

# ROOTS AND Branches



Photos courtesy of Maija Yasui

MARIA JAKKU, granddaughter Betsy Jakku, and John Jakku, 1928 Hood River.

## Family history

By MAIJA YASUI

One thing about backtracking through history is you may follow a trail of breadcrumbs deep into the forest, only to become overwhelmed by the boundless stand of trees surrounding you and the labyrinth of paths leading in unlimited directions. Thanks to the winter weather, I was allotted a few more weeks of discoveries in identifying the trees in this ancient Finnish forest of families I am exploring. My own family is fearful that this may be an endless trail that I may wander down for many more months or even years. They know me well.

I remind them that the journey on the Yasui side of the family has led to many news articles, a movie, "Never Give Up," a novel, "The Stubborn Twig," a documentary, "The Family Gathering," and the award of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the family of Min Yasui for his life-long pursuit of justice for all. The Min Yasui Legacy Project seeks to keep the call for justice alive and in the forefront of social justice movements. March 28, 2020, will mark the fourth Min Yasui Day in Oregon, a day set aside by our state legislature to honor those who have sought justice for all and encourage others to follow a path of service.

Homer and Yuka Yasui, siblings of Min Yasui, both in their mid-90s, continue to share their own stories to prevent history from repeating itself. They are engaged in the latest social justice project, Tsuru for Solidarity, a national pilgrimage across the southern border of the United States to Washington, D.C., June 5-7 to ease the suffering of immigrant children and families on the border and close the camps. Adults and children across the United States are folding 125,000 paper cranes that symbolize hope and perseverance, as well as representing the 125,000 Japanese Americans who were incarcerated in U.S. concentration camps during World War II.

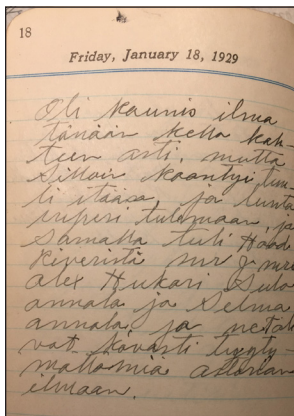
I tell my family I will keep on the Finnish trail of breadcrumbs to see what more I can learn, and help to instill the Finnish sense of Sisu, perseverance in the face of great odds, until my enthusiasm wanes or time runs out. Who knows how long that may be if I follow in the footsteps of Homer and Yuka Yasui.

Last weekend, Finnish cousins Timo and Elina Huusari stopped by on their way home from a day of cross-country skiing at Teacup Lake. They were returning the Jakku journals they had been translating for the last two months, enabling me to add a first-person voice to the Sense of Place presentation Wednesday, Feb. 5 at Columbia Center for the Arts. They had gotten to know John Jakku through the journals he had kept from 1929 through 1943, spanning the life and death of his wife and only grandson. I was able to share with them some of the old pictures from the Jakku collection, helping them visualize the family, farm, fortune and misfortune throughout their lives in Oak Grove.

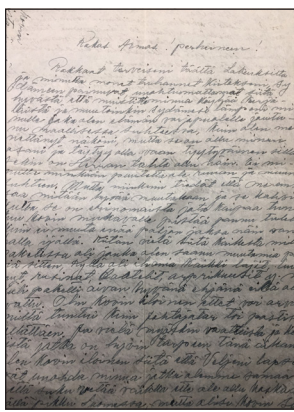
Timo and I enthusiastically recounted mysteries that we had uncovered, keeping us both on the endless trail of breadcrumbs in search of answers. While my questions were related to an obscure newspaper mention in the 1902 Hood River Glacier about Johan John Madsen Matsson Jakku to John Jakku, Timo's mystery surrounded a three-month gap in John Jakku's journal on his mysterious trip to Finland in the twilight of his life, losing three months somewhere in Europe. He ultimately reappears in Berlin, Germany, then travels to the Netherlands, and finally returns home to Hood River via the Panama Canal.

I had two more letters in my possession, written in old-fashioned Finnish with the flowery, cursive flourish that made it almost undecipherable. The letters spanned the continents, families and eras I was researching. Perhaps within these letters was a clue to solving these mysteries. I would try to entice Timo and Elina with a steaming bowl of chili and some Finnish flatbread to stay a little longer, then surreptitiously slip them the two letters for translation. As their backs warmed by the crackling fire, my plan came to fruition. They generously read and began summarizing the letters content for me.

One letter was written in 1937 to Maria Jakku in Finland by my grandmother, Selma Seppa Annala. Grandmother Selma was lamenting the lack of communication from the family in Finland and deep concern around the reports of yet another war the Finnish were fighting. Although Selma had lived in America since she was 9, sent away by her family to escape the devastation of famine, war and poverty, she still was very connected to the happenings in her homeland. She shared with Maria some everyday happenings in what felt like an attempt to lift Maria's spirits. She recounted that my father, Sulo Annala, had climbed Mount Hood the previous week to set the ropes and stanchions for the following day's Legion Climb. She described the climb in some detail, recounting that women, in long skirts and flowing hats, as well as men, climbed the mountain, reminding her of the Finnish spirit of Sisu. Timo surmised that she was encouraging Maria Jakku to



JOURNAL ENTRY by John Jakku.



LETTER from Selma Annala to Maria.

### YESTERYEARS

## Winter is here — across the decades

#### 1910 — 110 YEARS AGO

A land sale of more than ordinary interest at Hood River was the purchase last week of the 13-acre place belonging to Lee Smith by Capt. J.H. McCon, a St. Louis man, for \$17,000. The land consists of four acres in bearing orchard, some in young trees and hay land. It is understood that Capt. McCon bought the place for a country home and will make some extensive improvements on it.

#### 1920 — 100 YEARS AGO

Stockholders in the Cottage Hospital association are now planning to enlarge and remodel the existing building to bring it more nearly up to the requirements of the city and valley. Plans have been drawn for these improvements and if carried out, Hood River will be in possession of an up-to-date hospital. Several residents interested in better facilities for isolating infectious cases suggest that an opportunity is now afforded for both city and county authorities to get together on a proposition for providing funds for the provision of isolation wards.

#### 1930 — 90 YEARS AGO

With a ground level temperature around 22 degrees and a high chinook, showers fell during the early hours of Thursday morning and at dawn, the blanket of snow in the lower valley and town was covered with a film of ice. While the ice was not sufficiently heavy to injure limbs of trees, it had the effect of cutting down all forms of traffic. Motorists who traveled over highways yesterday morning were never quite sure which direction the car was headed and as the rain froze immediately when it hit the windshield, most of the motorists were driving "blind" anyway.

#### 1940 — 80 YEARS AGO

In cooperation with the board of directors of Oak Grove School, the County Library is repairing school library books. Ruth Woody and Kiyo Akiyama, on a NYA project, are receiving instruction in bookbinding and repairing. As soon as Oak Grove books have been repaired, books at other schools will be gone over.

#### 1950 — 70 YEARS AGO

King Winter continued to hold Hood River County with a firm grip as the fourth week of January rolled around and snowfalls had totaled the heaviest in recent history. Slightly over 100 inches had fallen by the first of the week since Jan. 1 in the upper Hood River Valley. The total for the month in lower Hood River Valley amounted to a fraction over 75 inches. Eighteen inches of new snow had fallen in the upper valley during the week ending this Monday, and over 13 inches of snow had fallen in the lower valley during that period. Highway traffic between Hood River and Portland remained at a standstill. Produce and other items from Portland came either by rail or by those trucks routed over the Wapinita cut-off, via Maupin.

#### 1960 — 60 YEARS AGO

All city and county school busses are on a standby notice this week to run an hour later than usual if present icy road conditions prevail throughout the week. Parents of school children have been notified that the revised schedules will be



Hood River News archives

### JANUARY 27, 1950

Rain and sleet was the weatherman's bill of fare last week and a heavy, slick crust was formed over a snowpack which, in the lower valley, measured around 30 inches in depth. The above picture taken of Hood River Community Hospital shows the icy glare from the vast expanse of snow on the hospital's lawn last Friday night.

### VERBATIM

## Very Heavy Rains Follow Snowstorm

Those who are in favor of a variety of weather no doubt fully appreciated the many changes recorded last week and in the early days of the present week.

A week ago last Sunday, a warm spring day enticed people out of doors and a number were in their gardens, spading or pruning. Early in the week, however, the wind turned to the east and for several days, the mercury was a few degrees below freezing point.

On Friday night, a snowstorm set in and by morning, three inches of snow had

fallen. On Saturday afternoon a silver thaw covered all the trees with a half inch coating of ice and rendered navigation along the city streets a dangerous process.

Early Sunday morning, rain set in, with a rise in temperature and by Monday morning and within 24 hours, over two and a half inches of rain had fallen. Late on Monday afternoon, an easterly wind set in and for an hour, a warm sun introduced a more cheerful spirit in the city and valley.

— Hood River News, January 30, 1920

#### 1970 — 50 YEARS AGO

Gov. Tom McCall came to Hood River last Thursday to view weather disaster areas, and to reminisce about the days when he stayed at a friend's home as a boy. "It's like a homecoming for me," said the governor at one point during his visit.

He'd be the first to say it was a tragic homecoming, with a tragic purpose. He was here to survey the area which he had declared a state disaster only hours before. After lunch at the Jernstedt home, he was trailed by television and newsmen to the Dee Flat area, core of the county's weather damage zone, where his response was immediate.

#### 1980 — 40 YEARS AGO

Tooth rattling cold clung to the Mid-Columbia this week, but there were hints that the worst of the cold snap might be past. While it was at its most severe, the temperature dropped to an official low of minus 6 degrees Fahrenheit, a figure that held for two nights. Official readings at the Upper Valley station reached a low of minus 3 on Sunday, minus 5 on Monday and Tuesday. Many upper valley resident recorded lower temperatures, many minus 8 degrees, some asserting it dipped as low as minus 10 degrees.

#### 1990 — 30 YEARS AGO

Heavy rain combined with a clogged drainage system created a puzzle for state crews preparing to solve a problem at the I-84 underpass near the

Hood River interstate bridge. As a series of storms passed through, it meant heavy rain and penetrating winds at lower levels and near-gale winds and much-needed snow in the mountains. By Tuesday of this week, Hood River had experienced only a dusting of snow on the Heights, only snow mixed with rain at the river level. More storms are on the way, however.

#### 2000 — 20 YEARS AGO

The blood drive sponsored by the Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital Auxiliary on Wednesday brought in 171 good units of blood, the highest total donated by Hood River residents since the Gulf War. Interest in the drive was heightened by a "red alert" issued by the Red Cross Northwest Blood Services, the first in more than 12 years. Red Cross officials said the shortage, spread over much of the U.S., is the result of many natural disasters that have occurred in the past two or three years, as well as much higher than


normal regional demands for blood.

#### 2010 — 10 YEARS AGO

The Hood River County School Board got a little show of appreciation Wednesday evening prior to its regular meeting. Since Oregon has named January "School Board Recognition Month," each board member was presented with a gift and thanks from his or her district.

Compiled by Trisha Walker and Emily Fitzgerald, News staff writers

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