MY PARENTS
Don Kiyoshi and Sally Sadako Mitani
JOHN MITANI
My maternal and paternal grandparents immigrated to the United States during the early 1900s. My father’s parents settled near Fresno, while my mother’s parents moved to Castroville along the Central Coast of California. Like many Japanese immigrants at the time, my grandparents made their living as truck farmers growing vegetables that could be sold locally.

My father’s parents fulfilled the Japanese immigrant dream and made enough money to return to Japan where my father grew up. My mother’s parents eked out a living to support their family that included my mother and her three older siblings.

A year or so before the United States declared war on Japan, my father finished high school and returned to America. He found work at a nursery in the Bay Area and was employed there when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Meanwhile, my mother was a senior in high school.
San Francisco, California. Exclusion Order posted at First and Front Streets directing removal of persons of Japanese ancestry from the first San Francisco section to be effected by the evacuation. The first civilian exclusion order was signed in the Presidio in San Francisco.

Photo by Dorothea Lange, National Archives

President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 a few weeks after Pearl Harbor. It led to the forced evacuation and internment of all those of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast of the U.S. to relocation centers scattered around the country. Given the timing, my mother was unable to finish her last few months of high school.

My mother, Sally Sadako Oshita, and her family were interned at a camp in Poston, Arizona.
My father, Don Kiyoshi Mitani, was initially sent to a camp at Tule Lake in Northern California. He was subsequently moved to the camp at Heart Mountain, which you will visit during the Board meeting.

Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Wyoming. As carloads of personal belongings arrived at this relocation center, they were taken to the central square, sorted alphabetically and distributed to the barracks.

Photo by Tom Parker, National Archives
My father grew up in the relatively equable climes of Hiroshima and would occasionally recall the brutal winters at Heart Mountain. My mother talked about the dry and dusty conditions at Poston and the hastily built tar paper shacks that she and others lived in. She told me about the paper-thin walls of their homes and how they provided little in the way of privacy. Both of my parents remembered the out-of-the-way and desolate conditions of their camps. There was an obvious reason for this. The U.S. government wasn’t keen to advertise what it was doing to some of its citizens.

Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Wyoming. Looking west on "F" street, main thoroughfare of this relocation center, with its namesake "Heart Mountain" looming in the background.

Photo by Tom Parker, National Archives
## NAME BY NAME ACCOUNTING OF ALL RESIDENTS

**For Period Ending September 30, 1944**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>LAST</th>
<th>FIRST</th>
<th>MIDDLE</th>
<th>FAMILY NO</th>
<th>CENTER</th>
<th>DATE OF BIRTH</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>MI</th>
<th>KANA</th>
<th>ALIEN</th>
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A name by name accounting of all residents at Heart Mountain Relocation Center. Don Kiyoshi Mitani is listed here.

Document provided by the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation
While interned at Heart Mountain in 1943, the U.S. government asked my father and other men older than 17 several questions in a "Statement of U.S. Citizenship of Japanese American Ancestry." The questions were designed to identify those who were "loyal" and "disloyal." Questions 27 and 28 went straight to the heart of the matter and asked the following:

Question #27: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?"

Question #28: "Will you swear unqualified allegiances to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or other foreign government, power or organization?"

San Francisco, California. Flag of allegiance pledge at Raphael Weill Public School, Geary and Buchanan Streets. Children in families of Japanese ancestry were evacuated with their parents and imprisoned for the duration in War Relocation Authority centers.

Photo by Dorothea Lange, National Archives
My father told me that he answered “no and no” to these questions becoming an infamous “no-no boy” in the process. Those who did so were segregated in a special facility at Tule Lake. Some were even imprisoned. Why my father was able to remain at Heart Mountain is a mystery to me. He did tell me that he would change his answers to “yes-yes” so that he could go out to work in the neighboring community from time to time. Perhaps this was the reason he wasn’t moved back to Tule Lake or incarcerated.

My account of what my parents endured during the war is brief. This is because they and other members of their generation, the Nisei or second generation of Japanese immigrants, were reluctant to tell us, their children, about what they experienced during the war. This is an important part of the story. Some were probably angry. Others may have been ashamed. Virtually all were determined to forge a new and better life for themselves after being released.

*Manzanar Relocation Center, California. A grandfather and grandson interned at the Manzanar War Relocation Authority center.*

*Photo by Dorothea Lange, National Archives*
After the war, the Nisei worked hard to reintegrate into American life. My interpretation is that to do so, they felt that they had to be more American than Americans. As a consequence, my brothers and I weren’t taught much about our heritage – Japan, Japanese culture, or the Japanese language. The latter is a lasting regret, and one that I felt deeply as an adult when I worked with Toshisada Nishida and some of my other Japanese colleagues. I was embarrassed that I could not communicate with them in Japanese. But I understood why I was unable to do so.

My parents spent the duration of the war interned at Poston and Heart Mountain. After being released, they found their way to Los Angeles. My father began a short-lived career as a gardener, while my mother started an equally short-lived career as a seamstress. They were introduced to each other by a mutual friend and married in 1950.

My parents worked hard and lived long, happy, and productive lives after the war. They made sure that my two brothers and I were given opportunities denied to them in youth. My father passed away a few years ago, and my mother died last fall. I was incredibly lucky to have such loving and caring parents. I miss them.
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2019

The image on front and back cover is from an obi (a broad sash worn around the waist of a Japanese kimono) that belonged to Sally Sadako Mitani.