

## The Tie that Binds

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In the 1898, Ichisuke Fukuhara, a twenty year-old farmer living in Hiroshima Prefecture, left what he had to seek what he wanted: a better life. As it turned out, that life was on a continent where he had yet to set foot. He arrived in Portland, Oregon unable to speak a lick of English. He didn't have a job waiting for him upon his arrival, nor much money. But what he did have was dedication and optimism. Therefore, the trials and tribulations he encountered did not diminish his hopes to become successful in the Land of Opportunity. Fast forward to 2002, when a fourth generation Japanese-American arrived in Japan to work as an ALT with absolutely no knowledge of the Japanese language.

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It is here where the similarities between my great grandfather's and my journey end and the differences begin.

Before I came to Japan, I did not give much thought to what exactly my great grandfather had to endure as an immigrant. Sure, I had heard the stories plenty of times, but I never fully understood his experiences in their true context. After all, it is one thing to hear it, and yet a completely different thing to actually live it. So, after living in a foreign country myself, I have discovered a newfound appreciation for my great grandfather. At times, I have had to overcome difficulties while living in Japan. However, the problems that I have had to deal with are petty compared to what my great grandfather faced. As a result, my experiences in Japan have been a defining moment in understanding those that came before me, most notably my great grandfather.

The reasons that pulled my great grandfather and me to a foreign country and the events that followed are as juxtaposed as black and white. My great grandfather's journey to America was out of necessity, a decision that was based solely on economic reasons. After enduring an exhausting sea voyage, he found himself in a country where he could not convey the simplest of thoughts and he knew not a single soul. In the eyes of my great grandfather, the only difference between Seattle and the moon was that Seattle had job opportunities. Imagine not being able to share your fears, your stories, or your problems. On top of that, initially he had no source of income. In a country with very few Asians at the time, he stood out like a corn plant in a field of cotton. Yet, as easy as it would have been to just give in to despair and lose hope, he pushed on, despite the obstacles that presented themselves. With a determined mind set, he managed to ride out the ebbs and flows of living a new life in a new country. Even though he may not have accomplished what he had set out to achieve financially, what he did accomplish is priceless.

Personally, I decided to come to Japan because I thought it would be an exciting adventure. Needless to say, it has been everything I had imagined and more. Instead of a week-long trek across choppy waters, I arrived at Narita Airport after what I thought was a tedious eleven hour flight and was greeted by people in English. In addition, I had a job and apartment waiting for me in Sano City. Initially, I couldn't communicate in Japanese, but it did not pose a problem because many Japanese people understand English. My life in Japan was an easy transition due to the abundance of good will that I received by the people I came across. This support network proved to be essential when adapting to life in Japan. All in all, in stark contrast with my great grandfather, my experiences were like a stroll in the park on a Sunday afternoon.

I am extremely grateful to have come to this new outlook. Now, I have a greater appreciation for the actions that my great grandfather took, as well as my current life in Japan. While my great grandfather may not have made it big in life, there is no doubt that he acted in ways that made him larger than life. And that, in essence, is the biggest difference between us.