

**Guest Editorial by Dr. Gary Kono**  
**Support a “Living” Legacy of Japanese-American Culture**  
**Part 1 of 4**

*Established in 1975, Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) is a bilingual, multicultural childcare organization located in San Francisco’s Japantown. In 2002, NLF launched the Issei Women’s Legacy Project – a \$2.2 million Capital Campaign to fund the purchase and renovation of the historic 1830 Sutter Street building. Completed in 1932, it was originally built as the Japanese Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).*

**Nihonmachi Little Friends**  
**Capital Campaign**

For the past five years I’ve had the pleasure of serving as the Honorary Co-Chairman of the Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) Capital Campaign along with Hatsuro “Hats” Aizawa. \$2.1 million of our original \$2.2 million goal has already been raised. Through 35 years of fundraising in San Francisco’s Japantown, I have come to appreciate the difficulty of completing campaigns. In 2009, given the poor state of our national economy and the worldwide recession, the ascent to complete our ambitious goal is steeper than ever. *Well, that’s not quite true:* The young *Issei* women, who raised funds to build the Japanese YWCA building at 1830 Sutter Street, NLF’s home today, in the deepest part of the Great Depression, had a far greater challenge.

*Your contribution might well be the difference between an ongoing Japanese-American “living” legacy or a legacy reflected only in history. Why?:* Completing NLF’s Capital Campaign allows young children to thrive from NLF’s programs. Underfunding risks programs ending.

Sitting comfortably in your living room, office, or corner coffee shop reading this editorial suggests that Japanese American culture has a place in your life. I am not speaking of just a “Japanese” influence, but of your tangible and intangible appreciation of things, events, people, and memories distinctly “American” of Japanese descent.

**JA an Evaporating Culture:**  
**The Unnoticed Diaspora**

More than likely your connection to Japanese America is no longer with the J-town you grew up in or near simply because 43 of the 46 Japantowns in America no longer exist. Or if you grew up in San Francisco’s *Nihonmachi*, you probably didn’t live in the current remaining 4 to 5 square blocks; you lived elsewhere across over 50 square blocks, among 300 vibrant JA businesses in the greatest Japantown ever outside of Japan.

Uniquely, one building in J-Town was built by *Issei*, used by *Nisei*, fought for by *Sansei*, served as a school to *Yonsei* and *Gosei*, and, with the completion of this NLF Campaign, will serve future generations. It was formerly the San Francisco Japanese YWCA building. This facility is one of the oldest remaining community edifices in

Japantown. *I hope to share with you my belief that it is the embodiment of the American Dream: A start from immigrant hope and imagination, struggles against racism, advocacy for over five generations, an icon of community justice, and now a place for unique and ongoing learning and creativity.*

### **Julia Morgan: Risk Taker**

Do you know what the Greek Amphitheater at U.C. Berkeley, the Hearst Castle at San Simeon, and 1830 Sutter Street all have in common? Julia Morgan designed all of them. Julia Morgan graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1894 as the first female to earn a degree in civil engineering. In her senior year, she was influenced by renowned architect Bernard Maybeck to go into architecture. The center of western culture and intellect in the late 1890s was Paris, France. She moved to Paris and applied to L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, School of Architecture. Morgan was stunned to find her application was refused because the French school did not accept women and discriminated openly against Americans.

She persisted by apprenticing for an architect in Paris and entering open design competitions. She overcame the discrimination she faced by winning several awards, which led to L'Ecole des Beaux Arts accepting her. Julia Morgan then became the first woman architect ever to graduate from L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

In 1904, she came to San Francisco and started her design career. Two years later her office was destroyed in the Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906. Julia Morgan was one of many to be displaced that year. Japanese immigrants had generally been concentrated in three different sections of San Francisco prior to this natural catastrophe. Most chose to build their new lives in what we now call the Western Addition neighborhood. *Thus, in 1906, San Francisco's Japantown was created.* The earthquake/fire also motivated many *Issei* and *Nisei* families to leave San Francisco and start communities in the East Bay, the Peninsula, and South Bay.

### **Morgan Works Free for Issei Women**

Famous for her attention to detail and exquisite craftsmanship, Julia Morgan would design over 700 buildings throughout the world. By 1919, she commanded the highest salary as the architect of William Randolph Hearst's palatial castle in San Simeon. Around 1930, she was approached to design three YWCA buildings in San Francisco, including the young *Issei* women's Japanese YWCA. Remarkably, this world-famous architect did her work *pro bono* (for no charge) for these *Issei* women.

We can only imagine that she might have done her work for free because she related to these young women from Japan. Like her, they had crossed an ocean of adversity and faced the challenges of living amidst a whole new language; like her, they were female and denied the opportunities open to men. She might have sympathized with the fact that since the mid-1920s, their family and friends had been barred from immigrating to America by racist legislation. Or it could be because she knew the *Issei* women, who had worked so hard to raise money from the community, could not own the property outright due to the racist Alien Land Law. Regardless of what we may guess as

to her motivations, it is clear that Julia Morgan supported the Christian fellowship of providing low income housing and programs to the poor and less fortunate.

### **Comparing 2009 to 1933**

Today we are each experiencing the second worst recession in the history of the United States. I'd like to help you appreciate our time compared to the era of the *Issei* women. After the "Black Tuesday" crash on Wall Street in 1929 (which was only a few months before Julia Morgan was first contacted by the *Issei* women), stocks fell another 89% over the next four years. To imagine just how profoundly difficult fundraising must have been for these women, just look at the Dow Jones average, which was recently around 9,000 in mid-2009: *It would have to fall below 990 sometime in 2013 to be comparable to the stock market losses suffered in the era of the Great Depression.*

Now try to imagine what would be our contemporary costs for purchasing a lot in the heart of San Francisco, on which we would construct an authentic 10,000 square foot *Noh* theater, a dormitory, and several conference rooms. Further, imagine that we planned to undertake this task by raising funds door-to-door alone, without contributions from corporations and foundations. As I went through this thinking process, I began to understand the strength of character and determination these young *Issei* women shared with each other in order to pursue their dreams.

*Why did they have to build their own YWCA in the first place?* Because all YWCAs at the time were segregated (another form of overt discrimination that continued until 1946). The young Japanese women did not allow the multitude of restrictions of their era to dampen their aspirations to benefit future generations. *Nor should we allow the shadow of our recession to dampen ours.*

### **Keep the Legacy Alive**

Your contribution to Nihonmachi Little Friends' Capital Campaign will help keep the legacy of both our *Issei* pioneers and Julia Morgan alive. Your contribution will also help fulfill the dream of providing a living, learning environment for young children in Japantown for generations to come. Aren't those compelling reasons to contribute now? In subsequent articles I will share with you the powerful spirit that has existed inside and around this building. Through uncovering many untold or forgotten stories, I hope to help you map the history of Japanese in America and to create a trajectory for our future.

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**Nihonmachi Little Friends**  
**Needs Your Help**

The 1830 Sutter Street building is one of the few and most long-lasting of great Japanese American works destined to convey some knowledge of us to remote posterity. It is not a shrine, not a pagoda, not a garden, and not a bridge. Nor is it a museum or an historical organization looking backwards at our past. It is instead a building inspired by *Issei* which has evolved with every following generation of Japanese Americans. While it has a rich history possibly unparalleled in Japanese American culture, *through Nihonmachi Little Friends this building thrives in our present and will continue to evolve into the future.*

You may have never stepped into 1830 Sutter or heard of Nihonmachi Little Friends, but if you embrace Japanese American culture you must consider helping them both. You may now live far from San Francisco, yet if “Japanese America” is close to your heart, consider that your gift will enable our collective legacy to flourish.

**A History of Advocacy and Inspiration**

In Part 1 of this series I shared with you the birth of 1830 Sutter. Women in this country could not even vote until 1920. Japanese could not migrate to America in the mid-1920s because of racist laws. The YWCAs were segregated. The *Issei* women of the Japanese YWCA could not own the 1830 Sutter Street building outright because of the Alien Land Laws. They chose to build a place of their own after the Great Depression started, and they finished just before the Depression bottomed out. Because of their ‘audacity of hope’ and their collective ‘yes we can’ spirit, the building was born against great odds. *Their reward?* They were in their building for less than a decade before being unjustly forced into internment camps.

Sixty years later, the *Issei* women’s actions became a model for our community advocates seeking to save 1830 Sutter. Generations after the *Issei* pioneers, the building was saved for our community because of a dedication to justice and community values. I want to share with you how this compelling and little known story unfolded.

### **The 1970s: A New Community Spirit**

In the 1970s, third generation Japanese Americans, the *Sansei*, began forming organizations serving the Japanese American community, including Kimochi, Inc. (1971), the Asian Law Caucus (1972), and Nihonmachi Little Friends (1975). The *Sansei* embraced the revolutionary nationwide student movements from the initial Free Speech Movement (FSM) at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964 and the beginnings of the Third World Strike a few years later at San Francisco State.

I was a student at Cal, along with Yuji Ichioka, a friend since our days in Berkeley's all Japanese American Boy Scout Troop #26. Profoundly influenced by the FSM, Yuji graduated from Cal in 1968 and soon after, coined the term "Asian American." Until then, the term "Oriental" generically referred to the Chinese and Japanese (plus the few Koreans) who lived here. Yuji's concept recognized our American *and* ethnic heritages, enabling these groups to work together for larger political purposes and causes. To have these three cultures marching under one banner was unheard of. Consider this: *In Asia, many of the diverse nationalities that include themselves today so comfortably as "Asian" or "Asian American" were more often adversaries than allies in the past.* Like Julia Morgan, the architect of the 1830 Sutter Street building, Yuji Ichioka was a visionary.

By 1996, the groups begun in the 1970s were well-established and in the mainstream of the community. Also in 1996 the San Francisco (SF) YWCA - which took control of the 1830 Sutter Street building after the women of the Japanese YWCA were interned - announced their plan to sell the building for \$1.65 million. *The main tenant, Nihonmachi Little Friends, was among those who were given an eviction notice.*

### **An Almost Forgotten History**

The SF YWCA's action brought advocates from a wide cross-section of Japantown's community groups to a meeting at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC), under the leadership of Paul Osaki. The threat to NLF's services was discussed along with the likely demolition of the historic structure. There was faint hope of keeping the building in community service since no one from the Japanese American community could afford the sale price set by the SF YWCA.

Fortunately, Steve Nakajo of Kimochi Inc. brought to light recollections of some seniors of community fund drives for the building and vague promises of a right to purchase the property. The SF YWCA allowed Kimochi volunteer Al Gordon to investigate the old archives of the "Y." Al doggedly sifted through dusty stacks and boxes of old YWCA records. Imagine his joy when he discovered the SF YWCA's promise, in their own board minutes, to hold 1830 Sutter in trust for the *Issei* Japanese women. These women could not hold title to the property due to the notorious Alien Land Law, which prohibited Japanese immigrants from owning property in their own names.

### **Hope, Frustration & Action**

Discovery of the Japanese YWCA trust raised hopes that 1830 Sutter would be saved, but the SF YWCA stubbornly refused to acknowledge the trust. The community first reacted with disbelief, then drew together with a determination reminiscent of the courage and fortitude of the *Issei* women whose building they were now fighting desperately to preserve. A show of solidarity by NLF families and supporters then forced the SF YWCA to cancel the eviction of NLF from the building. Community representatives engaged unsuccessfully in mediation for months. The only recourse was for a principal party in the community to file a lawsuit against the SF YWCA. *There was a major obstacle: Without any Japanese YWCA members, which disbanded after the interment orders during World War II, who could file the lawsuit?*

To enforce the trust, the court required someone with legal connection to the property to file suit. The *Soko Bukai*, a confederation of Japanese Christian Churches, headed by Reverend Gary Barbaree, rose to lead the fight. The *Soko Bukai* recognized that the *Issei* women had been members of their churches and had been motivated by their Christian values to create the Japanese YWCA and its building.

### **Community Lawyering**

The *Soko Bukai*'s legal team also grew from community roots. NLF Executive Director Cathy Inamasu had asked Karen Kai, a lawyer and parent on NLF's Board, to attend the community meetings. Karen recruited her husband, Bob Rusky, to draft the lawsuit. Together, Karen and Bob contacted attorneys Dale Minami and Don Tamaki. I knew Dale when he first founded the Asian Law Caucus (with Ken Kawaichi); met Don when he was ALC Executive Director; and met Karen and Bob when the four had worked together on Fred Korematsu's *coram nobis* lawsuit that vindicated his historic challenge to the wartime internment of Japanese Americans. Dale led the group of 25 attorneys collectively known as the *coram nobis* legal team. *Its success removed a major obstacle which, if left unchallenged, would have blocked Redress and Reparations for Japanese Americans.*

Just as for the *coram nobis* cases, Don led the public education and fundraising for the *Soko Bukai* against the SF YWCA (Before Redevelopment occurred in San Francisco where much of Japantown was destroyed to make way for new "development" and the Geary Boulevard thoroughfare, Don's *Nisei* father became the owner of a hotel through a land trust created by attorney Guy Calden. Mr. Calden helped many Japanese American families to work around the Alien Land Law). In the late 1990s, other attorneys were recruited to the cause of fighting the SF YWCA, including Tracie Brown, a passionate *hapa* attorney who is now an NLF Capital Campaign Committee member. Tracie personally logged over 2,000 *pro bono* hours on the case. Eventually, 36 lawyers and several law firms, including Minami Tamaki LLP, joined the effort *pro bono*.

### **Roots of Advocacy in the Asian Law Caucus**

Back in the mid-1970s, shortly after I started my surgery practice in Berkeley, I joined the Board of the Asian Law Caucus (ALC). At my first ALC meeting, I sat between Don Tamaki and Reverend Lloyd Wake, who 10 years ago succeeded Rev.

Barbaree in leading the *Soko Bukai*. Little did I know my relationships with these legal advocates would involve me in two landmark cases in Asian American legal history. I later volunteered to be the lead fundraiser for Steven Okazaki's movie on the Korematsu case, "*Unfinished Business*." It was nominated for an Academy Award and shown to many members of Congress prior to Redress. I also had the privilege of chairing the inaugural Fred Korematsu Civil Rights Dinner recognizing the legal team's over 50,000 donated hours on the *coram nobis* cases.

I don't remember whether Don approached me to help support *Soko Bukai's* legal effort or I asked him if help was needed. In any case, I didn't hesitate to offer my support when I found out he was working again *pro bono*. While *pro bono* means doing something for free, working behind the scenes, I have found it is hardly the case. First, there are still hard costs of traveling, creating documents, depositions, phone bills, and so on which still must be paid. Second, the time spent doing *pro bono* work still necessitates working more to earn a normal living. *I hope you can now appreciate that when you see "pro bono," in reality, someone is expending time, effort, and money to do a good deed, to forward a cause which probably cannot be done otherwise.*

### **For a Greater Good: Giving from the Heart**

The *Issei* women were motivated by their love for and duty to their community. Julia Morgan wanted to help women who could not afford her fees. Although debilitated by throat cancer, Yuji Ichioka, then a professor at UCLA and the foremost authority on the *Issei*, donated his services as an expert witness. Yuji validated the trust with evidence linking the Japanese YWCA and attorney Guy Calden, the same lawyer who had helped Don Tamaki's father. The *Soko Bukai* attorneys, leaders, volunteers from Japantown, and so many others, did so much of their work *pro bono*. Assemblyman Mike Honda worked with the Japanese American Citizens League and NLF to pass a *unanimous* California State resolution supporting the 1830 Sutter effort. Literally, *pro bono* means "for good" and that is what any donation from you to the NLF Campaign will be.

### **Why Donate to NLF?**

As the trial neared, NLF's Board, together with the *Soko Bukai*, made an important strategic decision: NLF would help settle the lawsuit by agreeing to take ownership of 1830 Sutter at a price far lower than what the SF YWCA sought. NLF demonstrated itself to be a dedicated and courageous organization, willing to keep and maintain the building as a community resource.

At the JCCCNC community rally celebrating the settlement, I warned, "[While] we could all deservedly celebrate the settlement, *there can be no 'victory celebration' until NLF's Capital Campaign is completed!*" Pioneers have struggled to give birth to this building, and advocates have fought to keep the building as a cornerstone of Japanese American culture. The legal settlement only becomes secure for the future *when the funds are fully raised*. We need your help to put NLF's Capital Campaign over the top! *Yet again believe: "Yes we can!" Join us.*

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**Support Nihonmachi Little Friends**

Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) Capital Campaign has already raised 95% of its \$2,200,000 goal. NLF retired the mortgage on the 1830 Sutter Street building in 2007 and is currently in the process of much needed retrofitting and upgrading. My purpose in writing is to encourage more supporters to find inspiration in the many extraordinary stories related to NLF and 1830 Sutter Street, formerly home of the San Francisco Japanese YWCA. Significantly, it is among a mere handful of pre-World War II buildings created for and still supporting San Francisco’s Japantown community.

**Two Sets of Footsteps on the Sand**

Edward R. Murrow, the first great television journalist, was once asked what he had learned about people and projects from 30 years of doing one-on-one interviews. He thought pensively for a moment and responded “I’ve learned that it takes a long, long time to gather all the details and minute facts...it takes longer to learn the obvious.”

Most all of us have learned the Christian parable where a young man walks on the beach with the Lord, looks back and sees there are two sets of foot prints in the sand. But after a great storm passes over them the young man confronts the Lord with the question: “Why did you leave me all alone? I looked back during the storm and only saw one set of footprints.” The Lord responded: “When you needed me most, that is when I carried you!”

In my previous articles, I’ve revealed a multitude of small details and facts that occurred in Japantown (specifically regarding 1830 Sutter) through the past 100 years. But what is now *obvious* to me (and I am a Buddhist) is how much Christian faith and the *Soko Bukai* churches have quietly carried many Japanese, Japanese Americans, and supporters of Japanese American culture through their darkest times in San Francisco. After all, the young *Issei* women who struggled against oppressive and racist legislation to build 1830 Sutter in the worst of economic times, *were* members of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).

### **What is the *Soko Bukai*?**

The *Soko Bukai* is the organization of the San Francisco Japanese American Christian churches. Its most active members are the Christ United Presbyterian, Pine United Methodist, and Christ Episcopal Churches. Although today's *Nihonmachi* (Japantown) emerged after the 1906 Earthquake/Fire, the first Japanese institution in the United States, the Japanese Gospel Society, was born in San Francisco in the 1870s. Meeting in a basement in Chinatown for years, from this group arose the first members of all three churches and the forming of the *Soko Bukai*.

Young *Issei* women from the *Soko Bukai* churches gathered to support each other. They saw the value of what was going on in other YWCAs, but because of segregation, they weren't allowed full access. In 1912, these *Issei* women founded their own independent Japanese YWCA. By the late 1920s, they saw the need to have a permanent home. With the support of the *Soko Bukai* churches, the women pursued their ambitious plan to raise money to build their own facility. They completed their goal in 1932. The *Issei* women used their new facility for less than a decade until the wake of World War II, when they were interned with all others of Japanese descent. After the War, the *Soko Bukai* played a significant leadership role in helping the returning Japanese Americans to regroup and reestablish their community in San Francisco.

### **Christian, Buddhist, Shinto Churches All Shaping Today's J-Town**

The *Soko Bukai* has also influenced J-town beyond the Japanese YWCA as a member of the Japanese American Religious Federation (JARF): The eleven Buddhist, *Shinto* and Christian churches in San Francisco. JARF founded both Nihonmachi Terrace for independent senior living as well as the Japanese American Religious Federation Assisted Living Incorporated (JALFI).

In 1999, JALFI hired me as its first Capital Campaign Coordinator, in charge of raising \$1 million of community funds in one year's time. An immediate priority was that JALFI, already in existence for a decade, needed a fresh name change. I asked Reverend Donald Drummond of the Christ United Presbyterian Church to consider two Japanese words related to essence or spirit: "*tamashii*" and "*kokoro*." As a linguistic expert, Rev. Drummond picked the latter. Thus, JALFI became Kokoro Assisted Living. Having reached the fundraising goal in 10 months, I resigned my paid position, donated the remaining salary, and served as a member of the Kokoro Assisted Living Board of Directors.

### **The Quakers Helped Too**

Digressing for a moment, when the *Issei* women were forced into internment camps in 1942, a Quaker group called the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) rented the vacated space at 1830 Sutter. They established their West Coast regional office to oppose the internment and provide assistance to Japanese Americans. At the end of World War II and the closing of the internment camps, the AFSC assisted over 6,000 *Nisei* to get into colleges across the country. They also helped scores of *Nisei*

returning from their incarceration to find jobs and housing. For many years these *Nisei* enjoyed programs, movies, and dances held at 1830 Sutter.

### **The *Kokoro* of Japanese America**

I was surprised to find that the word *kokoro* is difficult to translate into English. When asked, one might say it means “heart,” another “mind,” and yet another “core.” Apply this term to our Japanese American culture, which once was highly visible and which today has dwindled down to a few handfuls of institutions. *Our collective kokoro, no matter how small our physical presence, lives in our hearts, minds, and in our core.* For that reason, we can embrace our *kokoro* by supporting any of our remaining institutions.

A perfect expression of this is when the *Soko Bukai v. SF YWCA* lawsuit was suddenly settled after six years of contentious litigation. Bill Hirose (philanthropist, consultant at Minami Tamaki LLP, mentor, and friend) and I had raised funds from the Japanese American community to support the *Soko Bukai* legal team. With the settlement, however, those litigation funds were no longer needed. Unselfishly, the *Soko Bukai* then transferred that \$30,000 to become the initial contribution to NLF’s Capital Campaign, in a true spirit of “one-for-all-and-all-for-one”!

### **The Interconnection of Your Gift**

I’ve shared some of my fundraising activities for 35 years in Japantown (most alongside Bill Hirose) to underscore my unique view of the continuing evolution of Japanese American culture. Rather than disjointed or disconnected from each other, over time I’ve come to appreciate that they have all been interconnected. I believe if you reflect on your life you too are connected to this evolution, whether it be by your generational tree, by the sadness of justice denied, by the pride of justice served, by your relationship to the *Soko Bukai*, to the American Friends Service Committee, or to 34 years of NLF’s staff and students.

You can express your commitment to our Japanese American *kokoro* by supporting Nihonmachi Little Friends as it raises the final 5% of its \$2.2 million Capital Campaign.

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**A Garden Metaphor**

For more than 30 years, off of the deck of my house, I have gazed into the beautiful garden of my neighbor next door below me. I observed Rose planting flowers everywhere, tenderly applying soil or pulling unsightly weeds. Years ago she passed away, and her husband did a good job of keeping all the colorful flowers for over a decade...but slowly, the garden shrank in size and color. This happened so slowly, I hardly noticed. As he turned 90, the garden deteriorated due to lack of watering and daily attention.

In one corner though, a yellow rose bush still thrives without getting any special attention, while more and more of the few remaining plants die or wither away. This reminds me so much of the 1830 Sutter Street building in San Francisco’s Japantown. It was once a part of a great “garden” of Japanese American businesses and families that had thrived and then slowly disappeared over the last century...yet somehow this one building, like the beautiful yellow rose plant, is still vibrant. *It has a special energy within and about it.*

I used to be very angry and saddened that Japanese America, which has endured so much pain and injustice, is now represented by only a few institutions. Today I’ve come to realize that maybe we have attained the American Dream we so strongly sought after coming out of the internment camps: We’ve simply assimilated (Be careful what you wish for!). Philosophically, I understand that everything we see, touch and feel does come to life and then folds back into eternity.

That yellow rose plant is also a metaphor to me of Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) and the 1830 Sutter Street building. Both are alive and full of vitality: Starting with just 15 preschoolers 34 years ago, NLF now serves over 200 students each year. In my neighbor’s garden, it is not any flower...it is not the begonia or tulip that has survived. It is the rose which now thrives in Rose’s garden. Through my prior editorials, I hope I have effectively shown you that NLF’s 1830 Sutter is not just *any* building...it is one that was born out of a community vision, nurtured, transferred to friends, stolen from

us, fought for, and returned. It now endures for the future... *unlike the yellow rose plant, however, NLF needs finances to continue its success.*

### **Maria Matsu, Past NLF Board President**

I want to balance my focus on the building by briefly sharing with you insights of a few individuals who have been involved in NLF. They are examples of the many connected to NLF over the past three and a half decades (ironically the same period I have been raising funds for community groups). With the settlement of the lawsuit and then the sudden need for NLF to raise funds to purchase 1830 Sutter, the burden of responsibility fell squarely on the shoulders of Maria Matsu, then NLF's Board President. She asked me to help because their Board consisted of mostly young working parents who had little or no experience in fundraising, and had limited time for volunteering. Some were also taking care of their own parents.

Initially, the majority of Board members told me that they gave their time, but could not give money. I spoke to them and asked, "*Why would anyone else want to give to your cause if you don't?*" I also shared with them the unique and inspiring history which I've uncovered in the last three articles. Passing out a piece of paper to each member, I asked them: "*If you truly believe in NLF, in what it is providing your children, in why you feel it is important to preserve this school, please write down a dollar number that you feel you can pledge to make your campaign dream become a reality.*" I was astounded that the pieces of paper totaled over \$75,000. This was almost 50% more than I had seen from boards of other community organizations with more affluent, older members. From this example, *one can understand that people find NLF as special to the community, as the building it belongs to.*

Maria's children, both NLF alumni, are in their teens and early 20s, yet she remains involved, becoming the second highest individual benefactor to NLF. Her continued enthusiasm and dedication to NLF are shown in her recent remarks during an interview: "[At NLF,] there is a sense of commitment and caring that transcends the traditional childcare experience... It's important to me to see NLF continue to thrive."

### **Jack Hirose CPA, Philanthropist**

Thus far, the largest individual (excludes private foundations) benefactor to NLF's Capital Campaign has been Jack Hirose (oldest brother of Bill Hirose). When we recently approached Jack about placing his name prominently in the 1830 Sutter Street building as an appreciation of his generosity, he politely refused. Like Julia Morgan, the renowned architect who designed 1830 Sutter over 75 years ago, Jack started off as an engineer but then changed careers. And similar to Morgan becoming the first female architect, Jack became the first Japanese American accountant after returning from World War II, as a member of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS).

It is not surprising to me that Jack is both tough and humble. I met many *Nisei* Veterans of the 442<sup>nd</sup>/100<sup>th</sup> and the MIS when I was a Board member of the National Japanese American Historical Society (NJAHS), led by Rosalyn Tonai. Many of these men had the same traits. At one NJAHS dinner, I asked the *Nisei* veterans to stand up

and look across the capacity filled room to the *Sansei* Dale Minami, Don Tamaki, Karen Kai, Bob Rusky, and the rest of the *coram nobis* legal team, who were also standing. In between the two was the audience of 400. I explained that the veterans had fought for all of our freedom...but to me there can be no *real* freedom without justice, which is what the *Sansei* attorneys had accomplished. *Not only has the Japanese American community benefited from both groups...all of America has.*

I met Jack when I was fundraising at a Golden Gate Optimist meeting years ago. His friend is Hatsuro “Hats” Aizawa (also an MIS vet) with whom I share the Honorary Co-Chairmanship of NLF’s Capital Campaign. Jack’s generous donations have supported most of the institutions, organizations, and churches I have already referenced throughout my historical review. At NLF’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dinner in 2005, Jack stepped forward to make the final payment of almost \$100,000, enabling NLF to retire the mortgage on the building. When asked why he did this, *he quietly stated that he simply wanted to help empower the lives of young Japanese Americans.*

### **Cathy Inamasu, NLF Executive Director**

When Cathy Inamasu came to San Francisco in the 1970s from Stockton, she was inspired by the groundswell of grassroots community organizations that were being formed. Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF), similar to the Japanese YWCA four decades before, had just been uniquely founded as the first bilingual school of its kind in San Francisco, and possibly throughout Japanese American communities.

Cathy started as an NLF teacher and rose to Executive Director, a position she has held for over 20 years. NLF was special from the beginning. Indeed, it is that uniqueness that keeps Cathy and other teachers, staff, and board members fresh and active: “What sets NLF apart is its community base and the close working relationship between the staff and parents. This develops leadership skills among the parents that they carry with them to their children’s elementary schools and beyond.” She is proud of the fact that “[NLF] is the only full-day and full-year Japanese bilingual/bicultural program serving preschoolers in San Francisco to meet the needs of working families.”

### **The Future - NLF**

In his book *The Prophet*, the philosopher/writer Kahlil Gibran wrote this about children: “You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth... You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit... For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.”

Last year, Cherry Blossom Queen Alicia Kagawa, who grew up mostly in Marin, spoke at the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1830 Sutter Street building as an NLF alumna. “When I returned to the Japantown community, I saw buildings, programs, and services in a different way. I understood the hopes that our *Issei* generation had set forth for us...what *Nisei* had fought for...what our *Sansei* activists had preserved. I recognized the need for my generation to get involved.”

Alicia is just one NLF graduate. Every year, over 200 students at NLF shape their values and dreams amid the historical posters of 1830 Sutter and under the guidance of culturally sensitive teachers and staff. Imagine how many are influenced like Alicia: *They are the seeds planted for the future and are reasons to support NLF's cause.*

### **The Meaning of Your Gift**

As I explained earlier, NLF's Board initially felt inadequate to give money, in addition to their time, for its Capital Campaign to purchase and renovate the 1830 Sutter Street building. When they stepped up, I reminded them that, with their financial commitment, they now shared the original intention expressed by the *Issei* pioneers who had created the building four generations before. When the young women met their challenge in the 1930s, I am certain that most of them also felt they had limited funds, just as you might feel in our current state of economy.

NLF's future can only be secured with more funding. As Kahlil Gibran wrote about giving: "Give now, that the season of giving may be yours...." The *final* \$100,000 of the \$2.2 million *Issei* Women's Legacy Project is the hardest to raise. Certainly, I would appreciate one individual, foundation or corporation giving this amount. However, I would rather see 100,000 like-minded individuals giving \$1 to become involved and reconnected. That, I see, would be an expression of a collective *kokoro*, an intention to propel Japanese American culture into the unknown future. Thank you.

*To learn more or to view the full series of editorials, visit NLF's website at [www.nlfchildcare.org](http://www.nlfchildcare.org) or contact NLF at [nlfchildcare@yahoo.com](mailto:nlfchildcare@yahoo.com). Contributions to the Capital Campaign can be sent to NLF, 2031 Bush Street, San Francisco, CA 94115 or online at [www.nlfchildcare.org](http://www.nlfchildcare.org). All donations are tax-deductible.*

Dr. Gary Kono is a hospice volunteer. He is a retired surgeon in dentistry, recipient of two humanitarian awards, guest of the China Medical Association, and Regent Scholar of the University of California. He resides in Oakland, CA with his wife Qin Lu. He can be reached at 510.658.9898.