

Cultural Collage ~ Earle Oda



Born in the Territory of Hawaii (statehood was in 1959), I grew up in a sheltered community of Japanese-Americans. I was part of the majority. My parents spoke both English and Japanese in the home. I went to Japanese language school everyday after school for 10 years. English was taught in school but I spoke "Pidgin" English amongst friends.

My parents' generation (Nisei) had to prove their loyalty to America during World War II while some were sent to Internment camps. The 442nd Infantry Battalion is considered the most decorated unit in U.S. military history.



By coincidence, I continued Japanese studies at the University of Hawaii. It led me to study abroad at Keio University in Tokyo for 3 years. This experience changed my life. It broadened my horizons but I also struggled with my identity there. I was an American on the inside but had the face of a Japanese person.

After living my early adult life in Hawaii, I moved to Seattle and raised a family. Suddenly becoming a member of a minority group was an adjustment at first. I have lived in the Pacific Northwest for almost 30 years now. I think moving to the "mainland" has changed me again. It has further shaped who I am today.



It is difficult for me to explain how it feels to be a member of a minority group. I believe people who have never experienced it, don't really know how it feels. I've experienced it in Japan as an American and in Seattle as an Asian. Whenever I feel insecure about being a minority member, I think about President Barrack Obama and what he has accomplished. Being a minority person growing up in Hawaii did not limit him at all.