

## "Hidden"

### *artist's statement*

During World War II, my mother was incarcerated in a Japanese American Internment Camp – a youngster, a Los Angeles native, born and bred in the United States. She was sent to a horse stable first (Santa Anita Race Track) then after seven months living in that temporary facility, the 18,000 people detained there were distributed to the ten U.S. concentration camps built for this purpose. My mother was part of the contingent of children, aged 12 and under, who the government saw fit to classify as "subversives" based solely on their race, ignoring their American citizenship and their right to due process. Of the 120,000 internees overall, about one quarter of them were children.

These statistics encapsulating the lived experience of my family – aunts, uncles, cousins – who were forced to give up their homes and journey through an unknown void of existence, unjustly sentenced by the all-powerful government and not knowing how long their imprisonment would be, are only the dry bones of the stories that we carry with us. The subtle details remain elusive and buried. All families retain in their bones the whisperings of their ancestors. Yet are we, the succeeding generations, merely vessels for these sacred memories, or can our own stories also constitute a vital ingredient to discover our full history?

My shadow art piece "Hidden," being inspired by the beautiful prose poem of Karen Propp, reflects how we all carry the embers of family history; how within that, we have our own experiences hidden away. How can we recognize our own burdens and healing as we approach these sacred flames of history?

We have had a very minute taste of this uncertainty with the Pandemic, and even that tiny bitter droplet has driven people to distraction. What dread my grandparents must have felt riding the bus with their children and only what they could carry into that bleak tomorrow? I do not presume to think that I can comprehend what my mother, as an adolescent, watching the upheaval of her whole world taking place, must have felt. But knowing that this history is in my blood, I want to believe that I am bequeathed a sensitivity, heightened just slightly, to be able to feel some of the pain of others dealing with dispossession, displacement, and unjust accusation. This Pandemic has brought us slightly closer to understanding a reality that assaults many people here and around the globe daily, and hopefully, if we can be wise, we will have the courage to recognize our connections as humans and reach out to defend and help.

– Leslie K. Gray  
April 2021