

Aimee Yogi (feat. Helen Liu) - ILLUMINATION Interview

Thomas [00:00:00] Welcome, everybody, to this discussion as part of the ILLUMINATION project of the Springfield History Museum. Really pleased to be here. I'm here with Aimee Yogi. Mimi Nolloedo is taking photographs, and we're lucky to chat with Helen Liu about a project that you did recently. And how are you today?

Helen Liu [00:00:18] Good.

Thomas [00:00:19] Good. Thanks for being with us.

Helen Liu [00:00:21] Thank you for having me.

Thomas [00:00:22] Yeah. Would you like to introduce yourself briefly and talk about your background with this art project?

Helen Liu [00:00:28] Yes, thank you. I am a visual artist, and I have been working in graphic design to begin with. And then later when I had children, I decided to not work outside the home and started doing my own art. So that's been almost 30 years, I guess. Something like that. So this recent project came out of, basically kind of a concern for all the plastic waste that I personally generate, but also in the community. And started when I was living in Taiwan in 2010 with my family, my, my two kids and my husband were there. And they do a really good job of collecting almost everything, you know.

Thomas [00:01:15] Really.

Helen Liu [00:01:16] Household trash and compost and all the plastic seems to be all collected. And so I was very impressed. And then I got really used to sort of collecting everything, including like the film that goes on top of a yogurt container, you know?

Aimee Yogi [00:01:33] To seal it. Okay.

Helen Liu [00:01:34] Yeah. So when I came back here, I was like, oh my God, there's nowhere to put this stuff. And I was still collecting, but there was nowhere for this stuff to go. So I just kept collecting, kept collecting. And then pretty soon my garage was kind of getting full. So eventually I did make a couple of large pieces, and that went as a backdrop for a recital at Beall Hall, that was my first one. And that one was 20 feet by 10 feet. 20 feet wide and 10 feet tall.

Thomas [00:02:08] Oh, had you seen it there at Beall Hall?

Aimee Yogi [00:02:10] Mmm mm, no.

Helen Liu [00:02:11] It's on my website if you want to take a look at it. [helenliuartwork.com]

Thomas [00:02:14] But Aimee has seen the ramen packets that are a part of a project that you did. And that's why, since you've since you've seen it, you were so excited to bring it into this whole Asian-American representation and visibility project.

Aimee Yogi [00:02:27] Okay. It's put together by sewing, like a quilt.

Helen Liu [00:02:32] Kind of, yeah, part of it. So I started out, the first piece I did, the 20 by 10, I had never done anything like this. I'd never worked with plastic. All of the materials I'd ever worked with was traditional art materials. You know, things are archival white, you know, charcoal, oil, watercolor. So really I just was doing it by the seat of my pants. I didn't know what was going to work. So the only way I can think of to put plastic to plastic together is by tape. So I tape that whole thing, that first piece. But then I thought, well, I'm just using more plastic, so I'm going to make the next piece, I'm going to sew it all and not use plastic. So I did sew the second piece, which was, how big was that? Anyway, it was smaller. A little smaller, but still very big. And I killed my sewing machine. And I killed my mother's sewing machine. I had to buy a third one. And so because it's so big, it just, the first two sewing machines were really old. So they were kind of ready to go anyway. But then this one, I did a combination of sewing and taping because it is so big, it is 40 feet by 12 feet high. And so the way it started was that I saw something for the Springfield Arts Commission. They were looking for applications. So I, actually let me back up just a little bit. I had proposed a project with the City of Eugene, downtown. It's also plastic related, and I wanted to wrap the trees with plastic.

Thomas [00:04:10] Nice. What an interesting juxtaposition that would have been. The plastic wrapped around the trees.

Helen Liu [00:04:17] Right, exactly. Like the dirt. I was going to cover the dirt with plastic and have the plastic go up the tree and into the branches. So it's kind of like the plastic is taking over the earth kind of, and it's covering the earth. But they, well, I don't know. I don't want to make the City of Eugene sound bad.

Thomas [00:04:35] Well, we sure wouldn't do that. We would never do that.

Helen Liu [00:04:35] But we can edit it out. We are in Springfield.

Thomas [00:04:35] We are friendly river neighbors. But let me ask you, because when I hear about this, I'm seeing an environmental consciousness that's deeply a part of it.

Aimee Yogi [00:04:45] Yes.

Thomas [00:04:45] Do you think that you've had a background in that as a particular part of your life to be concerned ecologically, or it just came to you in this way?

Helen Liu [00:04:53] It kind of grew over time, I think, just from my gardening, you know. I was telling Aimee, I grew up on a chicken farm in southern Taiwan. You know, bare feet, like probably 11 months out of the 12, whatever, you know? I mean, they say that a chicken farm is like the second, probably the second dirtiest kind of farm that you can grow up in.

Thomas [00:05:19] Next to pigs?

Helen Liu [00:05:20] I think a cattle ranch is the worst, or something?

Thomas [00:05:24] Oh, okay. I hear there's a lot of feces.

Helen Liu [00:05:24] But that's why I'm so healthy, because I've been exposed to all kinds of stuff.

Aimee Yogi [00:05:27] She's immune to everything. But also, the culture, like you say. They took all the plastic someplace.

Helen Liu [00:05:35] Yes.

Aimee Yogi [00:05:36] Growing up in that culture led you to doing this and saying, this is what's different here.

Helen Liu [00:05:42] That is a really good point, because really that stems from the Taiwanese culture of being very frugal. I mean, we don't like to waste anything. And I always tell that my aunt used to save leftovers that are like, literally like a bite.

Thomas [00:05:56] Yeah.

[00:05:56] Like if there's somebody, if there's a piece of fish, that's-- right?

Thomas [00:06:03] Well, my girlfriend, who is a wonderful white American, was giving me a hard time because I was going to take home, like half of my crab fried rice from Ta Ra Rin yesterday.

Helen Liu [00:06:12] Well, yeah!

Thomas [00:06:13] And she said, 'You didn't even like that very much, honey. You don't need to take that.' I'm not going to give this up. I mean, I'm Japanese and that's not Taiwanese, but I can feel some of that cultural symbiosis.

Helen Liu [00:06:23] But I think, yeah,

Thomas [00:06:25] No offense to my girlfriend.

Helen Liu [00:06:28] No, no, but it's,

Aimee Yogi [00:06:29] It's an ethic. It's an ethic that we hold.

Helen Liu [00:06:30] It is, and I think it's much more,

Thomas [00:06:32] And I think we're encouraged to waste, in the West, I think. In some ways.

Helen Liu [00:06:35] Well, I think we are so fortunate here in America to have so much food. Really, literally, like all the apples on the ground kind of thing. I mean, that just doesn't happen in Taiwan, you know what I mean? People just don't let ripe apples rot on the ground. They would glean, like everyone, like you just don't see that kind of waste. So I grew up with people using like, you know, I think in this country too, people that were the older generation that went through the Depression that knew what hunger was. And then they didn't waste anything, like people that I knew that were in their eighties when I was in my thirties or whatever that was. People who might be 100 years old right now that went through that period that they saved everything. I mean, they use paper on both sides. You know what I mean? They saved copy paper to write notes on. I mean, I still do that.

Thomas [00:07:32] Yes.

Helen Liu [00:07:32] So for Taiwanese, it's just kind of like it still is. Even though Taiwan is really a very wealthy country right now. It's very modern, but.

Aimee Yogi [00:07:41] It's also an island.

Helen Liu [00:07:43] Yeah.

Aimee Yogi [00:07:44] And when you're on an island, you have limited,

Helen Liu [00:07:47] The arable land is very small.

Aimee Yogi [00:07:49] Right. You have to be conservative.

Thomas [00:07:50] Similar to Japan.

Helen Liu [00:07:52] Right, exactly.

Thomas [00:07:53] Where so little of the land is arable. Or really inhabitable, because of the mountainous nature. Right.

Helen Liu [00:07:57] And it's that Taiwan is like this, you know, there's a little bit of sliver of land and then it goes pssht pssht, like this, you know? It's hard to live up on those, but on the hills. But, anyway.

Thomas [00:08:08] Can I ask you with the quilt project that you've done, and I believe this video will accompany an image of it, I hope that's possible. [Check out www.helenliuartwork.com/art-quilt-for-earth-day for amazing images!] Do you feel the impact that it's had has been positive? Have you heard people say, about it or do you feel that it's connected?

Helen Liu [00:08:27] Yeah, well it's really nice that Aimee remembered this project and asked me to talk about it. It was not up for very long. And every time I make one of these, I don't think about what happens to it afterwards. I just, I'm kind of focused on just making the piece. And if I can get an exhibit, it's shown somewhere. And, you know, that's what video cameras and photographs are for. I figure I documented, put it somewhere, and then that's good enough. But every time I make one of these, somebody would say to me, Somebody needs to buy this and put it in a lobby somewhere. Or this needs to be in a, you know, such-and-such museum. And I said, Well, you just go contact them and then I'll just give it to them for free. You know, I don't. So the very first piece I did, I actually cut it up, because I didn't want to take it home. So I actually cut it up into 24 pieces and then I gave it away to the audience for, I think, a donation to BRING Recycling. Because I didn't want to take it home and just store in my garage for, who knows how long?

Thomas [00:09:41] BRING Recycling, an important part of this town's community, absolutely, too.

Helen Liu [00:09:43] So you asked earlier, two things about how I became-- this whole environmental thing. I think it's just, it just kind of grew over time. And everyone, right? We know about the problem that the planet is having due to all the waste and especially plastic. So there's been, just kind of a journey. And then as far as the attention. It would have been nice if this was a permanent installation because I do get people asking me, So is it still there? Can I go look at it? And I go, Mmm, nope, it's not there anymore. But, I did

cut a 20 by 8 foot piece for the Asian Celebration backdrop, for our main stage. So it's been used twice now, this year and the year before. So maybe we can make a new one, or add to it or change it or something. So it is getting some attention that way.

Aimee Yogi [00:10:42] And it really is beautiful, as a piece, it is to take all of those little pieces of everybody's contribution. And there is no, there's a theme, but there's no one movement or anything. But to take all of that, and to make it an art piece is just phenomenal to me. It's gorgeous.

Helen Liu [00:11:07] Thank you.

Aimee Yogi [00:11:08] It is. And it makes its point. This is all plastic. This is rubbish that was discarded, and we cannot even recycle. That it's so important to realize that, yeah, it's beautiful, but it is something we need to deal with.

Helen Liu [00:11:31] Well also, I call it, We Are In This Together because we are all,

Aimee Yogi [00:11:35] Yes.

Helen Liu [00:11:36] We are all responsible. And so in a way, the project as proposed to the Springfield Arts Commission was that I would hold these sort of community workshops. And people would come and either bring their own plastic, or I'll provide the plastic, and then we would make the piece together. But then COVID happened. That was supposed to be that four months before Earth Day. So I proposed to have the thing displayed downtown. After the City of Eugene project fell through, and it just didn't work out.

Thomas [00:12:17] Sure.

Helen Liu [00:12:17] They didn't. They liked the idea, but logistically, they felt like they couldn't do it. So I wanted to bring it to Springfield because I saw this grant. I thought, oh, it could be, something could happen downtown. So when COVID happened, though, I thought we'll just wait and see. Nobody knew how long it was going to take. So then after a few months, I wrote back to the commission and I said, What do you think if I change this, to where people can make their pieces at home? And then mail them to me, and I'll put it together? So we still have, the end result will still be something that that people contribute that I put together. But it's just a little bit different on how we go about doing it. They'll just do it on their own, and give it to me, and trust that I'll just put it in there somewhere.

Aimee Yogi [00:13:13] And you probably had more people participating because of that.

Helen Liu [00:13:16] Yeah, in a way. You know, I really didn't know how these little workshops were going to do. We did one at the school, and the school was very excited about the project.

Thomas [00:13:25] This was A3? Here on Main Street.

Helen Liu [00:13:27] Right. Just two blocks down, right? Three blocks down.

Aimee Yogi [00:13:31] Yes.

Helen Liu [00:13:31] So they were, the principal and a couple of the teachers were very excited about it. And so they hosted the first little workshop that we did. And then we

couldn't do any more after that. So when I was looking for a place to display it, I was wanting to do it at the end of this, I think, next block. At the end of it, just at the top of Main Street, there was a big wall there that I thought could work, but they kind of wanted it. And I said, okay, well, then I looked at their walls and looked at a couple of different places, and eventually settled on that. And also I needed to kind of know the size of the wall so I know how big, and--

Thomas [00:14:12] Of course. How heartbreaking would it be if you were just one ramen packet too wide? You know, one Calpico bottle too tall.

Helen Liu [00:14:19] I'd have to, like, cut it off, right? Cut off the ramen. But anyway, it all worked out.

Thomas [00:14:23] Well thank you so much for bringing that message, that thoughtful and beautiful art to this town and this community. I think, is there anything else you want to say about it? Otherwise, we will let you-- we'll say thank you for your time, because I know that you endured my lateness today. It's just embarrassing, I'll keep saying it.

Helen Liu [00:14:41] No, no, no.

Aimee Yogi [00:14:41] And she's leaving for Taiwan,

Helen Liu [00:14:44] Tomorrow.

Thomas [00:14:45] Extraordinary.

Helen Liu [00:14:45] But thank you. I really appreciate Aimee, bringing this. It's nice to know that the piece still has a little, you know, it's still,

Thomas [00:14:56] It's alive, it's got energy behind it.

Helen Liu [00:14:57] On people's minds. So, it's nice.

Aimee Yogi [00:14:58] And it was one of the very few large-scale, Asian-American artists that I knew here in Springfield. So that was so fulfilling for me. So thank you.

Helen Liu [00:15:15] Great. I'd like to make some more.

Aimee Yogi [00:15:18] Yeah, let's do it.

Thomas [00:15:20] Wonderful. This short interview is accompanied also with a longer discussion with you, Aimee. And so we'll proceed with that portion and say, thank you so much, Miss Liu, for being here.

Helen Liu [00:15:31] Thank you. [screen fades out, fades back in]

Aimee Yogi [00:15:33] Okay.

Thomas [00:15:33] Okay. So, welcome to a wonderful continuation of my discussion with Aimee Yogi. We can continue to dive into, now your background. And I'm happy to have you here. We're all happy to be here. This is great.

Aimee Yogi [00:15:48] Thank you, Thomas. And thank you, Mimi, for being here. Okay, so I'll give you a little bit about my background. I'm Aimee Yogi. I was born and raised in Hawaii, born on the big island, in Hilo. And as I was telling Thomas, my grandfather was the first one to emigrate from Okinawa. And all of my grandparents came from Okinawa, so I am 100% Okinawan. Which is a very different culture from Japan.

Thomas [00:16:25] Yeah,.

Aimee Yogi [00:16:25] It was its own kingdom. And in fact, was at one time under the possession of Taiwan. So we're very close neighbors, in culture. Okay. So my grandfather emigrated from Okinawa in 1908, to work for the sugar plantation as a sugar cane grower. That is what his family did in Okinawa. And so, was able to buy the family 95 acres in Mountain View, about 15 miles outside of Hilo. On the Volcano Highway, 95 acres in 1920. So we have been there.

Thomas [00:17:11] So the sugar industry must have been very profitable.

Aimee Yogi [00:17:13] It was. It was, yeah. And he was able to, right, grow, and buy property.

Thomas [00:17:22] And I'm sure he worked his butt off.

Aimee Yogi [00:17:24] Yes. He was able to buy the property, and however, was not able to become a citizen until the 1950s, right? So, anyway.

Thomas [00:17:37] Not to interrupt, but what a fascinating, you know, juxtaposition between, Oh, you can contribute to the economy. You can have a business, but you cannot live, and be a citizen.

Aimee Yogi [00:17:46] Citizen, right.

Thomas [00:17:47] You're not one of us, truly.

Aimee Yogi [00:17:48] Right. Yeah. But for him, it was a lifestyle. It was a living. He would not be able to do that in Okinawa, because he was the second son. He would not inherit his father's farm. So, anyway, I grew up, we lived there for four years. My grandparents had the farm, and then my parents decided to move to Honolulu, where they could work, have jobs. My dad wasn't going to grow sugar cane. He had been educated at Iowa State University and was a counselor at Hilo High School. But anyway, so we moved to Honolulu. He had a job with the supermarket, Times Supermarket, which was a family-owned grocery chain. But I grew up in Honolulu and then in Kailua, and I graduated from Kailua High School in 1966. And then went to the University of Hawaii for a couple of years, majored in journalism. Or, I majored in liberal arts, and then decided I wanted to major in journalism. So I couldn't stay at the University of Hawaii, and decided to transfer to the University of Oregon. It was a small enough town. It had a great journalistic history, journalism school history. And I didn't want to go to the major cities by myself. And so, yeah, so I moved to Eugene, graduated in 1970. It was the radical '60s, just a whole lot of fun.

Thomas [00:19:43] Yeah. Woodstock happened while you were in college.

Aimee Yogi [00:19:46] Yeah! Yeah. And worked on-- at the Oregon Daily Emerald, I worked there.

Thomas [00:19:52] Yes, which still exists now as just the [Daily] Emerald.

Aimee Yogi [00:19:54] Oh, absolutely right. And that was just at the transition of becoming independent of the university, becoming an independent newspaper.

Thomas [00:20:07] That's very important.

Aimee Yogi [00:20:08] Because we were very, very limited in what we could say or do. And and it was a very, very tough time because, frankly in 1969, '70, the whole state of Oregon hated us at the University of Oregon. You know? We were,

Thomas [00:20:26] Tell me how you really feel. No, it's real, though.

Aimee Yogi [00:20:30] Yeah, it was. They wanted to shut us down. We were protesting the war. They wanted, Governor McCall threatened to close our school, send in the National Guard because he didn't like the protests. You know, it was a very scary time, and especially to be at the Emerald, and one of the top ten radical newspapers in the nation.

Aimee Yogi [00:20:57] Been fighting the fight, haven't you. Laying the groundwork for a lot of work to be done.

Aimee Yogi [00:21:02] Well I depended on my, 'She looks like a nice Japanese girl from Hawaii, so she's not doing anything,' you know? And I got a lot of stories that way. But, anyway.

Thomas [00:21:13] Mm hmm. And that's good. Let's get a little juicy, were there times people were angry about what you wrote about them afterwards?.

Aimee Yogi [00:21:21] Not what I wrote about. But, what, you know, we used the F-word in our stories. Because, freedom of speech and all that. So it seemed like we were out of control because, you know, we're not the quiet, quiet student-staff. And we were out there, and our editors were the leaders of the protests.

Thomas [00:21:51] Wow. They continue to have an excellent journalism legacy at UO.

Thomas [00:21:54] Yeah, absolutely. And so then I graduated in 1970, on time, and decided to stay in Eugene. It was very comfortable to be a single woman in Eugene. So I got a job. My dad says, 'Well, you've been looking for a job. I always take the civil service exam and get a job.' And that was being held right on campus. So I went in one Saturday, took the civil service exam, kind of aced it out, had a 99. So I could,.

Thomas [00:22:29] Humble brag.

Aimee Yogi [00:22:30] Yeah. I got on the list, you know, for entry-level clerical support.

Thomas [00:22:36] There you have two ultra-Asian moments. You're like, I got 99. Also, when I went to college, Thomas, I graduated on time. I was there, four years. Boom,

boom, boom, boom. This is what we can do, when we're Asian. We can share in-group jokes.

Aimee Yogi [00:22:49] Yes.

Thomas [00:22:50] While also knowing that stereotypes have a negative impact on culture. So we'll probably get to that, too. But gosh dang, my mom hustled me hard to make sure my grades were good. A-minus was not acceptable.

Aimee Yogi [00:23:02] Yeah.

Thomas [00:23:02] I derailed you, I apologize.

Aimee Yogi [00:23:04] Well, okay. As an only child, of a Japanese-American family, all of my cousins and all Japanese-American girls at the time were expected to be elementary school teachers. That was the best profession they could have. Well, I knew I wasn't going to do that, so I had to find my own path. And I knew I wasn't going to grow up unless I left home, because my mother would worry about me every time I went out at night, or something. So yeah. So I thought, okay, being at a university? A lot of structure, safe around me. So I came to the University of Oregon. But my eyes were open, when my dad sat me down and talked to me. He rarely did, but he said, okay. Now that you've graduated from high school, you have a choice. You can go to college and I'll pay for that, or you can go to work. You know, me? The only child. The precious treasure of this family, go to work? Well, I'm going to college. So, yeah, so that got me on the road.

Thomas [00:24:27] I could see that on the placard in the museum exhibit. 'Me? Go to work? I'm going to college.' I love it.

Aimee Yogi [00:24:37] Yeah.

Thomas [00:24:37] That tenaciousness is what continues to empower what you're doing today, Aimee, and I'm really glad to know it.

Aimee Yogi [00:24:44] Absolutely. They always tell you, You'll thank me for this later. And I absolutely do, because he taught me how to be self-sufficient. If you make your own money, nobody can tell you how to spend it. Right? So, yeah, he taught me that. So I went to work, and got a job with the university. It was clerk one. Entry level, and it was way fun. I got to be the night manager for the main desk store in the student union, which meant that I got to work from 3 to 11:30. And managed the main desk, we had student employees. So they expected me to know what I was doing. And some of them were older than me, because I was only 20. So, yeah. And in my interview, they, they said, What's your best characteristic? And I said, I love working with people. And I realized, famous last words, you didn't know what you were saying.

Thomas [00:25:58] Yeah. Yeah.

Aimee Yogi [00:25:59] You're just saying, you know, it's just something you're supposed to say. But but anyway, yeah, we had all kinds of people, and international students that we had to take care of, and everything. So it was a very, very wonderful job. And so I continued. And then in 1984, I was able to get a job. I wanted to get into computer work and I'd heard about it. So I got out of the student union and into the library. I got into inter-library loans. So we were definitely on the leading edge.

Thomas [00:26:35] Oh, nice. With other institutions, like LCC? OSU.

Aimee Yogi [00:26:40] Yeah.

Thomas [00:26:40] Wow. Yeah, it's definitely something that maybe we take for granted, that is so commonplace today with higher ed institutions near one another.

Aimee Yogi [00:26:51] Right, and we were expected to, we were an academic library. And into resource-sharing because we didn't have the money to buy all of our books. So we were lending and borrowing all over the world. I have some wonderful stories about that. But in the 22 years, from '84 to 2007 or 2006, the last 22 years. We saw the breakup of the Soviet Union. We saw the fall of apartheid. And the reunification of Germany. Yeah, so fabulous. Having sent books and articles to these countries, to see the change, the epic changes they went through was just wonderful. And then I retired to--

Thomas [00:27:45] When I hear you talk about that, simply the act of sharing knowledge, is something we're trying to do right now. And for me to participate in that with you and talking about these, I know that you're not saying you claim credit for the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the end of South African apartheid. But I truly believe that it was part of a movement of ideas, and that you were very much involved in that. And you continue to be involved with so many nonprofits today, as well. I know you want to get to that, but you unroll your story however you please. I'm here to facilitate it.

Aimee Yogi [00:28:15] I'm ready to go on to that. So having worked for one of the biggest nonprofits in the county, the University of Oregon, I decided in retirement, that was all going to be-- my social circle would disappear. And so how was I? What was I going to do? I was already participating with the Oregon Asian Celebration, the Asian-American Council, and very active in that. And the Japanese-American Association, we created all of those organizations. And brought them up, and managed and maintained them. So yeah, it was my group, that six of us that built the drums for taiko. We got the wine barrels from Hinman Vineyards, and recycled the White Oak wine barrels into taiko drums.

Thomas [00:29:17] I wouldn't have ever known that they weren't, you know, imported from Japan. What I've seen.

Aimee Yogi [00:29:24] Yeah, that's what we do here.

Thomas [00:29:26] Fantastic.

Aimee Yogi [00:29:27] Yeah. A drum, a taiko from Japan is \$10,000. So, yeah.

Thomas [00:29:35] Pocket change. No, that's a lot of money.

Aimee Yogi [00:29:38] Yeah, so we bought these. And we learned how to make taiko from Mark Miyoshi, who was at Shasta Taiko at the time. He's still in Shasta.

Thomas [00:29:51] The middle school?

Aimee Yogi [00:29:52] No. Shasta, California. Way up there on the mountain. So he he was a drum maker, and had been with Denver Taiko, so one of the original American taikos. So he was making the drums, and he taught us how to do it. And so, yeah, so we

had the wherewithal to process the drums. Anyway, so I thought okay, I will continue my participation with the Asian-American groups, but there's other things I want to do with my volunteer time. So within two weeks of retiring from the university in 2007, I applied to become a volunteer with Hospice of Sacred Heart. Yeah. Death and dying had always been kind of intriguing, to me. And also having that sort of Japanese-American, or that Buddhist sense of how we treat the dying process. Not really deep, but that was part of it. The reverence for the body and the ceremony and everything was a part of that, that maybe I could use for myself, but also bring it to the work, or the volunteering. So I've been a hospice volunteer for 15 years. Learned a lot. And about, oh, ten years ago, our volunteer coordinator with Hospice asked about ten of us volunteers to set up a non-- not set up a nonprofit, but help. To help hospice families with the expenses that they face when their loved one goes on to hospice service. There are a lot of things that are not covered by Medicare, so they have to put up the money for it.

Thomas [00:32:06] No doubt, and that's so hard in that time, too.

Aimee Yogi [00:32:08] Oh, yeah. You're dealing with,

Thomas [00:32:11] There's never an easy time to pay medical bills.

Aimee Yogi [00:32:12] Yeah, absolutely. So anyway, she said, Okay, we have items that are donated. We can get donations, especially from families. The person has passed away. They have medical equipment that, you know, what are they going to do with it? How are they going to dispose of it? And then we have staff that have extra medical supplies. If we could set up, like even a garage sale where we have a volunteer group, take all that in. Have a garage sale, sell it. Pour that revenue back in, to support the non-Medicare services that Hospice has. We can give that to the families, all that revenue. So we we did garage sales and we worked around that. And then it came to the point where the volunteers had to set up a standalone nonprofit. By then, I knew how to do that. Because we had set up the Japanese-American Association. Created bylaws, we had a board. We knew what we had to do, make the reports of donations or memberships to the attorney general's office.

Thomas [00:33:48] Wow. So we knew how to do that, how to make all that report. And how to set up a good set of bylaws for governance. So we got together, we set up bylaws, we set up Hearts For Hospice. We set up what we were going to do with the money. In order to be a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, you have to have a charitable distribution, and this was it. We would award grants annually to the nonprofit hospices, and also organizations that support end of life care. So about 11 years, maybe about 2013, we set up the organization, and we got tired of hauling stuff around. So somebody found us this storefront, and we set up the store. And we have a warehouse to take in the extra materials that we cannot keep here. So, Hearts For Hospice was formed. And you can see on the board there, that is just the total that has been awarded.

Thomas [00:35:16] Can I take a picture and put it in the video, too?

Aimee Yogi [00:35:17] Absolutely. That is just the total that has been awarded to PeaceHealth, Hospice of Sacred Heart. And the other nonprofit hospice is Cascade Health.

Thomas [00:35:33] That's a large amount of money for half a year, it seems.

Aimee Yogi [00:35:37] No, it's not--.

Thomas [00:35:37] Oh, from 2011 to 2022.

Aimee Yogi [00:35:40] Yeah, it's 11 years. Yeah.

Thomas [00:35:43] An extraordinary amount of money, that's the point I'm trying to--

Aimee Yogi [00:35:45] Right, that's how much they've asked for. We have generated of course, more than that. We have, in reserve, more than that. But, to the nonprofit hospices. Cascade used to be a part of McKenzie Willamette Hospital until they went for-profit. So now they're a separate organization, but they have the Pete Moore Hospice House, which is incredible. We also donate to Courageous Kids, which is a PeaceHealth program. It is one of two grief support programs for youth from ages 6 to 17. There's one in Portland, and there's Courageous Kids here. We also do White Bird. We just started, White Bird Clinic.

Thomas [00:36:35] It's been getting national attention for the CAHOOTS program.

Aimee Yogi [00:36:37] For CAHOOTS. But they also have, we didn't know about, until they asked us. They set up a program a couple of years ago, and we've been giving to build up the program. There is one medical social worker named Amy May. She's part of CAHOOTS. Amy May will do end of life counseling for the unsheltered. There are simply people who will not come in. So she goes out wherever she's needed. Talk about counseling, and and make sure they have someone with them, when the time comes. Or she's with them. She's kind of on call, 24/7. That's what she does. So we thought-- that was something, we had no idea. I mean, we do hospice for homeless people, if they come in to a facility. We will take care of them. But if they don't come in, which many will not,.

Thomas [00:37:42] Sure.

Aimee Yogi [00:37:42] She does it. So we support that. And then we have Patient Pet Advocates, which is a new program. Two of the hospice social workers decided that there's always this, I mean, we have 200 hospice patients on right now, at Sacred Heart. So, many of them have pets. And toward the end of their life, if their family can't take care of the pet, what's going to happen to their pet? And they worry about that. So they go out, on the intake and say, we have a system in place where we will re-home your pet.

Thomas [00:38:24] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [00:38:25] So, yeah.

Thomas [00:38:27] Just, little things that are such a bedrock.

Aimee Yogi [00:38:30] Absolutely. So that gives them comfort until they pass. Then we take care of the pet. And we've done, of course, dogs and cats and rabbits and ferrets.

Thomas [00:38:46] Yeah. I would absolutely befriend a ferret if I was in a situation where that's, you know, my friend. I could see it being my friend. Whether through, housed or unhoused.

Aimee Yogi [00:38:55] Yeah..

Thomas [00:38:57] There's so much to talk about, you know? I feel that you have certainly-- we could talk about the Asian Celebration, we could talk about the Japanese-American Internment Memorial. Which one do you want to start with?

Aimee Yogi [00:39:08] Okay, okay. So anyway, that's what Hearts For Hospice does, it distributes grants for these programs.

Thomas [00:39:18] And we're sitting in it right now, in the storefront..

Aimee Yogi [00:39:20] Yes, and there's there's about 50 volunteers who bring in the donations, clean them up, downstream some of what we can't use, and then puts it out for sale here, to generate that. So I'm very, very proud of Hearts For Hospice. Okay. So now, I'd like to talk about the Eugene Japanese-American Memorial. Which was proposed in 2003. And dedicated, we built it, finished it in 2008, which is quite a story. But it has always been, 2008 it was done. But for years, it has always been a question for, especially at the Japanese-American community, what happened here in 1942? We know that Lane County was part of the Western Defense zone. We know that all people of Japanese ancestry had to leave. They were forced to leave. They were put on trains, taken to prison camps. Concentration camps, where they could take only what they could carry.

Thomas [00:40:39] Horse stables, in many cases.

Aimee Yogi [00:40:44] Yeah, absolutely, the assembly centers were stables. My aunt -- my dad's oldest sister -- who's still alive today up in Washington, was a student at Oregon State University at that time. Obviously, she wasn't going to go home to Hawaii, so she was here. And fortunately, my uncle had just graduated from Portland State University. They got married, May 1st, 1942. May 6th, 1942? They were at the Pacific Exposition Center stables, to wait for the train to Minidoka. Yeah.

Thomas [00:41:30] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [00:41:31] 23 years old. Married, and going to prison. Because she was Japanese. Yeah. So anyways, so I thought, okay, I work in the library. I know where to get the information. I know what to look up. And people were asking, what happened here? So I looked up, and found three Lane County residents. And I found them on an online database that had to register at the civil control station here. They were registered in Eugene, and they were all University of Oregon students. So I went into the newspaper records for the Oregon Daily Emerald, and found that in May 1942, the Oregon Daily Emerald was saying farewell to 23 students.

Thomas [00:42:35] Mmm.

Aimee Yogi [00:42:36] So it was, the population of Japanese in Lane County were all Japanese-American University of Oregon students. Imagine being 20 years old, and told that you have to go to prison now. Because of who you are.

Thomas [00:42:56] And simply trying to get an education.

Aimee Yogi [00:42:58] Yeah, absolutely.

Thomas [00:42:59] In the country you live in and love.

Aimee Yogi [00:43:03] Right, yeah. So I worked out the story of what happened, because it's phenomenal what the University of Oregon did for them. Okay, and that's kind of an unknown story.

Thomas [00:43:19] Well, it's about to be known now, and I even said [beforehand] to be, thinking about time and stuff. We shouldn't be thinking about that. I think it'll be fine. I think it'll probably roll and roll and roll, and this is the time to get the story out.

Aimee Yogi [00:43:32] Okay.

Thomas [00:43:34] So I just want you to know, don't ever let me feel like I'm pressuring the story into a further cage. We're trying to let it out. Thank you.

Aimee Yogi [00:43:42] Okay. So, to begin with, February 19, 1942 is the Day of Remembrance. Because President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, designating a western defense zone in Washington, Oregon, California and parts of Nevada, giving the military the right to remove anyone they deemed a danger to national security. So all persons of Japanese ancestry had to register in their counties of residence. By June 1942, they were forcibly removed and incarcerated in concentration camps. And that is what they were called. There were three Lane County residents, all University of Oregon students. In fact, the Japanese-American population in Lane County was centered on campus. There were 23 students, and here are their names. Chie Arai. Harry Yoshiro Fukuda. Midori Funatake. Mary Furusho. Frank Hachiya. Ted Hachiya. Thomas Hayashi. Woodrow Ichihashi. Kenji Inahara. Harold Ito. Makoto Iwashita. Grace Ikuko Kumazawa. Alice Kawasaki. Takuo Kawayuchi. Samuel Teruhide Naito. Kenzo Nakagawa. Ellen Ogawa. Tadashi Osaki. Lawrence Takei. George Uchiyama. Hitoshi Watanabe. Michi Yasui. And Robert Hsu Yasui. Okay, so here's what the University of Oregon did. At the beginning of March, 1942, Karl Onthank, who was the Dean of Personnel Administration, led the effort to support the Japanese-American students. By the end of March, the National Japanese-American Student Relocation Council was established by a coalition of west coast universities, the National YMCA and YWCAs, and the American Friends Service Committee. Colleges were requested, in inland universities, to admit our students who were incarcerated. Students were asked to register and were guaranteed admission and transportation to the new colleges and universities. Most of the students returned to their home counties in order to help their families. A few made their way to other locations to complete their education. In May 1942, there were no Japanese-Americans in Lane County. So here is the history after.

Thomas [00:47:12] It's just not that long ago.

Aimee Yogi [00:47:14] No, it isn't.

Thomas [00:47:14] You know, I'm here every day. You and I are here every day, and it just is amazing to think that only 80 years ago,

Aimee Yogi [00:47:23] Yeah.

Thomas [00:47:24] There were zero.

Aimee Yogi [00:47:25] Yeah.

Thomas [00:47:26] I'm sorry. Feel free to proceed, it just, it hit me.

Aimee Yogi [00:47:29] That it was here in Lane County. So by September 1943, 5000 students from the West Coast had been placed in 529 colleges and universities inland, to continue their education. Okay. Now, in other instances during the war, of course, we know about the segregated 442nd Regimental Combat Team of Japanese-American soldiers. There were also the segregated 522nd Engineering Unit of Japanese-American soldiers. And General Patton's Tank Corps included segregated African-American soldiers. Now they were, of course, behind the combat lines, fixing the roads or providing support for the combat soldiers, foot soldiers on the front lines. However, the engineering unit and General Patton's Tank Corps were all assigned to see, to view, and to aid in the liberation of the Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps.

[00:48:59] Sure.

[00:49:00] Yes. To see the liberation of the victims, of the survivors, of the concentration camps. So you can imagine what it is like for young men whose families were in concentration camps, and the others who bore the weight of history, of slavery, lynching and massacre. When they saw The Final Solution, the Holocaust. You can imagine that. And in fact, there was a recent documentary done by PBS that noted this, because it was never acknowledged that these men saw this. But anyway, because of that, it also explains how these veterans returned to the U.S. after the war, and worked together to build a better country for their families and communities. By 1963, Japanese-American concentration camp survivors and veterans joined Martin Luther King on the March on Washington. And in 1964, we had the Civil Rights Act. In 1995, after the Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building, Dale Minami led a team of Japanese-American attorneys as legal first-responders for the Middle Eastern Arabic-American citizens who were being harassed and detained as suspected terrorists in Oklahoma City, 1995.

Thomas [00:50:48] I don't think I have to remind the audience that that community had no - it was a white terrorist. A white domestic terrorist.

Aimee Yogi [00:50:56] Yes.

Thomas [00:50:56] And all of this bigotry and this discrimination, the stereotyping, this profiling. You know, it continues against so many marginalized, people of color groups.

Aimee Yogi [00:51:05] Absolutely. Yes, it does. So in 2019, Japanese-American concentration camp survivors have led the effort to close the detention centers on the southern border. These are the detention centers where the refugees and immigrants coming from Latin America, and really all over the world, recalling their own separation from their families in 1942. They, with the support of Tsuru For Solidarity, have been involved in direct action against detention centers for immigrants and refugees. That continues today. So the takeaway from all this is, having gone through the injustice that this particular community has. After two Presidential apologies, redress and reparations, the injustice continues. And it is up to all of us to fight for the democracy we want to see, and we cherish. And we must stand united with everyone who suffers injustice.

Thomas [00:52:20] That's so important.

Aimee Yogi [00:52:22] Yes.

Thomas [00:52:22] And I hope it's something that's spurred on by when people visit the memorial itself. Because I'd love to hear if you're willing to share about what it looks like, where it is. I think it's set in such an anchor of the performing arts, it's by the Hult Center. Hospitality, it's by that historic hotel that's changed its name a few times now, recently. I used to work there, so I don't need to rattle it off.

Aimee Yogi [00:52:42] Oh, okay.

Thomas [00:52:44] And just in the heart of downtown, a space that is so frequented. And to be honest, too, I think a lot of unhoused people have been in that space,.

Aimee Yogi [00:52:55] Mm hmm.

Thomas [00:52:55] And have have experienced it, too. And to see the suitcases and the history. And, you know, I think it's just a very important space. So tell me about it, because I take it for granted.

Aimee Yogi [00:53:07] Sure. Right. The Eugene Japanese-American Memorial is at the Hult Center. It's the garden on the north side. Right on, what is it, 6th?

Thomas [00:53:20] Correct.

Aimee Yogi [00:53:20] 6th Avenue and Willamette. That is the site of the civil control station, that the Japanese-American students had to go and register.

Thomas [00:53:36] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [00:53:36] That declared that they would all be removed by May.

Thomas [00:53:42] It's where the Hult Center is now.

Aimee Yogi [00:53:43] Where the Hult Center is.

Thomas [00:53:44] I didn't know that.

Aimee Yogi [00:53:44] It was. If you read the address, 34 West Sixth Street. That is the Hult Center. And that is why that garden is there. And it as it turns out, our Asian-American history, we just found out, is in that neighborhood. Because we just found out the Natural History Museum did a dig at the Homes For Good market commons apartments. And uncovered some Chinese porcelain. And they traced it back to this Chinese-American couple who ran a restaurant and a gift shop from 1912 until 1928. So we've been here a hundred years, in Eugene. But it was right there, at about 6th and Willamette. And there were a couple of Chinese laundries, there was a boarding house for Chinese workers. So that is our neighborhood.

Thomas [00:54:57] Absolutely.

Aimee Yogi [00:54:58] Yeah. Yeah. 6th and Willamette.

Thomas [00:55:00] I'll just interject to say that when, I used to work there as a bellhop. So I was driving shuttles. And I felt honestly in many ways, just a little bit as a detour, that I'd

drive people to and from the airport a lot. And it's a prominent hotel where I felt I was very much an ambassador to Eugene in some ways.

Aimee Yogi [00:55:26] Sure.

Thomas [00:55:26] Sometimes I would be the first Eugenean that a lot of people would actually talk to and have a conversation with. And I'd be the last Eugenean to talk with them as on the way out, in many in many cases.

Aimee Yogi [00:55:35] Right.

Thomas [00:55:35] And I thought that was a really special experience. And at times, because of the unique nature of our community, people come from so many different places and call Eugene home and call the Eugene-Springfield area home. And I stood out there at the bell cart where we keep the valet keys. And in so many instances, you know, just letting my mind wander, and then I hadn't even known that it was such a deep-- I was in my community, geographically. I didn't even know it. That's kind of what I'm getting at.

Aimee Yogi [00:56:08] Mm hmm, that's right.

Thomas [00:56:08] So thank you for telling me.

Aimee Yogi [00:56:09] Yeah. And initially, when I first saw that poster, it was so painful. Because we didn't know anything about the people we didn't know. When I first read the names, which was only a couple of years ago. I thought, Oh, my God, that's my history. I worked at the University of Oregon for 36 years. These are my students. Yeah, these are my alumni. These are my friends. And that's when it became real. And, you know, like you, it was such a painful thing to look at because I was going up to Special Collections, to see what the university did, to or for these students. And I had worked there 30 years. What if they just called the FBI and turned them in? You know, what did they do? But I found out they did this magnificent effort. They got them all to other universities, and schools. And what a magnificent effort that was. And the other thing, too, is, you find out your allies, okay? When you look into this painful history. Because at the dedication, we always had me.

Thomas [00:57:36] This was 2008?

Aimee Yogi [00:57:38] Yeah, 2008. We always had this friend of Misa's. Misa Joo, who was who provided the impetus for doing Obon, and doing the Asian Celebration, and playing Taiko. And she had her friend there who is indigenous, he's Native American. Bob Tom, he's Siuslaw tribe. With the tribal government there. But Bob Tom was there, and he was listening to all of this. And as he left, I hadn't talked with him very much. But as he left, he said, You know, we share a common history. And I said, oh, well, thank you. And I didn't know what he was talking about, really. But I thought, well, you know, they were on the reservation, and they were persecuted and removed from from their land to be taken over to the reservation. But I said thank you. And I have come to realize that what he meant was, we couldn't have built the Eugene Japanese-American Memorial, and have the plaques, and have the basalt, and have this garden there, like we wanted. It was going to be way too expensive. We didn't have that kind of funding. So somehow, the Grand Ronde Reservation and Spirit Mountain Foundation offered a challenge grant. We'll give you \$50,000 if you raise the rest. Which is exactly what we needed, \$100,000, to build that memorial. And we had it done. We had it done. Yeah.

Thomas [00:59:36] I should be thanking my indigenous brothers and sisters and siblings of this earth, a lot more. That's amazing.

Aimee Yogi [00:59:42] Yeah, and so then I was reading about, you know, the indigenous people went through and especially our, the Grand Ronde worked for 30 something years because they voted for termination. And then they voted, they wanted to get recognition back because all of their educational, medical resources were taken away.

Thomas [01:00:14] Awful.

Aimee Yogi [01:00:16] So I read *The People Are Dancing Again*, about the recognition. We are celebrating this year. Recapturing that recognition. 45 years ago is when they finally got recognized again. And so I was reading the book about the fight for it, and it was very telling. In 1942, when the Japanese were incarcerated in their concentration camps, the man who ran the concentration camps was Dillon Myer, who was Federal War Relocation Director. And they were known for not having enough food or medical supplies for the people. And it was, yeah, it was awful. And then, in 1946,

Aimee Yogi [01:01:20] Families.

Aimee Yogi [01:01:21] Yeah, you know. Yeah, children died of malnutrition. So, um, so anyway, in 1946, when the camps were closed, he just closed them and said, Okay, you're on your own. Go back or go wherever, but you can't stay here. So he just shoved the people out there. And so Dillon Myer was out of a job, after the war. And during the Eisenhower Administration in 1952, he became head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bureau of Indian Affairs. And the Republicans were always hot to save money. So he thought they thought, hey, if we closed down the reservations, promised them money, compensation for the timber that they hold, thousands of acres of timber? And say, yeah, we'll compensate you for the land, the reservation land that you hold. If you will vote for termination. You've got great jobs, you're living off the reservation. You came back from the war, you're skilled. You don't need public support. You don't need the feds watching everything that you do. So they they managed to arrange for 16 people to vote at Grand Ronde to terminate. They voted to terminate, and it was signed. So Grand Ronde lost their-- and then they were hardly compensated for the reservation land. They were never compensated for the timber land.

Thomas [01:03:15] Really.

Aimee Yogi [01:03:16] That was the usual, you know, try to get moqney out of the feds. Okay, so that was Dillon Myer. That was our common history.

Thomas [01:03:24] Mmm. Mmm.

Aimee Yogi [01:03:25] Yeah. So, consequently, having looked at this very, very tragic injustice, we were able to find our allies. And there was a long history of that.

Thomas [01:03:42] When you initially said you learn who your allies are, I believed this was not going to go well. I believed you were basically going to say, you learn who your true allies are not.

Aimee Yogi [01:03:54] Yeah.

Thomas [01:03:55] And that's an amazing thing to learn. So, thank you for that.

Aimee Yogi [01:04:00] Yes, absolutely.

Thomas [01:04:02] And there's the Asian Celebration, and then there's CERT, and there's all these things that you're involved in. It's phenomenal. Phenomenal.

Aimee Yogi [01:04:09] Thank you. Well, it-- couldn't have done it alone. Initially, it was with the Asian Celebration and things. It was, if you don't do it, nobody else will. So, you know, so we built drums and we play taiko a bit. But anyway, yeah, it was just that to support the community.

Thomas [01:04:30] Well, we're good.

Aimee Yogi [01:04:32] We're good. Okay. So I'll get to my last-- and it isn't easy. Of course, we were talking about that earlier, Mimi and I. It isn't easy to be a hospice volunteer. There's, you have to have that calling, I guess. But also, what got me through it, I mean, to sit with a dying person is pretty daunting, especially for somebody who's, you know, never had children. And I didn't even babysit, you know?

Thomas [01:05:07] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [01:05:08] What made me think-- and I work in a library. What made me think I could sit with someone who, you know, could have an episode or something? But what it was, what got me through it was that I could bring the resources and the knowledge to the Asian-American community. I would have that for them. And it doesn't matter that I don't speak all these languages. I could tell their family what we have available. They could tell their elders or whoever needed to know. We'd at least have access to information. So that's what got me through that. And also because we're such a small community, I think there were only one or two of us that were Asian in the Hospice Volunteer Corps. But, even if I didn't know them, and if I came to sit with Grandma, and I didn't speak her language, at least I'd look familiar to her. So I thought that would be a comfort. So that's why I did.

Thomas [01:06:20] Every little thing helps.

Aimee Yogi [01:06:21] Yeah. Yeah. And with the Japanese-American Memorial, I had access to information if I couldn't find it. And yeah, I knew my way around a database. So, yeah, it was me. I knew how to find the information for our community.

Thomas [01:06:41] Do you have a doctoral degree? Should I be calling you doctor?

Aimee Yogi [01:06:44] Oh, gosh, no. I'm not even professional staff at the library. Yeah, you have to be a librarian, you know?

Thomas [01:06:52] Huh. All right, all right. Well, anyway. Doctor, in my heart. Honorary.

Aimee Yogi [01:07:00] And then also, I got into CERT because we are facing, here in Oregon, we are facing disasters. And the big one,

Thomas [01:07:14] What does CERT mean? For the people.

Aimee Yogi [01:07:15] Oh, okay. CERT is Community Emergency Response [Team]. So it is a citizen corp group of volunteers, who are trained in disaster response. And our particular group trains neighborhood groups to take care of their neighborhoods. To do first aid, do damage assessment, to train everybody else. We have ham radio operators, so we're now on our little handheld walkie talkies, talking to each other and training people to to be their leaders. To be able to take information. Because frankly, in a mass casualty incident, your first-responders are not going to be available. Yeah. So we need to take care of our neighbors. So three years ago, we were we were getting ready for the big one. The big earthquake and tsunami. Not so much tsunami here, but the big earthquake. It, it was,

Thomas [01:08:27] Overdue superquake.

Aimee Yogi [01:08:29] Absolutely overdue. Every 300 years. We finally believe the indigenous stories. Yeah. I mean, before 1986, I think. We thought Oregon was just a blessed landscape. We didn't have tsunamis. We didn't have earthquakes. Nothing real big, you know? California had all that stuff. And then we began to. Then we had a tsunami, I think in '64. We had a tsunami that went from Seaside down to Crescent City and caused damage. And all these little boys were out there listening to the noise, and watching this wave go through their yards and down, down. And all these little boys grew up to be geomorphologists. Yeah, hydrologists, archeologists. They all grew up and realized that we have a ghost forest off the coast because the coast, the land subducted. It sank in an earthquake and the water rushed back and came forward as a tsunami. And there are traces of tsunami in the hills. So it was a big one. There were villages wiped out, and we just didn't believe the dating on the indigenous record. You know, we just didn't believe it.

Thomas [01:10:11] To clarify, they had mapped out essentially, what's a good word? A hypothesis for how often they would happen? Or the recording of these events in the past, through oral history?

Aimee Yogi [01:10:27] Oral stories, yes. Okay, oral stories told by the the Native Americans here, especially on the coast, because you know, they said they lost some villages. They just dropped. And so they collected those anthropological-- they collected those stories. And somebody in Japan collected, checked out the date, and looked in Tokyo's records of an earthquake tsunami, at the same time. They found it. Because you know, they're pretty diligent about keeping records. They found it. 300 years ago. Well, 320 years ago.

Thomas [01:11:09] That's cool. Corroboration through different methods of preserving history and understanding.

Aimee Yogi [01:11:14] Because they never even thought of an earthquake in Peru, creating a tsunami in Japan, or Hawaii. Yeah, or in Alaska. They never thought of something we can't see. This tsunami just came. Yes, so now we know. So that's what we're getting ready for. We know, kind of the scale of this, the earthquake and what effect it will have here in the valley. Nine-- probably the bridges. That's the major problem. The bridges across the river is how are you going to deal with that. So consequently, the emergency managers, especially PeaceHealth, has its own emergency manager. You know, what's going to happen to all the doctors and nurses who work at Riverbend, but live in South Eugene, right? How are they going to get across the river? So what they have done is, they have community, they have urgent care clinics in all the neighborhoods.

Okay, including here. And they are stocked, in case of a disaster event. Of that time to take care of their neighborhood. So in case that happens and they can't get across to Riverbend, they have the university district and the urgent care centers. They're all stocked. In fact, during the pandemic, that was the first thing they did, was they checked each of those urgent care centers to make sure they had enough masks and gowns or gloves or hand sanitizers. Yeah, they checked every day. It's an emergency manager up there. So, yeah. So we were prepared.

Thomas [01:13:18] Well I can't help but think, sometimes in this world where we all have our blind spots and our ignorance on certain things. You know, we Asian-Americans in this community experience that sometimes when we just talk about our own stories, other community members who aren't in our community think, why are you making this all about you? Why can't you just be colorblind? Why can't you? That doesn't speak to me. Or that's, you're trying to push me out. Or all these increasingly different ways to basically say that negative sentiment, right? I'm also appreciating that you are involved in this this emergency response that affects everybody. And that's undeniable, you know?

Aimee Yogi [01:14:00] Absolutely. Yeah. Well, I was I was, right. And I was especially concerned of our elders, even during the pandemic. You know, here we are worried about the big one. And we get, in 2020, a pandemic. And a wildfire that comes to the border of Springfield for the first time in my life.

Thomas [01:14:27] Holiday Farm Fire.

Aimee Yogi [01:14:27] Yeah.

Thomas [01:14:27] Smoketober, 2020.

Aimee Yogi [01:14:29] Yes.

Thomas [01:14:30] It was awful.

Aimee Yogi [01:14:31] Yes. And the pandemic isolated all of us. And so we sent out people saying, how can we help? You know, what can we do? So we did a call out for, okay, if you need something. Let us know if you know of somebody who lives by themselves, call them. Find out if they need something. Tell them, give you a call. If they need to go to the doctor. If they need to get groceries, we'll do it. Somebody will run and get it for you. And it turned out, you know, everybody was taking care of each other. So we didn't, really, have calls for that.

Thomas [01:15:15] I want to correct myself, I think it was September 2020, and I said Smoketober.

Aimee Yogi [01:15:18] It was Labor Day.

Thomas [01:15:20] It was Smoketember. Because I'm used to, now, unfortunately, we're still seeing air quality issues in October of 2022.

Aimee Yogi [01:15:26] Yeah, unusual.

Thomas [01:15:26] And so the season's unusual seems to be, I don't want to say prolonging,

Aimee Yogi [01:15:30] Yeah, it was Labor Day.

Thomas [01:15:32] But anyway. Well, thanks for what you're doing.

Aimee Yogi [01:15:35] Yeah. Yeah.

Thomas [01:15:37] It's good to know that preparedness, in any capacity, can apply to what's going to happen, even if it isn't what you're expecting. Expect the unexpected.

Aimee Yogi [01:15:47] Yeah, yeah. Right. And I know that what also happens is that a lot of people are on Facebook. And they they also get, you know, Oh my God, there was an earthquake in St. Helens, you know? or something like that. And it goes out and, oh my God, what are we doing? There's going to be a fire coming down. And it just gets people overly excited, or overly afraid of what's happening. They don't know the scale.

Thomas [01:16:23] I mean, not to get too into this, but people are just blamed, and made up stories about arson, you know? Like like PDs were having to tell, and sheriffs offices were having to say it wasn't Antifa. You know, like, because people were just making things up.

Aimee Yogi [01:16:38] Yes. You were in the middle of that. Yes, thank you.

Thomas [01:16:40] You know, making things up to use that opportunity to say, it's this group, it's that group that I oppose. When we should-- and we did see some coming together, but that's when we should be all coming together. And fight these fires and protect our people.

Aimee Yogi [01:16:54] Yes.

Thomas [01:16:55] All of our people.

Aimee Yogi [01:16:56] And that's that's why I had access to say-- I mean, it was public information, but it was real information. So I asked people, please, please don't do that. You know, you're just scaring people needlessly. So just keep an eye out for the air quality index, or if the storm is heading this way. Or, you know, we've had tornados in the valley, of all things. But yeah, just be prudent about what you say. I don't want to get people freaked out and needlessly stressed out, especially. Yeah. So that's why I do CERT, is to give out the information. To make sure that people know, if you have to evacuate? Have a go bag. And this is all you need to have in there, we'll come and get you. So, yeah. Just to build support that way. And, okay, the other thing is we want our community to be prepared to shelter in place. Sometimes that's the best thing, or evacuate safely. We're kind of getting together our evacuation plans of what road. We don't have a whole lot of roads to get out of here. Yeah, yeah. And I-5, you know, we're so connected by bridges and things. And of course for wildfire, Eugene is working really rapidly now with, and Lane County is, with defense zones around the houses. So in case a fire comes by, it doesn't destroy your property. And also, we are out there passing out information to the kids. We were at Jerry's Home Improvement doing Fire Safety Day, passing out comic books to the kids, because I want them to know how they can help their family. I want them to know they can do something. And they are so happy to see that.

Thomas [01:19:19] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [01:19:20] Because, yeah, because they feel so helpless.

Thomas [01:19:23] No one wants to grow up feeling helpless.

Aimee Yogi [01:19:23] Yeah. So here's what you need in your go bag. You know, read to your sister or brother and say, I'll help you put one together. And here it is, you know? And so let's make plans. So they're a lot less stressed out.

Thomas [01:19:39] Good.

Aimee Yogi [01:19:39] So yeah, and it's a neighbor to neighbor effort, and we all want to be together in this.

Thomas [01:19:52] So you've been volunteer-- are you on the board or?

Aimee Yogi [01:19:55] I am on the steering committee.

Thomas [01:19:57] I assume that, you know, it probably doesn't need to be said. Maybe we should say, you're not speaking on behalf of these organizations.

Aimee Yogi [01:20:03] Oh, no, no.

Thomas [01:20:04] In order to be, you're just sharing some of your involvement.

Aimee Yogi [01:20:06] Yeah. Right.

Thomas [01:20:08] Do you want to, we've gotten a pretty great in-depth discussion. Do you want to say anything about the Asian celebration? Because that, to me, is one of the most visible. The Oregon Asian Celebration is truly one of the most visible statements, and experiences of Asian community, togetherness, identity, pan-Asian difference, all sorts of things, in the state.

Aimee Yogi [01:20:32] Absolutely, it is.

Thomas [01:20:33] You were involved in its creation, I believe.

Aimee Yogi [01:20:35] Yes, yes. I came in on the second year, I think.

Thomas [01:20:41] So you're an early-on member.

Aimee Yogi [01:20:43] Yes. And it's interesting, because it was Ada Lee [who we also interviewed!] who wanted to bring together the Asian community at the time. And she was having, you know, Lunar New Year parties and New Year's parties and so got a core group of people together. And wanted to, in the '80s-- this was in the '80s, we were dealing with a trade war. Of the big five American carmakers, against Toyota.

Thomas [01:21:29] Mmm.

Aimee Yogi [01:21:29] Because Toyota was selling more cars,

Thomas [01:21:32] Yeah.

Aimee Yogi [01:21:33] Than General Motors. And how dare they? You know, because we were saving gas. Yeah. And it was, it was a trade war. And both Japan and-- Well, you know, China. Their products don't hold up. That's it's just inexpensive. And there was a real image problem.

Thomas [01:21:58] Yeah.

Aimee Yogi [01:22:01] So we had to come together, because--

Thomas [01:22:06] Now it's the American cars with the image problem. People know, longevity is not the best.

Aimee Yogi [01:22:14] Yeah. And it was affecting our children. And, you know, their friends. And so anyway, we we got together and said, what-- how can we show pride in our Asian culture? And so we kind of picked, you know, Asian entertainment. I chose Asian crafts because I'm a basket maker. And Asian businesses, and things like that. And and we even talked about having at the fairgrounds having little Asian villages. You know, here's a little Chinese village and here's the little Japanese village. And then we got hit with multicultural education by Misa Joo, who says, wait. Because she was a middle school teacher, she was having to bring the Asian-American kids to the Asian celebration. We needed those kids, for Eugene Taiko. We needed those kids to feel welcome and visible. The reason why is because they were going to graduate from high school, and they would go to the big cities to find who they were. They did not see themselves here. Yeah.

Thomas [01:23:53] I don't have to go, I don't have to live--.

Aimee Yogi [01:23:54] They were going to go to San Francisco. Seattle. Because they did not see themselves.

Thomas [01:24:00] Where there's many people. Yes.

Aimee Yogi [01:24:02] Yeah. So we went, okay, okay. So has to be Asian-American, you know. And so we had to stop calling ourselves Orientals. That was an old archaic term, and oh boy, the battles we had to go through to do that. But we had to do the Asian-American identity in this. And that's just when this Asian-American student movement was coming up, also. So that was very good. That taiko was a big part of it. Because believe me, women didn't play taiko in Japan.

Thomas [01:24:44] I'm sure.

Aimee Yogi [01:24:46] Right? Women didn't do lion dancing in China or Taiwan.

Thomas [01:24:53] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [01:24:53] And we were going, Yeah, but we want to do this. We love it. Yeah, women didn't do that in the countries. So we went, okay. There's a benefit to being American. And we're going to use it.

Thomas [01:25:07] Yeah! There you go.

Aimee Yogi [01:25:07] Yeah. So we did. So, yeah, it was good. So the Asian--

Thomas [01:25:16] I came up and I actually did get to play a little bit of taiko on the stage in, in first grade. So this would have been like, 2001. Oregon Asian Celebration, at the time it was at the Lane Events Center where it was set for so many, so many years.

Aimee Yogi [01:25:27] Yeah.

Thomas [01:25:28] And the passport going around, you know? So many wonderful-- the food, you know? And even just as, for me, actually, this is the funny thing that a child thinks about, right? Year after year I would go there. And so I didn't know that that event center hosted other things.

Aimee Yogi [01:25:46] Oh, you thought that's all it did.

Thomas [01:25:47] I'd go and it's always the Asian Celebration, you know? And then I'd learn it's also gun shows, and it's also Lane County Fair. Which I think I went to that too, but a little later. But I just thought that was funny, you know? But it was an intro to those other things, like the art displays that happened and all sorts of cool things,

Aimee Yogi [01:26:05] Right?

Thomas [01:26:05] That make you come back and are interested in that space. That space, honestly, this is a tangent, but it's always being talked about as how we're going to maybe build this baseball stadium here, how to better utilize that space. But the Asian Celebration was a big part of the community impact that was had in that building, I think, for a long time.

Aimee Yogi [01:26:27] Right. And we're probably never going to go back there. Yeah.

Thomas [01:26:31] I think I heard you say that.

Aimee Yogi [01:26:32] Yeah. It was expensive. \$30,000, for two days.

Thomas [01:26:38] Yeah.

Aimee Yogi [01:26:39] And also the last two Asian celebrations in the fairgrounds, I had to run. I had to, because we were having a lot of mass shootings in ethnic festivals.

Thomas [01:26:53] Ahh.

Aimee Yogi [01:26:53] Mass shootings, music festivals. Um, we had volunteers who said, I don't think I can do it this year. Because they were afraid of coming into that one big room.

Thomas [01:27:08] Mmm.

Aimee Yogi [01:27:09] Yeah. Right. They were. And these were our lead volunteers. So knowing what I did from CERT, knowing that we had an active shooter formula or protocol, okay? From FEMA. This is what you do. And also because I was a hospice volunteer, and PeaceHealth was shut down because we had two active shooters, two different guys in one year, in the emergency rooms, threatening to shoot up the staff.

Thomas [01:27:55] Ohhh.

Aimee Yogi [01:27:54] And the people. They shut it down, hired extra security. We had to code in. It was shut down. And in 2021 or 2020, we were, all the volunteers were given the FEMA guidelines for active shooter. We were given all of the alarms, code black. Yeah. And it was, it really sucked. But I knew what had happened. And I had my FEMA guidelines from them. They had given it out to their hospice volunteers. I mean, we're a hospital. We're saving lives here. So I thought, okay. I said, David. Tam. I have. I have the active shooter FEMA guidelines that we just got from PeaceHealth. I want to have it in the volunteer packet. They have to know that we have a process in place, that if they suspect-- they need to be on the lookout for suspicious people. Because they're walking in with their backpacks and stuff.

Mimi Nollo [01:29:10] Well, and the Asian Celebration has hundreds of volunteers.

Aimee Yogi [01:29:11] Yes. Right. That somebody will do something about it. It was always--

Thomas [01:29:15] Mimi said off-mic, the Asian Celebration has hundreds of volunteers.

Aimee Yogi [01:29:18] Right, yeah, 400 volunteers. 400, we know.

Thomas [01:29:23] Wow.

Aimee Yogi [01:29:23] And yeah. They need to know what to look for, what to do in case someone starts shooting. Or if they suspect somebody, call David Tam. So, anyway, so we put that in place. But that was such an awful thing to do. That was such an awful thing.

Thomas [01:29:45] It's very hard to think about-- between a rock and a hard place.

Aimee Yogi [01:29:50] Yeah.

Thomas [01:29:51] No good solution.

Aimee Yogi [01:29:52] But it was-- everybody loved, you know, everybody loved the Asian Celebration. And yet to have us all in one big room? Yeah. [Looking off camera] Is this Servicemaster?

Thomas [01:30:05] Servicemaster. Oh, yeah. [Redacted for privacy: Brief conversation with cleaning staff who entered.]

Thomas [01:30:42] Since we had that moment there. Just thank you for letting us use this space, because this is a wonderful space.

Aimee Yogi [01:30:47] Oh, you're welcome.

Thomas [01:30:48] And I'm grateful that it's going to be cleaned here. Sorry, that sounds really bad, but that's explaining that there could be some vacuuming. So we're going to, you know, wrap up. But we've already gone through so much awesome stuff. And I want people to know as well that you are, they should know that you're deeply involved in this

project beyond being in this one video. You are helping us get stories out there because of your deep connection to the community. So we're super glad to have you.

Aimee Yogi [01:31:17] Thank you.

Thomas [01:31:18] Yes.

Aimee Yogi [01:31:18] So let me finish up with the Asian Celebration.

Thomas [01:31:22] Please do.

Aimee Yogi [01:31:22] So, okay. So with the pandemic of course, we could not have the Lane County Fairgrounds, because of the capacity. They wouldn't have done it. So we were going to have it, an Asian Night Markets on the Park Blocks, but the surge happened. So that had to be canceled. So so we did a quick pivot and we did the one-day Asian Celebration and Obon and Taiko Festival at Alton Baker Park, and managed to pull it together in a month. But got, oh, six or seven food booths, and got a children's carnival, and Obon went on as usual. And everybody, before David left that night, he said, Oh boy, the food vendors are asking if they could sign up for next year because they did a whopping business. There were a lot of people there for them, during that time. So we were really happy with that. So consequently, we had the same situation this year. Except we had like eight months to get ready. And so it's been pretty well-decided that probably, Asian Celebration at Alton Baker Park is going to be permanent. And then Obon will have its own space and time on the main stage. Because Alton Baker Park allows us to grow. And as a pandemic space, it's great.

Thomas [01:33:09] Yeah.

Aimee Yogi [01:33:10] So, you know, it's wide open.

Thomas [01:33:14] Well there have been thriving cultural events of many many different kinds there, recently, that I've been able to see. I don't even have to name-- there's so many.

Aimee Yogi [01:33:23] Right. And kind of the wonderful thing is, very minimal expenses, as far as renting a building. So we don't have to charge. And that brought up that whole issue, which is, the reason we had to charge, and have 300 vendors, and charge admission for 20,000 people was because of the expense of that rental. So now, we've gone back to the original idea about the Asian Celebration being open and free and welcoming, especially to the kids. So yeah, a safe. yes. A safe, inviting and welcoming environment. So, yeah. So the children's carnival from Yujin Gakuen middle school, they run that. And then the Adventure Museum. Kami Hendrix, and the Adventure Museum, which is a nonprofit, does activities. Asian activities, too. And that is such a winner for the for the young kids to do.

Thomas [01:34:47] Really just floored by, you know, I'm gonna sound too complimentary. I need to make sure I'm not too complimentary. Because I have to keep that up in every episode and it make not come off as sincere. But it is sincere. There's a lot to appreciate about what we've been able to talk about here. And the enduring legacy of so much that's come before, and so much that's going to continue to happen in this community.

Aimee Yogi [01:35:09] Yes, yes.

Thomas [01:35:09] So I want to invite everybody to check out the other five interviews, that's fully transcribed. Full disclosure, this is the first one. You know? So I don't know what order they'll be on the site, or how they'll be projected. But thank you for participating as a viewer and a listener. And thank you, Aimee Yogi, for your time.

Aimee Yogi [01:35:30] Thank you, Thomas and Mimi.

Thomas [01:35:33] Thank you. Mimi, come in the shot real quick. You want to come in the shot? And just say, photographer, she's rockin' it! Alright. Bye-bye, everybody.