



Episode 906, Story 1 – Japanese Carved Cane

Tukufu Zuberi: Our first case asks what this cane uncovers about a family's hidden life during World War II. Beginning in the late 1800s, tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants found success as farmers in the fields of California. They raised families far away from the feudal land of their birth. On December 7, 1941, for many, that dream turned into a nightmare. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor cast suspicion on immigrants of Japanese descent. Within months the US Government consigned more than one hundred thousand of them to relocation camps for the duration of the war. Now, Scott Hirotsu of Los Angeles, California has an heirloom which dates back to those difficult days.

Scott Hirotsu: I'm hoping that the cane will unlock some family secrets.

Tukufu: I'm starting my investigation with a few questions for Scott. So what is this you have here?

Scott: It's my grandfather's cane.

Tukufu: Did you know your grandfather very well?

Scott: No. He died the year I was born.

Tukufu: Scott says his grandparents, Kikunoshin and Ichi Hirotsu, were born in Japan in the late 1800s, and came to the United States at the turn of the century. When his grandmother died at age 101, Scott found the cane among her things.



Scott never knew his grandfather to be a woodcarver, so he doesn't know where it came from.

Tukufu: Do you know what this says on the cane?

Scott: I think, I could kind of read this part, which says, it think it says camp. He was in a Japanese internment camp.

Tukufu: A Japanese internment camp? Scott's father and grandparents had been interned at a place called Gila River. Although he says they were largely silent about their experiences, Scott recently learned his grandfather had been moved from the Gila River Camp.

Scott: He was interned at a different interment camp than my father and my grandmother.

Tukufu: They were separated?

Scott: Yes, I think my grandfather was considered a high risk.

Tukufu: Scott says before the war his grandfather had been a senior figure in the Japanese district of Walnut Grove, California. The Japanese called it "Kawashimo."

Scott: He was very involved as a community leader. I know he was put in charge of building the Buddhist temple that's in Walnut Grove.



Tukufu: What questions do you have for me?

Scott: I'd like to find out, what it says, exactly and who made it.

Tukufu: I'll do my best and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. You mind if I take the cane with me?

Scott: Not at all.

Tukufu: Scott's grandfather's cane is the second object that I've had an opportunity to investigate, produced in the Japanese internment camps during World War II. In Season Two, I had a case involving paintings created at a Japanese camp in Tule Lake, California, so I do know about the history of internment. President Franklin Roosevelt's Order 9066, issued in February 1942, allowed the Secretary of War to designate certain areas as military zones from which people could be excluded and eventually removed. And that really led to the creation of ten internment camps all around the United States, to lock up the 120,000 individuals of Japanese ancestry in the United States. Although some people of German and Italian descent were also detained, the vast majority had Japanese ancestry. And that's the racial undertone which really makes the whole internment camp legacy something that was hard to swallow.

Let me see what I can find about Gila River where the cane may have been carved. This camp was opened in July of 1942. And it stayed open until November of 1945. Gila River was built on an Arizona Indian reservation, over the tribes' objections. Thirteen thousand men, women and children were incarcerated there including Issei, those born in Japan like Scott's grandparents,



and Nissei, the next generation born in the United States. I need to find out more about what was going on there. But the next thing I need to do is get the inscription translated. San Francisco-based artist Takayo Muroga Fredericks has agreed to help. Here is the cane.

Takayo Muroga Fredericks: Oh, that's beautiful. This kind of script was more common in, you know, older generation. Some of the characters used here are no longer used. It says "showa 18" here.

Tukufu: Showa 18?

Takayo: Yeah, showa 18 is 1943.

Tukufu: Okay.

Takayo: Yeah. And here it says December.

Tukufu: So this cane was most likely made a little bit prior to December of 1943?

Takayo: I think so, yeah.

Takayo: And here it says Arizona. And here it says concentration camp.

Tukufu: Concentration camp? Takayo says "concentration camp" translates to "a place where people were forced to go." Takayo reads the message on the other side: it is especially evocative.



Takayo: "It's the end of the year, it's quiet in the camp. I live my life for carving, or engraving, all day long." In Japanese culture, New Year is a big holiday. A little bit similar to Christmas here. And I can feel artist's loneliness.

Tukufu: Takayo spots a clue. The artist who made the cane appears to have signed it.

Takayo: Sugiyama Togaku.

Tukufu: Sugiyama Togaku?

Takayo: Yes.

Tukufu: And what is Togaku? That's his first name?

Takayo: Yeah. But often in Japanese traditional painting or calligraphy, people use artistic names instead of real names.

Tukufu: So I should be able to locate Yogaku pretty easily, given that it's a unique name.

Takayo: No, unfortunately because an artist name is not registered as an official record.

Tukufu: Takayo says the surname Sugiyama is common and will be difficult to track down. Perhaps a camp survivor can help me identify the artist. Little is left of the Gila River Camp. After the war, the US returned the land to its Native



American owners. These days, the tribes guard their privacy. Ninety-year-old Mas Inoshito has agreed to meet me at a nearby Phoenix Park. Mas is Issei, born in California in 1919.

Tukufu: So when did you arrive at camp?

Mas Inoshito: June 16, 1942.

Tukufu: How old were you when you arrived at the camp?

Mas: I was 22.

Tukufu: Mas tells me he was farming family land in the Santa Maria Valley when the war began. Six months later, he was relocated.

Mas: Our loyalty was in question. And the fact that we were Japanese made the other Caucasians sure that we were anti-American, that we would do anything to hurt America's cause.

Tukufu: Like most detainees, Mas says he was sent first to an assembly center. These were often converted horse stalls at racetracks and fairgrounds.

Mas: They were holding us captive until the real camps could be built.

Tukufu: Gila River, he says, was an improvement.

Mas: Real nice looking buildings. Double roofs to take care of the heat.



Tukufu: There was a school, scouts, even a camp newspaper. But no one could leave. How long were you at the camp?

Mas: Not too long, almost at the same time the United States Army has discovered that they needed to find people who could read, write and speak Japanese.

Tukufu: Mas left camp in 1942, after volunteering for the Army.

Mas: Even though I knew my father would oppose it. He was a citizen of Japan and he always told me, "Do not fight Japan." But I felt that, "Hey, I'm an American."

Tukufu: Mas' patriotism came at a high cost. He says his father never spoke to him again. So this is the cane that I'm investigating.

Mas: Arizona, Shuuyousho Kenen. And underneath it's a little more difficult.

Tukufu: I read Mas the inscription and the artist's name: Togaku Sugiyama. He doesn't recognize the carver, but he says canes were a part of life at Gila River. They were carved by older men, first generation Issei.

Mas: And surprising number of immigrant Japanese turned to small artwork in order to pass the time.



Tukufu: But Mas thinks Togaku Sugiyama's poignant words, "I live my life for carving," suggests he might have made other art. Look, you have been a tremendous help.

Mas: I'm glad I could be of some help.

Tukufu: Who was the carver who quietly mourned that New Year's of 1943 at the Gila Camp? Delphine Hirasuna is the author of "The Art of Gaman" about relocation camp art.

Tukufu: Hello!

Delphine Hirasuna: Hi. Nice to meet you.

Tukufu: Delphine shows me other examples of relocation camp canes. Delphine says the stoic longing of our carving embodies the Japanese concept of *gaman*.

Delphine: *Gaman* is to bear the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity. Grin and bear it. They had lost everything. How do you retain your sense of self? And part of it is creating something that is sort of uniquely your own. You know, there's no furniture. Okay, we'll make a chair. The soil is sandy and gritty and it's hard to walk, we'll make canes.

Tukufu: Have you ever heard of an artist named Togaku Sugiyama?

Delphine: Sugiyama is a very common name. It's like saying, have you ever heard of Smith before.



Tukufu: But the date, 1943, captures her attention. She says that year had been especially conflicted for the inmates at the camps. In early 1943, the US Government had distributed a questionnaire.

Delphine: Most of the questions were pretty routine, but two of them were particularly troubling to the people in the camp. One of the questions asked, “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces and fight overseas?”

Tukufu: And the other question?

Delphine: It asked if you were willing to foreswear any loyalty to the Emperor of Japan. The people who were immigrants to this country, because they were not allowed to become US citizens, they found that question very troubling. If we sign yes to this, then basically we’d become people without a country.

Tukufu: For many American-born Issei, the questionnaire was also troubling.

Delphine: They felt it was a trick question too, saying wait a second. We’re US citizens. We never swore allegiance to the Emperor of Japan. And the people who signed no to those two questions were called no-no’s.

Tukufu: The vast majority signed the documents, but several thousand refused. Many to protest how they had been treated. So what happened to the no-no’s? Delphine says no-no’s were sent to different camps, some run by the relocation authority, others by the Department of Justice.



Delphine: This divided whole families. This divided generations.

Tukufu: I'm reminded of Scott's grandfather, and how he was separated from his family at Gila River Camp. Do you think he could have been part of those who were somehow affiliated with this movement?

Delphine: It's possible.

Tukufu: Delphine thinks the Gila River Camp itself might hold the answer to our cane. It's bit of a long shot, but was Scott's family incarcerated nearby anyone named Sugiyama? Jane Nakasako is a manager at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles.

Jane Nakasako: This is the final accountability roster.

Tukufu: The center holds official records about ethnic Japanese evacuated into relocation camps during World War II. Can we look at the Hirotsus?

Jane: Yes we can.

Tukufu: Is this them here?

Jane: Ah, Kikunoshin...

Tukufu: Ishi.

Jane: Ishi.



Tukufu: Yes. She finds 17 Sugiyamas in Gila River. These are all the Sugiyamas that were at Gila River?

Jane: Yes.

Tukufu: Jane suggests looking for older Sugiyamas, who would've used the old-fashioned calligraphy.

Jane: I think if you look at the birth dates, you can see, based on the year that they were born, if they were first generation.

Tukufu: And what year were they born in?

Jane: Normally, late 1880's, 1890's.

Tukufu: We find four Sugiyamas of the right age.

Jane: We can look at each block number and see where they were all living, and see their proximity to each other.

Tukufu: Gila was divided into different camps, Butte and Canal. They were three miles away from each other. So these are the two camps.

Jane: We have three candidates over here in Butte. Keisaburo Sugiyama, the Shigemi Sugiyama Family, and the Torakichi Sugiyama Family.



Tukufu: Right, how about the Hirotsu Family? Where did they live?

Jane: We have the Hirotsus living here in Block 7, and then the Isaburo Sugiyama Family lives in Block 25.

Tukufu: Right behind them?

Jane: Yes.

Tukufu: Isaburo Sugiyama could be our artist, but Jane has no way to confirm. Isaburo and his wife, Tomi, are not listed as having children. This may be a dead end. But Jane thinks she might be able to help us figure out our other mystery: why and when Scott's grandfather had been relocated to a different camp.

Jane: So this is a Freedom of Information Act file. And we're going to do a search on Kikunoshin Hirotsu and see what comes up. It says right here that this group of men were apprehended.

Tukufu: Scott really needs to see what Jane finds next. This cane was made by a guy named Togaku Sugiyama.

Scott: Okay, great.

Tukufu: And Togaku here is his artistic name. So you wouldn't find that in any government records. I show Scott the inscription on the cane and explain the meaning: the artist's loneliness at the New Year, forced to be in the camp.



Scott: It's brings in a lot of emotion.

Tukufu: That's not where the story stops. I explain how the date on the cane helped point me to the unknown story behind his grandfather's separation from his family.

Jane: This group of men were apprehended by bureau agents for interfering with the enlistment in the military in Gila River and trying to advise men against signing the loyalty pledge.

Tukufu: So is it safe to assume that Scott's grandfather was a part of the no-no movement?

Jane: Yeah, according to this document, he was definitely opposed to both. He was pretty brave.

Tukufu: I explain how we may never know exactly why his grandfather refused to sign a loyalty oath. But it had been an act of conscience that had separated him from his family.

Scott: Makes me feel good. Gives me a lot of pride.

Tukufu: The document revealed something else. Scott had always thought the cane was his grandfather's, but it's dated December 1943, 10 months after Kikunoshin Hirotsu was arrested and removed from the camp. So it was your grandmother's cane. The cane had waited half a century to reveal this information.



Scott: Sits in the corner, kind of hiding secrets.

Tukufu: In plain view for those who can see.

Scott: Yes. Yeah. Exactly.

Tukufu: Since the end of filming, the History Detectives have tried to track down relatives of the Sugiyamas relocated to Gila River. While we have yet to identify the artist, we did find a tantalizing clue in the Gila River Camp newspaper from 1942. The third prize in an art contest was awarded to T. Sugiyama for wood carving.