



The Scoop

Executive Notes

The summer seems to have passed by quickly, as we start off our 36th new school year with a full house. October marks NLF's 35th anniversary and we are excited to finish the year celebrating this milestone. Please see the Capital Campaign update for more on our upcoming events.

The programs and staff have been busy developing new activities: the Bush site preschool will be focusing on community service this school year with monthly visits to the neighborhood senior centers among other projects. The students at Sutter Site's preschool are continuing to expand and work on their lush garden growing various vegetables, fruits and flowers. And the After School Program has started a new program called the "Nihongo Club" which meets on Friday afternoon, emphasizing Japanese speaking skills that are practical for getting around Japan and Japan-town.

A special thank you goes to NLF parent, Rod Suzuki, for arranging a matching donation of

\$500 from Mass Mutual Financial Group. We are seeking individual contributions so that once we reach \$500, we can receive the match. Your help will be appreciated in this effort!

As you can see, it promises to be another productive school year and we hope to see you at some of the various activities and events held at our programs and in the community!

--Cathy Inamasu, Executive Director



NLF's Pre-K groups visited the Friendship Doll exhibit at the Asian American Museum in the summer.

Photo courtesy of the Asian Art Museum

Yona Abiko— Issei Pioneer

Nearly eighty years ago, Yona Abiko was one of the *Issei* (first-generation) women who founded the Japanese YWCA. Her leadership and fundraising efforts paved the way for construction of the 1830 Sutter Street building, just as – decades after her death – her diaries helped lay the foundation for the legal case that preserved the 1830 Sutter Street building for NLF and the broader Japanese American community.

Yona Abiko (née Tsuda) was born in 1880 in Japan, the fifth daughter of a sophisticated family. She first visited the United States in 1907, and here met established Californian Kyutaro Abiko, the founder of the popular Nichibei Shimbun newspaper. As the wife of the founder of the Nichibei Shimbun, Yona not only helped her husband with the newspaper business but also devoted her considerable energies to serving the nascent Japanese American community. She and other women leaders founded the *Joshi Seinen Kai*, an organization that helped young immigrant Japanese women acclimate to the United States. In the 1920s, the *Joshi Seinen Kai* morphed into the Japanese YWCA, which was then a separate institution from the all-white San Francisco YWCA. As the Japanese YWCA grew, Yona and her fellow women leaders raised money to build a new facility to house the group; that building is the 1830 Sutter Street building that today houses one of NLF's preschool programs.

In addition to her work establishing the Japanese YWCA, Yona was also committed to building cultural bridges between Japan and the United

States. Through the Nichibei Shimbun, Yona and Kyutaro Abiko created the "*Nisei Kengakudan*" program, sending selected *Nisei* (second-generation) on extended tours of Japan to learn their cultural and ethnic roots.

Yona and Kyutaro Abiko had one child, Yasuo William Abiko. After Kyutaro's death in 1936, Yona and Yasuo ran the Nichibei Shimbun together, until Yona appointed Yasuo the new president in 1942. During the internment, Yona's Quaker friends helped her and Yasuo get released to Philadelphia. Yasuo Abiko married Lily Tani, and they had five children, all of whom were born after Yona's death in 1944: Joan, Grace, Beth, Bill, and Ken.

Yasuo and Lily Abiko moved back to San Francisco after Yona's death. When renovating their Arguello Street home in 1965, Yona's grandchildren found old letters in which Yona mentioned the Japanese YWCA, as well as a "treasure trove" of Yona's Japanese antiques.



Yona Abiko—Issei Pioneer (continued)

One of Yona's greatest treasures was her detailed diary, currently housed at UCLA's Department of Special Collections. Yona's diary became a key piece of evidence in the legal battle to prevent the San Francisco YWCA from selling the 1830 Sutter Street building in 1996 for its own profit. In her diary, Yona wrote of a meeting with the Chairwoman of the Board of the SF YWCA and Guy Galden – a lawyer well known for helping Japanese immigrant families. In that meeting, Yona wrote in her diary, they discussed creating a legal trust by which the SF YWCA would hold paper title to the 1830 Sutter Street property built by and for the Japanese YWCA. (The trust mechanism was necessary because California's Alien Land Law prevented immigrant Japanese,

such as the founders of the Japanese YWCA, from owning property in their own names.) Critically, Yona's diary is written almost entirely in Japanese, but in discussing the 1830 Sutter Street building and the meeting with Guy Galden and the Chairwoman of the SF YWCA's Board, the word "trust" is written in English.

Yona Abiko's grandchildren are rightfully proud of their grandmother's place in the Japanese American community. We at NLF are likewise grateful for the work that Yona Abiko did for the Japanese YWCA. With the generous support of her grandchildren and other donors, we seek to carry on the legacy of learning and giving that Yona and her colleagues began nearly eighty years ago.

Capital Campaign Update

As a new school year is starting, Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) is gearing up to celebrate its 35 years of providing exceptional childcare services to families in the San Francisco Bay Area. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our loyal supporters who have made generous contributions to our capital campaign thus far, and share with you exciting activities held and/or planned as a part of the year-long celebration.

To kick off the 35th Anniversary celebration, NLF hosted a "Spring Social" at Yoshi's Jazz Club in S.F.'s Fillmore District in March. Participants enjoyed an array of sumptuous sushi and appetizers prepared by a renowned chef, Shotaro "Sho" Kamio. The evening ended with an electrifying performance by Jake Shimabukuro on ukulele, with a repertoire that incorporated elements of jazz, blues, funk, classical, bluegrass, folk, flamenco, and rock. A special thanks to Yoshi's for providing us with a memorable evening of food, spirits and the remarkable performance by Jake.

In recognition of the critical support given to NLF during its first phase of the capital campaign by a group of NLF donors, NLF recently arranged a special luncheon for these NLF donors at the Asian Art Museum. In conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the *Kanrin Maru* to S.F., the luncheon included a presentation of the *Kanrin Maru* exhibit by the Museum's curator and also an NLF parent, Melissa Rinne. Our heartfelt thanks to Hatsuro "Hats" Aizawa and his wife Amey, who graciously arranged the use of the beautifully appointed Peterson Room, as well as to Melissa, who shared her wealth of knowledge with our donors. It was fascinating to learn about the footsteps of early ambassadors from Japan and their significant contributions in founding the Japanese YWCA, which houses one of our preschool programs today. The exhibit will be shown at the Museum until November 21st.

Upcoming events to celebrate NLF's Anniversary will include an unveiling/dedication ceremony of the Tateuchi Auditorium to be held on **Friday, November 19th**. The event will feature an original performance by Brenda Wong Aoki, one of America's foremost solo performing artists. For those of you with little ones, plans are also underway for a Family

Day on **Sunday, December 12th**, which will include *mochi*-pounding, singing by NLF's preschoolers, and a performance by *Eth-Noh-Tec*, featuring award-winning storytellers Robert Kikuchi and Nancy Wong. Please mark your calendars now and stay tuned for more information on these fun-filled events!

In these challenging economic times, each of us still has an important role to play in keeping our children, families, and community sound and strong. Please help us as we are now embarking on a \$300,000 Building Preservation Fund to ensure the continued upkeep of the Sutter Street facility for use by future generations, and to honor the legacy of the *Issei* women founders, such as Yona Abiko who is featured in this newsletter. There are still spaces left for your name on the beautiful *Issei* Women's Legacy Donor Wall that graces the main entryway of the Sutter Street facility. Names will be added by the 35th Anniversary celebration for new donors starting at \$5,000 level and those who increase their donor level. Donors contributing \$1,000 or more will receive priority notification and registration to special events described above, according to their recognition levels.

On behalf of the children, their families and our staff, we thank you for your continued support and generosity. For more information about NLF or to contribute to the Building Preservation Fund, visit NLF's website at www.nlfchildcare.org or call (415) 922-8898.



Guests enjoy the lunch in the Peterson Room at the Asian Art Museum before the *Kanrin Maru* presentation by curator, Melissa Rinne.

Nihonmachi Little Friends was saddened to learn earlier this year in April, of the passing of Al Gordon, a little-known but key figure in the history of the 1830 Sutter Street building. Many NLF families and supporters are familiar with the 1830 Sutter building's basic history: When the San Francisco YWCA attempted to sell the building for its own profit in 1996 – threatening to evict NLF and other tenants in the process – community activists and pro bono lawyers fought the sale, filing a lawsuit that ultimately led to NLF's purchase of the building at a heavily discounted price. What they may not be aware of; however, is the critical role Al Gordon played in NLF becoming a steward of 1830 Sutter.

Al Gordon neither sought nor received the public recognition he deserved, but he played a critical role in the retention of the building. For it was Al, an amateur historian, who tirelessly reviewed decades of San Francisco YWCA Board minutes to search for documents that might corroborate what some of the older members of the Japanese town community remembered – that *Issei* women in the 1920s and 1930s were deeply involved in the fundraising and construction efforts for the 1830 Sutter building.

Al had a near photographic memory, which let him remember the myriad details of the boxes of historical records he reviewed. But more than that, Al understood what he was reading. He recognized that these San Francisco YWCA Board minutes revealed a long-forgotten promise: To avoid

the Alien Land Law (which prevented Japanese immigrants from holding title to property in their own names), the *Issei* women of the Japanese YWCA and the SF YWCA had created a trust, with the SF YWCA agreeing to hold "paper title" to the 1830 Sutter property for the benefit of the women and girls the Japanese YWCA served. Al Gordon correctly grasped the larger story of the trust that lay behind these sketchy records. Although more evidence was uncovered during the six-year legal struggle over the 1830 Sutter building, including the diaries of one of the Japanese YWCA's founders, the documents Al unearthed, and his keen sense of their meaning, remained the heart of the case to reclaim the former Japanese YWCA property for the community.



All of us who consider the 1830 Sutter Street building and NLF a part of our lives owe Al Gordon a debt of gratitude. We remember Al, and we thank him for both his single-minded focus and his generosity of spirit.

Your Support is Needed

General Program Support: Your contribution will go toward keeping our service fees affordable for our predominately low to moderate income families. There are many ways for you to support the work of NLF (check NLF's website for other ideas).

- * Designate your contributions through the United Way, and Combined Charities Federal Campaign, to go directly to NLF. NLF's code number is 3251.
- * Escrip is an easy way to have a portion of your shopping go directly to NLF. Just go to Escrip.com and follow the directions to register.
- * Shop at Amazon.com? Go to NLF's website and click on the Amazon link so a portion of your purchase may benefit NLF.

Or donate online through our website at www.nlfchildcare.org

Contributions (checks payable to NLF) can be remitted to: NLF, 2031 Bush Street, San Francisco, CA 94115

NLF is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



ASP students listened attentively as Tyler from Dinosaur Rocks! talked about various minerals and gemstones.



ASP students display what they got from the inside of a geode.



Bush and Sutter preschoolers enjoy buying and selling items they made during group time at the *Natsu Matsuri* (Summer Festival).



Nihonmachi LITTLE FRIENDS™

Japanese Bilingual & Multicultural Childcare

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Bush preschoolers enjoy playing in the water during a rare hot day in San Francisco.



Sutter preschoolers proudly show the strawberries they grew in their garden outdoors.

SUSHI SOCIAL CELEBRATION

Friday, November 19th, 6pm-8pm

1830 Sutter Street building

Featuring storyteller, Brenda Wong Aoki

MOCHITSUKI EVENT

Sunday, December 12th, 11am - 1:30pm

1830 Sutter Street building

*Featuring storyteller Robert Kikuchi & Nancy Wong and mochi
pounding with Kagami Kai*

“DOWA NO OMATSURI: A FESTIVAL OF CHILDREN'S STORIES”

Sunday, February 27th

Palace of Fine Arts Theater

Silent Auction at 12:00 pm

Theater Performance at 1:30pm.

For more information on any of these events, please call
(415) 922-8898 or email nlfchildcare@yahoo.com

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