



Interview with Laura L. Kusaka

MOHAI, *Boys' and Girls' Day Dolls at Bailey Gatzert Elementary*, 2024.52.1 Transcribed for the 2023 4Culture Collections Care Grant

Narrator(s): Laura Kusaka

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Interviewer: Polly Yorioka

This is an interview with Laura Kusaka about her mother, Massie's, life in Seattle's Japanese American community, the Yutani family's immigration story, and life in Seattle before incarceration during the second World War. The interview is conducted by the 2024 MOHAI Curator's Fellow Polly Yorioka in order to learn more about the Boys' and Girls' Day Dolls at Bailey Gatzert Elementary.

Keywords: Japanese American, incarceration, Bailey Gatzert, post-war community

Transcriber's note: Areas of uncertainty have been marked with an asterisk (*).

[Statement begins]

Polly Yorioka: Awesome. So, um, to get this started, I'm just gonna say a little bit just for the purpose of the transcription. So, this is Polly Yorioka, it is August 19th at 5:02 p.m. Seattle time, and, um, yeah. So, Laura, could you introduce yourself, say your name and where you are right now?

Laura Kusaka: Okay, my name is Laura Lee Kusaka, right now I'm in Toy—the city of Toyohashi, located in Aichi Prefecture of Japan.

Polly Yorioka: Nice. And how long have you been living there?

Laura Kusaka: Um, actually since 1976 here in Toyohashi, so. Yeah, I've been living here in Japan much longer than I actually—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, that's a really long time. What brought you to Japan from Se—were you in Seattle before or where—where did you grow up?

Laura Kusaka: Well, I grew up in Seattle until I was eighteen and I went away to college, uh, in Ohio, and during my college days I spent one year in Japan on an exchange—year abroad program. And after graduation I got a scholarship to study two years in Japan, and then—so that was '74 to '76—and then I met somebody (chuckles) and-and, uh, I—eventually we got married and I've been living in Japan since.



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Polly Yorioka: That's wonderful, wow. That's great. So, can you tell me about your relationship to the Yutani family?

Laura Kusaka: Okay, well I'm the oldest daughter of Masao and Masako Tomita, who—um, formerly Yutani—um, and, um, I pretty much grew up—like I said, I lived in Seattle until I was eighteen and, um, interacted very closely with my, uh, my cousins on both sides of the Yutani family and the Tomita side, yeah.

Polly Yorioka: Sorry, lost my notes. So, can you tell me what you know about the immigration story of the family?

Laura Kusaka: Okay, well from what I understand, my—uh, let's see. My grandfather, Nobuichi Yutani, uh, he was born and raised in a small town in Wakayama, in the Nachi-Katsuura* area. And evidently, he—either his older brother or he and his father first went, uh, the two of them, to work in the lumber camps in Washington state, and then something happened, something unfortunate happened, and the father or the older brother passed away and Nobuichi had to come back to Japan. And, uh, I think the second time, he went to-to America, uh, it was with a-a wife, okay? And so, he married my grandmother, Kazue, who was a—living in either the same town or a neighboring town, and then they went together as a couple, uh. I think there was a seven- or eight-year age difference, uh, and I guess at the time there were a lot of other immigrants from that area, it wasn't unusual, and from what my grandmother tells me, uh—well, in those days it was not unusual for women to marry the people—the person that their parents or someone had arranged, so, that was pretty much the situation, I think. Yeah.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, that makes sense. And I think you had said that you knew a little bit about your grandmother's, like, hopes and dreams, even—I think—did you say that? Or like—what do you know about, like, her experience? Or is there anything you wanted to share about that?

Laura Kusaka: Well, I was fortunate to be able to—after I learned how to speak Japanese, and, uh, on one of her visits, uh, to Japan, uh, she—we spent a lot of time, and she would tell me all these stories, you know, things I had never heard before because we couldn't really communicate.

Polly Yorioka: Mm, right.

Laura Kusaka: You know, I—with her very limited English. So, I-I think—what really stood out in that story was that, um, her mother was the second wife of-of the father, and you know, he—his wife—first wife passed away or something, anyways—uh, therefore, there were other daughters,



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and so, being the daughter of the second wife, she could not do exactly what she wanted. And I think she wanted to continue her education, uh, and I think in those days, uh, go to a school where you could become a schoolteacher was maybe, um, you know, that was really a big deal for women then. However, uh—I think she—the way she said it was, well, she had to kind of defer to her other, uh, her stepsisters, and therefore, uh, her dreams of continuing her education were dashed. And she mentioned she had to go someplace else, uh—maybe she went to sewing school or something, learning how to make—oh, you know, Western-style clothes, and therefore, she went to Osaka or some place. And the reason that being, her—she said—and she said this with-with, uh-uh, grimacing, that in those days, in order to prepare to become an adult, you had to live and— and eat the food of somebody else, or something. That was the literal translation, and, uh, so, my—in many ways that was maybe to kind of prepare her, to—eventually she's gonna leave home, and marry somebody, so that was maybe what it was about, so.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah

Laura Kusaka: So, I think, you know, she-she told that story many times so that really kinda stuck with me, that—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, yeah. Thanks for sharing all that. So what-what do you know about the Yutani family history before World War II in Seattle? Like, where-where did your family live? Or do you know where people worked or went to school? What-what do you know about kinda their life, that time period?

Laura Kusaka: Yeah. Well, to tell you the truth, [chuckles] I'm-I'm getting a little shaky about my own experiences of living when I was small, and I think it's very limited—I don't really remember hearing stories so much directly from, like, my mother, or—it was maybe after the fact thinking, "Oh, so that's where they were living." Like, the thing about Bailey Gatzert, I didn't realize that they had lived somewhere near Bailey Gatzert, uh, before the war, because after the war they were living—and I can't exactly remember, I can't know the names of the streets, but someplace in the Central District. And, therefore, to me as a young child, I knew where Bailey Gatzert was, and, uh, I often went to someplace nearby, but, uh, yeah to me that was kind of a surprise, and, um All I know of the—let's see, that there were—my grandfather was able to, um, he would buy vegetables wholesale at the public—um, Pike Place Market, and go selling it to homes in these wealthier neighborhoods. And my grandmother was either taking in laundry and, uh, or things, or ironing, uh, doing things like that. Maybe-maybe it was after the war, she started to go out and do housework for people.

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00:07:17

Polly Yorioka: Mm.

Laura Kusaka: There were—let's see. In the family—my mother was a middle child, actually she had two brothers, uh, older than her and younger than her, but the older of the two brothers, uh, when she was quite young, I think she said when she was still a baby, so I imagine under maybe a year old or so, the whole family went to—so it was the two brothers and her—they went to Wakayama, and—with the purpose being to leave those two brothers, so her two brothers, with her husband's family, okay, and they were gonna be raised there. And they didn't stay too long because my mother got sick or something, and then she said they went—they had to go back. Uh, and so I asked, "Well, why would—why'd you do that, why'd they do that?" And it seemed to be—the idea was, "Well, they're eventually going to move back to Japan," and ... and I also kinda got the feeling that that was sort of like—they're kind of hostages? (Chuckles) I've seen a lot of things in Japan, you know, dramas and stuff, but the fact that people would leave their children with other families was a way to guarantee that they would come back, so, um. Well, anyways, so. And then, after returning to Seattle, then, uh, there were two other—she had – she had two younger brothers, and they were born after that trip. So, um ... so at the time of the evacuation and imprisonment, there was three children, she being the oldest.

Polly Yorioka: Did your mom ever share with you, like, any memories from her childhood? Um, any stories or anything maybe unrelated to location but just, anything from her early life that you recall?

Laura Kusaka: That is, for me, is really (chuckles) to be honest kind of a total blank. Like-like it is really hard for—this whole story about the dolls is kind of like, "Oh! I never—I had no images of, you know, what their life could have—what it must have been like." All I know is the, uh, the—my grandparents' house after, you know, after they moved back after camp, so I never—and I didn't realize that was not the home that they, uh, where my mother grew up, so.

Polly Yorioka: Mm-hm. Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, just as an aside, my-my family's story is kind of really similar, because I always thought they lived in the Central District forever, but it was really after the war that that's where they moved. And they actually also lived very close—probably in the same area, close to Bailey Gatzert. But we didn't know where their home was for a very long time, right? And they didn't talk about it. So.

Laura Kusaka: So, uh-huh.



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Polly Yorioka: Yeah. So. You didn't really know that the family had gone to Bailey Gatzert until you found out about the-the dolls later? Is that—

Laura Kusaka: Yeah, yeah, so-so this whole story was kind of like—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah—

Laura Kusaka: It came out of nowhere, and—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah (chuckles).

Laura Kusaka: And, for me, um, knowing—you know, other Japanese American people my age and stuff, and you know, we would talk about—I would talk to friends like, “Oh yeah, I went to Bailey Gatzert.” But it-it never dawned on me that, “Oh! That my mother was also in—you know, had gone there.” So, to me it was, uh, some place, you know, it wasn't, uh, it wasn't—there was no connection to my family—

Polly Yorioka: Right. Right, that makes sense (laughs). Um, what do you know about your family's experience in the incarceration? What-what do you know about that?

Laura Kusaka: Um, well, things that I've been able to piece together, uh—one thing that stuck out—stuck with me was that, um, before they went to camp, um, my grandmother said they put all that they could into my grandfather's pickup truck, and rented a space with their neighbors, and she said they were German. Yeah, German Americans. In other words, to please keep this for us in their garage. And they were lucky because when they-they returned to Seattle, everything was there, it was intact. That was one story that I-I remember. And, um, yeah actually I went with my mother to the—one of the pilgrimages in 2012, and—but that was when I realized—

Polly Yorioka: I went a similar year, I don't know if it was 2012, but really close—

Laura Kusaka: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, anyway, there were a lot of—okay. Anyway, so I thought I would learn a lot more, and—but then I realized how reticent my mother was about actually talking about things, you know, “This happened,” or “That happened.” But the things that kind of—the few things that I, uh, learned was that my grandfather during camp—he was working as—in the boiler-boiler room or something, and my grandmother worked in the cafeteria or something. So, um So she was by then I guess a, um, late-junior high school, or high school age student, so she obviously went to school there, and—but and—but she mentioned something about her brothers kind of running around, okay? And so they were – they were her younger brothers. And

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she did say something—I guess, you know, the girls would talk together, the same age girls, they would hang out and do stuff. But anyhow, we used to talk about this, or that, you know, who's going out with who. But she never really mentioned, you know, the actual living conditions or how she felt about it. But what I —one thing that has stuck with me is, they left camp before the end of — end of the war. I guess—I can't remember when exactly when that might have been, maybe some time in 1945, because she wanted to go to a school in Seattle, and so I think she graduated from Hunt high school, but she wasn't satisfied. I guess she didn't think that the education she got there was good. So, she really wanted to go to high school in Seattle, and—I think she—yeah, she graduated from Garfield high school, so, um, and Um, one of the stories my grandmother tells me about—uh, she told me about, you know, leaving camp and returning to Seattle, was that she went shopping someplace, you know, maybe Pike Place Market, and people wouldn't sell things to her. This is while the war was still on. And ... that, um. Yeah. I can't – I can't imagine, so. When I think about that, that was rather unusual, in that—well. I know they were starting to let people leave, I guess if you had the clearance, and the reason for them, I guess, was for my mother's education. So. But it must have been, when I think about it, really hard. Yeah, hm. And it—so that was—for me, that still has stood out about their-their incarceration experience, they left early.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, that's so interesting I didn't realize that people could do that and go back, uh, to Seattle area. I know a lot of people left, right? To go to Chicago, or other places.

Laura Kusaka: Mm-hm. Right, yeah. So, anyway, the—I guess—yeah. My mother being the oldest child at the time, yeah, in the – in the family, and her—it must have been for her—yeah, like she said, wanted to go to school in Seattle, so. The family made the decision—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah. It's great that she was able to do that.

Laura Kusaka: Yeah.

Polly Yorioka: Did she ever talk retrospectively about how she felt like that experience impacted her in any way? Were there any things she was, like, open about about that? Or was that something that she did not ever speak about? Maybe you—

00:15:00

Laura Kusaka: Um After we went to—on the pilgrimage, um, um I realized, “Oh, it's really hard for my mother to talk about this.” Because there are many—there are opportunities where they actually—you know, where the survivors were asked, “Could you please say a few



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words about this?" or maybe something, and most of her stories were kind of off topic? You know, they really didn't talk about, uh ... yeah. They were really peripheral to the whole camp experience. And so that made me realize—well, of course being asked those kinds of questions in public—but then she's going on it, right? And I think she went on every year, she would attend, so for her there was some re—yea, there was a reason she was going. And she often sent me materials about, oh, this is happening, you know, this event is happening. And I did attend an event—I think before ... yeah, I think it was before—yeah, before the—that-that was '12, 2012. It was a reunion of people who went to Hunt* high school, or something. It was quite big, at one of those hotels near the airport. And, uh, so, I realized that there were all these things, events going on, and people were opening up and at least getting together, and doing stuff together, talking about—or, yeah, having reunions with people, so. For me, it was really great to see how my mother was being active with this, and being proactive about it, but the actual speaking about the experience was something that was, um, never really came out. I—and so what I was saying, after we went to the, uh, the pilgrimage, I-I-I wrote her a letter (chuckles) I wrote her a letter—oh. I happened to be in Seattle for one year, I was on sabbatical, so. Yeah.

Polly Yorioka: Oh, okay.

Laura Kusaka: Normally I would see my family every couple of years or something, you know, I would visit or someone would come and visit us in Japan. So, I wrote her a letter, kinda saying, you know, "I was really, um—I was really glad I could go with her to the pilgrimage and be a part of that, and—but I was really, um, wondering what kind of—uh, I thought maybe you were gonna share more stories," and things like that. And—so, anyway, "I-I'm very open to hearing anything that you want to share with me." So, I kind of I-I wrote that—I wrote a letter, and after that she said, um, she said, um—in words, okay, face to face, she said, um, "I thank you for your letter every time I go to one of these pilgrimages, um, yeah. I can maybe shed a few tears, I can kind of go over back what-what had happened, and" But for her, that was—um, but to talk about it and not—was not how she was processing it, I think. In other words, she was saying—yeah, yeah. It was obvious she was there, she was going, you know, she saw all these people, "Hi Massie," everyone, yeah. But for me, that was—yeah. It made me think: "Did something really terrible happen?" You know? I'm sure there's all kinds of – there's all kinds of things going on, but I never—I realized that was—she was saying, "Yeah, yeah, okay. I appreciate your concern" Yeah, yeah. For us to have been there together, to me—for me, of course, that was really a-a-a huge moment, and, uh. And then I think the following year, my other sisters, they went. Okay, or



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the—yeah, yeah. Anyway. Yeah, so I really didn't learn very much about her personal story, um, having been in Jap—so, yeah.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, that completely makes sense. But it's interesting because she did a lot in the community, right? For the Redress movement, when I was looking—I mean, she was very involved in advocating for the community later, um. So, it seems like, you know, everybody has their different way of working-working through things. I wonder—could you tell me a little bit more about her life after camp? Like, graduating high school, maybe kind of a little bit of her st—what—what was her story after that?

Laura Kusaka: Okay. Well, let's see, so she went back, you know, in 1945, so then she went to Garfield, I guess graduated. I don't know exactly how that worked. But—and then she enrolled in the University of Washington, and—but as a college student she moved out and—out of the house and lived with a family. They called it—what? She was a—she said schoolgirl, or something? I guess it wasn't unusual because—well, she would get free room and board with a family, and then maybe take care of the small kids or something, babysit for them or something. And so I guess she did that, um, and for her family—you know, her parents, I guess, you know, they had two younger—maybe high school, junior high school age kids to take care of, and so maybe one less mouth to feed was—probably, was half of going on there. And she—yeah. She graduated with a degree in chemistry, and I often asked, "Why chemistry?" And—because she didn't—she didn't—you know, she didn't become an engineer or anything, and, um. But she said, "Oh, well my high school teacher said that 'You'd probably do well in this,'" so. Anyway—

Polly Yorioka: Shows the power of a teacher affirming you, it can make this [unintelligible] decision in the future—

Laura Kusaka: Huh? Oh, yeah, yeah. Anyway, and um, I guess—well, she met my father, she said at a picnic or something, um, and um, yeah—you know, in the Japanese American community—and ... they got married in—let's see, 1951, so—I'm trying to figure this out. Yeah, she must have graduated from college about 1949, okay, then maybe sometime around there met my father and started to go out. So, yeah. I was born in 1952, so yeah. Um, and then after that, she was pretty much a stay-at-home mom, um ... uh, I have two younger sisters, um, okay, um, ooh (Laughs) There's quite an age difference between us. So my other sister Marianne is five years younger than me, and Julie is twelve years younger than me. So she was, uh, not working outside the home. But my image of my mother is—she was always doing something, uh, either a volunteer work either connected to the church, or—the Japanese Baptist Church—or Nisei Vets, types of



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things, or if it was a PTA, you know, baking cookies, or So, she was always doing something, she was always kind of—there was always—there was—one of those people that likes to talk on the phone, and there's always phone calls and there's Massie there, or she was calling people, getting them to, uh, oh, "We're having a bazaar, can you bake an apple pie or something for the Nisei bazaar?" So that was my image of my mother, always being very involved with the community, and ... and—yeah. I guess she was good at what she was doing, so—

Polly Yorioka: That's great

Laura Kusaka: Yeah. Yeah, so, yeah. On the one hand, she was not willing to divulge these really personal stories, but she was—I think, compared to me she was much more of a people person, was good at doing that, you know? Yeah.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah. Wow. Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah, I know she's very loved by so many in the community.

Laura Kusaka: So, when—and since I've been away, you know, in Japan for—yeah, for most, you know, these past—almost close to fifty years, people say "Oh! You're Massie's daughter." So, yeah, I'm-I'm "Massie's daughter."

Polly: You're a celebrity here!

Laura Kusaka: Yeah, "Oh yeah, the one who went to Japan."

Polly Yorioka: (Laughing) That's so funny. Wow. Um, and so, do you remember anything about hearing about her going to look at the dolls in the collection at MOHAI? Was there anything at that time that you heard about that visit?

00:24:00

Laura Kusaka: Hm.

Polly Yorioka: Or retrospectively?

Laura Kusaka: No, no, in-in fact—

Polly Yorioka: (Laughing) Probably a very small moment in her life.

Laura Kusaka: Yes. Yeah. No, I-I'm glad somebody (chuckles)—at least Julie seems to have remembered. But for me it was, uh, yeah, I didn't even know they had – they had—well, again,



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the whole thing about the connection to Bailey Gatzert, that was new, but the fact that they had Japanese—girls' dolls—Girl's Day dolls—

Polly Yorioka: Mm-hm. Yeah

Laura Kusaka: Yeah, no, I knew nothing about that, and the fact that she had gone there. And turns out I have actually visited MOHAI, when I visited, and I realized, “Oh this is a great museum!” But it's really exciting for me to realize that these kinds of things—exhibits, are going to be held there.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah. Yeah, Yeah, it's kind of amazing to, like, think that some of these dolls that are on display, they could have been your family's dolls. I mean, nobody knows at this point whose were who's in there. But, um, it's nice to know that there's at least, like, one family that's connected to them. Because it's unfortunate that none of them were ever, like, labelled, or it wasn't clear whose things were whose. So, to me I'm just like, I'm so happy to know that at least some of them were connected to your family, like—real-real people, real stories, and I just think—to me, these dolls represent so much that's lost and forgotten about our stories, and especially about the Japanese American community, so. Hopefully, you know, in a small way, by looking at these dolls and telling the story of the dolls, we can remember some of that generation, right? And their experiences.

Laura Kusaka: Yeah, no, this is—no, for me, um I have been very—well, what can I say. Um, since I became a young adult, I have been studying on my own, trying to learn about our history, and everything, so being able to participate this way in this project, for me, is very meaningful, and I really appreciate, you know, the kind of work that you're doing, um, and—

Polly Yorioka: Aw, thank you.

Laura Kusaka: And just realizing, there's so many stories already—you know, so many of that generation are gone, an, um, but yeah, ways to keep this kind of story going, yeah, it's—using these kinds of artifacts I think is very [unintelligible].

Polly Yorioka: So, when you think about these dolls, what-what do you think they represent? Or what kinds of stories do you think will be remembered in connection to them?

Laura Kusaka: Well, I think, um It's funny, I live in Japan, and we don't have those kind of dolls.



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[both laughing]

Laura Kusaka: The reason being is they take up a lot of room, and often times we lived in very cramped spaces. Um, but, um, to me, I think—I—the only time—when I was a young child, my aunt, who was from Japan, she had a—she brought her whole collection, and I saw it several times. And so, for me, it's a connection with, uh, the—uh, well. I guess “the homeland”, the homeland—I can't—I don't know if that's the proper word, I kind of—yeah, but it's very—I often resent the fact people trying to say, “Oh, you're back here in Japan.” I say, “Well not really.” (Chuckles) It—it's a little more complicated than that. But having this kind of connection with Japan, um, I imagine the family—the fact that they had those dolls meant that, you know, they really—you would give us—you would prepare a set of those kinds of dolls for your daughter, and she would take that with her after she got married. So I guess my grandmother—that must have been her—her dolls, and something that she really treasured as a reminder of how much her family had cared for her, and their hope that she would be able to, you know, share that with her daughter. So, um, you know, to me it's a connection with the—the family, and the importance of celebrating—well, what—of-of course, there's lots of different ways to think about, you know, Girls' Day, Boys' Day, these days, but um, the fact that there's a—you know, they're really special, I mean, even though we don't have one, you know. But I go see exhibitions or things of it. They're really special. My oldest daughter had a child, a daughter, they—again, being in closed spaces—we-we actually gave them a ceramic version of, uh, just, um, the prince and the princesses, uh—Noritake, the famous company, is in the area, so we had that made, but Yeah, again, it's that feeling of—you want—you're really wishing for the ... the, uh—the happiness of the daughter, and so they carry that, and they bring it with them from generation to generation to me, so. I would like—I would hope that that kind of story would be understood by people. And, uh—and—so, it's not just decoration, you know, its—you put it out just for that really short time and then put it away for the next year, um, so I think—yeah, it's very special and, uh, I guess the loving care that is put into making sure that they're in good shape over the time. I think that's also important to remember too. Mm-hm.

[Zoom malfunction disrupts narration 0:29:19-0:29:58]

Polly Yorioka: So, my final question is, what do you hope that the next generation learns from this time in history, and anything about your family's story?

Laura Kusaka: Um Well, I think—one thing that I—mm. I-I—well, what have—quickly say—not regret, but, um When I look back, I kind of wish that I had asked more questions as a child. And so that I would have – so that I would have known those stories about my mother and



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her growing up and everything. And I think—I'm realizing that this whole—um, it's so—these stories are so important, and however, circumstances have silenced a lot of people, and therefore—and that tends to be—continue throughout the generations. So, I hope people will learn, uh, from the story that, um, we really need to—even though sometimes these stories involve, you know, very hurtful memories and things that—how-how to keep those channels of—open—of communication open, um, so that even within the family a lot is not known about what happened about, yeah, during, yeah, immigration, about incarceration. Uh, and so, uh, the more general public, I hope they would appreciate the-the significance of how these dolls have—how they still are there, and to help us learn about one particular family, one particular group—immigrant group who arrived in America, had—went through many different kinds of experiences, and we need to keep our minds and our hearts open to hear and to learn about these stories is what I guess I would hope for this exhibition.

Polly Yorioka: Wow, that was so beautiful. Thank you, thank you for sharing. You just said that So, so beautifully. Um, yeah, um—

Laura Kusaka: You know, with everything happening right now in the world and in the States as well, uh, yeah, I think that that really is—that really—that kind of—including myself, okay? I haven't really—when I think about it—I've tried to teach—I've tried to tell some things to my own children, and for them it's not easy to understand, maybe they know, “Yeah, okay, oh this happened during the war,” and they've met my—they know—they met—they know my family there. But again, it's really hard—the context being so different, and then there's all these things about the U.S., Japan, and ... and things like that. It's, uh—it is—it be complex, but I guess, to bring—to keep it at a family level, individual story level, I think it's really important to do that. And I think this experience will hopefully help me, uh, tell more stories with my own children. I mean they're all adult—they're in their thirties, forties now, so. Anyways.

Polly Yorioka: That's great. Yeah, it's never too late, right? Like, I think that's one of the things I've learned as well, that, like, I wish I had asked more questions, like of my grandparents, and, um Yeah, I think once we've realized that we can be better about asking more questions, and passing things down, and telling stories to future generations. So, that's such a good – such a good message. I'm ready to turn my camera back on, hopefully it won't freeze again. Sorry, it's also—the sun is kind of setting here, so I was looking—

Laura Kusaka: Oh, okay.



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Polly Yorioka: [Unintelligible] Is there anything else you wanted to share? Anything else you feel like you'd like to say, or talk about anything that comes to mind?

Laura Kusaka: Oh, um, as we were talking about the dolls, I remembered something that happened about ... forty years ago, I guess? Um ... maybe you know about—in—outside of Nagoya, which is, you know, in Aichi, there's a place called Meiji-Mura. Do you know about Meiji-Mura? Uh—

Polly Yorioka: No.

00:34:40

Laura Kusaka: It's a—it's—it's a theme park where they have gathered buildings built during the Meiji era. And so—uh, and—so, it's a—but, interesting enough, they decided to—you know, so there's things from all over Japan, but they also have maybe three buildings, one from Seattle—it was a home that used to be—oh, uh. That was inhabited—I can't remember the family name, but it was a Japanese American family, and I think they had a small church there, or something. And there was another building from Hawaii too, I think. Uh, something connected to the immi—immigration, something or other. Anyway. And I can't remember the other one. Anyway, too—so, this Meiji-Mura, they ... I guess they needed to raise money, the community helped to raise money to have this building shipped over, you know, to-to-to Japan, and be rebuilt. But at that time, I guess they were asking for artifacts from the community, and my mother donated my father's army jacket, okay? And-and so, I was, uh, I was invited to attend the opening ceremony of this, uh, you know, they had these new buildings, so. Um, and ... and also there was a—so I think it was either in that building, the one—the Seattle house (chuckles). And so, there was my father's army jacket. So it's probably still there someplace in the archives, you know and so I—so this thing about artifacts, my mother thought—you know, she was—I wasn't really, you know, sure exactly, you know, what-what made her do that, but—so, but anyway, there it was, and there was an explanation about, you know, what it meant. And although my father didn't actually fight in the war, he was on the ship on the way to Japan when the war ended, so he was more with the occupation forces um I thought ... yeah, and I-I haven't been back since, so I need to go back and—

Polly Yorioka: You need to check it out! Yeah.

Laura Kusaka: Yes—

Polly Yorioka: Wow, that's amazing.



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Laura Kusaka: But anyway, um, I realized, um, you know in Japan, there are places where they are trying to, uh, you know, make these connections and-and educate the public, but. Yeah, it's just really.... My-my over forty years of living here, it's sometimes very frustrating to realize how little people understand who I am. Or otherwise, of course, I have to go on a long story. Here, there are a lot of more other Japanese of different ancestry, from Brazil especially, so.

Polly Yorioka: Mm, right.

Laura Kusaka: Yeah, there's—uh, you know, it's an interesting time in Japan with people, and—you know, who is Japanese? Also, I think, is also—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, mm-hm. Yeah.

Laura Kusaka: You know, they don't necessarily look Japanese anymore because there's more mixed people, so—

Polly Yorioka: Right, right.

Laura Kusaka: Uh, I think—you know, right now is a really important time, I think, everywhere, you know, just to be able to ... throw out your old concepts of who people are and just—and again, I guess it all goes back to being able to talk, to tell stories, you know? “This is who I am, this is my family,” you know? “This is” Just being able to share that I think is really important. And not being, you know—what's gonna—shut down for even mentioning these things. I think—um, yeah, I-I think ... I think now people are more receptive?

Polly Yorioka: Mm, that's good to hear.

Laura Kusaka: I mean even now, in the—Naomi Osaka, when they—when she was first—“Oh, she's representing Japan” There was so much, “Why is she? She does—she can hardly speak Japanese” and all that kind of stuff. So, well, finally the—you know, people don't say that anymore, but. And you look at all the Olympic co—you know, the people on the Olympic teams from Japan, you know, they're all—quite often they don't look Japanese. But that doesn't matter! But—no, things really are changing a lot, I think in my—just in my lifetime living here.

Polly Yorioka: Wow that's amazing to see.

Laura Kusaka: Yeah. And maybe—(chuckles) maybe now I have more free time, I-I—I'm kind of struggling with my retirement, like I [unintelligible] yeah, but this is very [unintelligible] kind of stuff, so. But, yeah, just figuring out, you know, what-what it is I can do. I think I'm done with



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English teaching, I did that for, you know, about thirty-some years. But being able to tell these kinds of stories I think is really important because You know, we need to get to know each other better and get along, I think—

Polly Yorioka: Definitely. Yeah, and kind of breaking down these conceptions of what it means to have a certain identity, whether it's in Japan and being Japanese—which is very complex and has particular things—or for the American Japanese Yeah, trying to understand the—you, know, what's my identity in wartime, right? Am I a loyal American, am I the enemy? There's so many—like, it's always a really important question in whatever time we live in.

Laura Kusaka: Oh, yes, definitely, yeah. I was just noticing—I got a message about—they're gonna be talking about the draft resisters, uh, from Minidoka, and I saw some sort of program, so I thought, "Oh, okay, finally they're being able to talk about that." And, uh ... so, um. Yeah, I don't—yeah, stories are so important. (Chuckles) Yeah, there's not just one narrative, I think that's—

Polly Yorioka: Exactly.

Laura Kusaka: That's what I really realized, um, from my own ... um, realizing the whole Japanese American experience is so complex. And there's no—oh, I didn't—maybe this is off the topic, but the two brothers who grew up in Japan, and-and after they were able to return to Seattle, that was a whole 'nother story—side that I didn't even begin to understand until I was able to talk in detail to one of my uncles—one of the uncles. And, uh, so Yeah, it's quite complex, this whole thing about nationality, and citizenship, and-and—especially in two countries at war ... yeah. There's some things that we probably—maybe intellectually, can say, "Oh, that must have been hard." But I think on another level there were so many things going on, and—

Polly Yorioka: Mm-hm, yeah.

Laura Kusaka: But, a lot of people, you know, they don't want to share those things—

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, yeah. And of course, we never want people to share more than they're comfortable with, as much as we can. I think sharing these stories is-is really helpful, right? And even translating them to other contexts and learning how to talk about the hard things and learn from one another is important, right?

Laura Kusaka: Mm-hm.



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Polly Yorioka: Yeah. Yeah.

Laura Kusaka: Well, I'm very—yeah, I wish I could be in Seattle when you're actually doing this, but (laughs). As—actually, I'm leaving tomorrow for a one week visit in Seattle, and—

Polly Yorioka: Oh, nice!

Laura Kusaka: I try to see my mother—I mean, now that she's kind of in decline, I try to get there at least once a year.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, oh that's nice. Well, I'm glad you can do that, and hopefully it'll be a nice time to visit here, the weather is getting a little rainy up ahead, so hopefully—

Laura Kusaka: Oh, that's okay, you know we had a whole month of no rain—

Polly Yorioka: Okay (laughs).

Laura Kusaka: And in the ninety-eight-degree weather every day, I thought, "Lemme just get to Seattle, I don't care if it's cold, that's—"

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, yeah, it'll probably be very refreshing I'm sure, so. Welcome back, soon, and I hope you have a good time. And it's nice to see your mom, I know it must be hard.

Laura Kusaka: Oh, yeah that's – yeah that's a whole 'nother thing, yeah. I-I—so. But, um ... anyway, yeah. It's-it's very important for me to-to stay connected with my family in Seattle, so.

Polly Yorioka: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Statement ends at 0:42:49]

[0:42:49-0:48:50 is production talk and details about copyright and privacy agreements]