



Searching for Saito

a
komorebi
history

by Miya Sukune

For the past and present and future residents of
Seattle's Chinatown, Nihonmachi, Filipino Town,
and Little Saigon: the International District.

We are not anonymous.

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Free PDF edition available on www.SearchingforSaito.com

Searching for Saito is a researched and imagined life story of a real individual
who lived from 1888 to 1969. The discovery of additional information may affect future
narratives found within this edition.



OFFICE OF ARTS & CULTURE
SEATTLE

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instrumental in providing funding for this project.



A note to the reader

In Japanese, the word komorebi translates as “sunlight flowing through trees” - a description of the impermanent reality of the sunshine and shadows shimmering through and around the leaves. This is how I think of this book’s narrative. It is research and imagination softening their shared boundaries into story: a komorebi life.

When I began researching, all I had were three facts: his last name was Saito, he lived in the Eclipse Hotel and he played baseball with Chinatown kids. Chasing an idea, I explored the newly released 1950 US Census and discovered Rinzo Saito, 63 years old, residing in the Eclipse Hotel. Unclear on whether he was the Saito mentioned in **International Examiner** articles from the 1970’s by young adults who remembered his kindness, I proceeded on a fact-finding journey that uncovered far more information about Rinzo Saito than I anticipated. I was surprised that a bachelor Japanese elder whose obituary cites no organizations or affiliations has an accessible recorded legacy.

I assembled a timeline of Saito’s life from researched items found in the Resource Materials section at the end of this book. The “Saito Remembered” section lists articles, interviews and materials that record memories of Saito. A transcript from his World War II incarceration at Fort Missoula contains the only words directly from him. Without letters or diaries by Saito to work from, I created his life vignettes from imagination. Eventually, I found a brief profile in the book **Issei** that confirmed Rinzo Saito was the baseball loving Saito of Chinatown’s baseball playing youths.

I offer this book in remembrance of Rinzo Saito and to the lives entwined with his.



Saito would arrive at 12 noon to the Chong Wa Benevolent Association's playground. He carried a bag of baseball equipment.

"He would point - it's coming to you!" remembers Tony Chinn.



"He said, "We play baseball! **Baseball!**" I was one of the older guys. So okay, I'd say, "Listen, divide up the teams!" And Saito can pitch. So he pitched. And he was umpire, too. And we would argue "Saito is he out?!"

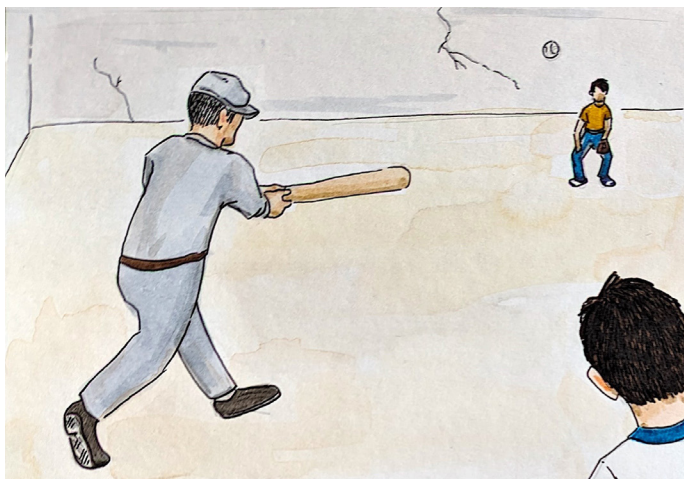
Saito would motion "Out!"

He'd say somebody go buy soda and he'd give him a couple dollars. It was 10 cents a soda back then. And he'd buy soda for everybody."



“Tony!
Number one hit!
Number one catch!”





“He brought base-
ball mitts. After we
played, you’d give it
back to him and he
said, “No, you keep
it.”



He gave it to us
because we were
regulars. A half
dozen of us kids.”

Games were at noon
and later in the day.



“After a while he started giving coins after we finished playing. He would dole out coins, like quarters and stuff,” Tony said.

“At 6 o’clock, Albert had to go to his father’s business, the Wah Young Company, to eat. His father told him, “You be on time!”

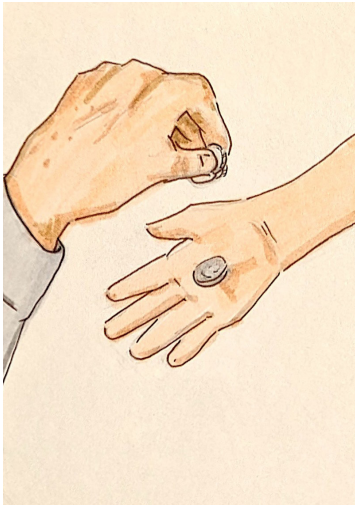


The employees ate at 6 o’clock. You better be there because it’s respectful. You know, you’re just a kid and you are not coming late to dinner.”

“Come 6 o’clock Albert says, “I have to go!” Then we would tease him and say “Saito, he’ll come back! You don’t have to pay him now!” laughed Tony.

Saito gave Albert coins despite the teasing of other children.

“You know, we were poor then. No one had an allowance unless you had a grandfather or someone to get nickels and dimes from,” explains Tony.



The 1950 United States Census records
were released April 2022.

Families and single men and women lived in places like the Oak
Tin, Eclipse Hotel, Eastern Hotel, and Rex Hotel in Chinatown.

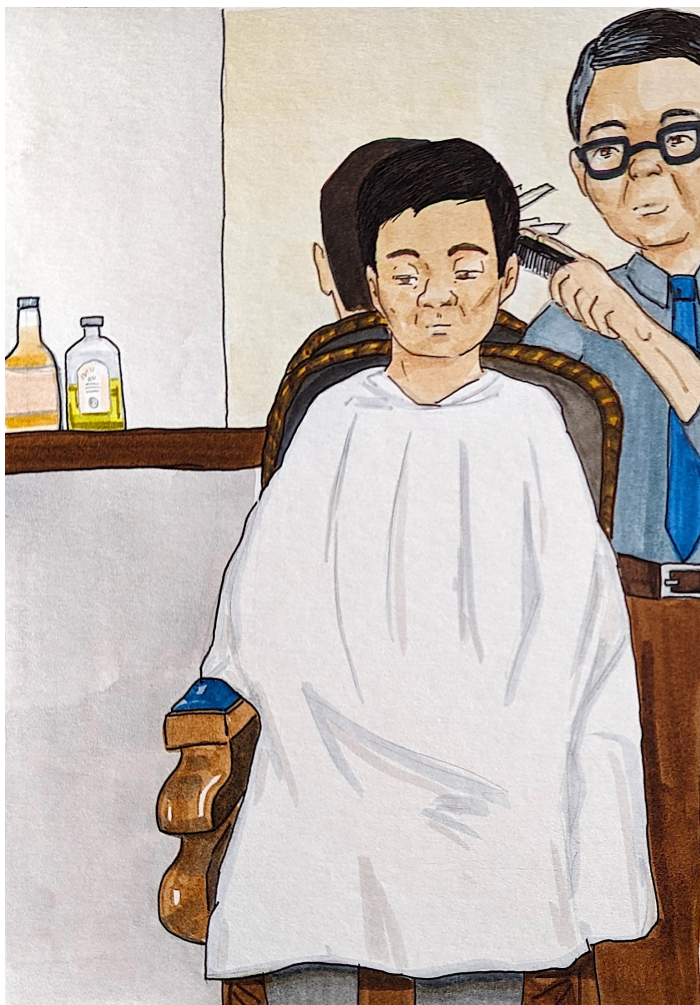


Dong, 43 years old. A
cook at a restaurant.

G.W., age 67. A
carpenter employed
at a carpentry shop.



Raymond, age 24, manager at a restaurant. Winston, 22 years old, and
Byron, 19 years old, born in Washington state. Maymie, 25 years old, a
director for teenagers at the YWCA in Seattle.

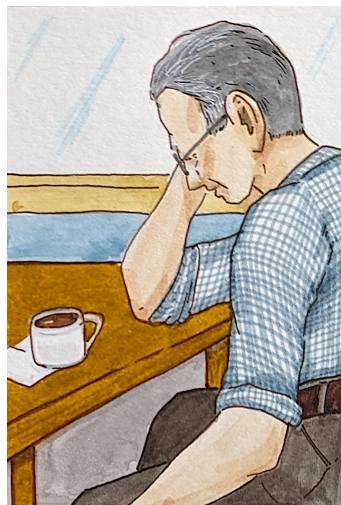


Nguey, 36 years old and a store clerk at a grocery store.

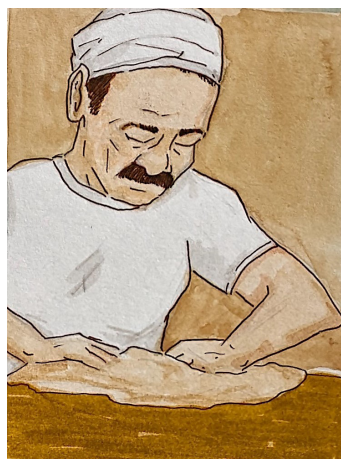
Chong, 55 years old, and a restaurant waiter.

Higot, a 46 year old Swedish fisherman working at sea.

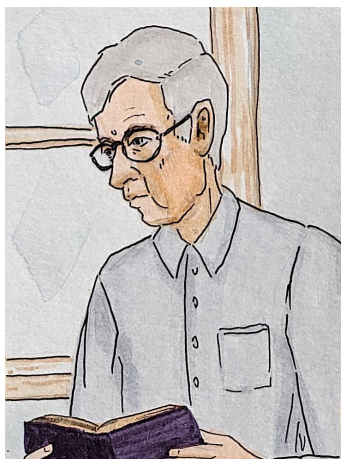
William, 62 years old, and a barber. He was one of many Japanese barbers in Seattle during the first half of the 20th century.



Kelly, 50 years old, from Texas is a forestry crew leader.
Okada, 53 years old, from Japan is a coffee shop waitress.
Harry, 68 years old, born in Pennsylvania, is unemployed.



Yanko, 71 years old, from Montenegro is unemployed.
Cecil, 42 years old, born in Indiana, works for the U.S. government
as a census taker.
Charles, 51 years old, from Nebraska, works at a bakery.



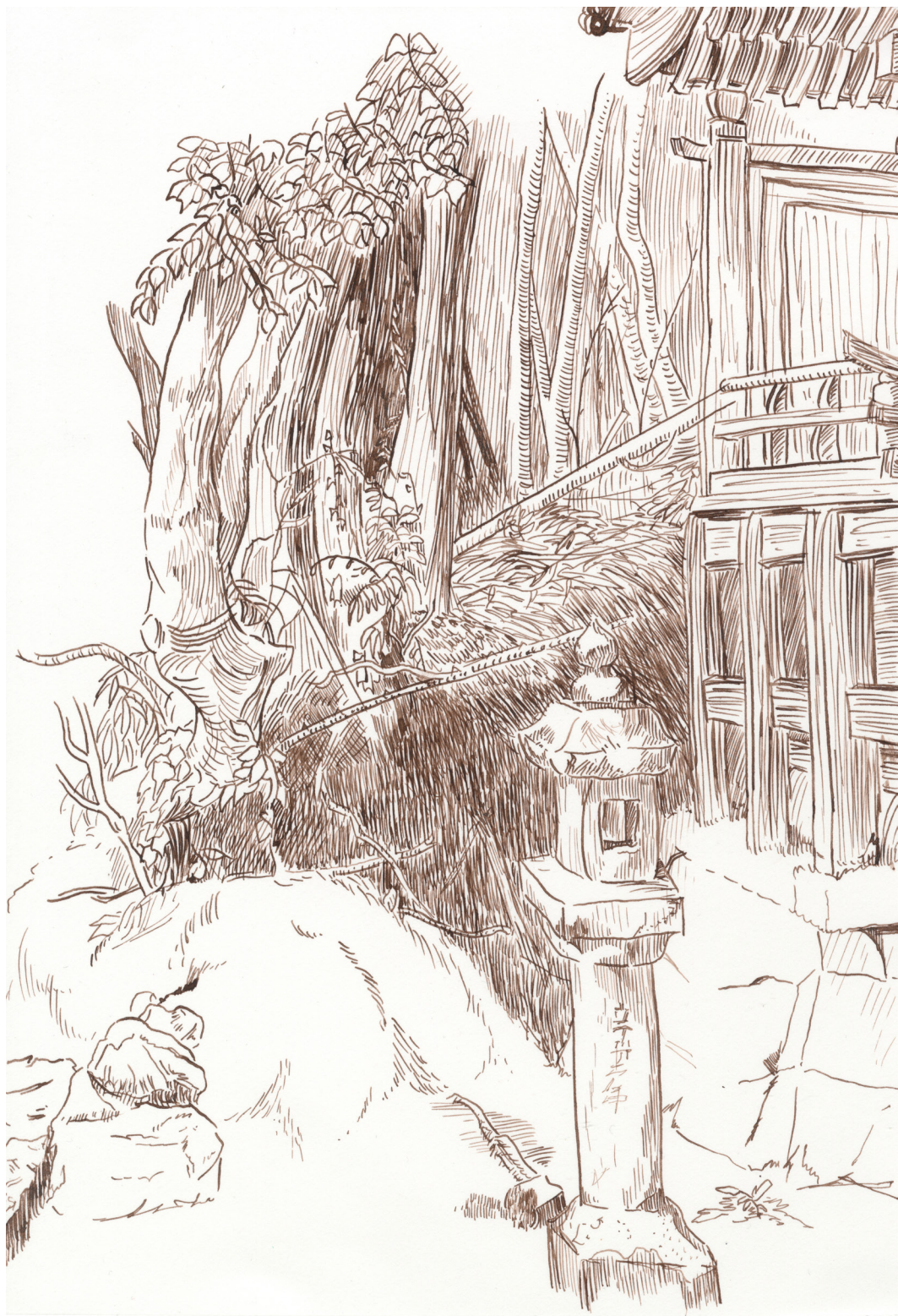
Emil, a 77 year old born in Finland, is unemployed.
Carl, a 71 year old Norwegian immigrant, is unemployed.
Rinzo, a 63 year old born in Japan, works at a club.

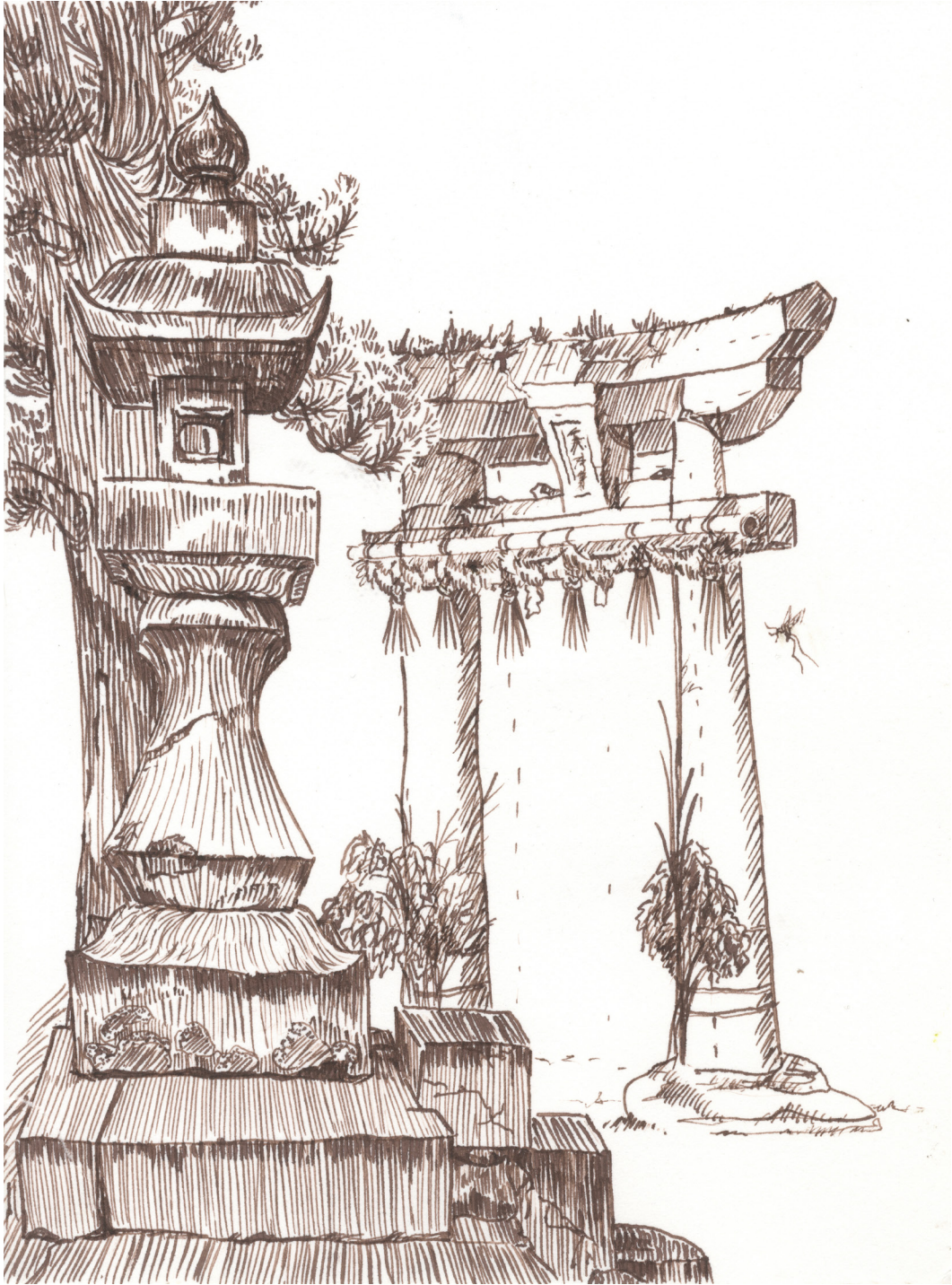


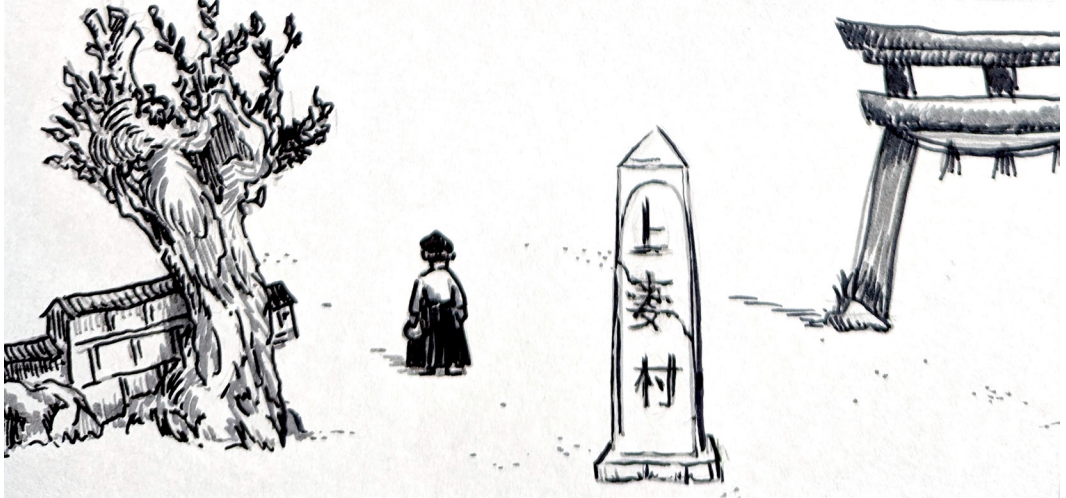
His full name is Rinzo Saito. He lives at the Eclipse Hotel located at 670 Weller Street in Seattle, Washington. He worked 48 hours the previous week. He never married.

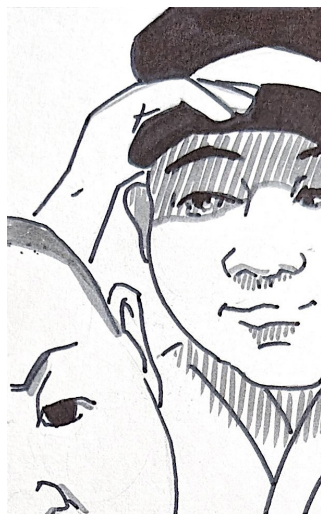
He was born in 1888 in Kamitsuma, Japan.









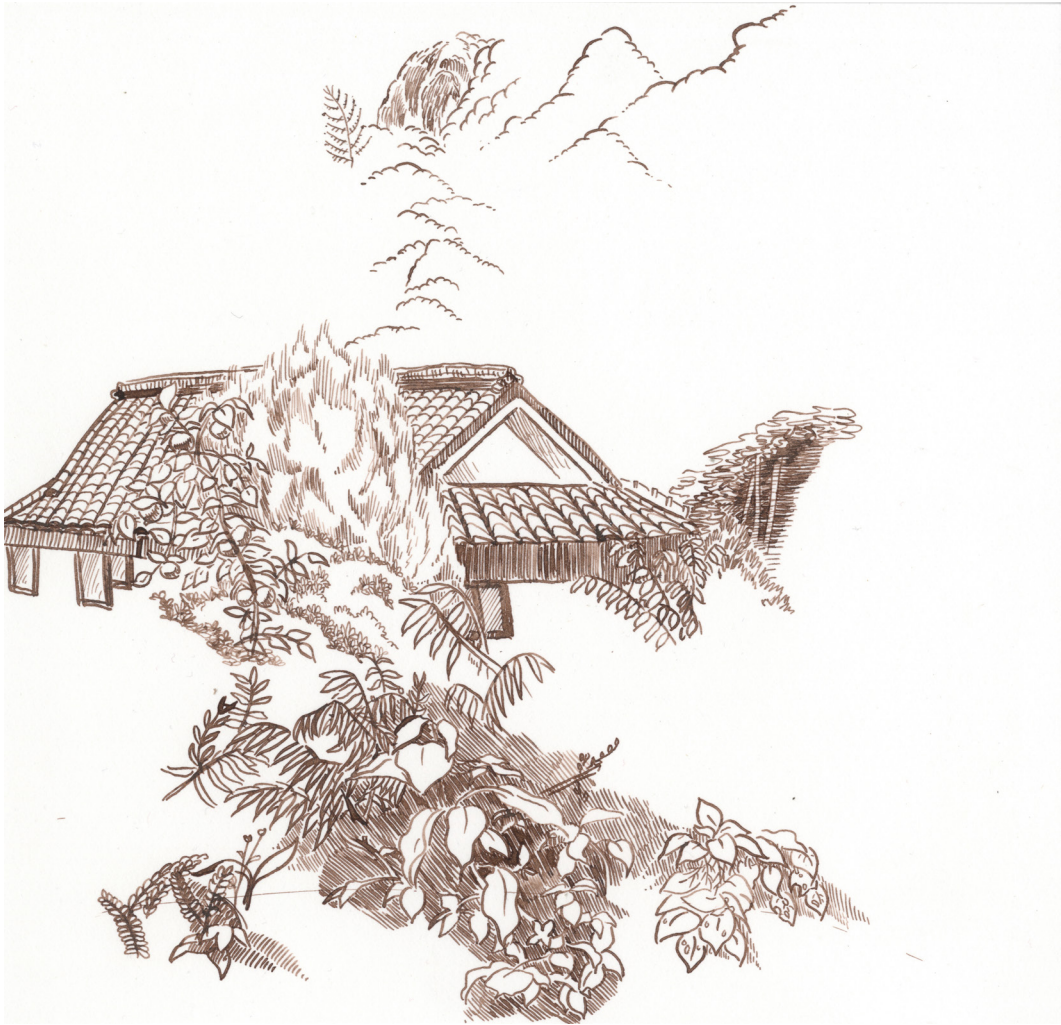




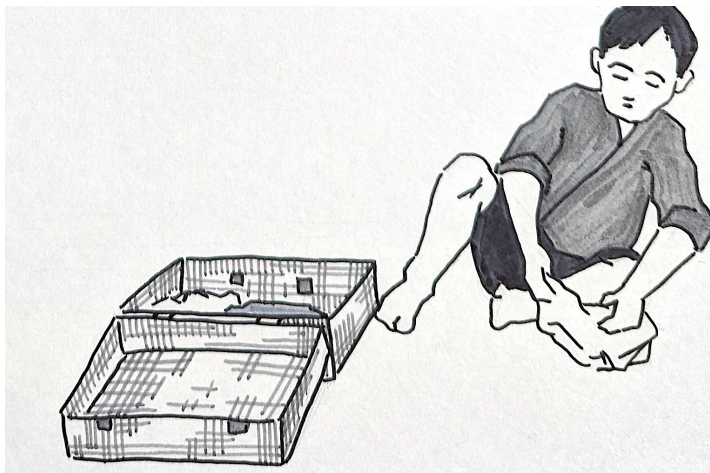
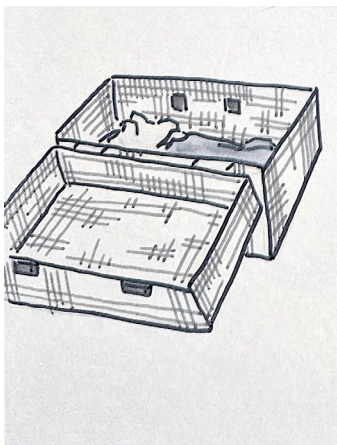
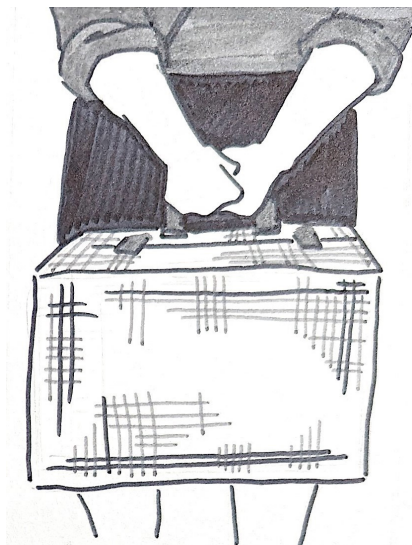


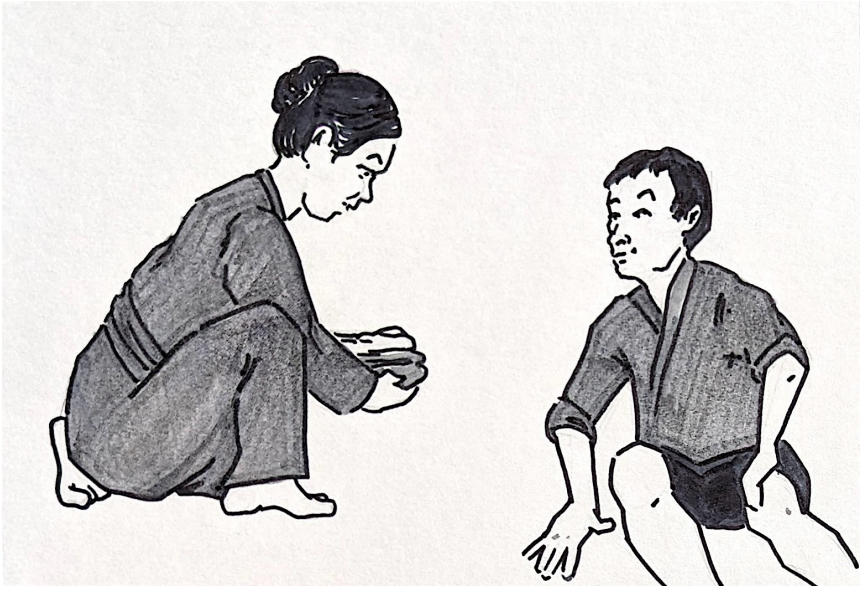


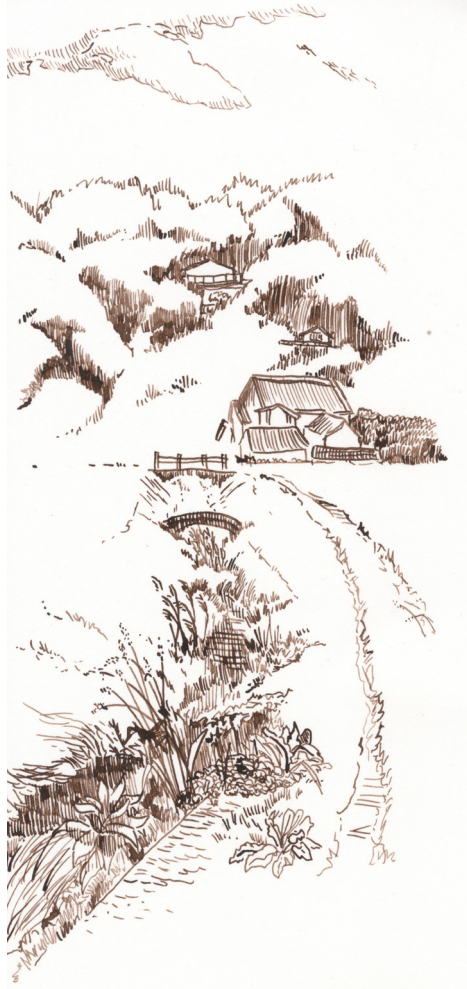




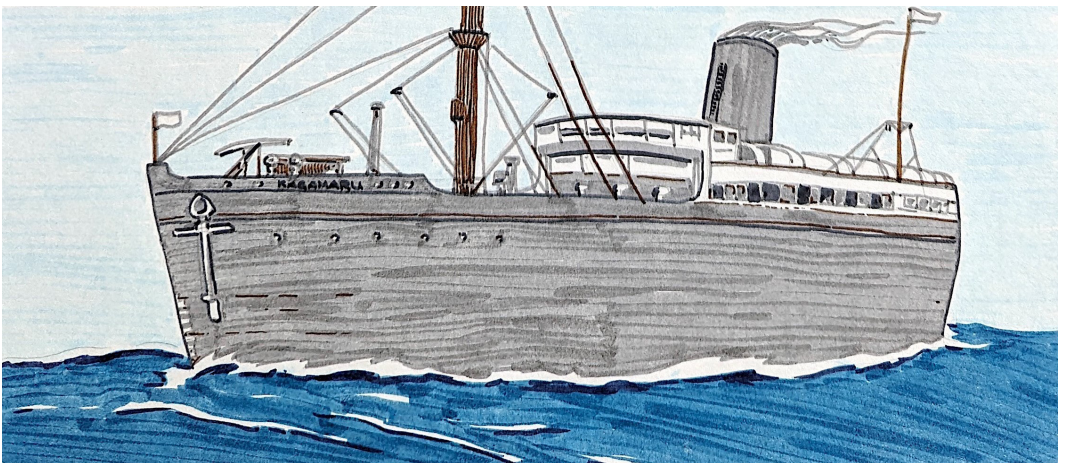








After leaving his hometown of Kamitsuma in Japan, Saito worked as a waiter and a cook on ships crossing the Pacific Ocean.









“You’re a cook, Saito! No sitting on deck!

Go below deck if you want to sit!”





ALIEN

Saito Rinzo
waiter Japanese
28th Aug 1908 Kibbe

Oct 16, 1908
Seattle Wash.

Checked O.K. on arrival
checked aboard crew on departure
found all aboard except
No. 14 on list 2

CREW

Saito Rinzo
3rd cook

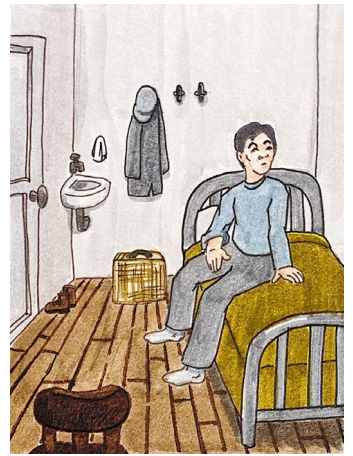
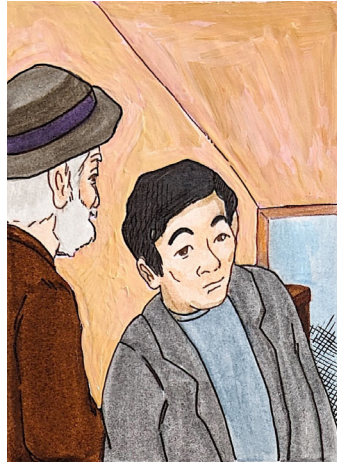
WHEN AND WHERE SHIPPED		EVIDENCE OF INTENTION TO REMAIN IN US
DATE	PLACE	
15th April	Yokohama	NO
"	"	"
"	"	"
"	"	"
20th May	"	"
15th April 1912	"	"
22nd May 1912	"	"
"	"	"
13th April 1912	"	"
"	"	"
21st Feb. 1911	"	"

LIST

Saito Rinzo
AGE 22 EMPLOYMENT Cook
Sado Maru, sailing from Victoria, B.C. Aug 28, 1912
NATIONALITY JAPAN
YOKOHAMA
EVIDENCE OF INTENTION TO REMAIN IN THE U.S. NO.



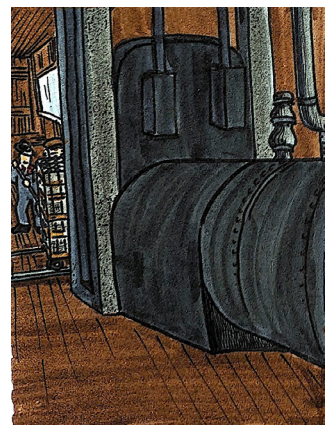
Deserted at Seattle
12-2-12



Seattle, Washington. 1912.



With Seattle as homebase, work in the Alaska canneries during the salmon season became part of life's rhythm.







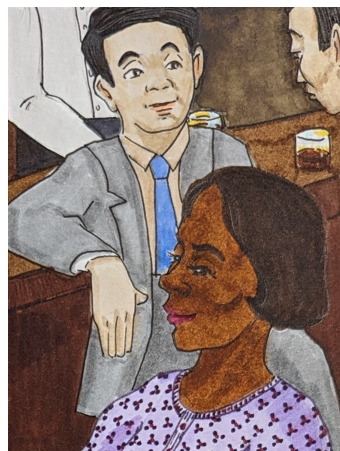




Indigenous, Chinese, Filipino, Scandinavian, Italian, Croatian and Japanese people did dangerous work from fishing to lead soldering cans and slicing innumerable fish every day. One day a new butchering machine was introduced and the ring of singing knives was replaced by a machine named "The Iron Chink" - a terrible slur against once valuable workers.

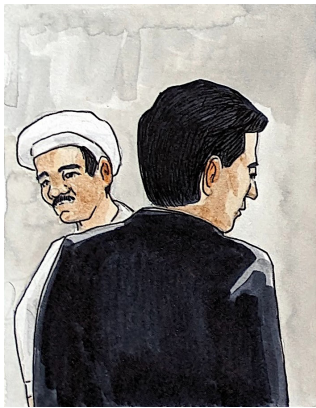
Returning to Seattle during the off-season, Saito worked in the thriving entertainment district of the Jackson Street jazz clubs. Edythe Turnham and her Knights of Syncopation played frequently.



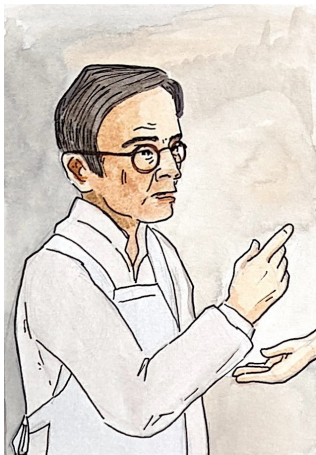


Saito worked at the Toyo Club, one of the largest Japanese gambling clubs on the West Coast. He worked as a porter and cook, and ran the gambling games as well.





“A full house
tonight!”





From 1912 to 1941, Saito worked in the Nihonmachi and Chinatown. He lived in the Rex Hotel on King Street and on Jackson Street in a building later demolished for the I-5 highway corridor in the 1960's. He shopped at Higo Ten-Cent Store and walked up and down the neighborhood hills. At the Nippon Kan Theater, he heard songs that reminded him of his childhood, of his mother singing while she cooked. During the New Year celebrations crackled through the streets, the smell of incense and sound of drums and firecrackers welcomed each year.



By 1940, the Nihonmachi (also known as Japantown) had grown to more than 10,000 residents.

Shortly after the December 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, the arrests and interrogation by FBI agents of Nihonmachi leaders, business owners and elders began.

On February 21, 1942, an FBI special agent and two King County sheriff deputies arrested Rinzo Saito at the Rex Hotel. Among the “prohibited articles seized” were photos of himself and friends, Japanese magazines, a map written in Japanese and other papers written in Japanese.



Saito was incarcerated at the Immigration and Naturalization Services Building. He was interrogated on his memberships with organizations, his family in Japan and where he worked.



**From the National Archives
(Archives.gov):**

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 that authorized military commanders to exclude civilians from military areas. Although the language of the order did not specify any ethnic group, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt of the Western Defense Command proceeded to announce curfews that included only Japanese Americans.

General DeWitt first encouraged voluntary evacuation by Japanese Americans from a limited number of areas. About seven percent of the total Japanese American population in these areas complied. Then on March 29, 1942, under the authority of Roosevelt's executive order, DeWitt issued Public Proclamation No. 4, which began the forced evacuation and detention of Japanese-American West Coast residents on a 48-hour notice. Only a few days prior to the proclamation, on March 21, Congress had



passed Public Law 503, which made violation of Executive Order 9066 a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

In the next six months, approximately 122,000 men, women, and children were forcibly moved to "assembly centers." They were then evacuated to and confined in isolated, fenced, and guarded "relocation centers," also known as "internment camps." The 10 sites were in remote areas in six western states and Arkansas: Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Tule Lake and Manzanar in California, Topaz in Utah, Poston and Gila River in Arizona, Granada in Colorado, Minidoka in Idaho, and Jerome and Rowher in Arkansas.

Nearly 70,000 of the evacuees were American citizens. The government made no charges against them, nor could they appeal their incarceration. All lost personal liberties; most lost homes and property as well.









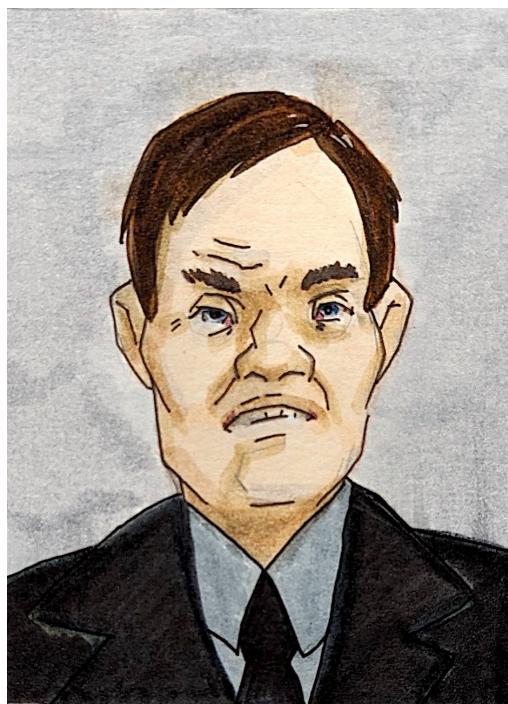
By April 1942, Saito had been incarcerated at Fort Missoula, Montana, a Department of Justice camp. He endured more interrogations and allegations.



“State your full name.”
“Raymond M. Tong.”

“What is your full title?”
“Immigrant Inspector.”

Inspector Tong explained his qualifications as follows: “I have completed a course ... which qualifies me as a fingerprint expert and a bertillion identification expert. Together with this, I have studied “Personal Description” by C. Vogel; “Policia Cientifica” by Camra; “Anatomical Description of the Personal Features” by Otten Loghi; “Up From the Apes” by Hooten; and “Our Face, from Fish to Man” by William K. Gregory. These volumes constitute the only known contributions to this subject matter.”



After looking at photos of Saito and another person Tong said: “In my opnion, I do not believe there exists any reasonable doubt but that they are photographs of the same person.”

Saito asked, “You said these two pictures are those of the same person. Then what does that mean?” Tong told Saito that he was not Saito, but a different person altogether.

Saito further asked, “Were my fingerprints the same as those [of the other person]?” He was told no.

“Then [that person] has no fingerprints?” Saito asked again.

“No,” Tong verified.

“Then where did you get that picture which you think is similar to my picture?” queried Saito.

“[The photo was] contained in the official Los Angeles file... of one Sakado Hikuemon, who was admitted in transit through the United States at San Francisco, March 30, 1929.”

“Is that person here now?” Saito asked.

“In my opinion,” answered Inspector Tong, “you are the same person.”

Saito was one of many individuals who had his identity questioned.



By June 1942, the mistreatment of the Japanese immigrants at Fort Missoula had been reported by several outside officials and an investigation began. Saito testified that he was physically shaken by an inspector and struck by an interpreter. He also said he was made to stand entire days without lunch and an inspector corroborated saying Saito was forced to stand eight hours a day for three or four days straight. Other Japanese men were hit hard enough they bled or lost teeth. An elder was made to stand outside for hours when the temperature was thirty below zero. The inspectors were found guilty but received minimal punishment for their abusive behavior.

Raymond M. Tong continued his career as an inspector for U.S. Immigrations, returning to San Diego, California after his time in Montana.

Sakado Hikuemon, travelling with his wife in 1929, had become a farmer in Mexico.

Saito was transferred to Santa Fe's Department of Justice camp on April 6, 1944.















At the camp, Saito once again worked as a cook.



“Saito, help the dinner crew with the fish shipment!”

The fish had arrived with maggots.





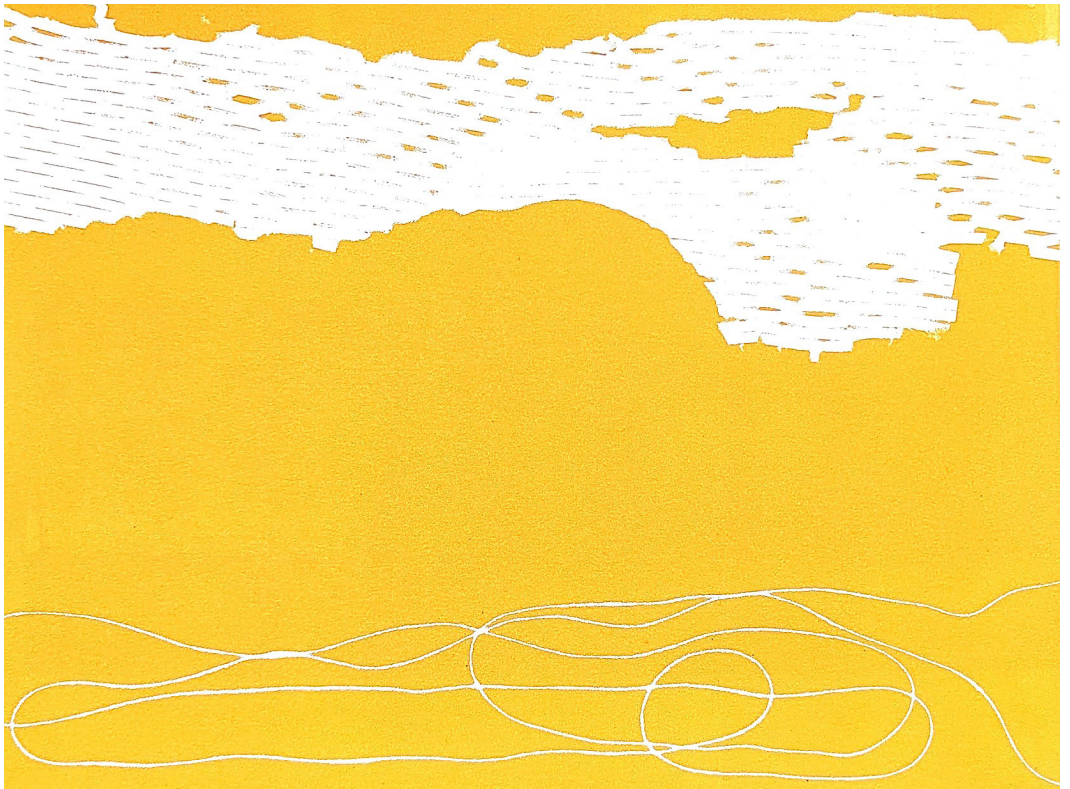
Baseball games provided laughter and exercise in the sparse landscape under the camp guard towers.

The kitchen work provided nourishment, though Saito found it difficult to stomach slicing away mold from the day's hot dogs. As the incarcerated at the camp grew their own vegetables, fresh food supplies improved.





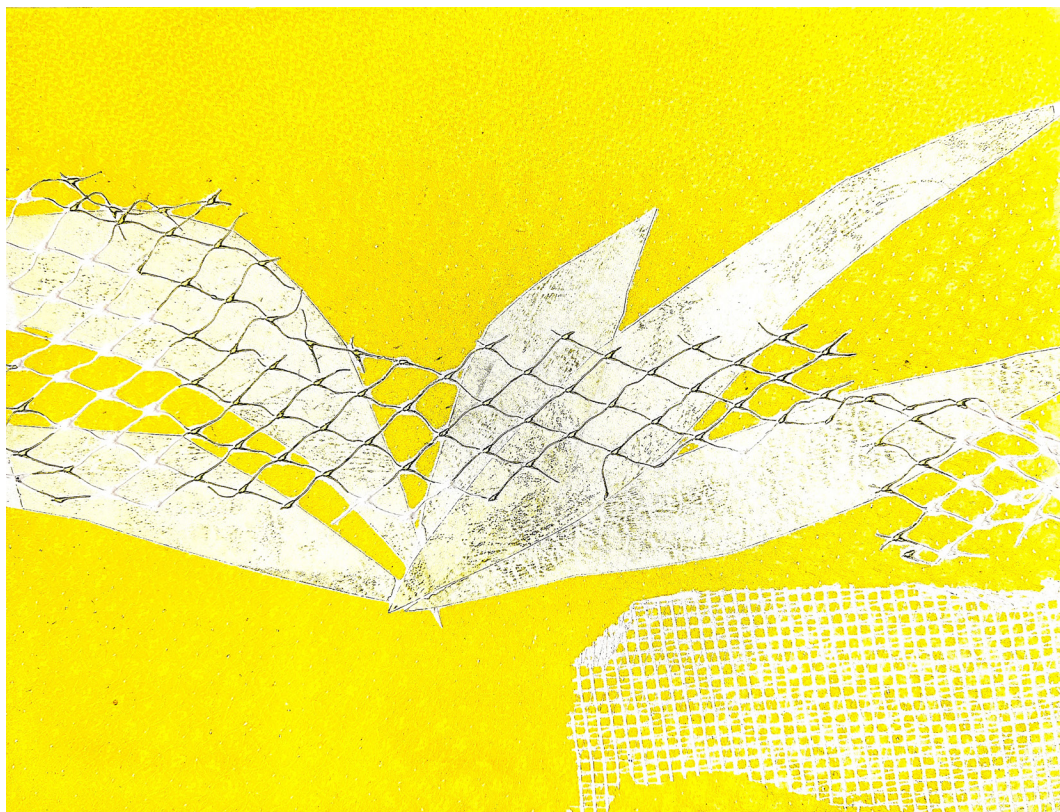
At night, search lights moved back and forth illuminating the barbed wire fences. The song “Don’t Fence Me In” was popular among the youth as they sang to protest their incarceration.



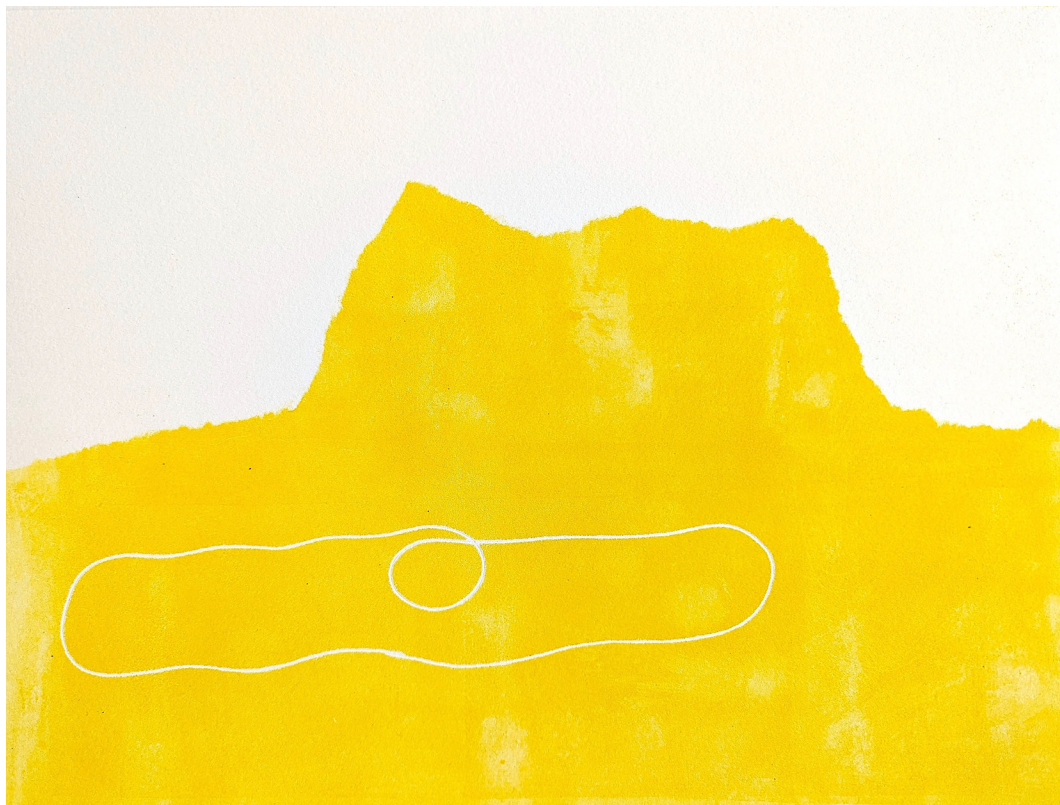
In the distance, past the barbed wire fences, the sun rose over the hills.



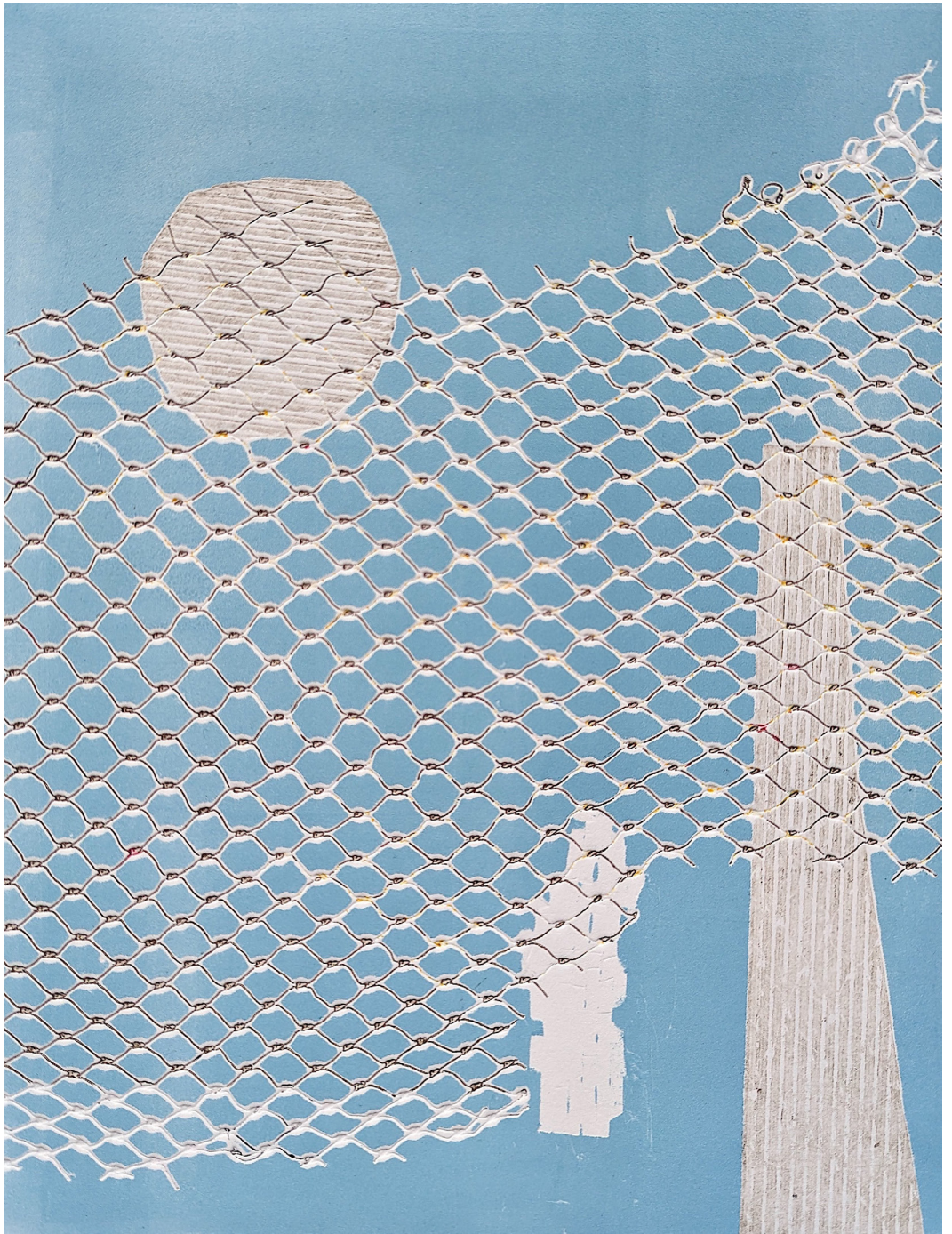
Seasons pass and spring comes again.

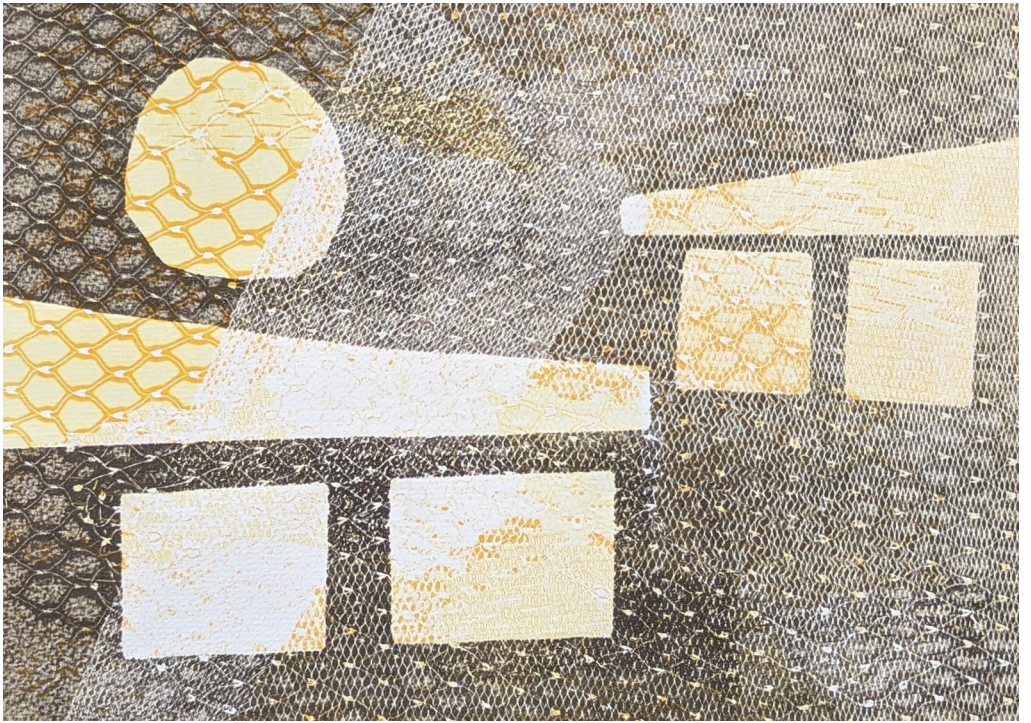


The flowers couldn't be contained by the fences.



And the mountains were not encircled by the wire.





In February 1946, six months after the war ended, documents were signed directing that Saito “an enemy alien be released.” He left the Santa Fe Department of Justice camp on March 5th, headed to Seattle. The detention facility closed in May 1946.

By 1950, he had returned to the Nihonmachi and was living on Weller Street and working at a club. He had pieced life together again in the neighborhood he had lived in for four decades. Baseball games in the lot near the club provided fun for himself and Chinatown’s kids.





In 1960, Saito returned to Japan for the first time and last time since 1912. He reunited with his sister and visited the graves of his parents, family and friends.





“HEY! Anyone see Saito lately?”

“Can’t say that I have.”

“Nope.”

“No.”

“Who?”

“Not for years, man.”



“... his name was Saito...”

“He lived at the Eclipse Hotel.”

“I thought his name was Sato? Or Seto?”

“He worked at the Wah Mee.”

“...we often went looking for Saito...”

“... friends like Saito made growing up a little bit easier.”



“...we often went looking for Saito, but never found him. There was so much we wanted to say to him, to thank him for caring about street kids whom he barely knew, giving us money when he knew that we did not have any, playing with us when he had nothing better to do, being a friend, showing us that the generation gap really meant nothing.”

– from “Ghosts of Childhoods Past”,
International Examiner.



More research material surfaced as this book went to print. Questions were answered and more were asked.





The search for Saito is not over.



Thank you to Dean Wong, Donnie Chin, Ron Choi and Tony Chinn. Saito is remembered and searched for because of your shared memories.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

A free PDF version of this book is available at SearchingforSaito.com. Updates and additional materials can be found at the site.

Saito Remembered - Rinzo Saito described in articles, interviews, and transcripts:

Chin, Donnie. "Ghosts of Childhoods Past." International Examiner, December 15, 1982, <https://iexaminer.org/ghosts-of-childhoods-past-by-donnie-chin/>

Wong, Dean. "Saito, the Cat Lady, Bruce Lee and others..." International Examiner, July 1977.

Van Valkenburg, Carol Bulger, "An Alien Place: The Fort Missoula, Montana Detention Camp, 1941 - 1944" (1988). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 1500. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1500>

Interview with Dean Wong. February 18, 2023.

Interview with Tony Chinn and Ron Choi. February 23, 2023

Issei by Kazuo Ito. Brief profile of Rinzo Saito in this 1973 book.

Little Three Grand by Dean Wong. Unpublished novel based on Wong's experiences.

Transcript of hearing with Raymond M. Tong & Rinzo Saito, 1942, The Dennis Crowley Collection, Courtesy of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula Collections

Books, Essays, Articles and Transcripts:

Building Tradition: Pan-Asian Seattle and Life in the Residential Hotels by Marie Rose Wong, PhD

Colors of Confinement: Rare Kodachrome Photographs of Japanese American Internment in World War II by Bill T. Manbo

Jackson Street After Hours: The Roots of Jazz in Seattle by Paul de Barros

Meet Me at Higo: an Enduring Story of a Japanese American Family by Ken Mochizuki

My Unforgotten Seattle by Ron Chew

We Hereby Refuse by Frank Abe and Tamiko Nimura

"Years of Wonder" essay by E.B. White

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki

Citizen 13660 by Miné Okubo

Fighting for America: Nisei Soldiers by Lawrence Matsuda and Matt Sasaki

The Four Immigrants Manga: a Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904 - 1924

by Henry (Yoshitaka) Kiyama

Seattle's 1962 World's Fair by Bill Cotter

Seattle's Streetcar Era: an Illustrated History, 1884 - 1941 by Mike Bergman

They Painted From Their Hearts: Pioneer Asian American Artists, catalog

edited by Mayumi Tsutakawa for the Wing Luke Asian Museum

Those Who Helped Us by Ken Mochizuki and Kiku Hughes

Trailblazing Black Women of Washington State by Marilyn Morgan

The Ultimate Sashiko Sourcebook by Susan Briscoe

Museums and Archives:

Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, Seattle, WA

Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site, Steveston, BC

Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, Missoula, MT

(special thanks to Emma Selfors, Curator of Collections)

Manzanar National Historic Site: Kango Takamura Collection,

Independence, CA

National Archives, College Park, MD

Nisei Veterans Committee Memorial Hall Collection, Seattle, WA

Wing Luke Museum, Seattle, WA

(special thanks to Bob Fisher, Collections Manager, and Jessica Rubenacker, Exhibit Director)

Newspapers:

International Examiner

North American Post

Northwest Asian Weekly

"Chomly Spectator" (University of Washington Digital Archives)

"The Northwest Times" (Densho Digital Archives)

Organizations:

INScape ARTS Building, Seattle, WA.

(special thanks to Friends of INScape for hosting my 2023 Artist-in-Residency session.)

Louisa Hotel, Seattle, WA.

Nisei Veterans Committee, Seattle, WA.

(special thanks to Lt Col, Michael Yaguchi, USAF (Retired), Shawn Brinsfield and Christine Susumi.)

Outdoor Asian: Historic Jazz Walking Tour with Paul de Barros in

Chinatown-International District, Seattle, WA. March 2023.

Outdoor Asian: Red Lining Tour with the Wing Luke Museum docents in
Chinatown-International District, Seattle, WA. May 2023.

Seattle Betsuin Buddhist Temple, Seattle, WA.

(special thanks to the Archives Committee's Andrea Mano
and Dana Nakashima.)

Television, Film and Podcasts:

Baseball (directed by Ken Burns)

Campu (Excellent Densho podcast - please listen to all episodes.)

The Cats of Mirikitani (directed by Linda Hattendorf)

Daily Life in Times of War (NHK World Prime documentary)

Diamonds in the Rough - Legacy of Japanese-American Baseball

(directed by Pat Morita, Kerry Jo Nakagawa and Gan Hanada)

Hometown Stories (NHK World): "Auntie Baseball" and "Baseball Heals Kids" episodes

Finding Mr. Kondo: Tracing the Life of a Wartime Illustrator (NHK World Prime
documentary)

Finding Your Roots (PBS series)

Flower and Stone (NHK documentary)

From Up on Poppy Hill (directed by Goro Miyazaki)

Koshien: Japan's Field of Dreams (directed by Ema Ryan Yamazaki)

Ologies podcast's 'Genealogy' episode

Only Yesterday (directed by Isao Takahata)

Origin Story (directed by Kulap Vilaysack)

Shohei Ohtani: A Baseball Virtuoso (NHK Top Docs documentary)

Sightseeing Japan podcast - '39. Baseball' episode

Sincerely, Miné Okubo (directed by Yuka Murakami)

Stories We Tell (directed by Sarah Polley)

Talkin' Baseball podcast - '163 | Koshien is Baseball's Version of March Madness
(feat. Ema Ryan Yamazaki)' episode

Thatched Living - A Nostalgic Future (NHK World program)

Tipping Pitches podcast - 'Koshien Certified (featuring Ema Ryan Yamazaki)' episode

Zero Waste Life (NHK World): "Old Gloves, New Dreams" episode

Online Sources:

Ancestry.org

Amplify Africa ("Flashback to the Glamour Days: Black Fashion from 1910 to 1950")

Archives of Vancouver (Canada)

Familysearch.com

HistoryLink.org

Nisei Baseball Research Project

NOAA Digital Archives

Oregon History Project
Seattle Public Libraries
Seattle Self Guided Green Book Tour (Black and Tan Hall)
University of Washington Digital Archives
US Census
Vanishing Seattle
Wing Luke Museum Collections

Additional Assistance:

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About the Artworks:

The artworks in this book are of a variety of mediums.
Comics illustrations were created in ink, watercolor and gouache on paper.
Images of Japan are pen and ink on paper and Yupo surfaces.
Still life objects are oil paint on wood panels. These objects include the salmon butchering machine, New Year's dragon and lion heads, family luggage, barber chair, Higo mannequins, restaurant signs, dolls and furniture created in the Minidoka concentration camp during World War II and hanetsuki paddles.
Santa Fe landscapes are monotypes on paper.

About the Artist:

Miya Sukune is a visual artist working in the Puget Sound area. Her career encompasses painting exhibitions, public art, art residencies, and publications. She is honored to be a recipient of the 2022-2023 Hope Corps Award from Seattle's Office of Arts and Culture.

Miya has exhibited in shows at ARTS at King Street Station, Mt. Hood Community College (OR), Canton Alley at the Wing Luke Museum and Vashon Center for the Arts Gallery. She has been an artist-in-residence at INscape ARTS, Vermont Studio Center, Studio Kura (Japan), Atlantic Center for the Arts, and the Serlachius Residency at the Serlachius Museums (Finland). She is a 2021 recipient of a 4Culture Art Projects award and received the 2022-2023 Bernie Funk Artist Explorations Scholarship from Pratt Fine Arts Center.

