

# FOOTPRINTS

*Impressions from where we were to where we will be*

The Newsletter for the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego

Summer Issue 1996

Volume 6



## **BEN HONDA—Nice guys are always #1**

by Mitch Himaka

The late baseball manager Leo Durocher once was quoted as saying, "Nice guys finish last."

Leo never knew our Ben Honda. Ben was a nice guy. He never finished last. In fact, in almost any endeavor he undertook, we more often than not saw Ben leading the pack.

In interviews with people who knew Ben best, the word heard most was "leader." Ben was a leader. He was an organizer.

Ben Honda also was a confidant and counselor to many of the young people with whom he associated for many years, not only as organizer and advisor to the San Diego Buddhist Temple's Junior Young Buddhist Association chapter but to the many athletic teams and community athletes he helped organize into teams after World War II.

*See Ben Honda, page 5*

## **TETS KASHIMA—An Appreciation**

by Joyce Nabeta Teague

My friend Susan Moribe, the President of the Buddhist Temple of San Diego, phoned early on January 4th. "Sensei just called me," she said quietly. "Tets passed away this morning."

Tetsuyo Kashima, just a few weeks short of his 62nd birthday, had succumbed to a massive stroke suffered January 1st while visiting some dear friends in the Bay area. His wife, Jeanie and his children, Sara and Kenn, were with him when he died. Reverend Akio Miyaji had flown up the day before from San Diego, and it was his phone call which relayed the shocking news back to San Diego. I don't know whether I cried at hearing the news, but I have been crying off and on since. Tets was the heart, and often the conscience, of the Buddhist Temple, and his loss is immeasurable.

You could assume Tets would be there for Sunday service, monthly board or committee meetings, fund-raisers, newsletter mailings—you name it, he was always there, ready and willing to lend a hand at any task, no matter how menial. He was a quiet, self-effacing man whose modest stature and demeanor belied his importance in the temple hierarchy. Over the years, he became responsible *See Tets Kashima, page 7*

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## **SPLINTERS FROM THE BOARD**

by Ben Segawa, President

The survey card enclosed with this issue is for informational purposes only. Your Historical Society has consented to disseminate this evaluation as a public service.

The Parker Area Historical Society has invited Poston Internees to share their experiences in Poston at a public program on Sunday, April 21, 1996, at 3:00 p.m. at the Blake Elementary School Auditorium. Your Historical Society encourages anyone who is willing to share those years with the Parker, Arizona people who are not too familiar with the internment to participate as well as anyone who would like to just enjoy the event to attend. Our tentative program includes a photo exhibit, video slide presentation, and a panel of speakers with questions and answers. A reception will follow the program. For more information and motel locations, contact Ben Segawa, 482-1736.

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## **JAPANESE AMERICAN KOREAN WAR VETERANS**

The California based national Japanese American Korean War Veterans organization has been established and their initial project is to erect a memorial monument honoring all killed (KIA's) and missing (MIA's) in action during the Korean Conflict.

The memorial monument will be built in the immediate vicinity of the newly constructed Japanese American Vietnam War Veterans Memorial Monument in the "JACCC Memorial Court" of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in downtown Los Angeles and is scheduled for dedication on Saturday, May 27, 1997.

According to President Robert M. Wada, "the Japanese American Korean War Veterans will never forget the over 217 Japanese Americans, including 164 from Hawaii, who fought and died alone in battle so far away from friends and family. It is our obligation to these Japanese Americans KIA's and MIA's to preserve their memory."

Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Hawaii, has agreed to serve on the Board of Directors for the organization as well as to be the Honorary Co-Chairman of the Memorial Committee.

The organization is appealing to all Koreans War era veterans and all post WWII veterans as well as other supporters to join in this long overdue project. The organization is seeking not only financial assistance, but they need to identify all MIA's and KIA's. The Memorial Committee advised that due to the inability to accurately verify all those of Japanese ancestry, only those with Japanese surnames will be presented on the monument and those names will be representative of all Americans of Japanese ancestry who perished in Korea during the war. For further information please contact: Robert M. Wada (714) 992-5461, or for name verification of MIA's or KIA's contact Chairman Roy Shiraga (818) 968-6385.

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### ELAINE HIBI BOWERS HONORED BY MUSICAL MERIT FOUNDATION

The Musical Merit Foundation of Greater San Diego honored Elaine Hibi Bowers and two previous 1946 winners at its Fiftieth Anniversary Gala held on March 9, 1996, at the Sheraton Harbor Island.

Since the Foundation's founding in 1946, the non-profit volunteer group has awarded more than 500 prizes totaling over \$350,000 to further the musical study of young people who, in auditions, evidence exceptional musical talent.

In the 50 years since its inception there have been only two winners of Japanese ancestry: Elaine, and pianist Hiroko Kunitaki who won in 1990.

### FOOTNOTES . . .

by editor, Jeanne Marumoto Elyea

Correction to our last issue, the great photo of Sammy Itami was identified as taken by Yuki Kawamoto, who takes many of our photographs, however this particular one was taken by member John Rojas.

### Letter to Board-

I enjoyed the article in the last issue of Footprints on John Yamamoto by his son, I am one of the few nisei still around who saw John and Paul Yamamoto play football for San Diego State. The only other one that I am certain of is Take Taniguchi. Our fathers loved sports and took us to many of the games. But not many went to San Diego State games then, because the big games in town were high school football, particularly San Diego High vs other Coast Conference teams. . . Long Beach, Glendale, Santa Ana, etc. . . and the rivalry between service teams, Navy, Marines, and Submarine Base.

Incidentally, John served as the first Scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 52 sponsored by the then First Japanese Congregational Church, though day to day functions were performed by the inestimable Moto Asakawa. Loved them ALL.

Sincerely, Seiji Kiya

### COUNTY NIKKEI STORY TO BE FEATURED

The story of the Nikkei in San Diego from the time of their arrival in the 1880s until the present will be shown at the San Diego Museum of History in Balboa Park for eight months starting in January 1997. The exhibit will be prepared by our Society under the direction of Don Estes.

We are interested in the loan of any photographs, documents, or artifacts like, books, ceramics, clothing, luggage, toys, vegetable and fruit lug boxes, labels and the like. We are seeking the loan of items that will be representative of things that were used daily by our local Nikkei people. See *County Nikkei*, page 4

Please rummage around your storage sheds, garages and closets to see if you have anything that we can share with the greater community, and help them better understand the local Nikkei experience.

The San Diego Museum of History is visited by literally thousands of county students each semester as part of the "week in the park" program. This exhibit represents a major opportunity to reach a very important segment of our local population.

If you have any materials, or can assist us, please call either Ben Segawa at 482-1736 or Don Estes at 280-9418. Thanks for all your help.

### CAUGHT DOING SOMETHING NICE

The JAHSSD would like to thank Mrs. Alice Yano for her permission to copy several of her family photographs including a shot of the Chula Vista farm home of her father, Kajiyo Oyama which figured in the very important alien land law case that went to the U.S. Supreme Court *Oyama v. U.S.*

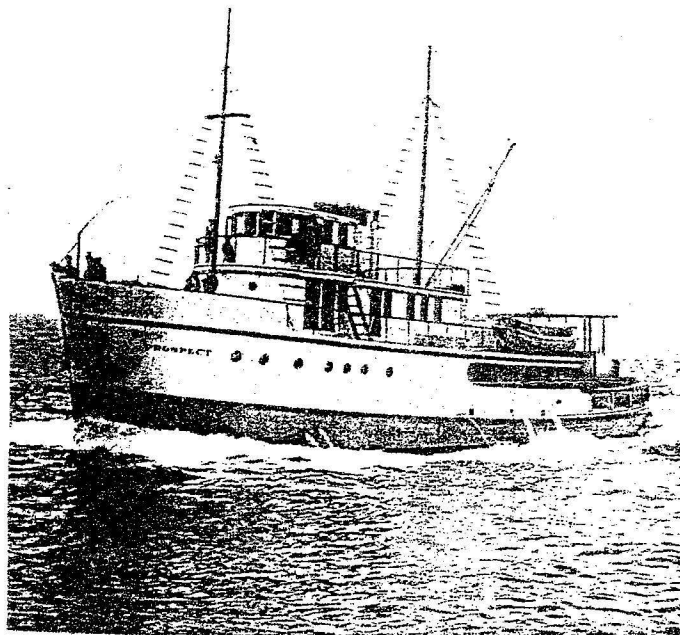
We also would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. William Vetter for the gift of a color photograph of his sister, Yuri Frances (Vetter) Neill in uniform. Mrs. Neill served in the Womens Army Corps (WACs) from 1944 to 1946 rising to the rank of T-5. Also included in his bequest was Bill's 1944 Poston high school annual, complete with autographed inscriptions. In addition Bill also donated materials he had collected in Japan including an "honorary deed" to two square inches of Tokyo, as well as a letter describing his growing up in San Diego on Ocean View Boulevard.

Thanks also to Naomi Himaka, James Wilstermann, Ben Segawa, and Maki Okimoto, who have volunteered to join our Museum of San Diego History exhibit committee. We can use every hand.

Our thanks to Mrs. Patricia Hasegawa Loomis for her generous donation to help cover anticipated expenses of our Balboa Park exhibit.

We would also like to recognize the loan of a display of barbless tuna hooks for our exhibit from Mr. Frank Koide, President of Koide International Consultants.

Organizational appreciation to Mrs. Hatsune Mukai for her donation of MIS Materials that were the property of her late husband, Tom Mukai.



*Prospect, 1943 modern tuna clipper*

### A TUNA BOAT GOES TO WAR

by Don Estes

To those old enough to remember, or for those who have read about the military campaigns in the Pacific during World War II, the name Guadalcanal may have some meaning. The hard fought naval and land battles that took place in the Solomon Islands between August, 1942 and February, 1943 has a San Diego Nikkei connection that in some respects makes one wonder about the nature of coincidences.

The tuna boat *Prospect* began its career as part of the Nikkei fishing fleet working out of San Diego. Built in the late 1930's for Mr. Tokunosuke Abe's Southern Commercial Company, the *Prospect* was a state of the art clipper some 122 feet long, driven by a 400 horsepower diesel engine, and capable of transporting 200 tons of refrigerated tuna.

On December 15, 1941, the *Prospect*, made her final voyage as a tuna boat, returned to San Diego in company with Captain John Tasso's boat, *American Voyager*. As the two ships tied up at the local customs dock, the *Prospect* was immediately boarded by members of the Eleventh Naval District's Office of Naval Intelligence and the local office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Japanese crew was placed

*See A Tuna Boat, page 5*



*Tuna Boat, continued from page 4*

under arrest and removed by an armed Marine guard to the county jail, while members of the *American Voyager's* crew were ordered to unload the catch at the Westgate Cannery, and secure the boat. On May 6, 1942, following a major refit, and sporting a new coat of navy gray paint, the former *Prospect*, now designated the YP 346, joined the fleet, and set sail for Hawaii in convoy with thirteen other former West Coast tuna boats.

The designation, YP stood for "Yard Patrol" craft, and quickly became known throughout the fleet by the something less than affectionate label, "Yippies." Although originally envisioned as harbor guard boats the little ships were quickly pressed into service as tugs, dispatch boats, rescue craft, troop and supply ferries, and as transports for minor amphibious assaults to meet the exigencies of a war strapped U.S. Navy.

From Hawaii the YPs convoyed gasoline from PT boats and navy sea planes flying from French Frigate Shoals. Later, YP 346 was ordered to the New Hebrides, and finally to the Guadalcanal - Tulagi area in support of the First Marine Division who had landed there in August, 1942. Since Guadalcanal was under almost continuous air and sea attack by the Japanese navy, the "Yippies" tended to anchor at Tulagi which was relatively safer.

On September 8, 1942, YP 346 and 298, accompanied by the destroyer transports, *USS Manley* and *USS McKean* ferried 700 marine raiders under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Merritt

Edison up the coast of Guadalcanal in an effort to destroy a Japanese supply base at Tasimboko. After disembarking the marines, the YPs returned to their Tulagi anchorage.

As fate would have it the YP 346 arrived at the Tulagi anchorage around mid-night, just about the same time as the Japanese light

cruiser *Sendai* and eight destroyers arrived to bombard Tulagi. Caught by the *Sendai's* searchlight, the wooden-hulled 346 was shot to pieces by the cruiser's anti aircraft guns. The 346's pilot house was quickly destroyed by the *Sendai's* fire, followed by the rupturing of the ammonia pipes used for refrigeration. As ammonia fumes spread throughout the ship, the YP 346, formerly the *Prospect*, was grounded and shot to pieces with the loss of two killed and two wounded.

In the end the crew and the ship received a Presidential Unit Citation for their role in the Solomons campaign. The Abe family was never compensated for the loss of their tuna boat due to enemy action.

*Ben Honda, continued from page 1*

Ben left us Christmas Eve day following a long illness at the age of 70. The respect Ben earned over the many years in his capacity as Buddhist Temple leader (there's that word again), temple youth advisor, community leader, tour group leader, was apparent at his funeral service held at the Buddhist Temple on December 30.

Four, maybe five, generations of San Diego's Japanese-American community turned out to pay final respects filling the temple to overflowing. People spilled out in the parking lot to hear the service over loudspeakers. It was the largest turnout ever for a funeral held in our community that I can recall.

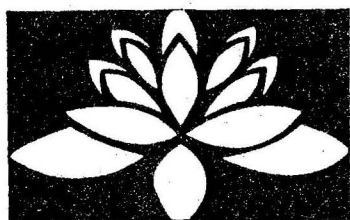
To Motoo Tsuneyoshi, a childhood friend of Ben's, Ben was like a big brother. In a moving eulogy to his friend, Motoo told how Ben was always willing to help others.

"He was always good to the young people of the community," Motoo said. "He was a role model to the young. He was always positive. They all looked up to him."

On the lighter side, Motoo recalled how Ben, whose dark complexion often betrayed his usual sunny disposition, sometimes ran into problems with the Immigration and Naturalization Service at the Border Patrol checkpoints along Interstate 5.

"He was so dark, they thought he was an undocumented Mexican alien," Motoo said.

*See Ben Honda, page 6*



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"Then on one trip to visit Hawaii, airport greeters refused to give him a flower lei as they often do to visitors because they thought he was a native of Hawaii."

Another long-time friend and former San Diegan, Rev. Jim "Gopher" Yanagihara of the San Luis Obispo Buddhist Temple, described Ben as an "unselfish, quiet leader."

"Ben never did anything for self-gratification," he said. "Much of his leadership was done by example. He got me back into the church that way."

"He asked me if I would draw him some art work for use at the church and I did. Out of curiosity, I went to the Temple to see how it was used. Going to the Temple that day was like a homecoming for me. It was as if he guided me back to church, my roots, without a word of urging on his part."

"That's how Ben was with his own family. He never forced his kids—Ralph and Terri—to go to church. It was just a normal part of their family life. Every Sunday, they would get up and go to church. There was not questions asked. And Ralph and Terri have continued in that vein since."

Ben once thought of going into the ministry himself but by that time, he was married to Micki and they had the two kids, Rev. Jim said.

"He knew it would have been a hardship on them to have to go through the change because they had established a lifestyle by then. Being a minister is not an easy life. When I went into it, I was still single. When my wife (Patsy) and I were married, she knew I was going to stay a minister."

"Ben ended up doing what he really wanted to do and that was to be a tour guide. In that way, he not only was benefitting the community but serving the people."

"But he wasn't too far from being a minister of sorts. He often counseled people, especially the young people with whom he often associated as Jr. YBA advisor for 30 years or so and as the man who revitalized the YBS here after the war."

"The young people went to Ben because they knew they could confide in him for help and that their discussion would not go beyond him."

"He was a father figure to many of the young

people. He enjoyed having his young charges drop by to see him once they grew up and matured and had their own families. The trust they had in him was awesome."

"One thing about Ben. He never talked bad about anyone. He never had anything negative to say about anyone. He never probed but if he noticed you were drifting off base, he would bring you back."

"Ben would bring you back without you know it. He would have been an excellent minister. The San Diego Temple gained a lot, probably because he wasn't a minister. I know all of the ministers who served here have said Ben's help was immeasurable."

"I know it was very difficult for Rev. (Akio) Miyaji to have lost both Ben and Tets Kashima within a span of a week. That was devastating."

In an interview with the San Diego Union-Tribune, another long-time and childhood friend, Akira "Jumbo" Takeshita was quoted as calling Ben a "born leader."

Akira noted that just a year out of high school, Ben was selected to head the Poston III High School physical education program.

Anyone who has known Ben also know he was a great competitor whether he was playing baseball, softball, basketball or any other sport. He had that fire in him that very few had.

"As a thirdbaseman, Ben covered more ground than anyone I ever knew," Jumbo said. Ben was outstanding, quick of hands, and a great talent as a ballplayer.

Had WWII not happened, who knows how far he might have gone as a baseball player? He was  
*See Ben Honda, page 7*



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*Ben Honda, continued from page 6*  
that good.

After graduating from Poston III HS, Ben enlisted in the Army and fought through the Italy campaign with the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team attaining the rank of sergeant, Jumbo said. When the war ended, Ben remained with the 442nd occupying Milan and Leghorne before returning stateside in July, 1946. By that time unfortunately, Ben's mother had died in a traffic accident.

He went into the landscap gardening business with his father upon his return before turning to his tour business during his latter years.

In addition to his wife, Mikiye, and children, Ralph and Terri Omori, Ben is survived by two grandchildren, Katie and Kurtis Omori; two brothers, Masami and Tom of San Diego; and a sister, Chiyoko Oshima of Los Angeles.

It's really too bad Leo Durocher never met Ben Honda. Ben might have taught him a thing or two.

Farewell, Ben. You will be missed.

*Tets Kashima, continued from page 1*

for many time-consuming duties, including temple president and vice-president, and chairman for countless fundraising and community events. He represented the temple at functions, both local and national. He was involved with the Dharma (Sunday) School program in some capacity for as long as I can remember, sharing his considerable knowledge of Buddhism. And he handled innumerable niggling details at every level of temple business without complaint. To imagine our Sangha (community) without Tets was—well unimaginable.

Tetsuyo Kashima was born in Yamaguchi-ken, Japan on January 29, 1934, the first son of Reverend Tetsuro and Yoshiko Kashima. When he was five, he left Japan with his mother to live in Oakland where his father was serving as a minister. During



the Second World War, young Tets and his family were evacuated first to Tanforan and then to the Topaz, Utah relocation camp, where they would stay until their release in 1945.

After living in Ogden, Utah, following the war, his family moved to San Diego in 1948, where Reverend Kashima became the resident minister at the Buddhist Temple of San Diego. As a teenager, living and playing with his brother on the floor below the *hondo*, Tets learned every nook and cranny of the temple building. After all, it was his home for about six years until his father's death in 1953. He understandably retained an interest in the welfare of the temple and the Sangha, for he had known many of these families since childhood. In fact, it often seemed to us he must spend as much time at 2929 Market Street doing this-and-that as he did at his Scripps Ranch home with Jeanie, their kids, and their cats. Jeanie confirmed this recently: "You know, he lived for the temple," she said.

But Tets did have other concerns besides the Buddhist Temple. He taught at San Diego High School for 32 years. A graduate of San Diego High himself, Tets received his bachelor's degree in science and later a master's degree in biology from San Diego State University. He began teaching at SDHS in 1962, specializing in physiology. (The 1962 yearbook photo shows an earnest, youthful face with no-nonsense black-framed glasses.) He would eventually become the chairman of the Science Department. Among his responsibilities during his long tenure at San Diego

*See Tets Kashima, page 8*

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*Tets Kashima, continued from page 7*

High were senior class advisor, advisor for the Science Olympiad team, and coordinator of the graduation exercises for many years.

Tets was a tireless volunteer for other community organizations as well. He served on the San Diego JACL Board of Directors in some capacity for about 20 years, most recently chairing the Scholarship Committee and hosting its annual awards dinner. He helped organize the yearly JACL picnic, a big task in itself. Tets served on both the Mayor's and San Diego County's human relations commissions for several years, as well as on the California Teachers' Human Relations Commission. He offered monthly Buddhist services to recruits at the Naval Training Center and several people have used the term "devoted son" to describe his attention to the needs of his mother who lives in Chula Vista.

Like many young men his age, Tets had served a two-year stint in the Armed Forces in the late 50s. But not everyone is aware that Tets also went to Kyoto for training as a Buddhist minister and received his ordination. Despite his commitment to Buddhist ideals, however, he chose to make teaching his livelihood, and youth education remained a priority throughout his life. In his many years of teaching, he had the opportunity to encourage hundreds of young people, including my contemporaries—now pushing 50—and my daughter, currently a senior at San Diego High.

So many of us in the Sangha came to rely on Tets' objectivity and calm in the face of crisis, and on his ability not to lose sight of common goals in petty bickering or emotional reactions. He was a no-frills leader with little ego and no hidden agenda. We often went to him to help us find the right approach when the path seemed prickly with potential obstacles. He would usually come up with a thoughtful suggestion that was acceptable to all parties—and maybe sometimes it was because the suggestion came from one whose viewpoint we all respected and trusted. We loved him for his ability to look at life's lumps and bumps with acceptance and humor. And what humor! He could amuse you with surprisingly silly and off-color comments. That was the human element reminding you he was actually a person, and not a buddha, as his more

tactful and serious side might have suggested!

At Tet's funeral, his brother Tetsuden said that at the time of his death, Tets was a happy person—satisfied with his life. How many of us can say at this moment we are truly satisfied with our lives? "We ourselves are responsible for our own happiness and misery," wrote the Ceylonese Buddhist, Narada Mahathera. "We are the architects of our fate." In sincere Buddhist fashion (and surely confirmed by his study of biology), Tets accepted life and death for what they are; part of the same inevitable process of change. He acknowledged his shortcomings and those of others. He cared about and worked for the welfare of others. He loved and was loved. In these simple truths, he found joy. I believe such a person can indeed die without regret, even if death comes unexpectedly. What a great, great lesson...

Shortly after the funeral service, Susan Moribe met with Reverend Miyaji and a small group of board members to reassign to several people the many duties which had been the responsibility of just one person. What they knew was irreplaceable was all the stuff Tets carried around in his head and heart—from the practical, like the unwritten history of the temple; to the intangible, like his deep sense of loyalty and commitment.

A few days after this meeting, Susan told me that Tets' ashes were housed in the nokotsudo (Columbarium) adjacent to the naijin (inner sanctuary) of our temple, where his father's remains are also kept. On hearing this, I felt a wonderful, unexpected sense of relief. For the first time, it made his loss more bearable. Now when we are at the temple, I feel Tets is still there where he belongs, guiding us as quietly and good-naturedly as he did for years—with wisdom and compassion. I think of what Ikkyu, a Zen master, uttered rather playfully on his deathbed:

*I shan't die, I shan't go anywhere, I'll be here.  
But don't ask me anything, I shan't answer.*

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## **JAPANESE AMERICAN MUSEUM TO HOLD SAN DIEGO RECEPTION**

The Japanese American National Museum located in Los Angeles cordially invites all their friends and members to a reception on Friday, April 19, 1996, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Las Cascadas Restaurant, San Diego Marriott Hotel at SeaPort Village

Light refreshments will be provided at no cost and there will be a no-host bar. A short program updating the museum's current projects will be presented at 7:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend and bring your friends.

Self parking will be available at the hotel for a \$5.00 fee with validation, or valet parking at \$10.00 with validation.

To assist with planning, please RSVP by April 16th with: Yukio Kawamoto, 286-8203, Don Estes 280-9418, or the National Museum at (213) 625-0414.

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## **REMINDER**

### **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS WERE DUE IN JANUARY**

IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO AND YOU ARE NOT A CHARTER

MEMBER, PLEASE SEND IN YOUR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL.

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### **JAHSSD BOARD**

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## **JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO 1995 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (includes *Footprints* Newsletter)**

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