

THE INTERVIEW

By Yuji Hong

Splash! I jump into the pool at my bachan and haraboji's house on a warm afternoon in Southern California. I enjoy being at my grandparents' house, but because of COVID-19 I have had to stay at my house in Oakland and I have not seen them in over a year. This is my time for spring break and so I decide to spend part of it interviewing my bachan and ask her how the COVID-19 virus has affected her.

I was surprised by the fact that my bachan was very disconnected from her community due to COVID-19. For four years before the pandemic she drove every Sunday to a city called Torrance to meet her social group, where she ate food, wrote poems, and talked with the rest of her group in Japanese. For her and the other elders it was important to stay social and talk in their home language. But after COVID-19 hit and Governor Newsom said that you could not have any gatherings, they had to stay home and not see each other. She also taught Japanese each week but that too had to close down.

Another way COVID-19 affected her was holidays. In Japan, she told me, there are holidays for every month but since the virus she had to celebrate them alone. For example in March they celebrate Girl's Day. Another example is at the start of January they celebrate New Years. She missed celebrating them with her community.

My vision for the post-pandemic future is for elders to recreate communities that they feel comfortable sharing experiences with. Something I learned from my bachan is for elders, seeing people on digital devices and screens is not enough and that it's better to be in person and actually be with them. I say that we should reopen community centers, invite elders to meet at parks, encourage events at malls and set up meetings in libraries. No matter what space, elders need social activity and to be in person.

I've learned a lot being at my bachan's house. I've learned so much about how COVID-19 affected my her and other elders. I think we should all work harder to create more spaces where elders can create more community. This is your time to take action and ask your grandparents what they need to stay connected.