REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

By Marlene E. Coach, Ed.D., Professor, San Jose State University, College of Social Work

This narrative describes the influence that cultural differences can have on a person's existence and how that influence can be a positive, life enhancing experience. It is an autobiographical perspective of the author's experience working with Hawaiian-born Japanese-American WWII veterans who were former prisoners of war (POW). The impact that their experiences had on their lives and on the life of the clinician that worked with them is explored.

This paper will describe my experience working with a group of men who suffered in silence for more than 50 years. I am an African American female and have worked in the field of Social Work since 1979. In 1985 I decided to go on active duty in the Army. My first assignment was teaching ROTC at Knox College (a small liberal arts college) in Galesburg, Illinois, where I taught for three years. I was involved in on-campus activities and was faculty advisor for the minority student organization on campus.

After three years at Knox, my next assignment took me to Hawaii where I worked as a Personnel Officer for an Army Reserve Unit until 1993. I got off active duty in 1993 and started working at the Honolulu Vet Center, a VA outreach program established in 1980. It is called "Readjustment Counseling Services" (RCS)) and evolved as a result of the Vietnam War. Today, there are approximately 206 Vet Centers throughout the United States, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

The mission is the same at each center, and the overall program receives separate funding from the larger VA. The program is community based and at the time of its inception, the majority of the staff were veterans themselves. The Team Leader and one counselor at the center have been at the Vet Center, which was primarily for Vietnam veterans, since it opened.

Initially, there were no restrictions placed on the veterans in order for them to receive services, so they felt as if they had found a home and a safe haven. They were able to drop in and have rap sessions with other vets or just hangout. The counselors would assist the veterans in completing paperwork for the VA and provide other support and clinical services.

Since the majority of my work experience had been with children, my new position (working with veterans) was a challenge. Even though I had worked for the Veterans Administration (which is now known as the Office of Veterans Affairs/VA) in 1976 as a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant, my knowledge about veterans was very limited. As a matter of fact, I didn't know that I would be a veteran after I got off active duty; I thought that only men

who fought in wars were veterans. Needless to say, I was surprised to learn that I would be a veteran.

For the most part, the stories I heard about veterans were primarily about Vietnam veterans. They were described as being violent, secretive, guarded, angry, drug abusers, and baby killers. The other veterans were seen as shell-shocked, handicapped by wounds they received in the war, and old. Although these stories were not positive, I wanted to learn more about veterans and the services that they were entitled to.

After working as a clinical social worker at the Honolulu Vet for five years, I felt pretty comfortable with my ability to work with veterans. The fact that I was a veteran myself made it a bit easier for me to relate to the other veterans. However, when I first started working at the Vet Center, I was concerned that the male clients might be hesitant to talk to a woman. Since I was born and raised in the Continental United States and had experienced discrimination based on who I was, I had preconceptions that since I was a female, the men might not want to talk with me about their problems. I was concerned that since I was not born and raised in Hawaii, the veterans might think I would not understand them and their culture. However, through my interviews with the veterans, I began to realize that there were more similarities than differences in who we were.

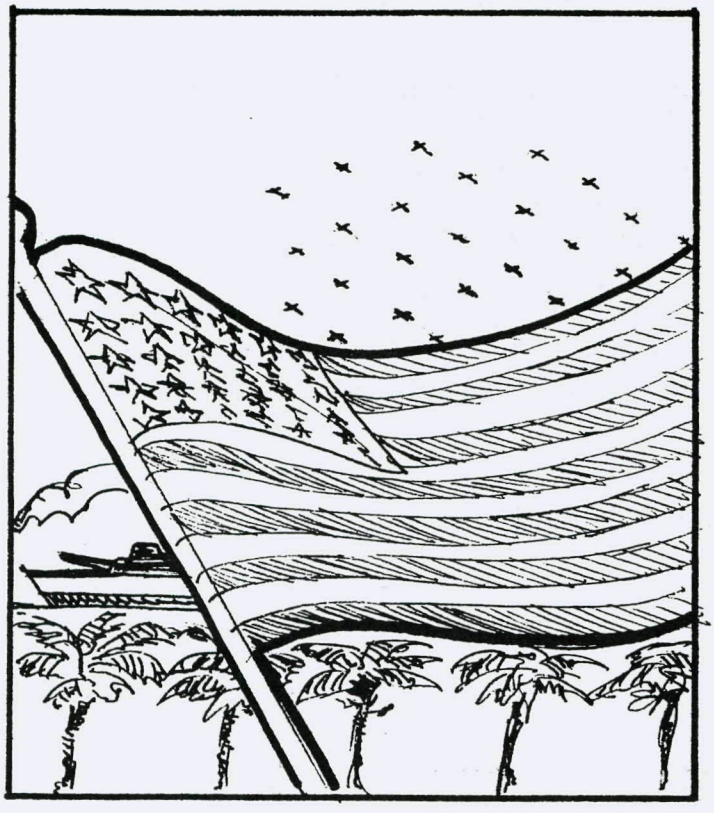
In both out cultures, families and children are highly valued, with two or three generations living under the same roof. It is not uncommon for a married couple to move in and live with parents or in-laws. When a parent becomes older, children will take care of them in their home, which allows the aging parent to be involved with the family.

When I first moved to Hawaii, I was surprised to find that there were so many Japanese people that were born and raised there. My knowledge about Hawaii was practically nonexistent, but over the years I learned how the Japanese ended up in Hawaii.

Japanese immigration to Hawaii came as a result of a U.S. government contract for laborers. On February 8, 1885, the first group of 944 government-sponsored laborers arrived in Hawaii on the City of Tokyo. Most of the Japanese immigrants were from southwest Japan (Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto, Fukuoka, and Okinawa).

Most Japanese came because they wanted to get away from poverty, earn more money, and have a better life: some planned to save money to return to Japan and buy land; many sent money home to their families. They worked on sugar plantations and were known as "Gannenmono," (people of the first year). Immigrants continued to come until 1924 when Congress prohibited the immigration of Japanese into the U.S. and the territory of Hawaii. By that time, more than 200,000 had immigrated and they were the first generation (Issei). The Issei were not eligible for U.S. citizenship, but their children were born American citizens if they were born in Hawaii (Odo, F. & Sinoto, K., 1985).

The Issei raised their children in the traditional Japanese manner. The children went to English and Japanese schools. They practiced their Buddhist religion and held the elderly in high regard. They were taught not to lose face or bring shame upon the family name. They were hard workers and did what they were told by their parents. The children of the Issei were the Nisei (second generation and born American citizens).



The bombing of Pearl Harbor drastically changed the lives of the Japanese living in the United States. In her book *Ganbare (Go for it)! An example of Japanese Spirit* (1982), Sumie Saiki noted that 1500 residents in Hawaii were interned. On December 7, 1941, martial law was declared. The FBI arrested Issei, whom they considered enemies (they were not born in this country and were not American citizens, therefore were seen as aliens), and turned them over to immigration and naturalization service. By December 8, 1941, 345 people in Hawaii and 867 on the mainland U.S. had been picked up. By October 1943, approximately 5,303 Japanese, most of whom were doctors, ministers, teachers, carpenters, newspaper editors and lawyers, had been taken into custody. Many were taken to Sand Island in Hawaii where they were stripped and examined and had their clothes examined as well before being ordered to dress. Others were sent to the mainland to internment camps. This was a humiliating experience for the Issei and their families.

These families were honest, hard working people who obeyed the laws and kept to themselves. They developed their own community and continued to live their lives in the traditional Japanese style. Their children were American citizens who wanted to prove their loyalty to their country (U.S.). So the sons of the Issei wanted to fight for their country and prove that they were true citizens.

Some of the Nisei boys were drafted into the Hawaii Territorial Guard and the Varsity Victory Volunteers before the war began. After the bombing occurred, they were stripped of their weapons because some Caucasian commanders thought they might not be loyal. The men were allowed to perform menial tasks, but that did not dampen their spirits. They were determined to prove their loyalty, so they worked hard doing everything they could to assist the Army. After a while their determination paid off because an all-Nisei Hawaiian Provisional Infantry Battalion was formed.

In 1942 the Nisei units left Hawaii en route to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. When they arrived, they officially became the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). These men had never experienced cold weather or snow, and had a difficult time keeping warm. Even in the cold, they exceeded the expectations of their superiors in their training. They remained at Camp McCoy until they were sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. While at Camp Shelby they continued to be outstanding trainees. They were so good that the Army was getting pressured to send the unit into battle, so in 1943 the 100th Battalion landed in Italy. After the

battalion suffered heavy casualties, the Army authorized an increase in the number of Japanese Americans who wanted to volunteer.

In 1943 the Army announced that it wanted to form an all Japanese-American regimental team for combat assignment in Europe. This unit was designated as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The military did not expect the response to be as overwhelming as it was. Young Japanese American men volunteered from the mainland and Hawaii, many of whom had family members in internment camps.

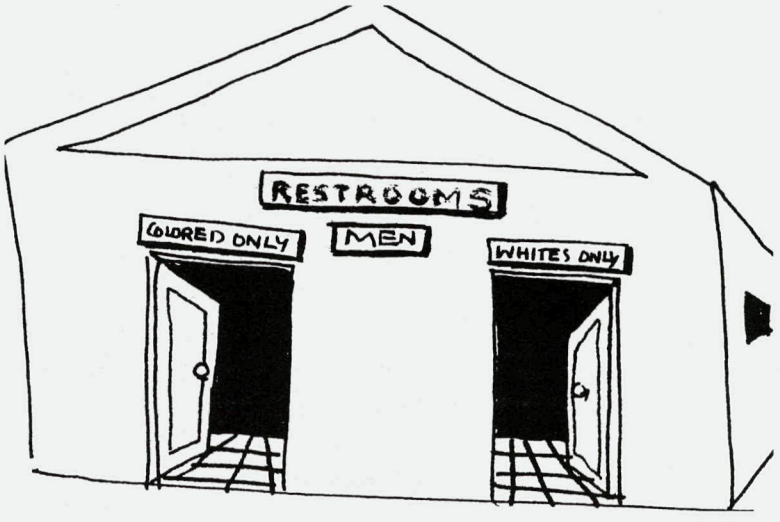
The soldiers of the 442nd did not go to Camp McCoy. They arrived in California in uniform and were met by armed Caucasian American soldiers who guarded them as they boarded the train. The window shades on the train were drawn and the Hawaiian boys were told not to raise them. They were only allowed to raise the shades while traveling through desolate areas. They did not understand why they were being guarded by other soldiers; they were later told that it was for their own safety.

When the soldiers from Hawaii arrived in Mississippi, they reported that the headlines in the newspaper read: "The Japs Have Invaded Mississippi." This was the first time in their lives that they experienced prejudice and discrimination. They did not consider themselves to be "Japs." Instead, they saw themselves as American soldiers.

Noticing signs that said "colored only" and "whites only," they were confused as to which sign applied to them. They knew they were not white, so they used the colored facilities. When they went to the movie theater they noticed that the "colored people" were sitting in the balcony. Back home in Hawaii, they always sat in the balcony because that was where the best seats were, so they sat in the balcony with the "colored people." But, they were reprimanded by their superior officer, who told them that they had to sit in the white section. They also noticed that the "colored people" had to sit in the back of the bus and were not allowed on the bus if there was not enough room for someone white. One of the men told me that a few of the Nisei soldiers were upset with the bus driver because he passed up several colored people who were trying to go home from work.

One day, they took it upon themselves to push the bus driver off the bus, then went around and picked up all the colored people waiting for the bus and took them off the camp grounds. Once again they were reprimanded. These incidents made them realize how different they were, and they felt lucky to have been born and raised in Hawaii where they weren't treated the way the colored people were on the mainland.

Since most of my social work experience had been in the continental United States, Hawaii was a new challenge for me. It is such a diverse place that one could virtually come in contact with people from any cultural, ethnic, or religious group on a daily basis. There is a



strong Asian influence on the island of Oahu that is coupled with Hawaiian culture. The culture (as cliché as it may sound) is one of respect for one another and living together in harmony. In general, the people are spiritual, honest, trusting, open, giving, easygoing, sharing, and helpful. They love to eat, talk story (sit around and have informal conversations about things), and have fun. They recognize the importance of relationships and living simple. For the most part, they are modest and soft-spoken. I observed this not only from the veterans I worked with, but from other people that I became acquainted with.

Sam* was the first veteran that was referred to me. He is a Japanese American male in his 70's who is married and has two daughters. I assumed that due to his age, he might have more health problems than trauma issues. But I then decided to approach this referral in an open-minded way and assess the client's needs and issues as they surfaced.

Initially, Sam was not sure why he was referred to me and did not know what posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was. I was not sure why he needed to be assessed for PTSD since he had fought in the war so long ago. He did not appear to have some of the problems that other combat veterans had (such as issues of trust, intrusive thoughts and flashbacks). In fact, he appeared to have had a nice life and a good relationship with his family. He was active in the community, and well respected by his peers.

As I started gathering information about Sam, he began to talk about things related to his military experience. It was not until I started listening to his story that I realized that he was a former prisoner of war (POW). German soldiers captured him while transporting German prisoners and wounded soldiers back to their base camp. He described the dreams he still had about things that happened in the war and his feelings of bringing shame on the family name when he was captured. As he described events, Sam could remember small details so well you would think the event occurred yesterday. He admitted that he had not talked to anyone about his military or POW experience since the war. When people found out that he was a POW, he would avoid talking about it. He wasn't quite sure why he shared these things with me. He only knew he wanted to start feeling better and he said he felt comfortable talking with me. He related that he worked harder after returning home from the war because he did not think he was as good as other people.

After two years of Sam's working with me in talk therapy sessions and journaling, he was able to sleep through the night without having nightmares. He was feeling better about himself and accepted the fact that he did not cause himself to be captured. He had a positive outlook on life and stated that coming to talk about his issues and symptoms helped him to overcome things he thought were taboo to talk about.

The second veteran that was referred to me was Mark. He was in his 80's and, like Sam, he was not sure why he was referred to come to see me. Mark was married and had three daughters. Initially, he was very cautious but polite about what he talked about. He was guarded when asked about his military experience. It appeared that he was not comfortable talking about fighting, killing, and watching his men die. He minimized the things that happened to him when he was in the military, stating that he felt he did not do anything to brag about. He was wounded three times while

*All names are pseudonyms

in battle, and was captured after being wounded the third time. He was given numerous medals for his heroic performance in combat.

Mark experienced depression, guilt, and self-blame. He received a commission as an officer while in combat and always led his men into battle. His feelings emerged as he began to talk about the loss of some of his men. He blamed himself for not doing more to protect them. He experienced mood swings and sleep disturbances. He lived with pain every day from his war wounds and never complained. No one at his job ever knew that he had been injured. He retired when he was 60 years old because he was having a difficult time climbing on barges, one of his job responsibilities.

Over time, Mark shared more about his life and was seen at the center for over two years. He talked about being captured after getting wounded and the events that occurred after his capture. Like Sam, Mark stated that he had never talked with anyone about his experience. He even belonged to the 100th Battalion Club and got together with some of the other veterans; they never talked about things that happened in the war.

Wally, James, Albert, and Mike were referred to me within days of each other. They too were former POWs. Albert, James, and Mike had been riflemen in the 442nd and Wally had been a medic. They told their stories individually. They also gave minute details of events, and the impact those events had on their lives. Each told of his capture and what it was like to be in a POW camp. They all talked about how cold and hungry they were and how they were transported by boxcar from one location to another, like cattle.

Wally expressed a lot of anger regarding his experience, stating that he was overworked but never recognized for the things he did. He took on the responsibilities of the other medics when they did not tend to the wounded. He was captured after he was sent to help other wounded soldiers who had been ambushed. He had just joined the unit when they were captured. This not only angered him but also took a toll on his health. After he was captured, he was sent to a hospital to work with American soldiers who were wounded. He described most of them as being amputees whom he would transport up and down the stairs during air raids. In his zest for caring for the wounded, he got sick and was transferred to the prison camp. He never fully regained his health, so when he was liberated six months later and sent to California, he was hospitalized for three months.

For the next 50 years, this veteran held on to that anger, distanced himself from his family and friends, and only did what he felt was expected of him in terms of his responsibility. He became a workaholic and never complained to anyone about his feelings. He assumed that no one was interested in what he had to say, so he kept to himself. He never shirked his responsibilities but never shared his feeling with anyone.

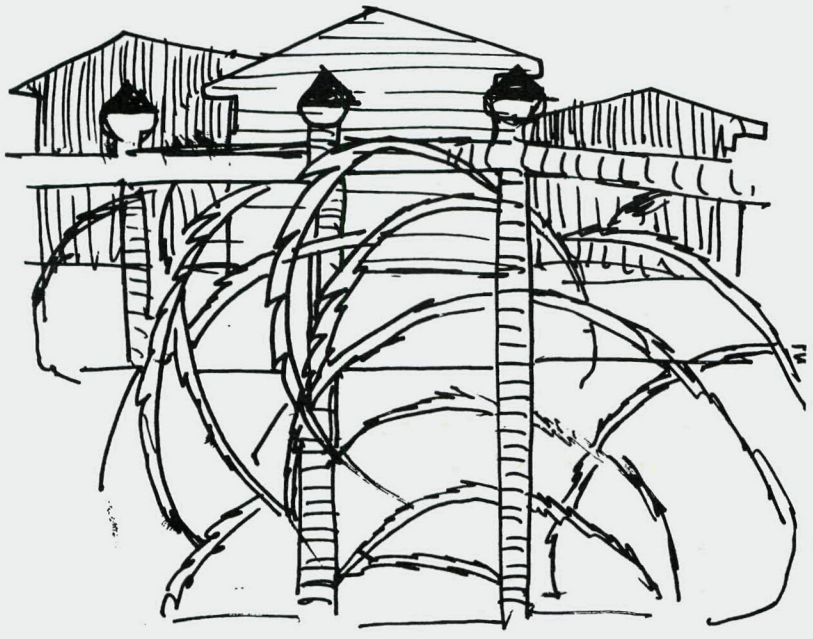
After I worked with this veteran for over one year, exploring why his feelings were so strong and looking at ways in which he could resolve those feelings, he became more relaxed and open. He was less agitated and expressed his joy in being able to talk to someone who understood what he was going through. Now he is a member of a cohesive group of men who share similar pasts. He finds support in meeting with the other men and he keeps tabs on them when they do not come to the meetings.

I realized while working with Wally

that the stereotype I had of Asian men (not expressing their feelings) did not apply to him. He taught me that rage and anger can be disguised in many ways. Most people who are not Japanese perceive older Japanese men as being polite, humble, and very gentle. I was surprised to find these men were suffering in silence. When Wally was given the opportunity to vent his feelings, he was enraged and explosive. He was not soft spoken, as the stereotype would categorize him.

Prior to their counseling sessions with me, the men had not discussed their feelings of pain, anger, depression, guilt, or rage. They had not mentioned the recurring dreams they had about the war, nor had they talked about what it was like to be in a POW camp.

When they returned home from the war, the families of most of these men did not talk to them about their POW experience. This suggested to them that it was not supposed to be discussed. Instead, they were expected to go on with life and not look back. It may have also sent a message to the men that being captured was not something to be proud of.



In the Japanese culture it is not good to bring shame on the family name, and to save face one should always do the honorable thing. Therefore, in the eyes of these men being captured was not an honorable thing. They felt they had let their families down and disappointed their parents.

James and Albert were riflemen, but in different units. James was captured the first day he went into battle. He is a frail looking, thin man who is the youngest of the nine men (mid 70's). He is married and has three living sons. His oldest son died when he was five years old after he fell off a bicycle and hit his head. This death sent James deeper into his isolation and depression. After we talked for several sessions, James admitted that he and his wife never talked about his son's death because talking about it would not bring him back, so he did not see the point in it.

James volunteered for the Army so that he could fight for his country. He was ashamed of himself for being captured and having it easy while other men were risking their lives to fight in the war. He felt that he had not accomplished what he set out to do. He described how he worked on a farm the entire time he was a POW. He minimized the experience, saying that he was treated well by the German soldiers. He and the other POWs were housed in a barn and slept on mats on the ground. He sent letters to and received letters from his parents, which he shared with me. It was quite clear from the letters he wrote his parents that he was scared, lonely, and depressed.

When he returned home, he spent the next 50 years working as an appliance repairman, which permitted him to isolate. To keep his mind busy, he would

make things in his garage and then give them away. He did get married but stayed to himself and had no friends. He did not interact with his neighbors and had a distant relationship with his sons. He did not see himself as a veteran because he did not fight in the war. He felt that he did not deserve any more than he got.

James came to individual sessions on a weekly basis. Initially, he challenged everything that I said and was not flexible about doing things that would enhance his life. He had some problems with his hips but would not go to the doctor to see what the problem was. He said, "I'll go tomorrow," but he did not go.

It was not until he was pressured by some of the other men that he decided to go to the doctor at the VA. They kept telling him to use the benefits he was entitled to, and one of the men went with him. So now he receives the health care he needs; he uses a wheelchair and has a means of getting around. He has learned to maneuver it and is grateful that the VA gave it to him.

Albert is a Japanese-American male who is married, with two adult sons who live at home. Albert is in his late 70's and has numerous health problems. He was the only veteran whose family wanted to know about his POW experience once he returned home. However, he shied away from talking about it by changing the subject. He had guilt feelings about not being able to help soldiers that he knew who had been shot. During the time he was fighting in the war, he was fearful that he was not going to live through the war or his capture. He did not want his family to know how scared he was, so he avoided the subject of his military experience.

After he returned home, he started drinking heavily and gambled a lot. He took care of his family but did not do many things with them. He remained distant from his family until his oldest son (who is in his late 40's) became interested in knowing more about his military experience. Albert talked to his son about some of the events but did not discuss how they impacted his life or what his thoughts and feelings were.

Albert had a recurring dream that he lived with since his return from the war. He would wake up in a cold sweat and would not be able to go back to sleep. After he retired, he experienced severe flashbacks, more intense dreams, and feelings of anxiety and depression. He drank as much as he could until it resulted in health problems. So he just lived with the nightmares and these symptoms as best he could.

Albert, like the other men, had kept things from the war and brought them in to his sessions. This allowed him to recall events that he had buried in his memory and found difficult to talk about. He also wrote something about what his military experience was like, which helped him to think about his experience and express what it meant to him.

Mike came to the center after talking with Sam (who is a relative by marriage). Sam knew that Mike was a POW, but only talked with him about his experience going to the Vet Center. Mike is Japanese-American and in his 70's. He is married, with five children. When Mike finally came to the Vet Center, he immediately started talking about his experience fighting and being captured. He tried to hold back his tears but was unable to. He admitted that he was tired of keeping his POW status a secret. He stated, " I have lived long enough that I don't have to be ashamed of the fact I am a

former POW." He related how he was never able to get a good or full night's sleep since he left home for the war, and how he worked long hard hours to provide for his family. He never complained, and no one ever knew about his feelings.

Mike had an experience very different from the other veterans. He was captured in an ambush and two of his men were killed. He was treated okay while he was a prisoner, but when the Germans were transporting him and the other prisoners from one location to another, they were attacked by Russian soldiers, allies of the United States, who liberated them. It was at this time that Mike's life was in serious danger.

They were released by the Russians and told to go to Warsaw, but they were not told what direction to go or how to get there. They were told to just go. They walked for several weeks and were approached by many Russian soldiers who thought Mike was Mongolian and wanted to kill him as a traitor. Mike painfully described how on several occasions while they were trying to get to Warsaw, Russian soldiers put guns to his head and were ready to pull the trigger when the soldiers he was with saved him. This not only angered Mike but made him think that he would not make it home alive. Because of how he looked, his life was in jeopardy. If he had not been with other American soldiers, who stood up for him, he may have been killed. For more than 50 years Mike had nightmares, intrusive thoughts and feelings of anxiety, guilt, and anger. Mike attended weekly sessions, kept a journal, wrote a statement about his military experience, and started talking to his wife about his experience. Mike has a son who went to Vietnam, but he and his son never talked about their war experiences. He said he never asked his son and his son never asked him.

Dan, William, and John had similar stories to tell about their experiences in the military. Dan is in his 80's and has been married to his wife for nearly 50 years. They don't have any children but have been active in the community. Dan is thin with gray hair that is thinning and speaks English with a strong Japanese accent. He and his wife were educated in Japan even though they were born in Hawaii, so the language they speak at home is Japanese.

Dan talked about being grateful to be alive because he was buried alive in his foxhole after a bomb exploded nearby. He was saved by another soldier who was searching for live soldiers and saw his hand move from under the rubble. The soldier then dug him out and got the medics to tend to him. That soldier was killed on the battlefield shortly after the rescue. Dan was in the hospital for several months before he was allowed to return to the field to fight again. It was later that he was captured.

Dan was a rifleman and was one of the men who had captured some German soldiers. They were returning to the base camp with their wounded German POWs when German soldiers surrounded the group. This was when the tables turned and he became a prisoner. After being captured, Dan thought that he might never return home again. He longed to see his mother, father, and brother but kept his desires and fears to himself.

I learned from Dan that humility can go a long way when relating to others. Even though he was born and raised in Hawaii, he did not want the Japanese people to hate each other.

Dan was so grateful to be home that he decided to devote his life to giving back to his community. He did this by

educating Japanese nationals who came from Japan to Hawaii. Since he was educated in Japan as a young boy, he was fluent in speaking Japanese and reading and writing conji. He translated to the visitors what life was like in Hawaii and what the history was of the Japanese Americans after arriving in Hawaii.

Despite his community involvement, Dan often spoke of the explosion but never talked about being captured. He did talk and think a lot about the man who saved him. Dan carries his picture with him and proudly announces that the work he does is for both of them.

Dan had bad memories of the war that followed him home. His wife talked about how he would call out in his sleep and fight. He would often wake up in a cold sweat but would not tell her what was going on. Once when he was sick, the nightmare was so intense that his wife had to hold him down to keep him from hurting himself. He recalled how scared he was. He felt as if he was living that event a second time and that he was actually dying.

Dan's wife accompanied him to each of his sessions. As he talked about his experience, she began to understand why he was having dreams that were so disturbing. She related how happy she was that she now understood what he had gone through, and saw him as a man to really respect and be proud of.

William is Japanese-American, married, and has three daughters. He is in his late 70's and enjoys traveling and drinking. He and his wife socialize a lot now that he sold their business and retired. William has a tough exterior and a husky voice. He is approximately 5' tall and weighs too much for his height.

William was a jeep driver and was on his way back to his base camp alone when German soldiers surrounded him. He had been in Europe for only a month when he was captured. He was worried that his commander would not find him and that the German soldiers were going to kill him. He was sent from one camp to another until they finally sent him to Stalag 7A where he stayed until he was liberated. He and a couple of other POWs escaped once and made it to Switzerland. However, the Swiss turned them over to the Germans and they were returned to the POW camp. From that point on, he and the other soldiers were heavily guarded.

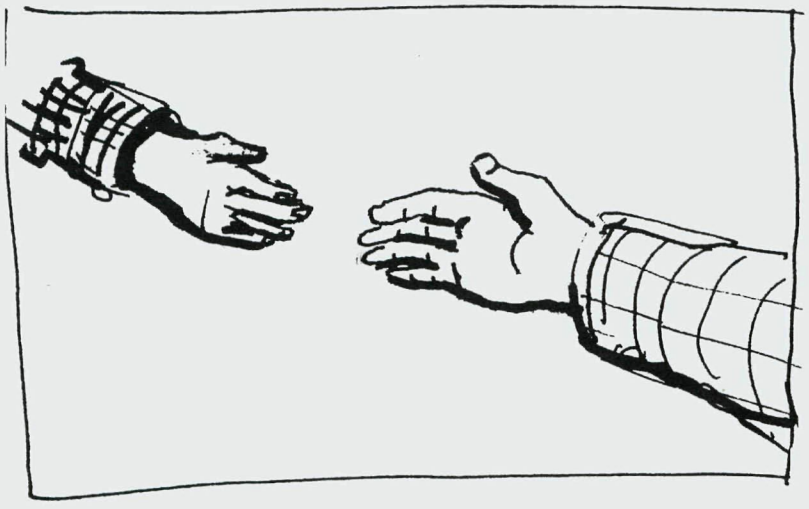
When William returned home, he became an electrician and opened his own business. He kept his war experiences to himself but kept records that documented events he had experienced. He even sent off for records that he did not have, which he eagerly shared during his sessions.

William, like some of the other men, minimized what it was like for him to be captured. He drew pictures of the utensils he made and a layout of the sleeping accommodations. While a prisoner, he made things out of cans and odd and ends that he found. He made a gadget that would heat water for tea and cut bread. He and the other men would give cigarettes to the German soldiers in exchange for food. He recalled how hungry he was the entire time he was a POW.

John is in his mid 70's and is married with a daughter and a son. He is the only veteran who returned to school and got a college degree in Business. He worked for the U.S. Customs Office for 29 years. Prior to that he was a Finance Officer for the Army.

John, like James, was captured his first day on the battlefield. As a matter of fact, they were captured together but sent to separate camps. John was reluctant to

come to the Vet Center and talk because he felt he had no reason to complain or have anything to talk about. However, once he started to talk he expressed his sorrow about not being able to fight and that he did not really feel that he should be entitled to any benefits. He was tearful as he recalled his first day in the field where a sniper killed one rifleman. He admitted he was so scared that he nearly became immobile, and that may have contributed to his being captured. John came to a few individual sessions but then did not return. He did attend some of the group meetings but



discontinued them when he had to care for his wife who became disabled.

Earlier, I mentioned that I made a wonderful discovery while working with these men individually. I realized, as you may have guessed by now, that the stories of how they were captured are very similar. They each named other men whom they were captured with, but used nicknames. As it turned out, Sam, Mark, Wally, Albert, and Dan were captured together. Sam, Mark, Albert, and Dan were all in the same unit. Wally was the medic who just happened to be with them when they were captured. He did not know any of the other men. Then, James and John were also captured together, and they were from the same unit and knew each other.

This discovery presented a perfect opportunity to have these men share their experiences with each other and to exchange information. I was not sure how they would open up to each other but hoped that they would be supportive. I was also hoping that each man would be able to heal more after talking with other men they went to war with.

Once I told the men about my discovery, they wanted to get together. They had not been together as a group in 50 years. In search of a right time to meet, we all checked our calendars. The only day that everyone could meet was the actual date that the five men were captured, October 23rd. As corny as it may sound, I think the Gods and/or Buddha planned it this way.

The reunion was a wonderful healing experience for all of the men. They met in the Vet Center group room, which was a place where they could feel free to talk and not have to concern themselves with being judged. The men talked about their experiences after they were captured and what their lives have been like since the war. Plus, they were able to find out what happened to some of the other soldiers that were in their units.

They did allow me to audio-tape the reunion but did not want to have more than that. The wanted the meeting to be informal and private. We listened to the tape at other sessions as a therapeutic instrument. The men found the initial meeting to be such a positive experience that they wanted to do it again. So, from the reunion a support group emerged. The other four POWs were asked to be a part of the group. The group met once a month, and I continued to see each man on an individual basis either weekly or every other week. Even though I am no longer in

Hawaii to facilitate the group, the men continue to meet twice a month in support of each other.

Their wives have met and they get together sometimes for lunch. The men and their wives talk about how they have grown since learning about the importance of talking, sharing, and exploring their feelings. The veterans have expressed how grateful they are for having had the opportunity to work with me. However, I feel that I am the one who is fortunate to have worked with such incredible men.

Working with these veterans allowed me to see that people cope and grieve in different ways. I was able to see how culture affects the way in which we cope. I now realize how important it was for the men to have someone to talk to. That someone needed to be non-judgmental and to help them to accept the positive things they accomplished in life (focus on the strengths perspective). They needed to realize that it was ok to talk to others and that they were highly respected for having survived the war. They also needed to see things from a different perspective, which allowed them to let go of some of the feelings they were carrying around.

Reflecting back on my work with these gentlemen, I feel that I have been on this incredible journey that has added more meaning and quality to my life than I ever would have imagined anything would. They taught me that learning about another culture is a life enhancing experience that will remain with me forever. I have even incorporated into my life values things like giving back to others for the sake of sharing and caring. The things I took away from my experience with the veterans could not be taught in books nor explained in a classroom. The personal interchange that took place while working with the men was one of deep respect and caring. This humbling experience allowed me to explore topics and ask questions about their culture that would otherwise be left unexplored.

I discovered that my age and gender were unimportant but the fact that I was a veteran carried a lot of weight. The men figured I could relate to some of what they were talking about even though they served before I was born. They described incidents during their training in Mississippi when they were exposed to racism, prejudice, and discrimination. In this respect, they felt that we might have something in common.

What I thought was going to be a case of providing a simple service to veterans turned out to be one of the most incredibly profound experiences of my professional career. The things I learned from working with these men were to value and respect the culture of others; to realize that time does not heal all wounds; to realize that cultural difference can be misunderstood, and that stereotyping can be harmful to others; to know that regardless of culture, talking about one's feeling can be healing. Learning and growing ends only when life stops. ❑

• Odo, F., & Sinoto, K. (1985). *A Pictorial history of the Japanese in Hawaii* 1885-1924. Honolulu: Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum.

• Saiki, P.S. (1982). *Ganbare! An example of Japanese Spirit*, Kisaku, Inc.