

CAMPU: EPISODE 6

Food

VO: To Chef John Sugimura, purple cabbage is the question he never got to ask his grandmother.

SUGIMURA: I garnish everything with purple cabbage.

VO: It's more than a pop of color or a sexy garnish.

SUGIMURA: My father said grandma always put something crunchy under the gyoza. I'm like great. So tell me what it is. "Well, I don't know." Was it cabbage? Was it a bunch of...Just be more specific. Nobody in the family was ever able to be specific of what grandma put underneath gyoza.

VO: Sugimura comes from a lineage of Japanese cuisine in the U.S. His grandmother, an immigrant, owned a Japanese restaurant in Sacramento before the war.

SUGIMURA: My grandparents immigrated from Kumamoto and Nagoya, Japan to Sacramento in 1917. So they were in their 20s, give or take, you know, almost 30. All of my aunts and uncles were born in California. My father, the middle child, or almost the middle, was born in 1925. My grandparents had already buried their firstborn child at the age of four from a childhood illness. And then my grandmother lost my grandfather very quickly to cancer. My grandmother is now a single parent of five children, originally six.

VO: Sugimura never met his grandmother. She died before he was born.

SUGIMURA: 30 years later, I know I will never know what my grandmother put underneath the gyoza.

VO: Purple cabbage is about holding onto people the only way you know how. Even after they're gone.

SUGIMURA: The purple cabbage is on there because that is a little moment where I think about grandma.

VO: So the day before this interview, Noah and I found out our cousin had driven our grandmother to the hospital. It was December 2020. I think you know where this is going. She died less than two weeks later, killed by the same pandemic that has stolen too many of our loved ones. It happened as I was writing this episode.

VO: In some ways, we were the lucky ones. I'm grateful that Noah and my dad were able to drop everything and drive six hours straight to Rochester to hold her hand and tell her how much we love her when I know that so many were forced to die alone during this pandemic. Grateful that I got to know this remarkable woman. That she lived a long and fulfilling life full of people she loved. And also sad to lose the stories she never thought to tell because she was never one for talking about herself. The stories she never found the words to say but wanted to. Most of all, I'm sad to lose her.

VO: So, when John Sugimura talked about purple cabbage, it felt like that was his way of honoring his loss--and ours. The losses of all Nikkei who had family who were incarcerated. All of our unasked and unanswered questions, all of the beauty in the life of a woman who

history could easily pass by. That's the story that purple cabbage tells.

VO: Food, Sugimura reminds us, is more than just sustenance. It's a vehicle for culture--one that persists even after we've forgotten things like language. It's a way to delight in the world around us, engage our senses, connect with other people. It's how we tell someone we love them. It's the lessons we pass down between generations--and the ones we don't.

[Theme]

VO: All of this makes food a powerful transmitter of memory, both good and bad. One of the few things our grandma ever told us about camp was that she couldn't stand apple butter. Seventy years later, her nose still wrinkled with disgust at the memory.

That's what this episode is about. Food in camp. The memories about it. The politics it motivated. And the relationships built around it.



Mealttime in a mess hall at Manzanar. [Photo](#) taken July 2, 1942, by Dorothea Lange.

VO: From Densho, I'm Hana Maruyama, and this is Campu.

[End theme.]

VO: In case it wasn't clear to you, food in the concentration camps was not good. Here's Dr. Heidi Kim, professor of English and Comparative Literature at UNC. She's written about food in the camps and the culture around the mess halls.

KIM: In every memoir of the incarceration, food is a huge feature that people remember and that people attach a lot of negative emotion to.



A mess hall at Manzanar. [Photo](#) by Dorothea Lange.

VO: But if there's one meal that stands out in their minds, it's usually their first meal behind barbed wire.

KIM: The first meal was bad. I mean, for the most part, the meals were bad, but the first meals

were exceptional, because the supplies were poor, the kitchens weren't fully staffed or fully equipped. These people who have been ripped from their homes, and sent somewhere they've never seen before, to this half finished, desolate place, and then confronted with this terrible meal in this crowded mess hall where they can't sit together.

VO: Suffice it to say, the first meal wasn't pretty.

TAMIKO HONDA: We had our meal, our first meal--

SABURO MASADA: One thing I'll never forget is the first supper--

MARY NOMURA: The first meal--



Original WRA caption: "Manzanar Relocation Center, Manzanar, California. Meals are being served cafeteria style at this War Relocation Authority Center." [Photo](#) taken April 2, 1942 by Clem Albers for the WRA.

SOX KITAJIMA: --when I got to Tanforan--

MARY NOMURA: --that night was--

KINOSHITA: beets, cold canned beets with raw onions in them.

MARY NOMURA: Nice cold Jell-O on top of hot rice--

KITAJIMA: A couple of discolored cold cuts and--

NOMURA: Canned sauerkraut and--

WAKATSUKI: Apricots and syrup over the rice. [Laughs]

MASADA: Mutton soup, and grease was all over the surface--

VO: The army had forcibly removed 110,000 people from their homes and livelihoods; now, it had to figure out how to feed them. As we mentioned in episode 5, that involved--

CHORUS: A lot of Vienna sausages.

PEGGIE NISHIMURA BAIN: --day after day after day. [Laughs] And they didn't give us much, you know, just few little sausages, and just barely enough to keep us going.

VO: The lack of quantity was one thing but the quality wasn't all that great either. We asked around on social media about memories of camp food people heard from their relatives. Jessica Asai wrote in, "My grandmother remembers having to scrape mold off hot dogs." She was not the only one to remember some... questionable food safety practices.

GEORGE MATSUMOTO: Lots of time we got bread that was moldy. So you have holes in the bread, so you

will make bread pudding but nobody liked bread pudding.

MAY SUZUKI ICHINO: Now my sister told me something just recently. She and her friend were sitting outside somewhere and there was this big ice chunk of fish, and it was full of maggots. And I said, "Why didn't you tell us that?" She said, "We were scared to tell anybody what we were seeing."

SUSIE "JINX" FUJII: And we were all eating, and my neighbor lady would be eating her fish, and all in a sudden, inside the fish there was maggots. [Laughs] And that cured me. I didn't eat fish for the longest time. There's a lot of things I stopped eating after I went to camp.

BAIN: And people would faint, and we'd say, "Well, who's going to faint today?"

ROBERT M. WADA: One thing that they had on every table, every meal, was apple butter--

KIRIHARA: Apple butter.

CHORUS: Apple butter.

MAS OKUI: Just kind of dirty brown applesauce that's a little sweet.

VO: Maybe now isn't the best time to admit that I actually like apple butter? But I'm not sure I'd still like it if that was all I had for breakfast for the next three years.

CHORUS: To this day--

RICHARD E. YAMASHIRO: I shun--

KIRIHARA: I can't eat--

TAIRA FUKUSHIMA: I don't touch Vienna sausage, apple butter, and a few things like that, ever.

AIBOSHI: --never, ever eaten apple butter after the war. [Laughs]

SHIZUKO 'SUZIE' SAKAI: I had never tasted mutton before in my life.

VO: Ah, yes, mutton stew.

SAKAI: We had a lot of--

HISAYE YAMAMOTO: Curried mutton stew--

SAKAI: Mutton--

GRACE WATANABE KIMURA: Day in and day out--

WAKATSUKI: They call it lamb stew, but it's--

LEO UCHIDA: Green-looking mutton--

SHOICHI KOBARA: They put a lot of curry in there to camouflage the taste.

SHISHINO: And you could smell it.

DOROTHY IKKANDA: It smelled. Oh my god. We lived on one end of the block, and the kitchen was on the other end.

KAY ENDO: Yeah, and you could smell mutton even before you hit the door.

SHISHINO: It smelled like soap--

SHOSUKE SASAKI: My mother couldn't eat it. Many Japanese couldn't. The smell of it just nauseated them.

OKUI: And mutton--god, I hate mutton. Can't even eat lamb anymore. Well, I never could eat lamb.



Kitchen staff at Mess Hall B-14-27 at Heart Mountain circa 1943.

[Photo](#) courtesy of the Wada and Homma Family Collection.

VO: Taylor Tanaka's grandfather had a similar experience. Taylor wrote in to us, "they never ate mutton normally so whenever he had to eat it he would get really sick. Even the smell of it cooking made his stomach turn while he was there. So my Obachan never cooked it at home because even just the smell of it would remind him of Manzanar. It's something I'll never forget. No one in my family eats lamb till this day." That dislike of mutton was almost passed down, even if they hadn't necessarily experienced mutton in camp.

SAKAI: I can't say that it was my favorite dish.

VO: The cook could also really impact the quality of that block's mess hall food.

RICHARD M. MURAKAMI: If they were lucky, they had people that owned restaurants or were cooks--

KINGE OKAUCHI: We had a couple of professional cooks working there, so we had more or less palatable food.

VO: But the availability of professional cooks often depended on where people were coming from. Somewhere like Santa Anita, which drew its population from L.A. and San Diego, might have a lot of former restaurateurs. While Salinas, which consisted in large part of lettuce farmers from the Monterey Bay area, might not. Even the most experienced home cook would struggle if they suddenly had to cook for two or three hundred people at a time.

ICHINO: I hope the cooks on Block 32 are not alive. I just, they were the worst cooks.

VO: Even if a cook did have some experience, he or she might face an array of other challenges. Here's Dr. Kim again:

KIM: Cooks had to learn new recipes, new methods of cooking.

VO: They were constantly being brought these foods they'd never had to cook with before. And there're no recipes or blogs for them. If they've never cooked tripe or beef hearts or horse meat before, they just had to experiment and hope it turned out semi palatable. On top of that, the food supplies were constantly changing.

KIM: As soon as they got used to one way of cooking a whole other category of foodstuffs would be cut off by rationing, etc. So everyone was having to constantly adapt.

VO: They were getting the throwaways--the food that the government had subsidized but nobody wanted to eat.



Original Caption: "Cleaning up in Mess Hall 29-27". [Photo](#) taken by Yoshio Okumoto at Heart Mountain, March 26, 1944. Courtesy of Yoshio Okumoto.

[LUCY KIRIHARA](#): It was always surplus food that we got.

[TOM MATSUOKA](#): Like in Montana, the sheep ranch, they have to cut down, two dollars to the head. Government buy one sheep for two dollars. They killed all of them and the carcass, frozen, put 'em in the deep freeze. They keep them and the wartime come, camp prisoner like us all

time they have to feed them mutton. That's why the camp food was mutton, mutton.

VO: But mutton was the least of it. Dr. Kim says:

KIM: You see the camp administration in these archives, really running into problems with trying to give people less desirable foods. So there was one letter that I read, I can't remember which camp it was, where they wrote that, 'We can't move tripe, like nobody, nobody wants. Nobody wants to eat the tripe. And we tried to serve beef hearts last week and my understanding is that the garbage cans were overflowing.'

[OKAUCHI](#): Whoever was supplying the place, they loved turnips, apparently, 'cause we got tons of turnips.

[AIKO HERZIG-YOSHINAGA](#): Each camp prided itself, prided itself on how little they spent for each resident. They would report back to the government in Washington, "We only spent 49 cents per person in our camp." Some camps would be bragging they only spent 35 cents. So you could tell the quality of the food was not good.

VO: That's Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga. You've heard her speak in previous episodes, but I want to tell you a little about her now. Incarcerated at Manzanar then Jerome, she later began researching the concentration camps in the National Archives and discovered evidence of governmental misconduct that she used to advocate for reparations for Japanese Americans. She later became the lead researcher for the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, the congressional commission that paved the way

for reparations. Look her up. She was amazing. You can get started by heading over to this episode's transcript where we've shared some links.

[Learn more](#) about Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga.

VO: Okay, so back to these 35 cents a day per person. Throughout its existence, the WRA encountered criticism from Congress, the press, the ordinary Joe on the street about pampering. Yep, you heard that right. They were pissed because apparently the conditions in the camps were too good. That's why the WRA was bragging about keeping costs so low. Dr. Kim says:

KIM: The WRA was very public about keeping costs for each meal no higher than 45 cents per day. And during rationing and during all of the public resentment and the congressional hearings that touched upon this issue, the WRA constantly sought to drive costs down. So they were able to drive them down as far as 35 cents a day.

VO: We're going to talk about these pampering charges in more depth later. For now, let's just get back to the stellar culinary conditions in the camps. Like beef tongue.

[KIRIHARA](#): And once we thought, "Oh we're going to get meat." And so we all went and we said, "What are all those pimples around there?" Well, it was tongue sliced, and they didn't even take the skin off.

[MASSIE HINATSU](#): And I could still see the taste buds on the tongue.

TAIRA FUKUSHIMA: When you're prisoners, you have no choice.

VO: Cooks did their best to make the supplies they were given edible.

MARION MASADA: We ate horse meat I remember, because it was such an unusual texture and then they told us it was horse meat that they soaked in teriyaki sauce, and it was tough.

MISAKO SHIGEKAWA: Sometimes we would have spaghetti and potatoes. [Laughs] And one day something happened, we were eating neck bones for days, just boiled neck bones. And they fed us a lot of spaghetti, so 'til my mother died, she never would eat spaghetti. We had so much. Cheapest thing they could feed us.

VO: Susan Bennett wrote in to us that her grandmother also got so sick of the stuff that she, quote, "would not eat spaghetti after leaving the camp." Even if the meal was something you liked, you might not like it anymore if you were served it seven days a week--possibly covered in sand.

FRANK YAMASAKI: When you go to the mess hall to eat, of course, when you chew the food, you can feel the grit of the sand. And it's amazing, even that, you get used to it. I gradually got used to the mixture of sand and food.

KOBARA: Food was pretty lousy.

KINOSHITA: The food was pretty bad.

AKIKO OKUNO: One night, dinner was rice with ketchup.

FRANK ISAMU KIKUCHI: Nobody ever starved, but it was boring.

WAKAMIYA: They're just tryin' to keep us alive, not keep us happy.

VO: Mutton, apple butter, Vienna sausage, spaghetti...horse teriyaki. If the food doesn't sound all that healthy, that's probably because it wasn't.

S. SASAKI: And the food that we got was practically one hundred percent starch.

VO: Herzig-Yoshinaga was pregnant in camp, and faced the added challenge of getting the nutrition she needed while pregnant and, later, the milk her infant needed to survive.

YOSHINAGA: When my child was born in the camp hospital, she was born with an allergy to the powdered milk that they permitted babies to have during that time. She should have what was called at that time, Carnation milk in a can. I requested that for my child, but they said, "No, that has to go to the army." And we would not be permitted to unless we could afford to send for it from outside. And, of course we couldn't afford to buy canned milk. So my daughter suffered tremendously. She was hospitalized in the camp, went in and out, in and out. Most children double their weight, most infants double their weight, birth weight, at six months. My child had not doubled her weight in a year, she was so sick.

YOSHINAGA: And I think the lack of this important nutrition at this time of her life has affected her whole entire life. She didn't have the basic ingredients to be a healthy person.



A mess hall at Tanforan Assembly Center. [Photo](#) taken by Dorothea Lange on June 16, 1942.

VO: The food improved as the incarcerated moved from the assembly centers to the relocation centers. We haven't really discussed the differences between the two yet, so briefly: the assembly centers were always meant to be temporary holding grounds. They were run by the Wartime Civil Control Administration. A lot of the problems with refrigeration and food shortages happened during this time.

[Learn more](#) about "assembly centers."

VO: By fall 1942, the last people in the assembly centers were being moved over to the "relocation centers," which were the quote unquote permanent sites that the WRA had built over the summer. The facilities, while not great, were still better. The staff now had three months of cooking for a whole block under their belt, and the army had figured out that it needed to order a lot more rice and a

lot less bread and potatoes to feed a bunch of Japanese people.

WILLIE K. ITO: The Japanese, we love our rice and our pickled vegetables and all that. So eventually I think they made some kind of a tradeoff where we told the WRA that, rather than potatoes, could we substitute it for rice and tradeoff the potatoes for other uses. So we started getting rice finally.

VO: By the time this happened, people had become completely unaccustomed to seeing Japanese food on the menu. Sumi Hayashi wrote in to us, "My mom used to tell a story about the first time Japanese food appeared on the meal menu at Minidoka. It said 'maze gohan' and no one thought of rice, they wondered why it had a puzzle to wander through...and what the heck is Go-Han?" Maze Gohan is seasoned rice mixed with veggies and meats.

VO: According to our family lore, my great-grandfather insisted that his wife drop out of an English class because it let out at noon, which meant she wouldn't be able to line up with the rest of the family for the mess hall and the family wouldn't get to eat together. He wasn't even talking about getting there in time for the mess hall to open. He wanted her to drop out of the class so she could go wait in line with them. I've never understood his insistence on this but what I do know is that if we're going to talk about the mess hall in camp, we need to talk about waiting in line.



Part of a line waiting for lunch outside a Manzanar mess hall at noon. [Photo](#) taken July 1, 1942 by Dorothea Lange.

[MATSUI](#): Everything was a line up.

[JIM AKUTSU](#): We can hear the mess call, they ring the bell--

[YOOICHI WAKAMIYA](#): They rang a triangular bell. You know, ding ding ding.

[AKUTSU](#): We had to all go out there and line up.



Original caption: "San Bruno, California. Supper time: Meal times are the big events of the day at the assembly centers. This is a line-up of evacuees waiting for the 'B' shift at 5:45 pm. They carry with them their own dishes and cutlery in bags to protect them from the dust. They themselves, wash their own dishes after each meal since the facilities in the mess halls proved inadequate. Most of the residents prefer this shift because sometimes they get second helpings. But the groups are rotated each week. There are eighteen mess halls at this camp that accomodate together, 8,000 persons three times a day. All meals are prepared and served by evacuees." [Photo](#) by Dorothea Lange, June 16, 1942.

[MATSUI](#): It was embarrassing lining up like that.

[MARGIE Y. WONG](#): Everything was a line--

[BAIN](#): And people would faint every day. Two or three people would faint standing in line--



A year later in 1943, Ansel Adams observed similar lines at Manzanar. Original caption: "Mess line, noon, Manzanar Relocation Center, California." [Photo](#) courtesy of the Library of Congress.

VO: Now imagine going through that while pregnant.
Here's Herzig-Yoshinaga again.

[YOSHINAGA](#): Most pregnant women go through what is known as morning sickness and nauseous periods, waiting in line for our meals during that period was very, very difficult under the conditions that existed there: the dust storms, the heat, the cold.

VO: But if you didn't wait in line, you'd get stuck with whatever scraps were leftover.

[BAIN](#): If you didn't get there and get in line, sometimes if you're at the end of the line, they almost ran out of food.

[WAKAMIYA](#): First come first served, you sit where you can.

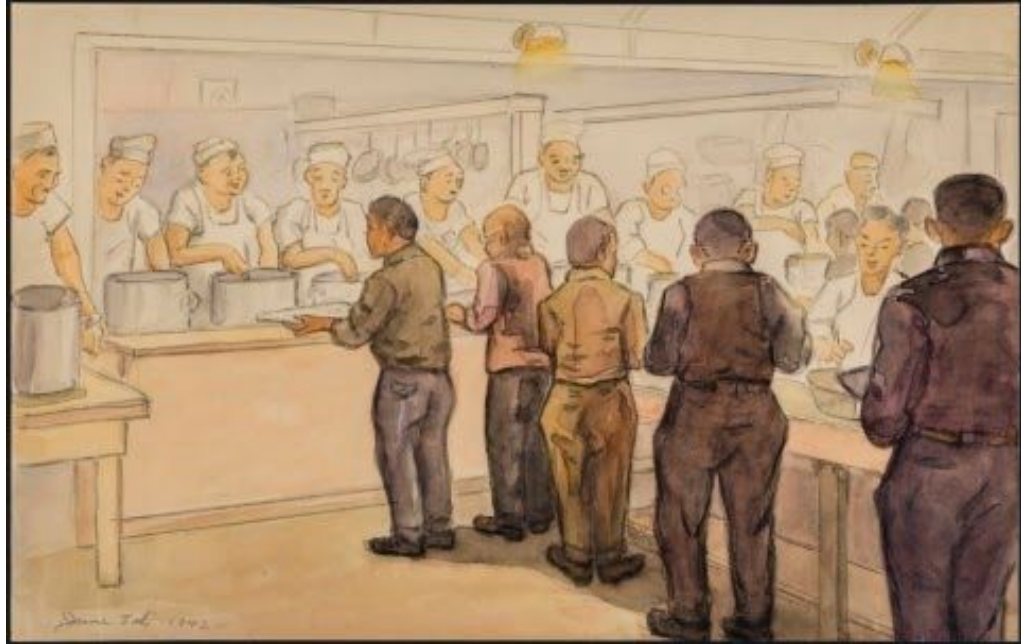


The lines didn't end once you got into the mess hall, as this photo taken at Minidoka shows. [Photo](#) courtesy of the National Archives.

[SACHI KANESHIRO](#): When people first came in, they would sit with their families--

[CHRISTIE O. ICHIKAWA](#): And pretty soon, you know, you couldn't gather everybody together.

VO: So, if you didn't get there early, you'd end up with whatever terrible leftovers remained--and apparently that involved a lot of boiled turnip. And if you didn't line up together, you likely wouldn't be able to sit together. Maybe there was a deeper wisdom behind my great-grandfather's seemingly silly patriarchal decision. Many incarcerated report that the loss of family mealtimes broke down family structures.



A painting by Kango Takamura of the mess hall line at Santa Fe Internment Camp, dated June 8, 1942. [Courtesy of Manzanar National Historic Site and the Kango Takamura Collection.](#)

[SUMIKO YAMAUCHI](#): When we went into camp, the very first, we teenagers went wild.

[JIM HIRABAYASHI](#): I think at first my parents tried to keep us together as a family unit, but--

[KANESHIRO](#): After a week or so, the kids would make friends--

CHORUS: --and the kids would eat with their friends--

[KANESHIRO](#): And the older people would eat with their peers.

[WAKAMIYA](#): Scattered--

[YAMAUCHI](#): We'd run all over the place. You know how big Manzanar was.

[SAKAGUCHI](#): Families were all separated now.

YONEKO HARA: --and the family unit's just gone.

KANESHIRO: --and the whole family structure was destroyed.

FRANK MURAMATSU: We didn't have a family, as I think about it now...why, I didn't speak to Mom hardly at all after that.

WAKAMIYA: The parents were really not in control anymore.

KANESHIRO: The fathers had no more...authority over their children. They couldn't discipline because the kids were doing whatever they wanted to do. And it just, I don't know, it was...You were no longer a family.

MURAMATSU: I lost all my ability to speak Japanese, which I didn't do too much to begin with--

G. SETO: At the time, as a young child, I didn't realize that, but as an adult, I could really see that now.



Men eating lunch in a mess hall at Heart Mountain. [Photo](#) taken by Yoshio Okumoto on January 16, 1944. Courtesy of Yoshio Okumoto.

VO: Hearing these stories gave me a newfound appreciation for my great-grandfather's insistence that the family eat together. He wasn't the only one to do this:

MADELON ARAI YAMAMOTO: Oh yes, we had our own special table, and my father said that we were to eat at that table as a family unit no matter what.

MICHIKO FRANCES CHIKAHISA: Shortly after we got settled my father insisted that we don't go eat in the mess hall, so my mother would go and get the meals and then we had a hot plate and she would add other stuff, and we ate at home 'cause my father didn't like the fact that families didn't eat together and he just, he says, "As long as I'm here we're gonna all stay together."

VO: For those incarcerated who could get their hands on them, hot plates were a popular--and totally banned--cooking solution in the barracks. Each unit had a stove for heat, but it didn't really help with cooking.

M. YAMAMOTO: There's a lot of things you can do on a hot plate.

VO: The problem was, the barracks weren't set up to have so many electrical connections.

HENRY MIYATAKE: Now these barracks were all designed for minimal electrical loads--

OKUI: They put extension cords in--there's too much power was being used--if someone used a hot plate, it would blow out the fuse.

MIYATAKE: So people would replace the fuses with a copper penny in there, and they screwed in there.

[TONAI](#): And that was dangerous because you could burn down.

[MIYATAKE](#): We were wondering when the next fire was going to start.

VO: Nonetheless, hot plates were extremely popular. Evelyn Kirimura authored the column "Food Fancies" in the *Topaz Times*, which was dedicated to sharing recipes that could be made on a hot plate from simple ingredients purchased at the canteen. She wrote, "We have come to the conclusion that cooking is simple in Topaz if: you have an electric plate, the coal stove cooperates, you are able to secure the ingredients, and you have enough dishes with which to serve the food."

[Explore](#) **digitized issues of the *Topaz Times*.**

VO: The recipes in "Food Fancies" showcase the incarcerated's ingenuity. Pudding pie from Amy Kajiwara. Mrs. Lloyd Enomoto's corn chowder. Martha Nozawa shared a chocolate ice cream recipe that involved boiling a can of sweetened condensed milk, then putting it outside during the cold Utah winter. (Best not to attempt that recipe during the summer.) If you didn't have a hot plate, the stove placed in each barrack room for heat was your other option.

[YAMAUCHI](#): We had this metal, like a pie plate--

[YAMAUCHI](#): We used to create this cake that we used to bake over the heater that we had. We used to make these little cupcakes and it'd come out like a pancake, a small one, and it tasted good. [Laughs]

VO: Okay, so the food was getting better. Ish. But at Manzanar, the mess hall staff had another problem.

GRACE SHINODA NAKAMURA: The first rumblings were because--

mitsue matsui: --things started disappearing.

NAKAMURA: The cook was saying, "You know, we're not getting the sugar that we're supposed to get."

MATSUMOTO: Lots of times when we got our supplies, like eggs, there would be layers missing out of the crate.

NAKAMURA: "Someone's stealing the coffee."

NAKAMURA: Those government workers, they lived in a separate place.

HARRY UENO: Caucasian mess hall, block one, they having everything.

NAKAMURA: They lived in barracks, real nice ones that were stucco that had insulation and all that kind of stuff, nice windows and all that kind of--

UENO: They got a sugar bowl on every table, a couple sugar bowls, every one of them filled up.

YOSHIMITSU SUYEMATSU: I heard it was hakujin people--

NOBU SHIMOKOCHI: The whites--

MURAKAMI: The cook--

MATSUMOTO: This guy named Winchester.

KOBARA: Director in the camp.

UENO: Mess stewards, they do all kinds of tricks to cheat the people.

VO: Harry Ueno decided to investigate.

JOHN TATEISHI: Harry found the master calendar, and so he knew what was being delivered, and certain things never showed up at Manzanar, staples, and they figured they're selling it on the black market.

MURAKAMI: He was taking a lot of stuff, sell it to the black market and he wanted me to do it too and I told him, "Nothing doing. If you're gonna do that, I'm quittin'," and he fired me.

UENO: He said we have to use a lot of sugar in hospital, and the hospital said lot of people have diabetes so we don't use the sugar--

MATSUI: Well, the Caucasians who were working there were caught red-handed. As they left--

UENO: Car hit something, probably a railroad track that bumped something and he had an accident. His trunk is wide open.

MATSUI: Sure enough, there was meat and things like that in the trunk of their car.

VO: Here's Harry Ueno:

UENO: I met the supply department, his name is Yoshiro Kaku. He opened up the warehouse and get the sugar pile. So we was putting in how many sacks here and there, we didn't hardly have enough. While we were checking the warehouse, the mess steward there, Winchester, came over and jumped on us and tear off the record we was marking on, see?

[TATEISHI](#): They both confronted the administrators.

[MATSUMOTO](#): And sugar was rationed--

[PAUL TAKAGI](#): Stealing sugar was a federal offense.

[UENO](#): But he's a powerful man and nobody opened their mouths and say anything.

[NAKAMURA](#): They were taking advantage of us.

[Learn more](#) about **Harry Ueno**.

VO: So maybe we should mention here that these anecdotes about the theft of food supplies have not technically been confirmed. Here's Dr. Kim:

KIM: We're entirely reliant on oral history. I haven't been able to find any cases where people were actually prosecuted for that.

VO: But, like, do any of us really believe that didn't happen?

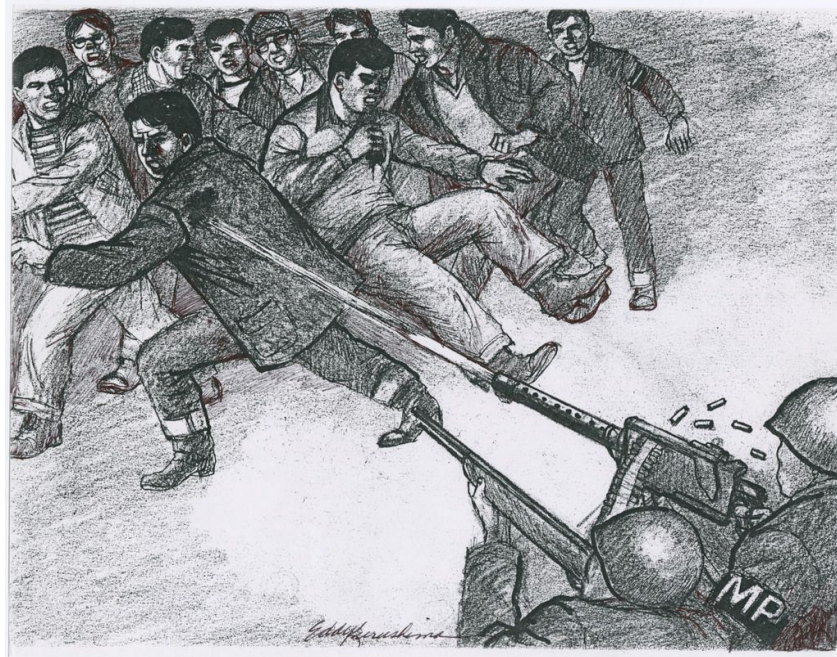
KIM: I have no doubt that it happened. It happened everywhere across the United States. There certainly was black marketing from larger or commercial institutions.

VO: It was about to get worse, unfortunately.

[UENO](#): Campbell put two Japanese onto tailing me all the time. He's a stooge for trailing me.

[TATEISHI](#): And it was around then that the riots broke out.

[MASAHIRO NAKAJO](#): And that's where the riots started.



A sketch of the Manzanar riot, also known as the Manzanar uprising, by Eddy Kurushima. [Courtesy of Frank Abe, Densho.](#)

VO: In December 1942, Fred Tayama, who was thought to be colluding with the administration among other things, was beaten up. He blamed Ueno along with two others. Assistant Project Director Ned Campbell--one of the individuals Ueno accused of stealing food--arrested Ueno and sent him to the county jail in Independence. Many were outraged at Ueno's arrest, which they attributed to Campbell's vendetta against him. A meeting the next day drew more than 2,000 people. Military police entered Manzanar without authorization. That afternoon, Manzanar Director Ralph Merritt agreed to bring Ueno back to Manzanar for his trial and to withdraw the military police if the crowd disbanded. The crowd disbanded temporarily, but gathered outside the police station later that evening. Merritt brought the Military Police back into the camp and--as the crowd began throwing rocks and taunting the MPs--ordered the use of tear gas upon the demonstrators. Two MPs instead fired upon the

crowd, killing two. Deemed a troublemaker by the WRA, Ueno was sent to Moab, Utah, then to Leupp, in Arizona. As we shall see, that was not the only time tensions arose over food in the camps.

Read about the Manzanar riot/uprising.

VO: In late April 1943, the Denver Post published a series of inflammatory articles by columnist Jack Carberry, "Hostile Group is Pampered at Wyoming Camp" and that "Food is Hoarded for Japs in U.S. While Americans in Nippon Are Tortured." Here's historian Roger Daniels:

ROGER DANIELS: There was a big segment of the American population that felt that the WRA was quote, unquote, "coddling the Japs." That they were getting sugar, butter, food, that the general population wouldn't.

VO: This controversy would come up on and off throughout the camps' existence. Earlier that year, North Carolina Senator Robert Rice Reynolds had charged that "the Japs are even given fine bathrooms." Listen to our episode on the latrines for a better idea of what these "fine bathrooms" entailed. At Granada in Colorado, Min Tonai recalls:

MIN TONAI: We always fought with the Colorado politicians, they always said we're being coddled in the stucco--because it was beige colored--in the stucco palaces. And they also said, one guy said that we have three swimming pools there. We were the only camp on a hillside, so from the highway you could see our camp. Well, the three pools they were talking about were the sewage settling ponds.

VO: Definitely would not recommend swimming in those. When Carberry published his articles, the accusations of pampering took off in an unprecedented way.

KIM: That particular scandal, due to its timing, just really blew up in a way that some of the other accusations of pampering at other camps had not. So it coincided with more severe rationing.

VO: That was Dr. Kim. Rationing often helped stoke resentment against Japanese Americans, she says. But something else also often coincided with these allegations of pampering.

KIM: The other key factor was the start of diplomatic and civilian and prisoner exchange with Japan and the very harsh conditions that were reported in Japan for prisoners there.

VO: Sure enough, when Carberry's article came out--

KIM: It also coincided with the reports of treatment of downed US pilots, in Japan.

VO: Of course, the two actually had nothing to do with each other.

KIM: The incarceration was a domestic civilian detention, it had nothing to do with the treatment of prisoners of war. It was, in fact, not governed by the Geneva Conventions properly because of those citizens. But public opinion often equated the two.

VO: Wyoming senator E.V. Robertson, a Cody resident, quickly seized upon Carberry's claims. He publicly accused the WRA of "petting" and "pampering" the incarcerated,

though he had never actually visited the concentration camp 20 miles from his hometown. The *New York Times* picked up the story in early May.

HENRY MIYATAKE: Well, there were some allegations made in Congress about the fact that we were being coddled. Japanese Americans were treated with more generosity than they should receive.

VO: Members of the House Committee on Un-American Affairs visited some of the camps to get a better idea of what the conditions were like.

MIYATAKE: They decided to tour the different camps to see what the camp life was really about. And Minidoka was one of the five camps they visited. But we never saw them. They never stepped inside of the camp itself. They were in the administrative area, we later found out.

VO: Guy Robertson, the Heart Mountain director, said of Carberry's reporting that he quote "made a complete and exhaustive survey of our project, mostly from the Irma Hotel." It turned out that Carberry's primary source for his Denver Post articles was Earl Best, a former Heart Mountain employee who had been fired 30 days prior. Here's Dr. Kim:

KIM: He'd been at Poston. And then he was hired on at Heart Mountain, and the Poston director had telegraphed that he was probably not competent to be chief steward, but that he might do as assistant steward. Their internal documents, show that he was virulently prejudiced against Japanese, and had a very punitive attitude, and a very combative attitude.

VO: Best was later charged with passing bad checks. He had also come from Canada without papers and still managed to get hired by the federal government. Twice.

VO: In summer 1943, the first harvest started to come in. And this was none too soon, because the camps were fresh out of canned goods. Here's Dr. Kim:

KIM: And then 1943 was when the really heavy rationing came in.

VO: Kirimura described the blow that this meant for the incarcerated in "Food Fancies": "This column is just about ready to give up the ghost and yell 'uncle,'" she wrote. "Before, we had to find the recipes suitable for electric plates and containing ingredients obtainable in Topaz, then we gave ourselves a little leeway and included Delta. But now, with the necessity of excluding canned goods, we must admit that we're beaten. Has anyone a towel we can throw in?" So it was good that the camps finally had some fresh produce to serve in the mess halls.

HERZIG YOSHINAGA: It became better after the residents had learned to, after the residents had cultivated the land and started growing the vegetables.

KIMIKO NAKASHIMA: You know how resourceful Japanese are so all the stuff they needed, vegetables, they planted. So they didn't have to purchase any vegetables, 'cause they grew it in camp. Well, there's a lot of farmers. They know how to grow things.

LUCY KIRIHARA: They farmed the land so we did have some fresh vegetables and so forth.

NAKASHIMA: So they planted cabbage, lettuce, you know, whatever we needed in, in the camp, daikon and cucumber. Whatever they needed. They never had to buy outside. They grew in camp.

VO: Produce was not all the camps farmed. Some had hog, chicken, and cattle farms for meat and eggs. Gila River even had a turkey farm.

SAKAUYE: Heart Mountain farm consisted of about 1,500 acres.

VO: But it didn't start out like that. Most of the area hadn't been irrigated.

JAMES ITO: I was told to feed twelve thousand people.

VO: That was James Ito who was the Assistant Farm Superintendent at Heart Mountain.

JAMES ITO: Along the river that I used mostly, the soil was nice and sandy and fairly deep. So we were very lucky to have that area to grow our vegetables.

VO: Ito had graduated from Berkeley with a degree in soil science and horticulture in 1940. He analyzed the soil in different locations around the site to determine what to grow where.

JAMES ITO: One of our evacuees had a seed business, and he sold us all of his seeds.

VO: This was not a solo venture though. Here's Eiichi Edward Sakauye, who replaced Ito as Assistant Farm Superintendent when Ito left Heart Mountain.

[SAKAUYE](#): The experienced group of farmers are from Wapato, Washington, where the climate is almost similar to where we are staying in Heart Mountain, Wyoming. These are the Isseis who had farmed in Washington, very experienced.

[SAKAUYE](#): The farm workers only got paid twelve dollars a month to sixteen, to nineteen dollars a month.

VO: In addition to farm workers, other incarcerated were hard at work building an irrigation system.



Original caption: "Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Heart Mountain, Wyoming. A center resident watches from the bank of the Highline Ditch canal, main irrigation water source for this relocation center's farm lands, as the first water finds its way along the just completed excavation." [Photo](#) courtesy of the National Archives.

SAKAUYE: And the evacuees, upon coming to this camp, they were recruited immediately to finish up the canal.

VO: They got the irrigation canal up and running and planted crops for the 1943 growing season--but then they had to get everything harvested.

SAKAUYE: We only have 109 growing days, and if we don't get a crop to harvest in 109 days, then the frost or freeze will get it.

VO: The Heart Mountain farms produced all kinds of stuff.

SAKAUYE: A beautiful crop of potatoes.

SAKAUYE: The hotbed area, growing peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, cucumbers, so that we can get them out in the field.

SAKAUYE: A hog farm. We have chicken farm, also.

VO: The agriculture program at Heart Mountain harvested more than 1,000 tons of produce in summer 1943, despite local farmers' predictions that the crop had been planted too late to have a significant yield. The program more than doubled that yield a year later. These crops formed a significant part of the incarcerated's diet once these farm programs got off the ground. The other concentration camps had their own agricultural programs. Different regions could produce different crops that could be shipped around to the other camps. In fact, several of the camps produced excess of what their populations needed.

JAMES ITO: And we were able to even provide vegetables to some of the other camps.

VO: So, the agricultural programs seemed like they were off to a good start. Then, on October 15, 1943 at Tule Lake, a truck transporting incarcerated from the Tule Lake farm back to the camp turned over. One man was killed. The widow's benefits only came out to a little over \$10 a month--two-thirds of the deceased's monthly wage. Agricultural workers went on strike. The administration responded by bringing in 234 incarcerated from other camps to harvest the crops. These strikebreakers were paid \$1 per hour--meaning they could make the usual rate of \$16 per month in about two eight-hour days.

KAWARATANI: People within the camp, they weren't gonna be strikebreakers cause, you know, they would--were gonna get beaten up so they had to bring them from other camps.

KAWARATANI: "You're feeding them well and paying them more"--

VO: Tensions continued to escalate. On November 1, WRA director Dillon Myer visited with group representatives--but rejected their demands. The administration built a fence to separate themselves off from the incarcerated. On November 4, a crowd of 400 tried to stop trucks taking food to the strikebreakers. The group later headed to Tule Lake Director Raymond Best's house. The Army entered the camp and used teargas to disperse the crowd.

KAWARATANI: And they said, "There's probably some stealing at the warehouses," so some of the leaders went over to check on that, but then they were caught in kind of a restricted area, and so they were tossed into the stockade. So there were further protests to get them out of the stockade.

VO: Many were arrested and locked up in the Tule Lake stockade. A curfew was established. On November 14, martial law was declared at Tule Lake.

KAWARATANI: So then the army really took over Tule Lake.

<h2>Disloyal Japs Fed Well, Idle While Nearby Crops Rot</h2>			<p>quantity. The food comes from the Army quartermaster and cost the government an average of 38 cents a day for each evacuee for the past three months. Each is rationed about one-half an ounce of sugar a meal.</p>
<p>By NICK BOURNE United Press Staff Correspondent SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 6. — Ducks and geese today feasted on unharvested lettuce and barley crops, \$250,000 worth of frost-threatened potatoes, and the Army fed 15,000 admittedly disloyal Japanese at the Tule Lake, Calif., segregation center, where the Japs attempted to kidnap Ray R. Best, project director, Thursday night.</p>	<p>The Japanese refuse to harvest the crops, which would be shipped to the nine evacuation camps holding the 95,000 "loyal" United States persons of Japanese ancestry.</p> <p>Focal point of the trouble which brought troops, tanks, machine-guns and armored cars to take over the camp was 1,200 kibei, unruly young Japs educated in Japan, brought here from Hawaii.</p> <p>Until the Army took over, white</p>	<p>War Relocation Authority employees feared for their lives, after beatings of whites, intimidation and the inadequacy of protection.</p> <p>While at the camp, I learned how the Japs live. There were many rumors that they dined on T-bone steak, wasted butter and were being "coddled."</p> <p>Here is a typical menu for a day:</p> <p>Breakfast—Fruit, such as stewed prunes or apricots; cooked cereal,</p>	

News coverage of the farmworker strike at Tule Lake in November 1943, which conveniently leaves out the reasons behind the strike. [Courtesy of The Seattle Times](#).

VO: The farm programs in the concentration camps shaped agriculture in those regions for years to come. When Sakaue returned to Heart Mountain decades later, he had a run-in with a resident from the nearby town of Cody.

SAKAUYE: She said, "Wait a minute." I was getting out of the car, I thought I did something wrong. No, she says, "You fellows did a wonderful thing here and opened our eyes as to what we can grow here." So it made me feel good, you know.

VO: The agriculture programs were also a way of preserving the incarcerateds' food culture. Some of the camps started growing Japanese vegetables so that they could cook some of the dishes they loved even in camp.

ITO: Japanese vegetables, we'd grow also.

[SAKAUYE](#): The *Isseis*, they had nothing else to do, so they became interested in growing daikon and nappa for our own use, which we would, never would have.

[HIUGA](#): And my father worked out in the farm, and I don't know if you ever heard of these, we call them naba, but it's kind of orangeish, yellowish mushroom, and he would get that and bring it home.

[ITO](#): The white radishes, the daikons, were great.

[YAMAUCHI](#): Soya beans, you could make soya sauce out of it, and you made tofu out of it.

VO: Some of the camps had their own tofu and soy sauce factories and shipped their products off to the other camps.

[YAMAUCHI](#): My father used to make tofu in Manzanar.



Japanese Americans making tofu in Tule Lake, October 24, 1945. [Photo](#) courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

FRANK EMI: And we used to get up there about four in the morning--

VO: And at New Years, some of the concentration camps even hosted their own mochitsukis.

HOMER YASUI: And one of the primary things the Japanese will always have at Oshogatsu, New Years, is what they call mochi. Mochi or pounded rice cakes, and you've been to these mochitsuki, and this tradition goes back for centuries, maybe millennia as far as I know.

SEICHI HAYASHIDA: So the first winter in Minidoka--

MARY HAMANO: So we had mochitsuki--

ONO: They had mochitsuki in our camp, in our block.

MASADA: They pooled together their sugar and their mochi rice, able to get it, order it or whatever.

HAYASHIDA: And, they have a special rice.

YAMASAKI: And they would steam the rice--

KITAMOTO: --in wooden crates over an open fire.

YAMASAKI: And they would pound it and make it into mochi.

KITAMOTO: The old fashioned way is to pound it with mallets.

KENJI J. YAGUCHI: There was a wooden hammer.

HAYASHIDA: In Japanese it's called an usu.

SEICHI HAYASHIDA: Big bowl made out of carved-out wood.

TOSHI NAGAMORI ITO: And they had even made a cement vat to make *mochi*--

NISHIDA: Our whole block participated--

ITO: And the men in the camp would pound the *mochi*--

YAMASAKI: Hachimaki around the headband, and they would have happi coats and--

ONO: They used to pound mochi in the laundry room.

MASADA: Another person puts water on it, after they pound it.

INAHARA: You keep turning it, folding it in each time the rice is pounded, and it's steaming hot.

MASADA: So it has to be a rhythm: pound, water, pound and water. And if you don't watch it, somebody's going to get hit on the hand, if you don't have that rhythm.



Incarcerees pounding mochi for Oshogatsu celebrations in Amache c. 1945.

[Photo](#) courtesy of the George Ochikubo Collection, Densho.

SAKAI: And then the women would make the small cakes.

INAHARA: Then you form it into little balls, let it cool--

HAMANO: --and divide them, everybody had their share of mochi for the new year's.

NISHIDA: It was just a good thing. It was just positive and feel good about being Buddhahead, and especially eating that fresh mochi.

VO: Mochitsukis in camp were a treat, but they were also rare. Not all camps had people who could steam the rice, pound it, flip it. For those blocks, New Year's was--

MASADA: Just like any other day, I guess. It was not mochi and special foods. Oh no, nothing like that.

VO: Some of these traditions have survived. Our parents used to take us to mochitsukis at the Japanese grocery store near our home in DC when we were little. Whenever I'm in L.A., I love visiting Fugetsu-Do, whose owners led the mochitsuki at Heart Mountain. (Mochi is my absolute favorite food, by the way.)

VO: Other traditions have been fragmented by the same dynamics that broke apart families in the mess halls during the war, the fuzziness of memory over time, and the loss of loved ones. At the beginning of this episode, we spoke with chef John Sugimura, who told us why he puts purple cabbage under his dishes at his restaurant in Minneapolis, *Pinku*. Sugimura's grandmother ran her restaurant in Sacramento right up until the family's forced removal to Tule Lake.

SUGIMURA: Purple cabbage deliberately tells the story of what went wrong and why I will never know what grandma put underneath the gyoza.

VO: His family spent four and a half years at Tule Lake. During that time, they lost the restaurant they'd worked so hard to build.

SUGIMURA: The kids and grandma would close down the restaurant, it was a Wednesday night, they were ordered into camp on a Thursday morning.

VO: Food tells a story. And for Chef Sugimura, and Noah and me, it's a story about our grandmothers. I feel that pretty deeply right now. Our grandmother is in every one of these episodes, but this one especially. Hearing how much others hated apple butter, the stories about mochitsuki in camp--these stories brought me closer to her at a time when physically I was unable to be with her or with my family.

My grandmother showed her love through her food. Teaching her grandchildren how to fan the sushi rice, how to get a mix of colors, how to roll the futomaki, how to stuff the inari. At New Year's, she'd wake up early to make ozoni for us, although she was fairly ambivalent about the stuff herself. Food... was her love language.

Noah and I would like to dedicate this episode to our grandmother, Fudeko Tsuji Maruyama, and all the grandmothers, the questions they could never answer, and the food they made for us with love. If you can, give your grandma a hug. Make her some food. Put purple cabbage underneath the dish. Not for the pop of color, but as a reminder of all we have lost, and all we remember despite that.

VO: You've been listening to Campu. Thanks for joining us this first season--it's meant the world to us to have you following along. If you haven't already, we'd love for you to subscribe, like, share, review--on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you're tuning in.

One review that I loved reading was from Oregon State Amy. She says: "Like so many Japanese Americans experience, my family would not talk about camp...Thankful for this podcast and keeping our history alive." Amy, we spent like fifteen minutes trying to record a really heartfelt thank you for you and found out it's actually really hard to do when you're trapped in a 90 degree closet for three hours with only your brother to keep you company through Zoom. But actually, really, huge genuine thank you. Also, tell your friends to tune in--they listen to you. And at risk of betraying my awkwardness again... yeah, an actual, genuine, very big thank you to everyone who's helped out so far.

VO: Visit densho.org/campu for this episode's transcript. Each transcript comes with photos, links to the oral histories we quote, and helpful resources so you can learn more about the topics we're discussing.

VO: Campu is produced by Hana and Noah Maruyama. The series is brought to you by Densho. Their mission is to preserve and share the history of the WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans to promote equity and justice today. Follow them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at @DenshoProject. Support for Campu comes from the Atsuhiko and Ina Goodwin Tateuchi Foundation. Special thanks to Natasha Varner, Brian Niiya, Nina Wallace, Kristi Nakata,

Naoko Tanabe, Andrea Simenstad, John Sugimura, and Heidi Kim for their assistance with this episode. And because I told them I would: thanks to our mom and dad who listen to every single episode, often several times over. And because Noah is asking me to now, thanks also to his girlfriend Kati, who does the same. This episode included excerpts from around 80 Densho oral histories as well as interviews conducted by Frank Abe for his film Conscience and the Constitution. The names of the narrators featured in this episode are: Tamiko Honda, Saburo Masada, Cherry Kinoshita, George Kiyo Wakatsuki, Sox Kitajima, Mary Nomura, Mika Hiuga, Tosh Yasutake, Margaret Junko Morita Hiratsuka, Peggie Nishimura Bain, Taira Fukushima, Sam H. Ono, Yae Wada, May Suzuki Ichino, Susie 'Jinx' Fujii, Masako Yoshida, Robert M. Wada, Toshiko Aiboshi, Mas Okui, Richard E. Yamashiro, Roy Nakagawa, Kinge Okauchi, Bo T. Sakaguchi, Lucy Kirihara, Setsuko Izumi Asano, Kats Kunitsugu, Hy Shishino, Shizuko 'Suzie' Sakai, Hisaye Yamamoto, Grace Watanabe Kimura, Karlene Koketsu, Leo Uchida, Shoichi Kobara, Dorothy Ikkanda, June Takahashi, Kay Endo, Shirley Nagatomi Okabe, Shosuke Sasaki, Richard M. Murakami, Tom Matsuoka, Aiko Herzog-Yoshinaga, Massie Hinatsu, Marion Masada, Misako Shigekawa, Frank Yamasaki, Akiko Okuno, Frank Isamu Kikuchi, Jim Akutsu, Yooichi Wakamiya, Margie Y. Wong, Sachi Kaneshiro, Christie O. Ichikawa, Sumiko Yamauchi, Jim Hirabayashi, Dorothy H. Sato, Yoneko Hara, Grace K. Seto, Frank Muramatsu, Madelon Arai Yamamoto, Willie K. Ito, Michiko Frances Chikahisa, Henry Miyatake, Min Tonai, Mitsue Matsui, Grace Shinoda Nakamura, Harry Ueno, George Matsumoto, Yoshimitsu Suyematsu, Nobu Shimokochi, Tommy T. Kushi, John Tateishi, Paul Takagi, Masahiro Nakajo, Roger Daniels,

Gordon Hirabayashi, Kimiko Nakashima, James
Ito, Eiichi Edward Sakauye, Fumi Hayashi,
Frank Kitamoto, Frank Emi, Homer Yasui, Seichi
Hayashida, Mary Hamano, Mo Nishida, Toshio
Inahara, Kenji J. Yaguchi, Toshi Nagamori Ito.