa.gov/legacy/washington-remembers/stories/fred-shiosaki/pdf/shiosaki-pdf.pdf

Japanese Americans who were young adults in the World War II camps were senior citizens a half-century later. Facing this urgency, as Densho took shape in 1996, its leaders decided to postpone work on building technical infrastructure. They would focus on collecting interviews as quickly as possible. They'd use video, like Shoah, because it would help convey the emotions of camp survivors. Ikeda volunteered to serve as Densho's executive director, without pay. (He didn't take a salary for 10 years.) Oki contributed $1 million toward start-up costs to conduct interviews.

For Densho, most of 1996 was dedicated to planning and training for interviews, which meant consulting experts from psychologists to intellectual property lawyers. Ikeda and team started identifying potential interview subjects by scouring Seattle voting records and zeroing in on the target age bracket. They soon had a pool of some 400 camp survivors in greater Seattle.

Often, when elder women were asked to be interviewed, they would defer to others, saying things like, "My story is not important. You should interview someone else." Under Densho's first oral history coordinator, Alice Ito, women were employed to interview women, and they often started with a request that emphasized their desire to talk about issues such as having a child in camp. "It was really helpful to have another woman, oftentimes a Japanese American woman, make that ask," Ikeda says.

In a few years, Densho started bringing oral histories to the web. It also decided to include interviews recorded by other groups, to help diversify its geographic scope. By the start of 2020, Densho had amassed almost 1,000 oral histories, along with 80,000 images, records, documents, and other archives searchable on the Densho.org website, which received about one million visits a year.

Densho is not a physical museum, but a "public history" online archive that includes nearly 1,000 oral histories on video. *Densho*

Densho also created an encyclopedia of Japanese American history. Editor Brian Niiya recruited experts to write entries. Densho's biography of Karl Bendetsen,

the Aberdeen architect of Japanese American incarceration, was written by Klancy Clark de Nevers, author of the only book about the ambitious colonel who sent Japanese Americans to internment camps while Jews in his ancestors' homeland were being rounded up for extermination.

The recurring claim that no Japanese Americans were convicted of sabotage or espionage during World War II is addressed by Eric Muller, a University of North Carolina professor and author on the government's hunt for disloyalty in America. In his rich but brief entry, Muller points to the exception: the Shitara sisters. They were three Japanese American women, who, while on work release on a Colorado onion farm, befriended two German POWs, also working in the fields. Two of the Shitara sisters became intimate with the Germans; all three helped them escape in what was scandalized as the "Japanazi romance." The POWs were quickly caught. All three sisters were convicted of conspiracy to commit treason and spent two years in prison.

Ikeda's paramount goal has been to make Densho a trustworthy repository that lasts a long time. That means vetting all kinds of claims. One is the frequent assertion that the 442nd Regimental Combat Team is the most decorated unit in American military history. Densho hasn't been able to find the underlying documentation for the statement, which has often appeared in the media.

That leads Ikeda, Densho's resident expert on the 442nd, to use the phrase, "It's one of the most highly decorated units in military history."

Densho has not shied from controversy. It uses the much-debated term "concentration camps" when describing the Japanese American World War II prisons. Some, including American Jewish groups, object because they see the words as synonymous with Nazi genocide of Jews. Or as Professor Muller put it, "You say 'concentration camp' to most people and what they hear is 'Auschwitz.' "

Soldiers from the U.S. Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team prepare to advance in France during October 1944. Nicknamed the "Purple Heart unit," the 442nd was one of the most highly decorated outfits in American military history. *Seattle Nisei Veterans Committee*

But the Japanese American National Museum and the Japanese American Citizens League have both used "con-

centration camps." It is historically accurate, some note, pointing to newspaper stories that used the term during World War II, as well as politicians, including Franklin Roosevelt. It also meets the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of "a place where large numbers of people (such as prisoners of war, political prisoners, refugees, or the members of an ethnic or religious minority) are detained or confined under armed guard …"

Ikeda was leery about the term at first. As he settled into his role as a historian, he came to feel it was apt. People were rounded up because of their heritage, not their actions. And they were kept under armed guard and couldn't leave.

"So, I've come to feel very comfortable using that term," he says, while often pointing out to his audience the differences and similarities in the Nazi and American camps.

THERE WAS A REASON Densho succeeded in collecting oral histories from so many once-reticent Japanese Americans. Nisei, like Ikeda's father, opened up about their experiences, in part, because of the redress movement, which led to monetary reparations and a formal apology from President Ronald Reagan in 1988.

Frank Chin, chief organizer of the first Day of Remembrance, had written a cover story for Seattle's *The Weekly* six weeks before the inaugural event, which "set the tone" for furious organizing, planning and outreach to the media.

Chin and his group of instigators had a priority besides remembrance. They wanted to breathe life into another cause with Seattle roots: the notion of reparations for Japanese Americans. Chin's story focused on how "Pearl Harbor had assaulted Japanese Americans as brutally as the rest of the nation." His point was that the psyches of Japanese Americans were battered—traumatized, Ikeda would say—by the war. They gave up their freedom, and more, to prove their loyalty. But the war's end failed to restore their good names.

The 442nd's bloody sacrifices were

'Relocation' Camps on Our Conscience
The case for $3-billion in reparations to Japanese American citizens
theWeekly
Seattle's Newsmagazine
October 11, 1978
50 Cents
A grandfather and grandchildren await the evacuation bus, May 8, 1942. Photograph by Dorothea Lange.

Frank Chin's story about battered psyches of Japanese Americans sparked organizing for the first Day of Remembrance in 1978. *Seattle Weekly*

well-publicized and quieted many of the bigots. Still, some Washingtonians opposed the resettlement of Japanese Americans after the U.S. Army announced in December 1944 the camps would soon close. Governor Mon Wallgren declared that he was "unalterably opposed to the return of any Japanese to the three Pacific Coast states for the duration of the war." Wallgren said the return of the Nikkei was a secret weapon "Japan was waiting for."

Wallgren's hostility was well-received by the Remember Pearl Harbor League, Teamsters Union, and others. Although their movement was countered by church groups and ended up winning thin support among the general population, some Japanese Americans returned to find their Seattle homes vandalized, "with death threats spray-painted onto their garages."

Chin wrote about how something had died inside the imprisoned Japanese Americans:

> They don't know what. They haven't looked at the body. They can barely endure going through the papers. They haven't buried it, and don't know how to case and frame the camps out back in history. For all intents and purposes, the Nikkei still lives in camp, not in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Salt Lake, San Diego or even Milwaukee. The Nikkei are out on parole, not out of camp.

The redress movement started in the early 1970s, and Seattle was at the forefront. With an Asian American generational shove, redress moved into the wake of fist-pumping civil rights campaigns by Blacks, Chicanos, and Indians. But the catalyst was not someone caught up in the era's radical chic. Henry Miyatake was a middle-aged Boeing engineer initially motivated by the way white company managers never seemed to give Nisei engineers their due credit. Miyatake, who was imprisoned in Idaho at the age of 13, thought the Japanese Americans lacked self-confidence to assert themselves. Redress was one solution.

In the long slog from Miyatake's early efforts to a presidential apology, Washington's political role was often supportive.

Mike Lowry, elected to Congress in 1978, was the first politician to sponsor a reparations bill. But the Seattle Democrat's legislation was rejected by the influential Japanese American Citizens League and died in committee. The Japanese Americans in Congress instead called for a special commission, as a first step, to study forced removal and incarceration.

In 1980, Congress created a nine-member panel that investigated records, held

hearings and gathered testimony from some 750 witnesses. In late 1982 the commission published a 467-page report titled *Personal Justice Denied*. “In sum,” the panel stated, “the record does not permit the conclusion that military necessity warranted the exclusion of ethnic Japanese from the West Coast.” Therefore, “there was no basis for the detention” of Japanese Americans.

Their material and intangible losses were incalculable, the report said, and included the breakdown of family structure and racial stigma.

Released from camps in 1945, some Japanese Americans were met by racism when they returned to their homes. *Associated Press*

Congressman Norm Mineta, a California Democrat, drew up a bill that closely adhered to the commission’s recommendations. Mineta and his family began their journey to a camp in Wyoming when he was 10 years old. He loved baseball, which had become an emblem of Nikkei assimilation in America. He carried his glove and bat when he left home. Soldiers confiscated his bat, considering it a weapon.

Lowry told his sponsors to transfer their support to Mineta. Cherry Kinoshita, former Seattle-chapter president of the Japanese American Citizens League, “would emerge as a key player both nationally and locally in the drive for redress.” While the federal government mulled what to do, she had successfully lobbied to win reparations for Washington state, city of Seattle, and Seattle School District employees who lost their jobs in 1942.

A key Congressional sponsor of reparations, Norm Mineta served in the cabinets of two U.S. presidents. *Department of Commerce*

Often the only woman in the room, Kinoshita became one of the leading lobbyists for redress. At times, she saw her gender as an advantage. She could talk about the emotional toll of incarceration in ways that few, if any, Nikkei men would, or could.

She was respectful but tenacious, with an instinct for closing the deal. After helping to persuade two hesitant Democratic con-

Seattle Mayor Charles Royer (sitting) honors local leaders in the push for reparations, including Henry Miyatake (far left) and Cherry Kinoshita (second from right). *Seattle Municipal Archives*

gressmen, Don Bonker and Al Swift, she was part of a trio that met with the last holdout of Washington's delegation, Republican Rod Chandler, a former TV anchorman representing the suburbs and farms to the east of Seattle.

With a floor vote on reparations imminent, Kinoshita made a last plea to Chandler, but he cut her off, saying "you should tell your group you went away disappointed." As they shook hands, she took one more stab, asking Chandler to remember—if nothing else—that supporting reparations "was the right thing to do."

While she watched C-SPAN during the vote, she heard Chandler at the podium saying he had been undecided until a few days earlier. "But I think this is a time," the congressman said, "when we reach into our hearts and say, even if it does not appear to make total sense, let us do it because it is ultimately the right thing to do."

Chandler had come around, along with most of Congress. On September 17, 1987, the House passed the bill by a margin of 243 to 141. The Senate approved six months later in a 69 to 27 vote.*

The new law required paying $20,000 to each eligible individual—with the oldest survivors getting the first checks. Payments to four Seattle centenarians final-

* A majority of Democrats in Congress supported redress; a majority of Republicans did not. A joint House/Senate committee agreed on a final version of the bill in August 1988. President Reagan signed it on August 10.

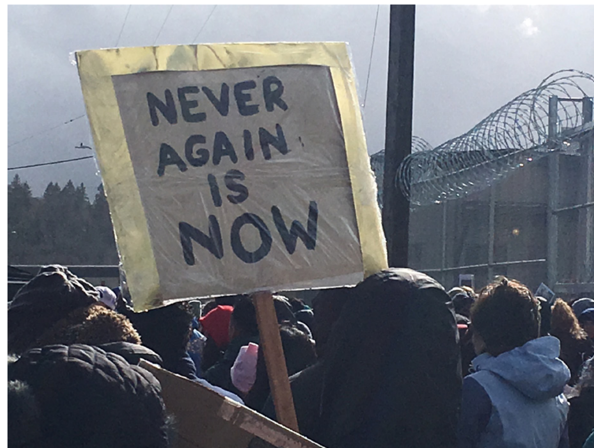
ly came in October 1990. The quartet ranged from 100 to 107 years old.

The dividends of redress included more. There was also a political and moral recognition of the Nikkei identity. They were able to come out of the closet, as one Nisei put it.

"The government apologizing allowed more to speak out and have confidence," Ikeda says. "Now my parents would say, 'Of course we were innocent.' I'm not sure before redress they would've said that."

IKEDA HAPPENED TO BE WATCHING the 2016 Democratic National Convention on television when he first heard Khizr Khan, an immigrant born in Pakistan, a Muslim, and the father of a dead American soldier. Khan talked about how his son represented "the best of America." Ikeda was soon wiping tears from his cheeks.

With his wife, Ghazala, at his side, Khan told the audience of the honor that came with being Gold Star parents. His son, U.S. Army Captain Humayun Khan was killed in action in Iraq in 2004. Ikeda couldn't help but think of the picture of his grandparents honoring their fallen son. From the convention stage, Khan, a lawyer, offered his pocket-sized U.S. Constitution to Donald Trump. In his campaign for president, Trump had proposed a complete ban on Muslims entering the United States. He also called for surveillance of mosques in the U.S. and blamed terrorist attacks on Muslims' lack of "assimilation," adding that "Islam hates us." He defended his plan by comparing it to Franklin Roosevelt's treatment of Japanese Americans.



Day of Remembrance 2020 protest in Tacoma. Those scapegoated as a "yellow peril" saw danger in the caging of brown people.
Bob Young

After Trump's election in November, Densho quickly posted two pieces on its website urging people to consider the lessons of World War II xenophobia. A few days later Ikeda was the sole local source in a *Seattle Times* story that asked if one of the gravest mistakes in American history could be repeated. "What we saw was it didn't start with the camps, it started with these other steps and having this hateful rhetoric early on against Japanese Americans," Ikeda said in the story. Two months

later, Trump issued his executive order, widely called a "Muslim ban."

Part of Densho's mission, Ikeda notes, has always been to "promote justice and equity." His son and daughter help him focus on that. His son Casey teaches history to high-school and middle-school students. He pushes his dad to make sure Densho's lessons on racism and justice are accessible to teachers and students. His daughter Tani is a filmmaker who was director and executive producer, along with Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors, of the recent YouTube Originals documentary series, "Resist." She has helped sharpen her dad's thinking on present dangers to minority communities. He's also been influenced by Densho staffers, such as Natasha Varner and Nina Wallace, who've helped him understand a younger generation, while bringing a bold freshness to Densho's blog. ("5 Bad Ass Japanese American Women Activists You Probably Didn't Learn About in History Class," is the headline for one of Wallace's articles.)

"Tom has been smart enough to hire these really intelligent, progressive women to work at Densho. They have led him, kind of edged him toward this leadership," says Frank Abe, a Seattleite who has written a biography of *No-No Boy* author John Okada. "Densho and Tom are not just archivists, historians, collectors. They are thought leaders."

Tani Ikeda, a filmmaker, was featureed in a *Vogue* magazine feature titled, "The Memory Keepers." *Vogue*

Ikeda reached out to Khizr Khan and began corresponding. Densho brought Khan to Seattle in 2018. Some Japanese Americans had started thinking about the plight of American Muslims the moment terrorists struck on September 11, instantly recognizing similarities between the 2001 attacks and Pearl Harbor. "By the time the second plane hit, why, I was thinking about what happened" in World War II, said Bellevue resident Tosh Ito in David Neiwert's deeply-researched *Strawberry Days*.

Before Khan spoke to hundreds at a Seattle Center event, Ikeda took him to meet his parents in their home. At one point in the conversation, Khan looked at Ikeda's mother and knowingly said, "No one wants to be a Gold Star parent."

Ikeda gets emotional telling the story. "And I remember my mom," he says,

choking up, "…just tears, and it was really, I think, a powerful moment for her, because I think there was healing for her, just to hear that."

On stage at the Seattle Day of Remembrance event, Khan expressed his gratitude. "Regardless of the mistreatment, regardless of the cruelty, regardless of the prejudice that Japanese American communities suffered, they went to defend this country. They had a belief in constitutional values, and the goodness of this nation," Khan said. "Muslim Americans are given strength from your sacrifice."

An immigrant, Muslim, and father of a dead American solder, Khizr Khan spoke at Seattle Center for a 2018 Day of Remembrance event. *Densho*

All of which reminds Ikeda of a story about leadership, told to him by Norm Mineta, sponsor of the reparations legislation and later federal transportation secretary under President George W. Bush.*

Mineta explained that several months before the 9/11 attacks, he was a guest at Camp David. President Bush was known for going to bed early. But one night he asked Mineta to tell him what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II. The two talked for hours into the night. Fast-forward to the day after 9/11. The president called a cabinet meeting. There were rumors of putting Arab Americans in camps or banning them from flying. President Bush said absolutely not, adding, "We want to make sure that what happened to Norm in 1942 doesn't happen today."

On the afternoon of September 17, Bush spoke at the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C. He said Islam was about peace, not terror—and the terrorists did not represent Islam. He said women who cover their heads must feel comfortable going outside their homes. "Those who feel like they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take out their anger don't represent the best of America, they represent the worst of humankind, and they should be ashamed of that kind of behavior," the president said.

* As the 9/11 attacks occurred, Mineta was in the White House bunker overseeing civil aviation. He ordered the FAA to bring all 4,546 planes in the air to the ground. A subordinate said he would, per pilot discretion. "F*** pilot discretion," Mineta said. "Get those goddamn planes down."

“That’s an example of political leadership that I would love to see,” says Ikeda, who didn’t vote for Bush. “And obviously we don’t have that right now.”

“HISTORY MAY NOT ALWAYS REPEAT itself but, but it often rhymes,” Ikeda likes to say. By that, he means this isn’t 1942, and you can’t make a direct comparison between incarcerating Japanese Americans, most of whom were U.S. citizens, and banning Muslims from entering the country.

But he sees similar patterns. First comes the demonizing of a group. Then the negative stereotypes. Once the group becomes synonymous with danger, policies are based on the group, rather than individual behavior. “It’s important to know and be able to talk about them,” he says, “but also to talk about the similarities, and I think ‘rhyming’ is a good way of doing that.”

This has him thinking about the big picture: How does a community heal? How can our country heal?

“I think of reparations for slavery, and the reconciliation we need to do. We have an example with the Japanese American experience that we can look at. I’m not saying it has to be reparations for a certain amount or anything. It’s just having this open conversation. Until we do that…I think we’re destined to just keep fighting.”

“This coming together feels like a huge shift for many Japanese Americans,” Ikeda told a crowd protesting an immigrant detention facility in Tacoma. *Bob Young*

In the meantime, there’s much to do at Densho. Ikeda is working on long-term sustainable funding for the nonprofit. And he continues to help in training teachers on the West Coast. His sense is that public instruction, even at his alma mater Franklin High, still treats Japanese American imprisonment as minor history that gets a paragraph or so in textbooks.

Densho will also step in when it sees history distorted or whitewashed, as in a recent example from Bellevue, Washington’s fifth largest city. A mural by artist Erin Shigaki was displayed at Bellevue College for 2020’s Day of Remembrance. Unbeknownst to Shigaki, a college vice president whited out a sentence in

her mural about Miller Freeman's anti-Japanese agitation.* That vice president and the president of the public college resigned amid the ensuing outrage. (About half of Bellevue's population is non-white and 43 percent speak a language other than English at home. The city's residents are also better educated and have higher incomes than Seattleites.) Ikeda wrote a piece for Densho's web site noting that a similar line had been struck from Shigaki's work when it earlier appeared in the city's Bellwether Festival. He also reported that papers and letters documenting Freeman's anti-Japanese sentiments had been removed from the University of Washington archives.

Densho has become a "leader in the Japanese American community now, certainly in connecting our past to the present, they're doing the best work around," says Frank Abe, an activist and archivist for five decades, who helped organize the first Day of Remembrance.

It's also a go-to resource for historians and writers, such as Daniel James Brown, author of the acclaimed *Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Olympics*. Brown is pounding away on a book about the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Ikeda helped him with research. "I'm a huge fan of Tom Ikeda and what he has done," says Brown, winner of the 2014 Washington State Book Award for Nonfiction.

Frank Abe (right), an activist and archivist for five decades, said he was "happy to pass the torch" of preserving Japanese American history to Ikeda and Densho's staff. *Frank Abe*

George Takei, known to millions for his role in "Star Trek," paid tribute to Ikeda in a Japanese American National Museum video. "We didn't talk about it," Takei says of World War II incarceration. "That silence is another of our heavy legacies. But what Tom has been doing is turning that around."

It's turned Ikeda inside out in the process. He found his life's calling in a gig he never imagined existing. He learned the power of a committed individual, from the likes of Cherry Kinoshita, and how one person *could* make a difference. It gave him confidence to speak out.

* Shigaki's mural contained the sentence "After decades of anti-Japanese agitation, led by Eastside businessman Miller Freeman and others, the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans included the 60 families (300 individuals) who farmed Bellevue."

It made him more comfortable in his own skin, in being Japanese American. And when he thought about the power *we have* and *what we do*, meaning Densho, it was really to make a more just America.

From chemical engineering to altruism, from nerdy introvert to the family of humanity, he had found his way. "This work has just transformed me," Ikeda says.

"It's one thing to be intellectually tied to something," said Scott Oki, the Microsoft sales wizard who long ago had an inkling that Ikeda needed Densho as much as it needed him. "But once your heart is in it, it takes on a whole different life."

Bob Young
Legacy Washington

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