

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

My name is Carol Yoshimoto and I am a Topaz descendant, a daughter born after the war to a couple who married in camp, and I am a stakeholder in the current controversy. Nine members of my family were confined at Topaz for the full three years it was in operation.

With two friends from Berkeley, I visited the Topaz Museum in September 2015 in order to see the Inaugural Art Exhibit which was on display before the grand opening of the museum. Jane Beckwith gave us a private tour of the art exhibit and then led our car caravan from the town of Delta to the camp site stopping along the way to show us historically relevant points of interest.

I had braced myself for some raw emotions at seeing the camp site, but nothing could really prepare me for the experience. The enormity of the injustice inflicted on my family members and their ability to somehow rise above it left me speechless. Through the years my family chose to speak sparingly of what they endured, perhaps to shield me from the trauma of hearing about their hardships and the indignities they suffered. I have never forgotten Jane's words to me on that day. Likely having observed that same look of shell shock on the faces of other Topaz descendants visiting the camp site for the first time, she knew how best to comfort me. She recounted the story of a little girl, wise beyond her years, who might have been to the camp site with a school group on an earlier occasion. This time she was there with her family and her younger brothers were running around the site as if it were a playground. The little girl took her brothers aside and explained that what they were doing was wrong because "they're still here." Of course, with those words "they're still here" she meant the spirits of those who had made the best of an untenable situation on that forsaken piece of desert.

On that visit in 2015 Jane took me to the footprint left by Block 5 where my father's family was once confined but she was unable to show me the outline of Block 42 to which my mother's family was assigned because it was the only parcel that the Topaz Museum had been unable to acquire. That parcel belonged to a Delta property owner who refused to sell it to the Topaz Museum thinking that by holding on to it he could leverage its value and extract a tidy profit above and beyond the property's market value at that time. Jane impressed me then with her determination to secure the land on which Block 42 once stood and somehow she got it done years later by working with a sympathetic and civic-minded Delta resident who traded his property of similar size for the coveted acreage and then donated it to the Topaz Museum.

I have made a donation to the Topaz Museum in memory of my family members and I have included the Topaz Museum in my estate planning. I have volunteered at events sponsored by the Friends of Topaz in support of the Topaz Museum such as the Mark Inouye benefit concert at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music; I have helped staff informational booths at the Nihonmachi Street Fair and J-Sei Family Day; and I have supported fundraising events at the Buchanan Street YMCA and the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California.

Jane Beckwith has always demonstrated her unwavering dedication to the mission of the Topaz Museum, which is to protect and preserve the site, the artifacts, and the memories of all those whose lives were forever changed by the years they were forced

to spend in Topaz. It is a gross injustice to accuse Jane and the Museum Board she leads of desecrating the Topaz site by excavating and moving to a more secure location a relic as important as the Wakasa Monument.

In a perfect world there would have been no miscommunication between the archaeologists and the Topaz Museum. In a perfect world there would have been no racial animus as evidenced by the incidents of trespassing and malicious activity at the site. Instead there would have been ample time to weigh every available option and to offer stakeholders the opportunity to bear witness to the unearthing of the monument. But this is not a perfect world and exigent circumstances required bold leadership and decisive action in keeping with the Topaz Museum's mission.

If Topaz was once regarded sarcastically as "the jewel of the desert," the Topaz camp site should now be viewed without sarcasm as one of the crown jewels among the incarceration sites recognized as National Historic Landmarks by the National Park Service. Topaz stakeholders owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Jane Beckwith and her tireless efforts to preserve the camp site and to oversee the day to day operations of the Topaz Museum. The work of the Topaz Museum and its board is more important now than ever. So much has been accomplished to date and yet so much still needs to be done. The most pressing concern right now is to give the Wakasa Monument its proper place in the history of incarceration sites and to prepare for the Memorial Ceremony at the Topaz Museum in 2023 on the 80th anniversary of Mr. Wakasa's murder with input from the Wakasa Memorial Committee, which represents one group of stakeholders, and all of the other interested parties.

I cannot help but think that the Issei landscape gardeners who had no choice but to bury the Wakasa Monument in 1943 would take a dim view of the current controversy. Would they not shake their heads in disapproval over the wedge driving later generations apart over the hows and whys of the monument's excavation? Would they not decry the monument becoming a cause celebre and instead be extraordinarily pleased that so many of us care about the fate of their monument to honor one man who was senselessly murdered? Wasn't that their goal in erecting the monument in the first place?

We should all take a moment to think about the Japanese expression "Oome ni miru." Taken literally it means to use a big sieve to look at something and to overlook someone else's missteps in the process, which seems particularly appropriate in the archaeological context of this controversy. Loosely translated it means "to see the big picture." I believe the Issei landscape gardeners would see the big picture here and understand that so long as the Wakasa killing is no longer just a sorry footnote in a sordid chapter of American history, their job is finally done. They will be standing front and center at the Wakasa Memorial Ceremony in 2023 at the Topaz Museum with all of us.

- - - Oome ni miru - - -