

## 2024 Minidoka Pilgrimage Closing Speech

Hello everyone, my name is Ana Tanaka and I am a Yonsel Gosel on the Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee. Both of my grandparents on my dad's side were incarcerated at the ages of about 14 and 18. My Bachan on my mom's side was born in Minidoka and my Jichan was incarcerated at Gila River. Somehow I was voluntold to do this closing speech but I truly am honored you all chose to be my captive audience for these next few minutes 😊

Last year, the theme was "We the Ancestors." The keynote speaker, Brandon Shimoda along with former co-chair Erin Shigaki, asked us: "What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?". It made me think how we are all connected; we are living through our ancestors - many of whom might have been friends or classmates (or enemies). So whether we like it or not, we really are all connected ... and so are our struggles. I know I need to continue fighting for those who are stripped of their own voice and identity, just like our ancestors were.

This year, we think about what it might mean to have a place, to belong to a place and the complexities that come along with that. To feel the visceral shame of the Issel in the bathrooms with paper bags over their face, an illusion of privacy, while simultaneously feeling the spurts of joy found in baseball and ice skating and swimming and art. To understand how resistance was exemplified by answering "no" and "no" on the loyalty questionnaire, but also by volunteering for the US military, fighting for the right to live in their own country.

I attended this pilgrimage last year as a youth fellow with the Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee and I got to take back my experience and share with my grandparents who reminisced, reflected, and relived their childhood through my newfound memories. Both of my grandfathers passed away this year, so this pilgrimage has been a different sort of experience from the last, an experience I am sure many of you can relate to, having ancestors and late relatives and loved ones whose experiences you have come here to learn about.

I wrote a letter to my grandfathers in the form of a messy sort of poem and I am going to share it with you today in hopes that you resonate with it, or at least to inspire some sort of introspection before we all make the trek home.

Before I get to that, I just want to thank you all for being here this year, especially our survivors, for sharing your stories and memories. As part of the younger generation, we feel honored to carry out and preserve our community's legacy, our history, and our place.

Dear Grandpa,

I've stepped foot in your ghost town—pun not intended—  
where you lived for some time, while your life was up-ended.  
They called you Unamerican, you were “committing a crime.”  
We'll go along with it for the sake of the rhyme.

I've stepped foot in your childhood, behind barbed wire and a guard tower.  
I spent four days here, and I say it with pride,  
with my friends and family, over eighty years later.  
We came, we laughed, we danced, I cried.

Sage was burned in a smudging ceremony  
by the Whistling Water Clan from the Black Lodge District.  
The Sansel kneeled on the ground of their ancestors.  
It was the most healing thing I think I've ever witnessed.

It was like I was interacting with the memories left there for almost a century,  
like I could feel you, right there with me.  
telling jokes, playing baseball,  
making light of the fact you ate every meal in a mess hall.

I heard stories from newfound friends and family  
of their mothers and fathers and uncles and aunties.

Now, this is not about a ghost town  
because we keep coming back  
and there's no way in hell we'll stop, no matter the attacks.

and this isn't about just your childhood  
because it's still happening today, which we can't allow  
and there's no way to ignore that Never Again is Now

and maybe that's why I cried;  
I rediscovered where and what I came from,  
your old stomping grounds as my guide.

I understand now that my healing is your own,  
and I say “rediscovered” because I think I've always known;  
we've been fighting for decades,  
it's been in my blood since before I was born.

we're not just living for ourselves, but for those who came before.  
in this town of ghosts living through *us*, who came way after the war.

For I see you and your friends through and me and mine.  
(and I now understand why Mom & Dad always ask what my friends' last names are, like, every  
time...)

So this is my promise to fight and heal for you, in the form of a letter that kind of rhymes