

Seattle City Council

Public Safety, Civil Rights, and Arts Committee Meeting

Tuesday, 2 PM, December 7, 2004

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Anna Maria Hong & Grant Cogswell**

Today's Words' Worth poet is **Suma Yagi**, curated by Anna Maria Hong

Suma Yagi was born in Seattle and grew up in the Central District. She attended Garfield High School until being relocated at the age of 14 to an internment camp in May of 1942. Following her return to Seattle in 1946, Ms. Yagi earned her diploma at Garfield High School and graduated from Petersen's Business School. She has worked at the Veteran's Administration, the Human Rights Commission, and South Seattle Community College. Her poetry and prose have appeared in *Bridge Magazine*, *Interact Governor's Interagency Committee on the Status of Women*, *Echoes From Gold Mountain: An Asian American Journal*, *Poetry Seattle*, *The Pacific*, *The Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Prophets of Human Solidarity*, and *Off Our Backs: A Women's New Journal*. She has worked with writers at the Richard Hugo House, including Frances McCue and Joan Fiset, and is currently writing a book-length collection of poems about the Japanese American internment.

Go For Broke

By Suma Yagi

The 442nd/100th Regimental Combat Team
fighting the enemy
from Rome to the Arno River
in battles --Belvedere, Luvana, Leghorn
Mount Cavallo, Bruyeres, Biffontaine--
breaking the Gothic line
soaked the battlegrounds with their blood,
soaked the battlegrounds with tears
from souls pierced by the barbed wire
imprisoning their families for crime of ancestry
in the ten U.S. Internment camps,
located in barren, desolate deserts.

The United States Army issued khakis
to segregated Nisei soldiers of the 100th Battalion,
the 442nd Regimental Combat Team,
and the Military Intelligence Service.

The United States Army issued khakis, same lot number,
to regular Army soldiers in watch towers with guns pointed
at Japanese families in the internment camps
while Nisei soldiers were fighting for the United States
on battlegrounds in Europe and in the Pacific Theater.

"Go for broke"

"Go for Broke"

echoed above guns and mortar
echoed above moans of pain.

Almost without sleep for almost 8 days
100th and 3rd Battalion of the 442nd
were taking a rest, when their rest abruptly ended.

Word came that the 1st Battalion of the 36th Texas Division,
surrounded by the German for seven days,
were running short of water and medical supplies;
the wounded needed attention.

General John Dahlquist ordered the 442nd/100th
Regimental Combat Team to rescue the "Lost Battalion."
"Push at any cost"

The 442nd were surrounded in the Vosges mountain
where foggy, semi-darkness cut visibility to five or ten yards
where the German assault had been so strong,
two battalions of the 141st, 36th Texas Infantry Division
had been pushed back
where trees crowded next to each other, light could not penetrate,
where terrain offered no chance for a flanking move, only a frontal assault,
where tree bursts on all sides were constant day and night
where foxholes were filled with water

They could not see ahead, or around, or behind;

They had to guess where the next bullet might come.

The 442nd /100th Regimental Combat team, after three days of fierce fighting,
rescued 211 soldiers of the "Lost Battalion," while they suffered 800 casualties.

With every gain on the enemy's stronghold,
Nisei soldiers envisioned gates opening:
Fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters
with the two suitcases, allowed under Executive Order 9066,
leaving the camps,
freed from suffocating desert dust,
scorching sun,
blistering winter cold,
from crowded one room quarters,
from community mess halls.

With every gain on enemy's stronghold

Nisei soldiers pushed voices
of their loyalty as American Citizens

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was distinguished as ***"The most highly decorated combat unit of its size in United States Military history."***

- 7 Presidential Unit Citations
- 21 Medal of Honor
- 33 Distinguished Service Crosses
- 1 Distinguished Service Medal
- 559 Silver Stars, plus 28 Oak Leaf Clusters
- 22 Legions of Merit
- 15 Soldiers' Medal
- 4,000 Bronze Stars, plus 1,200 Oak Leaf Clusters
- 9,486 Purple Hearts
- 2 Meritorious Unit Service Plaques
- 36 Army Commendations
- 87 Division Commendations
- 19 decorations from Allied nations

A special plaque of appreciation from survivors of the Lost Battalion, 141st Infantry Texas Division

Against the patter of heavy rains
drenched Nisei soldiers
stood like fence posts.

Their eyes fixed,
ears open
to the voice of President Truman
on the lawn of the White House:

"You fought not only your enemy, but you fought prejudice and you won. Keep up that fight, and we will continue to win to make this great republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for."

While these words were salve to wounded souls of Nisei soldiers, these same words fell like thunder on ears of Anti-Japanese Americans. They bristled. A California newspaper put their words in print: **"American Japs may fight in Europe, but you'll never get them to fight in the Pacific against Japan."**

Concealed from the public,
U.S. Government buried in secrecy,
like blue prints of the Atomic bombs,
Japanese-American soldiers in the Pacific
Who used their language and knowledge of their ancestry.
decoded military secrets, written in Japanese characters.
Listened over the wires to voices of men
who had the same folds in their eyes,
with skin the same hue,
whose surnames were identical to their country's enemy.

Nisei soldiers of the Military Intelligence
in teams of ten to 150 units along the Pacific Rim and to Allied forces from
Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, India and China
served in every major campaign and every major battle. They were with
Merrill's Marauders, With the Office of Strategic Services of Burma, with the
Marines in Saipan, Okinawa, New Caledonia, Leyte, Phillipines, Iwo Jima,
Corregidor

They served as the eyes and ears of the Allied Pacific Forces.
General Willoughby, Chief of intelligence for General Douglas MacArthur said:
"The 6000 Niseis shortened the war in the Pacific by two years."

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President Truman said of these linguists **"They are our human secret weapons.**

"Nisei soldiers came home to hear some voices:
"Look what Japan did."

Their American citizenship still lay hidden behind the folds of their eyes.

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