

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Kochiyamas to Be Feted for Their 'Fighting Spirit'

Yuri and late husband Bill Kochiyama have been selected to receive NCCR's award recognizing fighters for justice. The award will be presented at the Day of Remembrance on Feb. 18.

In addition to former Congressman Norman Mineta delivering the keynote, this year's Day of Remembrance program in L.A. will feature recognition of Yuri and her late husband Bill Kochiyama of New York for their lifetime commitment to fighting for justice.

The annual event, sponsored by the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations, recognizes individuals who have fought for justice with the "Fighting Spirit" award.

Kathy Nishimoto Masaoka, NCCR co-chair who nominated the Kochiyamas, said, "As a Sansei, I feel lucky to have worked with both Yuri and Bill. They have energized us and constantly reminded us that the fight for justice should not end with Japanese American redress, but needs to continue and includes justice for all."

NCCR's Frank Emi—who joined with others during the war to challenge the evacuation by re-



Yuri Kochiyama



Bill Kochiyama

fusing military induction on constitutional grounds—first met Yuri and Bill in Washington D.C. as part of the lobbying delegation in 1987. "I was impressed by their openness, he explained. "I respect them very highly for their stand for civil rights, which included their support for the draft resisters," recalled Emi, noting that Bill was a 442nd RCT vet and Yuri, remembered by many vets as a "One-Woman USO for her support of them.

"Yuri and Bill played an important role in gathering support for redress in the New York area and on the East Coast," continued Masaoka. "NCCR depended on Bill especially to testify in Washington D.C. whenever a hearing was held there for the redress campaign.

"Both of them, in a different ways, served as examples of fighters for justice. Yuri—outspoken

and bold, and Bill—unassuming and determined, but sharing the desire and passion to win redress."

The NCCR-sponsored event will also include a pan-Asian drumming performance directed by Johnny Mori; skits on issues of concern by students from UCLA; and other surprises. It will be held on Sunday, Feb. 18, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Japan America Theatre, 244 S. San Pedro St.

The program will be followed by a reception at 4 p.m. for Norman Mineta in the North Gallery of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center. The theater program is free. A \$5 donation will be asked for the reception. For information, call NCCR at (213)680-3484.

Son Reflects on His Parents

(Editor's note: The following comments were delivered by Eddie Kochiyama, Bill and Yuri's second son, at the 1993 Day of Remembrance event held on March 6 in New York City. The two were honored at the program.)

Many people have asked me recently what it was like growing up with parents who



CORKY LEE

Yuri Kochiyama and husband Bill address the audience after being honored by the Ad Hoc Day of Remembrance committee of NYC for their tireless efforts for redress.

are political activists.

Well, when I was young, I knew that somehow my parents were different from other parents. But I didn't quite understand why or how they were different. It always seemed so natural to see strange people coming in and out of our home, or seeing my mother run from one meeting to another.

In fact, it wasn't too unusual to come home and find someone you didn't know sleeping in your bed. But sometimes it got pretty weird, like when late one night, as I was fast asleep on the couch because someone had "liberated" my bed, I felt a nudge on my shoulder and heard some woman's voice whisper, "Move over." I rolled over and saw that it was Gwen Patton, who was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement at the time. And the couch was only so big. And I was only 12 years old!

Anyway, years later, when I was tending bar in a very busy Japanese restaurant in the Wall Street area (of New York City), the owner of the joint, a Nisei gentleman—and I'm not gonna mention his name because I may need a new job real soon—told me that he knew my father. He would often say, "Eddie, your father is a pretty nice guy, but he is such a goddamned liberal!"

I mean, my boss was so conservative that he made me watch the entire—and I mean every minute—of the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court justice nominee Robert Bork. I remind you that this was at the bar, a place where people are supposed to drink and have a good time. Needless to say, Robert Bork was one of my boss' heroes.

My boss would usually bring up my father's name while he was enjoying a cocktail, most often a glass of red wine. With each ensuing drink, he would become increasingly agitated and excited, and express more fervently his disgust for my father.

He'd start to rant about the only thing my father and his 442 homeboys would talk about is the war, the camps and stuff like redress and reparations. He said the Japanese American community should forget about the past and just move on.

And then by about his third drink, he would really go off talking about how the Sansei had been corrupted by emulating Black radicals like the Black Panthers, and that we needed more leaders like S.I. Hayakawa, not rebels like my dad and his crew.

And when he finished his ritual tirade, he would always ask me, "So Eddie. what about your mother? Is she a liberal and a radical, too?" And I would wonder where this guy had been the last 30 years. And I felt like saying, "No, my mother likes to consider herself a revolutionary nationalist, anti-imperialist..."

But jumping back to the past, I found out my parents were sort of different when, while in the seventh grade I helped organize what I believe was the first anti-war rally at a junior high school in New York City. It was real cool. About a hundred students came out to hear a number of speakers protesting the Vietnam War.

But the day after the rally, the principal called me and my two partners into his office and told us that we were suspended for one week because our leaflets were printed on red paper—and we all know what that means.

Man, I was really scared to go home and face my parents with the bad news. I just knew I was in deep trouble. Damn, I was gonna get my ass whipped again. I decided that there was no getting around it except by telling my parents the truth, because I didn't think I could try to act sick for one whole week.

I sat my parents down, explained the situation, and then I apologized. My mother started crying, and then she grabbed my arms and cried out, "Oh Eddie, we're so proud of you."

And I looked at my father and I was stunned because he didn't slap me in the back of my head like he normally did when I got into some trouble. That's when I knew my parents were different. I was relieved by their support, but I trip-out when I think that my mother would probably be ecstatic if I ever was arrested and sent to Rikers or Attica (prison)...where I would be with so many of her friends.

But in all seriousness, I guess the real difference of growing up in our household was having parents who constantly inculcated us with the idea that whenever and wherever there is injustice, inequality and oppression—that we all have a responsibility to fight for those who are victimized—whomever they may be.

As we have grown older and left home, and—after losing Billy and Aichi—my parents have needed to find a new home and a new crop of young people to teach and share their knowledge and experience with.

For those of you who have ever sat in my parents living room, you know that my parents have adopted probably the largest collection of stuffed animals in the world. And I think my parents really love them because they don't talk back—like me and Aichi.

But my parents have also adopted an extended family which includes the extraordinary new wave of activists, like the brothers and sisters in the David Wong Support Committee and with the older movement veterans from the Malcolm X Commemorative Committee, and of course, all of you who have been active in the movement for redress and reparations for so many years.

I would like to use this occasion to publicly say—because as Japanese American we still have that *enryo* (hold back, restrain) thing happening—and I think I can safely speak for Billy, Audee, Aichi, Jimmy, Tommy, (grandson) Zulu and (granddaughter) Akemi—that we are very proud of all of your efforts, your time, commitment, dedication, spirit and love that you have given, not only to the struggle in the Japanese American community, but to the struggle for peace, justice and equality everywhere.

Daddy and Ma—congratulations on the honor you will receive today.

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