As we say farewell to 2021, I pause to reflect on how resilient we can be to create a “new” normal for our children, families and staff, and how precious life is. The pandemic continues to challenge us, but we have risen to adapt to it and continue to provide safe protocols for our children’s programs. I appreciate how the families and staff have accommodated the program needs and continue to show their support and understanding.

For our 46th Anniversary virtual celebration on November 19th, we were able to honor our Unsung Hero, Bob Rusky, a long-time supporter, attorney and parent of an NLF alum. When NLF was faced with eviction from the S.F. YWCA in 1996, Bob saved our historic building and playground lot through his drafting of the lawsuit which challenged the S.F. YWCA’s claim to ownership. We were so happy that Bob was able to listen to the presentation of this award, and we were able to include his letter to NLF in the video recording. Unfortunately, Bob passed away a few days later after a battle with cancer. NLF has lost a wonderful friend and hero, who will be greatly missed. Our condolences go to his wife Karen, and son Quillan. We will be working on a naming opportunity in our building to honor and memorialize Bob’s outstanding contributions to NLF. Thank you, dear friend, you’ll be warmly remembered.

With 2022 on the horizon, I extend my sincerest gratitude to you, our supporters and extended NLF family for your continued support and assistance. May you have a Happy and Healthy 2022 and we hope to see you in-person sometime this year! Please take care.

On Friday, November 19th, we celebrated NLF’s 46th Anniversary with a virtual Sushi Social and program. Co-emcees, Executive Director Cathy Inamasu, and Board Member Augie Phillips opened this Zoom Anniversary program with personal remarks and a toast for the occasion. Through a video recording, the Honorable Hiroshi Kawamura, the newly arrived Consul General of Japan in San Francisco, provided warm welcoming remarks highlighting the 1830 Sutter Street’s recent historical designations and praising the organization’s service during the pandemic.

NLF’s Unsung Hero Award: This year event’s honoree was Robert “Bob” Rusky, an attorney and parent of an NLF alum, who drafted the lawsuit challenging the SF YWCA’s claim of ownership of 1830 Sutter when the YWCA put the building up for sale in 1996. Bob, who always has NLF’s best interest at heart and as the initial lead counsel for the litigation, developed the legal arguments for including the adjacent playground lot with the 1830 Sutter building, knowing NLF needed the outdoor space for its preschool program. His efforts would eventually lead to NLF being able to develop its second preschool on that lot, with a rooftop playground to serve both buildings. Bob was unable to attend the virtual event due to medical reasons; however, he graciously accepted the Unsung Hero Award and his heartfelt message was shared during the program.

Dreams Interrupted Project: The evening also included an introduction of the “Dreams Interrupted” project, a multimedia website featuring the Issei women who founded the Japanese YWCA at 1830 Sutter Street, including Yona Abiko and their allies (see Maya Yoshikawa’s article, pg. 6, on Yona Abiko). Concluding the evening program were the Preschool and After School Program students sharing their musical performances of well-loved songs, “Obento” Lunch Box and “Sukiyaki.” Special acknowledgments go to Union Bank for sponsoring our event, and Andy Tonozuka, of We Be Sushi for the tasty sushi dinners and generous support. Our 2nd virtual Anniversary Celebration and Sushi Social was a success, thanks to everyone’s generous support and participation. We look forward to an in-person celebration next year!
*Getting back to our senses…*

Back in March 2020, the media was busy broadcasting about COVID-19. The children were scared, yet a little excited to know that school could be closed for 2 weeks. Since it was right before spring break, they assumed it was just going to be longer, probably about three weeks of no homework. As we all know, the possible longer spring break turned into 3 months of lock down and a year of distance learning.

August 16, 2021 was the day we were all looking forward to. The ASP was able to re-open after the summer at 70% capacity. A familiar yellow school bus arrived and the children's laughter and giggles echoed through the 1700 Sutter building.

For the first couple of weeks, we were puzzled by the amount of band aids and ice packs we had to go through. Many children hesitated to go up on the monkey bars. Several children were falling down frequently, like they forgot how to run and jump safely. We were also intrigued but confused by how their “play” changed from what we used to observe. They love to take off their shoes wherever they go. They lie down and roll on the rugs and mats. Whenever they find something tall, they climb up and jump off from it. (If they cannot find something, they make a tower to climb up!) What is happening here? No fighting over particular Lego pieces nor a big crowd for colorful art supplies.

As Albert Einstein quoted, “Play is the highest form of research.” The children’s play dramatically changed. And now we know their needs. So, it is time for us to reframe our program focus to serve their needs. We continue to provide our project time to develop their “thinking minds”. We also focus more on their free play and observe their sensory needs and development. We welcome the children to take off their shoes, climb up the walls and jump off, hang upside down from the monkey bars, swing with ropes and more, as long as they are safe!

*New beginning with the children’s needs in mind…*

It makes so much sense why the children’s play dramatically changed. And now we know their needs. So, it is time for us to reframe our program focus to serve their needs. We continue to provide our project time to develop their “thinking minds”. We also focus more on their free play and observe their sensory needs and development. We welcome the children to take off their shoes, climb up the walls and jump off, hang upside down from the monkey bars, swing with ropes and more, as long as they are safe!

As Albert Einstein quoted, “Play is the highest form of research.” The children’s play was not only for fulfilling their sensory needs, but also opened up their world of inquiry. How can I fly my shoes further? What is the best way to swing on a rope for a long time? I wonder how far I can slide from a stack of mats. They seek the answer to their inquiry through play, and that creates new explorations along the way. Their curiosity and wonder in play never end.

This year, our project time is an extension of their play. The children planned and created their own activity booth for their Halloween and Holiday Parties. The 5th graders are especially eager to make fun memories in their last year at the ASP, but they also mentioned their desire of making these events memorable for the younger group children. Due to the pandemic, the size of the events was minimized and they weren’t as exciting as before. The older group children still remember how fun the parties used to be and wished to make these events as memorable as possible for the new students who joined the ASP this year, including the Kindergarteners. In the end, there were 10 creative original games developed and run by the children. Tasty special snacks cooked by the staff added fun to the party. (continue on page 3)
We tend to focus on hardships we have to go through. Yes, this pandemic required us to make changes and adjustments from what we used to cherish, but it also added new perspectives and excitement. As we observe the children’s play, we know the change we made leads us to better understand and connect with the ASP students.

*Gratitude…

As the ASP encountered some obstacles at the beginning of this school year, the facility we reside in faced some hiccups. The dedicated Maintenance Committee of Christ United Presbyterian Church (CUPC) addressed the issues right away and repaired the problems. We extend our deepest appreciation for their help and support now, and through all the many, many years.

It’s been over a year and six months since reopening our program on July 1, 2020. I would like to thank our courageous and brave staff at NLF who put themselves on the front line even before the vaccine’s arrival, doing their best to prepare and create a safe learning environment for the children and families. I also would like to thank all the NLF families who have been supporting us and loving us during this pandemic.

Over this period of watching children learn, play, adapt, and adjust in the school environment during this pandemic, I have been learning and relearning how to become a better educator. They also reminded me about why I decided to work with children over 20 years ago.

The children reminded me about the importance of enjoying life moment by moment, even in the worst pandemic. Some children may be feeling that the world is a bit different from before, but their attitude toward exploring and enjoying it hasn’t changed. Their approach toward learning and playing did not change at all. It is indeed my privilege and happiness to see the children’s smiles, excitement, and discoveries at school every day.

Although we are still at 65% capacity, we were able to get back to larger classroom settings and end our small group pods. This year, some of our school events came back all virtually!!! Yay!!! We had a fabulous Dowa no Omatsuri Zoom event in February, a wonderful and emotional Zoom graduation ceremony in June, a fun 5K run in October, and trick or treating for Halloween on the rooftop playground like last year.

In December, the children were fascinated and excited when the Insect Lab visited us at school.

Lastly, Santa came to school during our Holiday Party and they were able to take a nice photo with him! It was so priceless to see their smiles of joy and excitement when Santa walked into the classroom.

We have no words to express our gratitude and love for all the NLF families and supporters who made these virtual fundraising events very successful!!!

Now, let’s get ready for 2022! Please mark your calendar for Sunday, February 27th, Dowa no Omatsuri 2022. The event will be held in person at the Palace of Fine Arts!!! Raffle tickets are selling fast, so if you would like some, please let us know. We are also still accepting donations for our live and silent online auction.

Let’s spread love with our beautiful smiles! Here we come 2022! Wishing you Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!!
Thank You to Our Supporters

Along with our families of enrolled students and staff, we would like to acknowledge the following individuals who generously contributed to NLF in 2021: (as of Dec. 17, 2021)

Grace Abiko
Alaric Akashi & Pauline Tomita
Tom and BJ Baba
Fred Barstein & Diane Nakashima
Barstein
Luc Bellet & Laura Miyano
Jason & Junko Bice
Anthony & Martha Brown
Melinda Candano
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Wendy Wong
Raymond Woo & Adrienne Shiozaki-Woo
Doug & Betty Jo Yamamoto
Joyce Yamasaki
Daniel Yokomizo
Hideki Yokomizo
Shellin Young
Shang Ying Zhu & Fen Xiao

Older child shows his “omoiyari” (caring) as he helps a younger friend.
While Thanksgiving is behind us, there is ample reason to take time to continue to celebrate the heart of what Thanksgiving is all about - expressing gratitude. As the year’s end approaches, we would like to reflect on and celebrate what we are thankful for, and importantly, the many opportunities ahead.

**Local Landmarking.** After a series of hearings, the 1830 Sutter Street building has earned a designation as San Francisco’s Landmark #291. The designation was given for “its association with Japanese American history and culture in San Francisco, specifically, with Japanese American women who founded the first independent Japanese YWCA in the United States.” The landmark designation, with legislation signed by Mayor Breed, took effect on May 30th.

The S.F. designation, along with the recent listings on the National Register of Historic Places and the California Historic Register, will help NLF further promote the building’s unique history and accomplishments of the Issei women founders. Stay tuned as plans are underway to dedicate the signage in 2022 as a part of a year-long celebration of the building’s 90th anniversary.

**1830 Sutter Restoration Projects.** Several exterior work projects on our historic building were completed during the first half of the year. These much-needed major repairs included the replacement of exterior windows, stucco and wood siding, and painting of the entire exterior to match the preschool building addition. All the windows have been replaced based on the original design, including the hardware to keep the integrity of the building.

Additional projects that were undertaken included repairs of several leakages in the building and rooftop issues as well as replacement of the lighting fixture in front of the building. As for the interior, new shades for the conference room and communication center have been installed.

While NLF received generous grants from American Express/National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Crescent Porter Hale Foundation and the Low Income Investment Fund, the projects went over budget. Therefore, NLF is continuing to raise additional funds to make up the $59,000 difference.

**“Dreams Interrupted” 1830 Sutter Multimedia Website Project.** With a generous $99,790 grant from the Department of Interior, National Park Service through the Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) grant program, our project team has embarked on in-depth research uncovering the little-known story of the Issei women and the Japanese YWCA building at 1830 Sutter Street. The website will explore how 1830 Sutter was a centerpiece in the Issei women’s efforts to overcome racism, discrimination, and hardship faced by the Japanese American community, and struggles other marginalized people fought for their rights. The website is expected to launch by fall 2022.

The project seeks recollections from Nikkei whose mothers, grandmothers, or great grandmothers in San Francisco were incarcerated in the Tanforan Assembly Center and the Manzanar, Topaz, and Tule Lake concentration camps. The project also invites NLF alumni and their families who were involved in community organizing associated with the Soko Bukai v. YWCA case, to contribute their photos and stories. As one of the JACS grant recipients, NLF needs to match $2 in federal funds for every $1 in either non-federal funds or in-kind contributions.

**Your Support Helps.** While we have made great strides, we have much more to accomplish in the coming months. Fundraising continues for the building projects, extra payments on the mortgage, and the Dreams Interrupted project. Your gift of any amount will ensure continued preservation and retention of our historic facility for generations to come. Naming opportunities are still available starting at $1,000. On behalf of the children, their families, our staff, and board, we thank you for your continued support and generosity.
If you could be in a time machine, to which time period would you like to travel? I used to wish to go to the future and see how my life would be. But now, I would not hesitate to push the time travel button to go to 1932, the year that the 1830 Sutter building was successfully completed. Who changed my preference? Yona Tsuda Abiko and other Japanese Issei (first-generation) women, who dedicated their life to build SF’s Japanese YWCA and the Japanese American community!

Monday, January 20, 2003 was the day I started working at NLF as a substitute teacher. That was also the day I heard about Yona Tsuda Abiko. Embarrassingly, I had no idea who Yona was or what she did back then. To add to that, hearing about the successful legal settlement against the SF YWCA didn’t help me truly understand how significant it was to NLF and SF’s Japantown until I read an article in the Daily Journal in 2019. The article highlighted how Yona’s diary led NLF and the JA community to win the lawsuit. Yona usually kept her diary in Japanese, however, she happened to write the word “y.w.c.a trust meeting” and “local trustee” in English. That finding was the winning ticket for the litigation, but it was a clear message of how Yona was hoping to convey their thoughts and legacy to others as well.

Focus of the presentation:
“The Hidden Story of Yona Tsuda Abiko” was written with the intention to be a beginner 101 course on Japanese Issei Women’s Dedication, through the life of Yona from her perspective. It is safe to say that her work and passion contributed to today’s SF’s Japantown. However, Yona and the other visionary women’s legacies are not well known. NLF is launching a robust multimedia website, Dreams Interrupted, to explore this little-known story of the Japanese Issei women and their dedicated work. We were hoping that this beginner’s course would capture people’s attention and interest to want to learn more about this hidden story.

Yona, whose father was very ambitious and started the very first mail-order business, was also a sister of Ume Tsuda. Ume is a well-known educator who founded Tsuda University in Japan. As Yona grew up, she was surrounded by strong-willed loving family members, and it helped her to be a determined and caring person who supported her sister Ume. Yona’s life dramatically changed when she met her husband, Kyutaro Abiko, a founder of Nichibei Shim bun. Although their age difference was big, they knew they were meant to be together.

Yona became one of the influential leaders of the Japantown community not because she wanted to gain power, but rather her genuine wish to be a bridge between America and Japan touched other’s hearts. The Issei leaders welcomed picture brides into the community and supported their lives in San Francisco. Yona and Issei leaders fundraised to own a building designed by renowned architect, Julia Morgan, to expand their programs to not only educate the Issei, but for the second generation of Nisei to not lose the roots of their heritage. After WWII, the JA community lost its 1830 Sutter building. However, we were able to take the building back for the community with the diary of Yona. As if Yona knew the obstacles that the JA community might encounter, her diary became the savior of their hardship.

In the beginning of this article, I wished to have a time machine, so that I could go back to 1932. However, what we truly need is knowledge of history and a little imagination. As I work in the office inside of the 1830 Sutter building, I can hear the laughter and footsteps of Yona and the other visionary Issei women.
Your Support is Needed

Plant a Seed (Tane Maki) Campaign Major Donor Wall: Pledge or contribute and have your name be a permanent part of the 1830 Sutter Street building.

Name: ____________________________________________  Phone Number: __________________________
Address: __________________________________________
Email address: ______________________________________

Amount of donation: $__________  Amount of Pledge: $__________

I would like to have my name on the donor wall at the following level:

____ $5,000 (Cherry/Sakura)  ______ $10,000 (Oak/Kashiwa)  ______ $25,000 (Pine/Matsu)
____ $50,000 (Maple/Momiji)  ______ $100,000 (Bamboo/Take)  ______ $250,000 (Ginkgo/Icho)

Children’s Songs Community Building Campaign Display: Pledge or contribute and have your name be a permanent part of the Community Donor Wall.

I would like to have my name on the donor wall at the following level:

____ $3500 (Koinobori/Carp Streamers)
____ $2,500 (Okina Taiko/The Big Drum)
____ $1,000 (Kaeru no Uta/The Frog Song)

General Program Support: Your contribution will go towards keeping our service fees affordable for our families and maintain the quality of our programs.

Total Donation Amount: _____________  ❑ General Program Support  ❑ Building Fund Support

Credit Card Donors:
Name as it appears on the card: __________________________________________
Card number: ___________________________  Amount: $__________  Card Expiration date: ___________
Email address: __________________________________________  Phone Number: ______________________

Please remit this form and contribution payable to: NLF, 1830 Sutter Street, San Francisco, CA  94115          (415) 922-8898

Other Ways to Support

* **Online Donation:** Give online through our website at www.nlfchildcare.org. If your employer matches donations, you can double your gift!

* **Mail-In Donations:** Checks should be made payable to NLF, 1830 Sutter Street, SF, CA 94115

* **Amazon Smile** Visit www.amazonsmile.com and select charity: Nihonmachi Little Friends, and a portion of proceeds comes back to NLF!

* **United Way of the Bay Area** provides funds to NLF if you use code number 3251.

* **Remember NLF in your will or estate planning.**

NLF is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.
SAVE THE DATE:
Dowa No Omatsuri: A Festival of Children’s Stories Fundraiser
Sunday, February 27, 2022, 12-3pm IN-PERSON

Nihonmachi Little Friends Staff

Vivian Cho, Keiko Moore
Holly Dela Cruz, Maiko Murakoshi
Todd Eshima, Misa Okayama
Carmen Huang, Makiko Romero
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Exploring nature at Lafayette Park encourages the children’s “gakumon” (inquisitive minds).

Preschoolers have fun learning hiragana playing the karuta game.

Preschoolers love all the fun activities to do on the rooftop playground. Working together cooperatively, they made a train out of the block crates and demonstrated their “nintai” (perseverance) to reach the top of the climbing wall.