

## Reflection by Amy D. Yamashiro, JALD 2013

In reflecting upon the Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) 2013 visit to Japan, the recurring themes for me include breaking silences, *gaman*, resilience, and empowering leadership. *Gaman* is a Japanese term which means enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity, and resilience is the ability to recover from adversity and depression. Empowering leadership values individual creativity and provides a climate that encourages personal initiative.

Growing up as a Yonsei in Gardena, there seemed to be an intangible, invisible divide between the Issei and Nisei generations and the Sansei generation and beyond that was not uncovered or understood until the Redress Movement encouraged the first two generations to break their stoic silence regarding the Japanese Internment Camp experience and to create a bridge of understanding with the later generations which enabled intergenerational healing and bonding through sharing stories. By amazing coincidence, the Art of Gaman, a collection of work created by Japanese Americans during Internment, was on display in Fukushima on the day of the JALD 2013 Symposium, "Toward Common Ground: Connecting Diverse Voices for the Future."

On March 11, 2013, JALD visited a school that housed three separate elementary schools from Iidate Village and the Odagaisama Center for evacuees of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis and shared a deeply moving and unforgettable experience as we commemorated the second anniversary of the triple disasters with the evacuees. At the school, I was touched by the Principals' description of their efforts to hire storytellers to document the folktales of their village and to recreate the festivals and other traditions for the children. This resonated with my experience in Gardena, where the Issei meticulously recreated the festivals, field days, and other traditions from their respective villages and prefectures in Japan to pass on to the younger generations. The overall impression of the school reminded me of photos of Nisei children playing happily in the internment camps, with the most vivid image of the Iidate Village children laughing and playing battle robot soccer during science class.

At the Odagaisama Center, the Director, Kazuhiko Amano, recounted a paradoxical increase in rates of dying by evacuees of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 who had moved from living in emergency shelters separated by cardboard partition to temporary housing (like that at the Odagaisama Center). He wanted to highlight how the Odagaisama Center made use of the lessons learned to help the evacuees overcome the isolation, loneliness, and depression and create ways for folks to connect and create community. He described examples of how empowering leadership transformed evacuee volunteers serving coffee into a "coffeehouse environment" and how a simple footbath with hand massage became a "salon" to offer evacuees the much needed opportunities to break their silence, to begin opening up, and to share their stories as the first steps towards healing and bonding with others. He also explained how the evacuees have started making arts and crafts to provide an outlet for creative expression similar to the Japanese Americans in the internment camps as depicted in the Art of Gaman exhibit.

As a Japanese American, I was immediately struck by the close resemblance of the evacuee relocation center at the Odagaisama Center and the image I had of the Japanese Internment camp barracks. The photo below on the left shows the rows of temporary housing for evacuees at the

Odagaisama Center. The photo to the right was taken at Manzanar in 1942, and shows the seemingly endless rows of barracks at this internment camp for Japanese Americans.



Street scene near the Odagaisama Center for evacuees from the Great East Japan Earthquake, Tsunami, and Nuclear Meltdown Disasters. Photographer: Iguchi, Martin –Fukushima, Japan.. 3/11/13



Street scene looking east toward the Inyo Mountains at this War Relocation Authority center. Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- Manzanar, California. 6/29/42

The striking visual similarity of the temporary housing of the evacuees and the internment camp experience underscores the common ground that we as Japanese Americans intuitively had with the people of Fukushima such that we could bond with the evacuees at multiple levels from the sudden disruption of life, the relocation experience, living indefinitely in the diaspora, and yearning for what was lost.

Despite the loss and uncertainty, the primary message from the people of Fukushima to the outer world is that they have optimism for the future. They are forever grateful for all the love and support received from the United States, Japanese Americans, and elsewhere. The evacuees' greatest hope is that people across Japan and around the world will continue their support through exchange programs like JALD and the TOMODACHI Initiative, engage with the people from the affected areas, and visit Fukushima to show they care. During the remainder of our visit, we recounted the messages of common ground and optimism for the future to the business leaders and government officials in Japan.

On a personal note, as a delegate, I greatly benefitted from Irene Hirano-Inouye's empowering leadership style. Irene masterfully identified the best use of our individual and combined gifts and talents to make the most of each and every opportunity to exchange ideas and information and for people-to-people relationship building. After meeting with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado, and the other dignitaries, I have taken on a personal and heartfelt commitment to continue serving as an international goodwill ambassador between the U.S. and Japan. The importance of breaking silences, *gaman*, resilience, and empowering leadership, these are the indelible impressions I have of Japan from March 2013.