

Leslie Aguilar

I was thirteen years-old when I went on a school trip to the Manzanar National Historic Site in 2010. Ten years have passed by and in all my years in school, that was the only time I learned about the incarceration of Japanese-Americans during World War II. I vividly remember seeing photographs of young children, who were about the same age as me, and I couldn't help but wonder what it was like growing up behind barbed wires. I remember at such a young age I always wondered why we never heard about Manzanar and how U.S history simply skipped over dark but critical chapters in history.

Ten years later, I am reading about Arnold Maeda's life and his story resembles one of the many stories I read about that day I went to Manzanar. His efforts in memorializing an intersection, such as Venice and Lincoln Boulevard, where many Japanese families were awaiting the unknown, is a reminder to many of us that it has not been such a long time since that tragic time period. However, it's people like Arnold who inspire me with his "willingness to have a clear understanding of our present".¹ Stories like Arnold Maeda and his family resemble many of the current events that exist today such as family separation. Hearing the stories of thousands of children and families being torn apart and forced to live in detention centers always reminds me about the stories I read about the day I went to Manzanar. Those are the stories that inspire me to continue my educational trajectory and eventually become an educator.

His legacy and his commitment to social justice is what inspires me to be a part of the Manzanar Committee. His heavy involvement in the Venice Japanese American Memorial Monument Committee feels like a call to action to me as a future educator to be more involved in preserving history and ensuring that the impact of Executive Order 9066 is not forgotten.

¹ "Obituary: Arnold Maeda, 94; Leader of Venice JA Memorial Effort. Rafu Shimpo: Los Angeles Japanese Daily News. September 29, 2020.

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I believe that this moment in history is essential in understanding our present, as the incarceration of Japanese-American in the United States resembles the stories of many other communities who have been impacted by racism, war, displacement, and incarceration.

Having the opportunity to work with the Manzanar Committee Pilgrimage would allow me to engage more with Arnold Maeda's vision. I believe that the first-hand experiences of researching various materials and working alongside other committed individuals would give me a more in-depth understanding of what Arnold's family went through. I also believe that I can apply the lessons I learn from this unique learning experience in my future teacher curriculum. Most importantly I would be able to assist in creating a space, such as the Virtual Manzanar Pilgrimage, where stories like Arnold's will be highlighted and be made accessible for the general public. These are all experiences that I cannot get elsewhere and I would be really grateful to be part of this enriching experience.

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Bibliography

“Obituary: Arnold Maeda, 94; Leader of Venice JA Memorial Effort ” Rafu Shimpo: Los Angeles Japanese Daily News. September 29, 2020.