



Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii
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e-Newsletter
 2020
 July

Donna's Word of the Month

“gakushi”

((n) student...chose this word because everything changes from day to day so we are all students as we learn something every day. Donna)

Membership Meeting
 Saturday, July 18, 2020,
 Zoom Meeting, 9:30am
 Meeting ID:



Upcoming Activities

2020

- July 18 OGS Zoom Meeting, 9:30am
- Oct 18 **Cancelled** HUOA Legacy Banquet
- Sept 5-6 **Cancelled** Okinawan Festival
- Nov 21 Bonenkai

2021

- October 28-31 7th Worldwide Uchinanchi Festival
 Naha, Okinawa

June Report

Treasurer's Report: Income: Membership Dues
 Expense: Reimbursement

Secretary's Report: Newsletter

OGSH Photos: Curtis, members, and friends

Haitai OGS!!

This is a reminder that we have a meeting this Saturday and Susan will be sending out an invitation. Please note that the start time has changed from 10 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Our meeting will end by 11 a.m. The topics that will be covered was sent in our earlier email and the following items will be added:



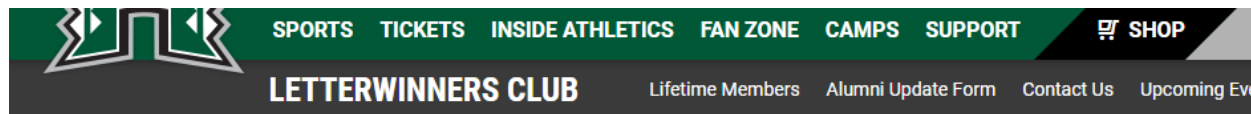
1. Mirokuyu Yenu Umiitachi “Documentary for Shimakutuba Revitalization” produced by Okinawa Hands On. Through the generous donation by Wayne Shiroma, OGS has acquired 2 copies of this DVD for utilization and viewing by our members. It is about 90 minutes in length and my thoughts are to open, for our members, the borrowing for your viewing pleasure. I found the story compelling and I am sure you will too! I am looking for a volunteer who can act as the “gate keeper” for these DVDs. Be ready to talk about this too!
2. Should we postpone Bonenkai until next year (i.e. Nov 2021)? Be ready to discuss. . . I’m leaning towards rescheduling because of COVID 19 . . . the situation changes from day to day and there is too much uncertainty. If any of you have a compelling reason why we should have it, I would like to hear your thoughts!

Thank you,
 Donna



Heidi was asked if she could write an introduction to Honolulu Star Advertiser Sports writer Ferd Lewis' write-up on her dad.

"What?!? UH had a boxing team?!? "It's hard to believe; but yes, it's true and very good one too! We were a championship team!", he would often say. Tom, my Dad loved to share stories of a bygone sport. Local boys who had never traveled on airplanes to far off places, arenas larger than they ever seen. He, his teammates and coach ventured into unknown territory fighting their way into the NCAA championship books. From pugilists to professor to principal to president they all shared a pride of their boxing legacy and applied the life lessons learned from Coach Minn throughout their lives." Heidi



Lifetime Members

Shimabuku, Tom



TOM SHIMABUKU

SPORTS LETTERED: Boxing ('51-'55)

BIO
 RELATED

Sports Lettered: Boxing ('51-'55)

His most memorable experience at UH was "going to the mainland & winning a bronze medal at the NCAA championships in Pocatello, Idaho." The best advice he received in life is "win with humility. Lose with dignity."

<https://hawaiiathletics.com/sports/lc/roster/tom-shimabuku/7864>

FERD LEWIS, Honolulu Star Advertiser, June 23, 2020

Shimabuku took pride in UH's boxing legacy

Decades after his punches had once stopped opponents in the ring, Thomas Suyeo Shimabuku found another way to stun people who thought they knew their University of Hawaii sports.

He would tell them tales of the glory days of UH's boxing team.

And they would invariably do a double take. UH and boxing?

Until his recent death at age 87, Shimabuku was one of the few remaining members of a national caliber program from a long ago period that brought the Rainbow Warriors their first NCAA champions in any sport in the 1950s.

"He made it a point to tell us that we didn't just have boxing, we had really good boxing," former UH athletic director Jim Donovan remembers of Shimabuku, who was a fellow director of the UH Letterwinners Club.

Once, when the Hawaii State Boxing Commission was in recess awaiting the arrival of several fighters from the airport, Shimabuku described how UH, following a three-day trip to get there, had become a crowd favorite in front of a crowd of 13,213 at the University of Wisconsin's Field House.

Shimabuku did it not to toot his own horn, but as a proud point of history to be dusted off and kept alive.

Shimabuku's place in it included a bronze medal in the NCAA Championships at 112 pounds.

Between 1949 and 1958 UH stood toe to toe with some of the best in the country under coach Herbert Minn, a businessman and member of a prominent Honolulu fight family.

In 1952 the 'Bows were a surprise of the nationals in Madison, Wis., where Roy Kuboyama of Lahaina won the 112-pound title. Two years later Seiji Naya, who grew up in Japan and attended Mid-Pacific Institute, won the first of consecutive 125-pound titles.

By the time the 'Bows returned to Honolulu, UH President Greg Sinclair was there to greet their arrival.

Boxing was an NCAA-sanctioned championship sport from 1932 through 1960 with fighters wearing head gear and competing over three two-minute rounds. But the sport was dropped by the NCAA in 1961 following the death of a Wisconsin fighter. Minn, who would go on to be an internationally renowned judge and referee, working more than 40 world title fights, had trained several Territorial champions and was recruited to coach UH's team. In an old Army Quonset hut on the Manoa campus and in matches at the Civic Auditorium, Minn imparted not only boxing knowledge but pushed his fighters to get an education while preaching "winning with humility and losing with dignity."

When Kuboyama made it his goal to go to medical school, Minn encouraged him to transfer to Wisconsin, where he starred before becoming a pediatrician and a president of HMSA.

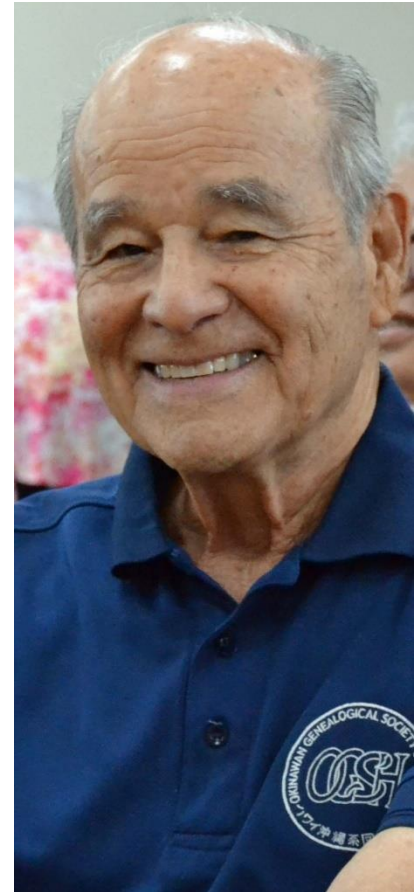
Naya, a renowned economist, headed the Asia Development Bank, the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism and taught at UH. Shimabuku became an insurance executive. Cyril Okamoto won the 125-pound title after transferring to

Idaho State, and became vice principal at Farrington High. Teammates went on to other posts in government and public service.

To Minn the idea that a boxer could be outstanding in the classroom and in the ring was not incongruous.

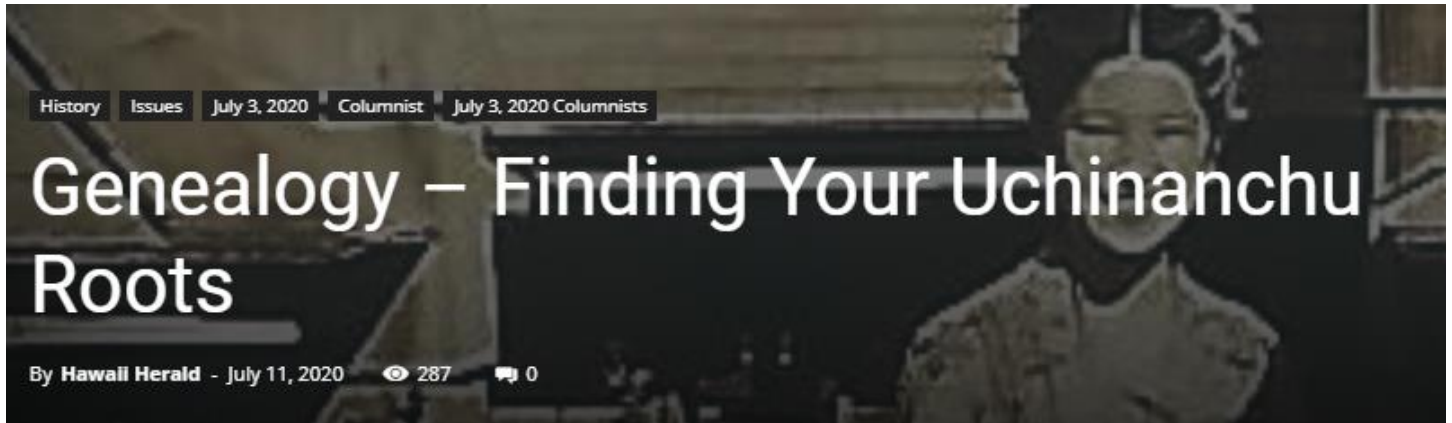
"My father wanted his fighters to reach their full potential in the ring and in life," Hubert Minn said. "He was proud of how so many went on to good careers and good lives after boxing."

—— Reach Ferd Lewis at flewis@staradvertiser.com or 529-4820.



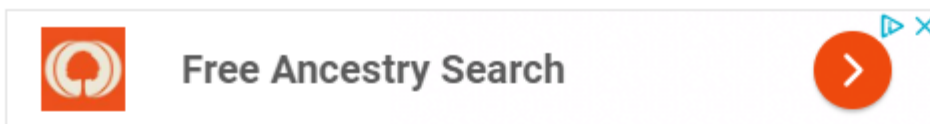
The people you hear,
the people you see, from here,
there, and everywhere.





As part of his quest to learn about his mother's side of the family, Nakasone visited the Miyasato haka at Mo'ili'ili Japanese Cemetery. (Photo courtesy of Dan Nakasone)

The Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii Helps Family Tree Branches Come to Life



Dan Nakasone

Special to The Hawai'i Herald

"What school you went?" is a common question heard in Hawai'i when meeting a fellow "local" for the first time. That question is usually followed by, "What year you grad?" and "You know so-and-so?" In Hawai'i, it's how we connect.

However, for Okinawans in Hawai'i and on the U.S. continent, the question instead may be, "What city or village in Okinawa is your family from?"

For some Nikkei, this is easy to answer. There are prefectural clubs or kenjinkai throughout Hawai'i, the mainland United States and South America, made up of people who descended from the same place of origin. Kenjinkai were formed by Issei as social organizations and immigrant support systems built on a foundation of solidarity.

I found that, when introducing myself in Okinawa, it was customary to also mention the region, city or village from which my father's family had emigrated, thus potentially establishing a social connection. In essence, the place of your ancestors gets introduced as part of your identity.

When making these self-introductions, I knew that Aza Yogi was the home of my father's issei parents. An aza, or hamlet, is smaller than a village, ranging from approximately 30 to 100 households. However, growing up, I did not know where my maternal grandparents came from. Not knowing my mother's place of origin felt like a cloud of guilt hanging over me.

The hearsay was that my maternal grandparents were also from Aza Yogi, but I had no credible documentation to confirm that. I needed the validation to fill the big puka in my identity.

With my mother's birth certificate as well as the names and photos for her parents in-hand, I had planned to meet a volunteer of the Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawai'i. However, the COVID-19 lockdown prevented that meeting from happening. Moving forward in the process of writing this story, I hoped to find a definitive answer.

The Quest to Find Our Ancestors is Big Business

Since the late 1990s, there has been a significant growth in the number of people searching for genealogical information. Some speculate this is a reaction to the way that today we might feel increasingly detached from ancestral roots and racial identity. With each generation that passes, the connection to our ancestors fades; we feel an urgency to reconnect.

With the need to know our genealogy in vogue, a new multi-billion-dollar genealogy industry arose, employing thousands of people. MIT Technology Review estimates that by the start of 2019, more than 26 million consumers had added their DNA to four leading ancestry and health databases. If this pace continues, that number will grow to 100 million people within the next two years.

In terms of market size: the popular website Ancestry.com was recently sold for \$1.4 billion dollars.

Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii

In stark contrast, the humble, not-for-profit Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii is made up strictly of dedicated volunteers. They may not have the scale or resources of the big guys like Ancestry.com, but the work they do is no less important to the people who seek their help.

OGSH, an affiliate of the Hawaii United Okinawa Association, emerged from a genealogy workshop conducted by Dr. Bernice Hirai and the Hawaii Hiroshima Heritage Study Group.

On March 20, 1993, a month after the workshop, Warren Higa, then-UOA (now called HUOA) president, called a meeting to inquire about forming a club. Thirty-four individuals signed up to become the first members of the Okinawan Heritage Club. On Oct. 18, 1997, the Club signed by-laws, added a genealogy component and changed its name to the Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii.

OGSH's mission is "to promote, preserve and perpetuate our Okinawa family heritage through education, research and networking."



Only recently did Dan Nakasone learn that the parents of his mother, Masae Miyasato Nakasone, had emigrated from Aza Yogi, Okinawa. (Photo courtesy of Dan Nakasone)

Journey of Discovery

I was probably the most ill-prepared descendant to start a search for my mother's place of origin. Masae Miyasato Nakasone's birth certificate did not include parents' names. And I could barely answer questions on the OGSB Genealogy Service form found on huoa.org/nuuzi/genealogy.html.

I took the plunge and contacted volunteers I had met a couple of years earlier, Rodney Kohagura, former OGSB president, and Steve Miyashiro, former OGSB vice president, who were eager to help. Kohagura suggested that I find my mother's marriage or death certificate. He also recommended that I visit my grandparents' gravesite, because the inscriptions on the gravestone may yield answers.

At this point, I also contacted a friend and OGSB volunteer, Hiroaki Hara. Hara is a librarian at the Okinawa Prefecture Library. He was studying for his master's degree in library science at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I had hoped to seek help from Hara prior to the pandemic lockdown.

While in Okinawa in 2016, Kohagura, then OGSB president, had arranged to meet with OPL directors. He established a working partnership with OPL to collaborate and expand the scope of their genealogy networks.

Finding official documents with my grandparents' names and dates of birth was the first order at hand. Steve was able to track down their names in the 1940 U.S. Census. My mother's death certificate included their names as well. I also paid a long-overdue visit to my grandparents' gravesite at the Mo'ili'ili Japanese Cemetery, finding their names and dates of birth on the back of the gravestone. Inscribed on the front of the gravestone was my grandfather's name in kanji; on the back, my grandparents' names and birthdates.

This is where the journey took a twist in the road: I learned that documentation during the sugar-plantation era was inconsistent. This was not surprising, given the influx of immigrants during that period, and given that, like most immigrants, my grandparents could not write or speak English. Things got lost in translation depending on who was

scribing that day. My grandfather's name was listed as Yamasan, Yamazo and Yamazou; my grandmother's name as Ushi, Chie or Chiye.

Steve told me that this is a common occurrence when researching someone's genealogy. He said although it presents a challenge, it made his detective work more interesting. To him, learning how to research and figure out misspelled or misinterpreted names feels like deciphering a code.

I had sent a copy of the census record that Miyashiro had found, my mother's death certificate and photos of my grandparents' gravestone to Kohagura, Miyashiro and Hara. It did not take long for Hara to find the answer to my question: Where did my maternal grandparents emigrate from? Yamazo and Ushi Miyasato, he discovered, came from Aza Yogi! That one validating piece of information filled my heart. After so many years of not knowing, my identity was finally whole.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It's not the destination, it's the journey."

While at the cemetery, I discovered a story that sent a chill down my spine. On the back of the gravestone was a name I did not recognize, Matsuko. I read that she was born on Oct. 10, 1916, and died on July 7, 1917. She was my grandparents' firstborn, but she died as a 9-month-old infant. Ushi "Baban" was just 19 years old at the time of her daughter's death. I stood there imagining the emotional trauma they had to endure.

I left the cemetery that day with mixed emotions. Regretful that I lost touch with my Miyasato grandparents but grateful that this journey brought me back.

Finding Family

Many others seek the help from OGSF, because they desire to find family members in Okinawa. To meet blood relatives face-to-face is to see the top branches of their family tree come to life.

This was the case for Beverly Dawson (Higa). Her mother's father, Kiyukichi Higa, came to Honomū on the Big Island from Urasoe, Okinawa, to work on a sugar plantation.

Dawson's initial search to find family in Okinawa came to a dead end, so she gave up. But later, close friend Steve Usui rekindled her enthusiasm with his persistent encouragement. Usui suggested that she contact OGS.

She met with Kohagura at the Hawaii Okinawa Center with her family tree in-hand. Because it was in Japanese, Kohagura asked Hara to assist her. Dawson said Hara was in shock and utter disbelief when she showed him the family she had sought. He told Dawson that she had a cousin in Okinawa, Tsugiko (Higa) Morikawa, who was looking for her.

Helping Dawson make that connection with her family, Hara said, was an unforgettable "chicken skin" moment.

To call this mere coincidence would fall short of describing that moment. In Okinawan spirituality, ancestors' spirits are always present in the lives of descendants. Perhaps we could say that the stars were aligned, or call it divine intervention.

Dawson and her husband, along with Steve Usui and his wife, set out to meet her family in Okinawa from late March to early April 2019. In April, Okinawan families celebrate the centuries-old tradition of shimi, when they visit their family haka (tomb) to pay their respects to the spirits of ancestors.



OGS's "A-Team." Front row, from left: Sally Kamiya Tsuda and Dorothy Nakama. Back row, from left: Shigeru Yoshimoto, Steve Miyashiro, Alan Toma and Rodney Kohagura. (Photo courtesy of Kaaran Takara)

Her Okinawan connections arranged for Dawson to meet her family and participate in the shimi tradition at her family's haka. Roughly 60 people attended, including nearly 25 relatives with their spouses and children.

Once food and respect were offered to their ancestors, these family members celebrated with their ancestors by partaking in food, drink and conversation. It could not have been a more fitting way for Dawson to finally meet her Uchinanchu (Okinawan) family and to honor and recognize her ancestors.

For many, the desire to discover our roots come later in life. Maybe a defining moment triggers us to want to learn about the place, the people and the culture that informs our identity.

For Penny Sakamoto (Ueshiro), that moment happened at the 2011 Uchinanchu Taikai, or Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival. Taikai is a feast for the senses with cultural performances rich in tradition and a range of events and activities happening simultaneously throughout the four-day festival. Held every five years, it was estimated that 350,000 people would attend the 2016 Taikai with 7,000 coming from overseas. For descendants of the diaspora that had left Okinawa in the early 1900s, it is a "coming home" to the motherland.

The Taikai trip was Sakamoto's first time traveling to Okinawa and, for her, a profound experience. Finding family in Okinawa soon became one of her priorities. Through a friend with whom she attended the Taikai, she learned of OGSB, so they both decided to join.

Her Ueshiro family, she next learned, had emigrated from Onna, on the western coast of Okinawa, to Hilo on the Big Island.

Then, during OGSB's 25th Anniversary tour to Okinawa in 2018, OPL arranged a meeting with 10 of Penny's family members at the Kisenbaru Community Center just outside of Onna.

Sakamoto credits members of OGSB, OPL and the Onna Museum for going that extra mile to help fulfill her wish. Besides helping her find family members, they provided a plethora of information on her family going back centuries. They went as far as tracing her family back to 1577. Sakamoto said the whole experience was overwhelming, but in a good way.

Stories that Bind Us

Dr. Nathan H. Lents wrote in "Psychology Today," "Connection to our recent ancestors is what compels us to study our genealogy. It is their stories that fascinate us, not their genetic stock."

OGSH seems to grasp this well. One of its most vital projects undertaken is the "Short Stories" series, in which OGSH publishes people's stories to preserve and share those compositions, so that present and future generations can learn from them and get inspired. OGSH currently works on Volume VIII of the series. Each book contains priceless stories and sells for \$20. "Short Stories" can be purchased at the Hawaii Okinawa Center in Waipi'o. (For HOC gift shop information, see huoa.org/nuuzi/giftshop/gift%20shop.html.)

Moving Forward

Donna Nakazato Nakamura, current OGSH president, believes the organization will continue to grow to serve a larger community. The foundation of her vision is the new "Okinawan Immigrant Database," which can be accessed online at huoa.org/nuuzi/index.html. She believes that technology along with the right people will provide the catalyst that will allow OGSH to better serve Uchinanchu well into the 21st Century.

Finding Your Uchinanchu Roots

Before the coronavirus lockdown, volunteers generally offered their help at the Hawaii Okinawa Center's Serikaku Chaya Building on Fridays from about 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. to assist people (by appointment) with their genealogy research. It is uncertain at this time of the pandemic, exactly when OGSH will resume a normal volunteer schedule. For updates, inquire by email at ogsh.mail@gmail.com.

Interested individuals are required to do preliminary research; OGSH researchers will assist them toward their goal. No fee will be charged for OGSH services; however, as a nonprofit, the genealogical society welcomes donations. For more information, visit huoa.org/nuuzi/clubs/OGS/ogs.html. (Note that this webpage is currently being upgraded.)



Volunteers at the genealogy research table at the 2019 Okinawan Festival. From left: Ayako Omori (OPL), Shigeru Yoshimoto (OGSH), Hana Omine (OPL) and Hiroaki Hara (OPL/OGSH). (Photo courtesy of Curtis Shinsato)

I owe a debt of gratitude to Rodney, Steve, Hiroaki, OGSH and OPL. Now, when I introduce myself in Okinawa, I will share my surname's place of origin and proudly proclaim, "... and my mother is a Miyasato from Aza Yogi!"

For now, my heart is full.

Dan Nakasone is a sansei Uchinanchu from Wahiawā. A marketing and advertising professional, he was a producer/researcher for PBS' award-winning food and culture series based in Hawai'i, "Family Ingredients," hosted by Chef Ed Kenney.

