

# Wisdom Gone Wild

A FILM BY REA TAJIRI



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE





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# Film Summary



In a vibrant tender cine-poem, a filmmaker collaborates with her isei mother as they confront the painful and curious reality of wisdom “gone wild” in the shadows of dementia. Made over 16 years, the film blends humor and sadness in an encounter between mother and daughter that blooms into an affectionate portrait of love, care, and a relationship transformed. Produced in association with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM).

# Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *Wisdom Gone Wild* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

### **Tips and Tools for Facilitators**

Here are some supports to help you prepare for facilitating a conversation that inspires curiosity, connection, critical questions, recognition of difference, power, and possibility.

## **Share Community Agreements**

### **Community Agreements: What Are They? Why Are They Useful?**

Community agreements help provide a framework for engaging in dialogue that establishes a shared sense of intention ahead of participating in discussion. Community agreements can be co-constructed and created as an opening activity that your group completes collectively and collaboratively. [Here is a model](#) of community agreements you can review. As the facilitator, you can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements or whether participants would be amenable to using pre-established community agreements.

### **Opening Activity (Optional): Establishing Community Agreements for Discussion**

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion or a group whose members know each other well, creating a set of community agreements helps foster clear discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. These steps will help provide guidelines for the process:

- **Pass around** sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can both hear and read the text.
- **Allow time** for clarifying questions, make sure all participants understand the necessity for the agreements, and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- **Go around in a circle** and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- **Go around two to three times** to give participants multiple chances to contribute and also to give a conclusive end to the process.
- **Read the list aloud.**
- **Invite** questions or revisions.
- **Ask** if all are satisfied with the list.

## COMMON CONCEPTS & LANGUAGE

### Care Partner

Communities and practitioners involved with the care of people living with dementia and other physical and mental conditions have embraced the term “care partner” as an alternative to “caregiver.” It frames the practice of care as a collaborative effort. It acknowledges that care activities are done not *for* people in need of care but rather *with* them. Emphasizing mutual responsibility, care partners participate in their own care. It recognizes that people living with dementia can continue to experience joy and pleasure in community with others, while respecting and valuing the humanity and dignity of everyone who contributes to the care process.

### Dementia

The National Institute on Aging defines dementia as “the loss of cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—to such an extent that it interferes with a person’s daily life and activities.” People with dementia experience depression, anxiety, fear, loss, and anger. People with late-stage dementia may require 24-hour care. An estimated 6.5 million people in the US aged 65 and older live with dementia.

### Executive Order 9066

After the Japanese military attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, economic interests and nativist groups lobbied Congress and President Franklin D. Roosevelt to remove citizens and non-citizens of Japanese descent from the West Coast. Roosevelt issued Executive

Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, authorizing the secretary of war and military commanders “to prescribe military areas... from which any or all persons may be excluded.” Although the order did not specify a particular group, 120,000 people of Japanese descent were forcibly removed from their communities and incarcerated in isolated concentration camps on desolate terrain.

### The Five Wisdoms

The Five Wisdoms (Beauty, Art, Animals, Nourishment, Spirit) represent the insights into Rose’s life that Rea gained through compassionate caregiving and deep listening. These wisdoms are based on the special qualities and skills that Rose cultivated throughout her lifetime. “Embracing the dream logic” of Rose’s fragmented recollections, Rea finds answers to questions about Rose’s life that went unanswered throughout their lives together. Seeing beyond the clinical diagnosis of dementia, Rea is able to interpret Rose’s stories and fabulations as allegories that allude to her childhood as the daughter of Nikkei farmers in California’s strawberry fields and her incarceration in a U.S. concentration camp built on the Colorado River Indian Reservation in Poston, Arizona.

### Internment

Internment refers to the “legally permissible” act of confining foreign nationals deemed “alien enemies,” often in large groups, in camps or prison-like facilities during times of war. Critical scholars and activists view

“internment” as an inaccurate and misleading term to describe the experience of American citizens detained and imprisoned by their own government, as two-thirds of Japanese Americans incarcerated during WWII were U.S. citizens.

### Living Archive

The living archive is a theory, method, and praxis for engaging the historical and collective memory of individuals and communities whose presence in the official and formal archive is marked by absences, distortions, and erasures. The stories and lived experiences of marginalized people and spaces are collected, recorded, interpreted, and disseminated to recover unknown histories and repair the historical record. Autoethnography, oral histories, storytelling, testimonials, family archives, ephemera, and cultural, spiritual and ancestral practices serve as sources of critical knowledge. As a strategy, the work of excavating the living archive creates the possibility for transforming dominant social, institutional, and ethical practices and perspectives. In the process, it opens up spaces for healing intergenerational trauma rooted in historical injustices.



# Participants

## **Rose Akiko Tajiri**

Japanese American woman living with dementia; survivor of incarceration in a United States concentration camp

## **Rea Tajiri**

Filmmaker, Rose's daughter and care partner

## **Brion Vincent Tajiri**

Rea's brother



# Key Issues

*Wisdom Gone Wild* is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of particular interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Dementia
- Health and Aging
- Intergenerational Knowledge
- Living Archive
- Deep Listening
- Trauma Informed Care
- Historical Injustice
- Historical Memory
- Historical Trauma
- Japanese American Incarceration during WWII



# Background Information

## Transformative Care in the Shadow of Historical Trauma

How do we care for elders who have experienced historical, intergenerational, and cultural trauma? How do we recover, document, interpret, and transmit the knowledge and wisdom of elders whose recollections are shrouded in the fog of memory loss? How do we develop a sense of care for elders that centers their lived experiences as a way to improve their quality of life? What activities can we engage in with the elders we care for that deepen our understanding of family and community? These are some of the questions at the center of Rea Tajiri's *Wisdom Gone Wild*.

Rea Tajiri's mother, Rose Noda Tajiri, was among the 120,000 Japanese Americans incarcerated in concentration camps after the Japanese military attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. With just two weeks' notice of their removal, Japanese Americans were forced to leave behind their homes, farms, and businesses. In ten camps located on desolate terrain, Japanese Americans were imprisoned behind barbed wire and surveilled by armed guard towers. They lived in overcrowded military barracks and bathed and ate in communal facilities. This erosion of privacy, along with the structures of camp governance, disrupted traditional familial and cultural dynamics. The painful memories of their incarceration were often suppressed, causing gaps in the development of identity and understanding of familial history.

The term historical trauma describes the experience of collective harm due to a group's race, ethnicity, or religion that results in lasting psychological and emotional effects across generations. It has been used to describe the cumulative effects of settler colonialism on Native Americans and other Indigenous communities, Spanish colonization and Anglo neo-colonialism on Mexican Americans, enslavement and Jim Crow on African Americans, and forced migration due to U.S. wars on Asian Americans from Southeast Asia. Research has shown that groups that experience historical trauma have higher rates of cognitive decline, memory loss, and dementia. As people who bear witness to these historical injustices age, the task of caring for them and preserving their historical memory becomes all the more urgent.

## **Historical Memory, Intergenerational Knowledge, and the Living Archive**

The work of engaging with and preserving the memory of elders who have experienced historical trauma can pose particular challenges. People who experience historical trauma are often reluctant to confront it or speak of it. On November 25, 1978, over 2,000 Japanese Americans and their allies gathered at the Puyallup Fairgrounds in western Washington State for the first Day of Remembrance. This was the place where 7,500 Japanese Americans were temporarily imprisoned before being transferred to more permanent concentration camps, and on that day, survivors shared memories. Their public and collective engagement with long suppressed historical memory helped to reenergize and mobilize the movement for redress. The act of collective remembrance still empowers generations of Japanese Americans today. In February 2024, the community gathered again at the fairgrounds to commemorate the historic events through ritual and storytelling. By honoring their elders, they have kept their memories alive while also strengthening their cultural bonds and communal solidarity.

For groups that have experienced historical trauma, an engagement with the living archive is generative. The living archive is a practice that centers the preservation of intergenerational knowledge of groups whose histories are absent, distorted and/or erased from the official archives, such as libraries and museums. It provides an opening for families and communities to engage in an intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Using oral histories, storytelling, testimonials, family archives, ephemera, and cultural, spiritual and ancestral practices, the living archive acknowledges everyday people as important subjects of history. This method can help with the collection of personal and family history and support the identity development of those who engage in it. The living archive is a valuable resource for care partners of people living with cognitive decline, memory loss, and dementia because it encourages humanizing forms of listening to and learning from one another. The living archive can also provide a foundation to build creative activities, join together in celebration, and reinforce the present-day aspects of empowerment. At moments, this work can be heavy, so it is important to remind ourselves that in the present we are connected to healing energies in joy, play, and imagination, which provide strength and resilience.

## **Trauma-Informed Care: Deep Listening and Art**

*Wisdom Gone Wild* demonstrates how trauma-informed care, deep listening, and engagement with art can deepen our understanding of, and transform our relationship with, our elders. Trauma-informed care requires that we realize the impact of trauma in the lives of our care partners, recognize its presence, and respond with methods of care that incorporate knowledge of trauma rooted in historical, cultural, racial, and gender issues. We must also resist retraumatizing our care partners. When Tajiri decides to move Rose to an assisted living facility against her will, she agonizes over how this might retraumatize her mother, who was incarcerated during World War II in a U.S. concentration camp. This moment in the film highlights



one complexity of caring for people with dementia and how we must also recognize the presence of trauma in the people who love and care for them.

Trauma-informed care involves practices that encourage and enable care partners to look beyond the clinical diagnosis of dementia to recognize the full humanity of the people they care for, to realize that they have the capacity for joy and a desire to be heard. Deep listening is increasingly practiced in a variety of settings and disciplines, including healthcare, therapy, social science research, community activism, and art. Tajiri draws her practice of deep listening from Buddhist philosophical traditions that center compassion, empathy, and dialogue in communication. Deep listening allows us to look and listen with compassion and without judgment, healing both listener and speaker. Deep listening helps us practice a form of trauma-informed care that recognizes the behavior, presentation, and responses of people with dementia not as signs of pathology, but as adaptive and creative ways of responding to traumatic experiences—testaments to their resilience.

Research has shown that participation in arts-related activities, whether as viewers or creators, can produce benefits for people living with dementia. An engagement with creative faculties and processes can evoke memories, facilitate communication, reinforce identity, and strengthen relationships with family and care partners. It allows us to engage the power of play and imagination. These outcomes are aligned with tenets of contemporary practice that center relational and compassionate care. As Rose is immersed in a multisensory art exhibit while interacting with children, we can see behind the clinical diagnosis of dementia, and recognize her capacity for joy and desire for community, her full humanity.

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# DISCUSSION PROMPTS

## Starting The Conversation

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

- What were the strongest feelings you experienced while watching this film and where were they located within your body? If this is painful or restricted, can you send energy to that place to release feelings and loosen any knots? Or can you notice what the feelings are connected to?
- What moment(s) from the film did you find most moving, compelling or challenging?
- What aspects of this story most inspired you or surprised you?

# Historical Memory and Intergenerational Knowledge

Rea Tajiri opens her narration with “Throughout our lives, I always had questions about Rose’s past that she would never answer.” What questions about our elders’ lives do we have? How might the answers to these questions help care partners develop practices of care for elders that center their lived experiences as a way to improve their quality of life? Although the memories of people living with dementia might be unreliable and fragmented, the sharing and engagement with their past can be meaningful for them and their care partners, especially when they are a part of your family and community.

- What memories of the past have your elders shared with you?
- How have their stories changed since the onset of dementia or memory loss?
- What memories of the past are your elders reluctant to share?
- Why do you think they keep them from their community of care, including partners, children, grandchildren, and care partners?
- Rea structures the film around the five wisdoms (Beauty, Art, Animals, Nourishment, Spirit) that she learned when Rose shared parts of her life during her dementia. These wisdoms are based on the special qualities and skills that Rose cultivated throughout her lifetime. Can you also come up with five wisdoms you have learned, through care partnering, about your loved one’s special qualities and skills?



# Deep Listening and Trauma-Informed Care

As Rose developed dementia, Rea reflects, “Then, her language and way of communicating changed. A window opened up. I slowed down to embrace the dream logic. Listening...she began to answer.”

## Deep Listening Activity

In pairs, one person shares while the other listens. Switch roles after three minutes. When sharing, the person offers thoughts and reflections about their history, home and work life, how they are feeling at that moment, and anything else that they would like to share. The listener engages without responding or interruption.

- After both have shared, discuss what it felt like in your body to be the listener and the speaker.
- After listening, what did you learn and/or observe about your partner?
- What questions did you want to ask the speaker and how did listening without interruption change the formation of those questions?

In Rose’s dementia, she often misidentifies Rea as her sister, Betty, who died when Rose was fifteen. While this initially troubles Rea, through deep listening she finds this projection of Betty on to her to be a blessing, as she learns how her aunt’s creative spirit resembled her own.

- Is there an individual from your care partner’s past that they mention frequently? Have they mistaken you for this individual?

- What have you learned about this individual?
- What insights have you gained about your care partner and/or yourself by carefully attending to the presence of this individual in your care partner's memories?

Trauma-informed care can sometimes exclusively focus on individual deficit due to social circumstance or individual experience. *Wisdom Gone Wild* shows that effective care for Rose must consider her cultural heritage and historical trauma.

- How do we incorporate knowledge and understanding of the impact of incarceration, racism, war, migration, poverty and other forms of collective and individual trauma into care practices that are humanizing and empowering?

## Living Archive, Art, and Care Partnering

In *Wisdom Gone Wild*, documented conversations between Rea and Rose and reflections about the context of family photos highlight how the living archive is an important resource for effective and transformative care partnering.

- What activities might we engage in with our care partners that includes the use of family/personal photos and videos, memory, and storytelling?

The film opens with a beautifully moving scene of a joyful Rose as she interacts with art and children.

- If art is a source of healing and pleasure, what are some creative activities that we can engage in with our care partners?
- What activities can we engage in together that are pleasurable and that will allow us to engage with play and imagination?
- How might we make these activities interactive and hands-on?
- What components of these activities can include interaction with children and youth?

# CLOSING ACTIVITY

## OPTIONAL

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions

- How has the film transformed or informed your view of caregiving?
- What do you think needs to be changed or transformed in the ways we care for people with dementia and other chronic conditions?

# Resources

## Reimagining Dementia: A Creative Coalition for Justice

Reimagining Dementia is an international group of people living with dementia – carers/care partners, family and community members, dementia activists and allies, health professionals, advocates, artists, academics, policymakers, and others – that view the care and support for all of these groups through the lens of social justice.

## Deep Listening for Social Change

Deep Listening for Social Change is a project that uses deep listening as a tool and encourages participants to engage in conversations that amplify marginalized voices, even when difficult.

## Densho

Densho works to preserve the history of incarceration of Japanese Americans.

## Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing: Video Series

A resource from the University of Minnesota Extension for understanding historical trauma, its present-day effects, and strategies for healing. The website offers video discussion prompts.

## National Institute on Aging (NIA)

A U.S. government source for research, information, and resources on health and aging, the NIA is the primary federal agency supporting and conducting Alzheimer's disease research.

## Rea Tajiri

Filmmaker's official website.

## Trauma-Informed: The Trauma Toolkit (PDF download)

A resource for organizations and service providers to deliver services that are trauma-informed. Published by Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre.

# Teaching Guide

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Participants will be able to plan an engagement that is rooted in the history, memory, and lived experience of an elder and/or care partner. The results of this engagement can serve as the basis or inspiration for longer term projects, including visual artworks, short films, photographic essays, poetry, oral histories, zines, and the like.

## MATERIALS

NOTECARDS  
CHART PAPER  
MARKERS  
NOTEBOOK OR LAPTOP  
*WISDOM GOING WILD* FILM

## TIME REQUIRED

90 MINUTES

## Essential Questions

- How do we improve the quality of life for elders and care partners living with mental and physical health conditions who have experienced personal or historical trauma?
- What can we learn about ourselves, family, and community in the process of caring with our elders and care partners?
- How can we partner with people with dementia to recover, document, interpret, and transmit their knowledge and wisdom?

## Activity

### Connection - 10 minutes

After participants watch the film, the facilitator asks them to sit in a circle. Give each participant two notecards. On the lined side of one notecard, ask each participant to write a response to this question: What does effective care partnering look, sound, and feel like? On the blank side of another card, ask participants to write what they would like to know more about as it relates to care partnering.

After they write, ask them to place both notecards in the middle of the circle for everyone to see. Have them get up and observe what they wrote as a group. Ask them to describe what they noticed about the collective responses.

### Teaching Point - 10 minutes

The facilitator defines the following terms in relation to care partnering: historical trauma, historical memory and intergenerational knowledge, deep listening and trauma-informed care, art and care partnering, and the living archive.



## Active Engagement - 20 minutes

The facilitator models how to apply the above terms to the development of an engagement project with care partners.

1. The facilitator draws the following chart, filling it in using examples from the film.
2. The facilitator asks participants to fill in the chart with additional examples from the film and/or from their own personal, family, and work experience.
3. The facilitator explains that this chart can be used to better understand the impact of trauma on the lives of our care partners and to identify ways to collaborate with them.

<b>Historical Trauma</b>	<b>Historical Memory, Inter-generational Knowledge, and the Living Archive</b>	<b>Trauma-Informed Care: Deep Listening and Art</b>
<p>Ask yourself: How can recognition of the presence of historical or personal trauma inform our care partnerships?</p> <p>Example: Rea agonizes over how moving Rose, against her will, to an assisted living facility would retraumatize her.</p>	<p>Ask yourself: How do we use the living archive as a resource for understanding our care partner's story?</p> <p>Example: Rea uses family photos and video, ephemera, storytelling, and oral history.</p>	<p>Ask yourself: How can deep listening and art be used as forms of trauma-informed care?</p> <p>Example: Through deep listening, Rea recognizes Rose's capacity for pleasure and desire for community. She documents Rose's joy while immersed in art and in community with children.</p>
Participants add to list	Participants add to list	Participants add to list

### **Link- 5 minutes**

Participants individually brainstorm about what type of activities they envision doing with elders, loved ones, or care partners.

### **Workshop - 15 minutes**

Each participant is given chart paper and a marker. During the workshop, each participant duplicates the chart and fills it out as a guide for planning the activities they brainstormed.

### **Gallery Walk - 5 minutes**

Ask participants to post their charts on the walls. Give participants stickies to write affirmations about each other's projects.

### **Collective Reflection - 20 minutes**

Facilitator poses these three questions that can be answered individually in writing or discussed as a group:

1. How has this lesson changed the way you think about how you listen to and learn from elders or care partners?
2. What are the next steps in planning and completing your proposed activities?
3. What else would you like to learn about the themes discussed in the film and/or this lesson?

### **Final Circle - 5 minutes**

Everyone completes this phrase: "I commit to caregiving that looks, feels, and sounds like..."

# Credits & Acknowledgments

## About the Author

**Boone Nguyen** is an artist of the Southeast Asian diaspora. He uses moving images, video vérité, photography, and soundscapes to create immersive installations exploring how the cultural and spiritual practices of displaced communities connect us to our history, build community, and transform places that have been subjected to social and political dislocation. He holds a BA in American studies from Yale University, an MA in ethnic studies from the University of California, San Diego, and an MFA in studio arts from Cal State LA, where he lectures in the Asian and Asian American Studies Department.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE PRODUCERS

Courtney B. Cook, PhD | *Education Manager, POV*

C. Rees | *Education Editor, POV*

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