Student Testimonials

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Ken and June Shimabukuro.
An anonymous donor in memory of World War II veteran Masao Takahashi.
Christian Saiki  
Humboldt State University – Arcata, CA  
Senior (2014-2015 School Year)

“Thank you for holding this contest and letting me have a chance to share my grandfather’s story!”

Clare Yejin Lee  
Oxford Academy – Cypress, CA  
Junior (2014-2015 School Year)

“I entered the contest because I was interested in the history of World War II and its soldiers. To my surprise, reading about the lives of the Nisei soldiers transformed the experience of just writing an essay about soldiers to an opportunity to honor the memories of their heroic actions through the way they served and lived their lives, making it a valuable moment to me. Through this contest, not only have I gained an understanding of the Nisei soldiers, but I realize that I’ve gained the privilege of holding their memories and wisdom—which feels like a great honor to be given. Through this contest, I’m thankful for the opportunity to learn about the sacrifices of these heroes.”

Mark Frederick  
Penn State University at Altoona  
Sophomore (2014-2015 School Year)

“As a long time student of history, the story of the Japanese Americans in World War II serves as a means of interest and inspiration for me (as it should for others). This contest allowed me to combine my passions of film and history in a way that permits me to share that enthusiasm with others. I’d just like to thank your organization one more time. Participating in the Center’s essay/video contest was exciting and educational. You will be seeing a video from me next year, too!”

Nicole Nishizawa  
Punahou School – Honolulu, HI  
Senior (2014-2015 School Year)

“My grandfather was a humble man and rarely shared his incredible stories. However, through this essay contest, I was able to share part of his inspiring life with a wider audience.”
Yu Rankin
University of Southern California – Los Angeles, CA
Junior (2014-2015 School Year)

“I wanted to thank you for everything. I am so happy that the veterans know that they are not forgotten and that we will keep their stories alive. I really enjoyed writing this essay, and I especially loved visiting the Monument and getting to meet Toke [a veteran of the 100th Battalion, who led the tour of the Monument for the student winners]. It is very humbling to actually meet one of the veterans and see all the names of the veterans who died fighting to save this nation and all of us. Thank you.”

Claudio Coleman
Point Loma High School – San Diego, CA
Senior (2014-2015 School Year)

“Overall, I am proud of the Japanese American soldiers’ accomplishments and their humility. I was glad to be given this opportunity to learn, and write about, the history that these soldiers had in contributing to the Allied war effort that I might not have otherwise considered.”
Student Testimonials

Sponsored by Pacific Global Investment Management Company, in memory of long-time community philanthropists and business leaders Manabi Hirasaki and Sig Kagawa.
I attend Norco High School where I participate in six AP classes, twenty five extracurriculars, and several leadership positions. I am the founder of the organization "The Face of Cancer," a 2014 Disney Dreamer, and a journalist for Huffington Post and CNN. I entered the contest as a challenge for myself to become more educated about the legacy of the Nisei. After reading the story of Raymond Jiro Takisaki, I was empowered by the bravery and selflessness of Nisei soldiers. One day, I hope to become an international human rights lawyer, foreign correspondent and diplomat with the United Nations.

How an Essay Contest Changed My Life

It was a murky summer night when I was completing my weekend tradition of perusing various scholarship websites in hopes of finding opportunities that would utilize my passion for writing to use. After listening to Pandora for two hours, pressing my head against my desk wondering how I’ll pay for college, and frantically researching, I came across the 2014 Go for Broke Essay Contest.

At first, I had a limited understanding of what the Nisei soldiers were. I remembered reading about them during my sophomore unit of Farewell to Manzanar, but besides that, I was clueless. As I researched more about their incredible legacy, I came across a heartwarming story of Raymond Jiro Takisaki, written in a Seattle newspaper. Not only did he face discrimination for his race, but he decided to stop the oppressive cycle by serving America and participating in programs that assist World War II veterans. When I received the news that my essay had won eighth place, I was shocked. Not only was it an exciting opportunity, but it was a chance for the legacy of someone I admire to go further than my limited knowledge. Now, people of all ages and backgrounds had the opportunity to experience the same revelation as I had, and put a face on the Nisei soldiers.

This essay contest changed my life. I wasn’t expecting to become immediately infatuated with Nisei culture, nor was I expecting to have my entire world upside down by the extreme kindness and impact that one man made throughout his lifetime. This essay contest empowered me to learn more about this wonderfully courageous group of individuals determined to serve their country to the fullest extent of excellence. I don’t believe in coincidences. Whatever reason I came across this essay contest, I believe it was for a divine purpose – to shake and challenge my current understanding, to open my eyes to the perspectives of others, and to spend time walking in other people’s dust-painted shoes.

Although the official gala was in September, there is no way I am stopping my commitment to Go for Broke. Last month, I began transcribing live interviews of the Nisei soldiers and I am constantly finding ways to use my love of writing to bring awareness to this special group of people. I wouldn’t have it any other way!

The moral of the story? Be open to new opportunities; if you have your eyes open wide enough, you may find your whole life being changed.
Christopher James Lindsay
Iolani School – Honolulu, HI
Freshman

I am a student at 'Iolani School in Honolulu, who loves history, science, space exploration, eating, performing on various instruments, karate, and bowling. As president of the 'Iolani School Class of 2017 for the past two years, I live in the hope we will learn from those who came before us and use that knowledge to improve the future for generations to come. I entered the contest because of my deep respect and admiration for the members of the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental “Go For Broke” Combat Team who share a common bond of humility; they are "ordinary" men who survived extraordinary odds against them. My generation won't forget these silent heroes and will remember the sacrifices and contributions they made so that all Americans may live as equals in peace and freedom today.

A Weekend of Inspiration, A Lifetime of Commitment:
Celebrating the Lives of Japanese American WWII Veterans

I have often wondered if anyone from my generation cares about history, specifically the exploits and heroism of the Japanese American men of the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team/Military Intelligence Service who served in WWII. Seventy years have passed since these veterans fought in battles such as the Rescue of the Lost Battalion, the Battle for Hill 140 in Italy, and the annihilation of the Gothic Line.

The veterans who are still alive today are now in their late eighties or older. Many are in wheelchairs, others use walkers, and some need full-time caregivers. When the last veteran is gone, who will tell their stories and honor their memory?

This past weekend, two 'Iolani students, Dakota Chun ('15) and myself, Christopher Lindsay ('17), were entrusted with the honor and responsibility to carry on the legacy of the WWII veterans. We received the top two high school division prizes in the 2014 Go For Broke National Education Center’s (GFBNEC) High School and College Student Essay Contest. Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Timothy Cottrell, Dr. Karen Neitzel, and 'Iolani School, we traveled to Los Angeles to meet the Japanese American veterans of WWII. We were guests at the 25th Anniversary of the GFBNEC's Evening of Aloha Gala Dinner, ate gourmet food cooked by Chef Roy Yamaguchi, received cash awards at the GFBNEC Essay Awards Brunch, and visited the Go For Broke Monument in Little Tokyo. Most importantly, we were entrusted with the sacred commission to keep the stories of our heroes alive for future generations.

The weekend was full of incredible, almost unbelievable stories, opportunities to meet true heroes, learn about how we can contribute to future efforts of the GFBNEC, and given opportunities to actively contribute to real efforts to keep history alive. The Aloha Spirit is alive and well in the Japanese American Veteran's Ohana. These remarkable people truly appreciate what the veterans sacrificed in order for us to live in freedom. Hundreds of volunteers, supporters, and comrades met at the Gala Dinner to honor the veterans who fought so we may live in a world where we are judged by our efforts, not by the color of our skin.
Talking with Toke Yoshihashi, we learned that he is now the only vet who steadfastly spends every Friday as the "Go For Broke" Monument interpreter, sharing the stories of the veterans with visitors. We all grew very quiet when Toke told us that there used to be other veterans who shared this responsibility with him, but now he is the only one since the rest have "passed on."

We were also very privileged to meet NASA Astronaut Daniel M. Tani, whose parents were incarcerated in horse stalls at Tanforan Racetrack and later to the Topaz War Relocation Authority camp in Utah during WWII. Mr. Tani spoke to us about how his family faced prejudice with dignity. His widowed mother raised several children and encouraged them to always believe they could achieve their dreams. Tani graduated from MIT with two degrees, became a NASA astronaut, flew on the Space Shuttle Endeavor, and lived for four months on the International Space Station, during which time he was informed that his mother passed away in a tragic automobile accident.

We learned the great news that in 2016, the Go For Broke Education Center will open new exhibits about the 100th/442nd/MIS at the historic Nishi Hongwanji Building opposite the Japanese American Museum in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles. In 1942, President Roosevelt authorized Executive Order 9066 calling for internment of Japanese Americans living on the mainland. Families had 48 hours to pack a suitcase and store their belongings in this former Buddhist temple. Essay winners, including Dakota and I, were asked to help with plans and ideas for the new museum that will be housed in this historic site!

Dakota and I were also fortunate to have our mothers accompany us, even though they were both "watering pots" as they listened to the many inspirational stories and watched us receive our prizes. To be fair, I guess we had to hide a few sniffles ourselves. **It was a very emotional weekend.** At the closing ceremony of the 25th Anniversary GNBNEC Evening of Aloha Gala Dinner, members of the Hawaii Military Color Guard passed two flags to two of the 100th Battalion veterans, Mas Takahashi and Toke Yoshihashi. The veterans, in turn, passed the flags to two of the essay winners, in a symbolic gesture of **handing the legacy of the veterans on to the younger generation.** As I accepted the flag representing the fallen soldiers of the 442nd, I **received the greatest honor of my entire life and vowed to keep the torch of the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team/MIS lit for future generations.**

Many thanks to all of you who made this journey possible for us.
From a very young age, I have loved exploring the intricacies of language through writing and reading; someday I hope to write a novel (or several!). I also love learning about practically everything in school, from biology to history to English to chemistry. Another one of my passions is my high school Speech Club, which I've been thoroughly engaged in since my freshman year. Although I feel very Americanized as a fourth generation Japanese American, my parents always made a point to cultivate in me a strong awareness of my cultural past, and the courage and fortitude of the Nisei soldiers never ceases to amaze me.

Thank You for Reconnecting Me with My Heritage

Dear Go For Broke,

I want to say a huge thank you for the Evening of Aloha Gala weekend--it was truly a life-changing experience and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to partake in it. I never expected that so much would come out of a simple essay! Meeting everyone at the gala, from the Go For Broke members to the Japanese American veterans, opened my eyes. I felt reconnected with my heritage and cultural background as a Japanese American, and learning more about the veterans' stories made me realize the power that a few people have to impact the world--and how important it is to keep those stories imprinted in our consciousness. I was so inspired to see how dedicated everyone was to the Go For Broke mission, and I hope that I can do my part as well to preserve the Nisei soldier legacy.

It was such a pleasure to meet the staff, the Nisei veterans, the Go For Broke members, and the other essay contest winners! I really appreciate all the effort that went into the Evening of Aloha Gala dinner and giving us students a very memorable experience!

Again, thank you so much for everything!

Sincerely,

Kelsey Ichikawa
Mahya Bigdeli
Poolesville High School – Germantown, MD
Senior

Mahya Bigdeli is currently a senior in the Global Ecology Program at Poolesville High School. She is interested in pursuing a medical education and becoming a cardiologist with Doctors Without Borders. Mahya enjoys serving as club president of UNICEF, hiking, and running track and field. She entered the contest to learn more about the 442nd regiment, which she thought was a sort of SEAL team 6 prior to applying for the scholarship! She appreciates the tenacity and courage of the Nisei soldiers in the face of extreme adversity and prejudice, as well as their resiliency in dealing with trials and tribulations of an imperfect world.

Thank You for this Eye-Opening Experience!

Dear Go For Broke National Education Center,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for sponsoring this high school essay competition. Prior to beginning research for this essay, I had no idea what a “Nisei” citizen was, and thought the 442nd regiment was a sort of specialized SEAL Team 6. How wrong I was. I have learned so much about Nisei soldiers and other marginalized groups during World War II just by completing background research for this essay.

It was an accident of faith that I found out about this essay contest, which has opened my eyes up to the plight of the Japanese-Americans by exposing me to the history of Nisei soldiers. Whether I win this contest or not, I am truly satisfied and content knowing that I gained invaluable cognizance about the world around me. I can speak for dozens of other students when I say that the GFB essay contest is an eye-opening experience.

Best Regards,

Mahya Bigdeli