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SCU IN QUARANTINE

Our Pandemic Stories

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Pandemic Injustice

Susan Boyd
Engineering/Math Librarian

This is the only photo I have of my parents when they were young. It was taken on October 17, 1936, on their wedding day. They look uncomfortable, stiff and formal with too much social distancing for a married couple. Instead of a wedding gown, my mother wears a kimono—a nod to their parents who had immigrated to Hawaii from Japan at the turn of the past century.

I am glad neither of them lived to see another pandemic—both were around for the 1918 pandemic—my mother was a baby, having been born that year, and my father was born in 1910. During World War II, my parents and my three siblings (I am a “later in life child,” born years after the first three) endured the injustice of being labeled “the enemy” because they were of Japanese ancestry although they were Americans by way of being born in this country. Japanese-Americans in the continental U.S. were incarcerated in internment camps because of their ancestry.

Most of those in Hawaii were not because the islands limited their movements and made them easier to police by the authorities. Even though they weren’t put into internment camps, it was obvious they were being watched. My grandfather died during the war, and my mother bitterly said that armed guards were present at the funeral—as they were at any gatherings of people of Japanese ancestry.

My father died in 2003, and my mother in 2015, spared from going through another pandemic, and spared from being treated as the cause of this pandemic. Their parents were from Japan, but above all, they wanted their children to be Americans. They loved the country that took in their parents to work in the Hawaiian agricultural industry. As second generation Americans, their life was hard, but they made sure their children received the best education which they saw as the key to a better future.



Up to the start of the pandemic, I (as an Asian-American) had never feared walking alone in my neighborhood. And then our former president called Covid-19 the "China virus." He is no longer president, but after his departure, the increase in violence against AAPI people has risen to alarming levels. Why now? Are people getting frustrated after more than a year of dealing with the pandemic, and they need somebody to blame? Why are minorities handy scapegoats? As living in fear of Covid is abating somewhat with the arrival of vaccines, suddenly there's living in fear of getting beat up because of race.

My mother and father have passed on and transitioned to a safer place. I hope this country does not make the same unjust mistake again by discriminating against its citizens for their race and blame them for a crime by association with the Covid-19 virus. An AAPI hate crimes bill has just been passed by Congress and is headed to President Biden for his signature. Let us hope this is a start in preventing history from repeating itself.

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