

To the Friends of Topaz,

I write reluctantly about the Wakasa memorial stone. I say reluctantly because I too am a descendant of Tanforan/Topaz incarcerated, I too belong to the Japanese American community. But I do not agree with how the recently formed Wakasa Memorial Committee has dealt with, and continues to deal with, the Topaz Museum and its board of directors. I do not agree how the Committee from the get go framed the situation as “us” versus “them.” I do not see the point of their publicity, correspondence, discussions, proposals, and meetings coming from an adversarial standpoint.

I have been to Topaz three times, most recently to visit the new museum. It is excellent and certainly “holds its own” in the pantheon of other camp museums and exhibits. I have known Jane Beckwith nearly 25 years, and a board member and museum supporters nearly 50 years. I applaud the decades of hard work they – and the town of Delta - put in to make the museum a reality. Jane and the board are respectful, knowledgeable, and fully cognizant of the importance of their stewardship of the Topaz site.

For months now I have been reading the increasingly aggressive barrage of letters, emails, op-eds, articles, comments, tweets, and posts from both the Committee and individuals about the “demolition” and “desecration” of the memorial stone that was somehow perpetrated by members of the Topaz Museum board. It is difficult to shake the perception of an orchestrated campaign directed with particular vehemence towards Jane Beckwith. Most disturbing is the insinuation of race into the situation via emails and an anonymous package. There is absolutely no room for that and must stop.

When I saw the list of “who’s who” on the Wakasa Memorial Committee Advisory Council I was surprised that Tom Ikeda, Karen Korematsu, Roger Shimomura and other academics, authors and historians signed their names onto correspondence that sounds more like demands. I am reminded again of the “us” versus “them” division, but hope their signatures do not suggest an overall lack of support for the museum or its board.

But here’s the thing. It is done. The memorial stone is removed. I’m fairly certain it will not be put back into the desert sand for a do-over. I agree 100% that how it was removed was wrong. The museum board acknowledged that and apologized for that. I also thought that the exact location of the memorial stone should not have been made public. Rather, the discovery of the memorial stone could – and should - have been a cause for respectful and somber celebration. Sadly, it was not.

The question now is how to move forward, how to include everyone, not “your side” or “my side.” Everyone. The memorial stone is a tangible symbol for all of us. It is a physical reminder of what our families went through 80 years ago, and of how much work there is still left to do. I take the glass half full approach and say it’s not too late.

Jean Hibino
Topaz descendant