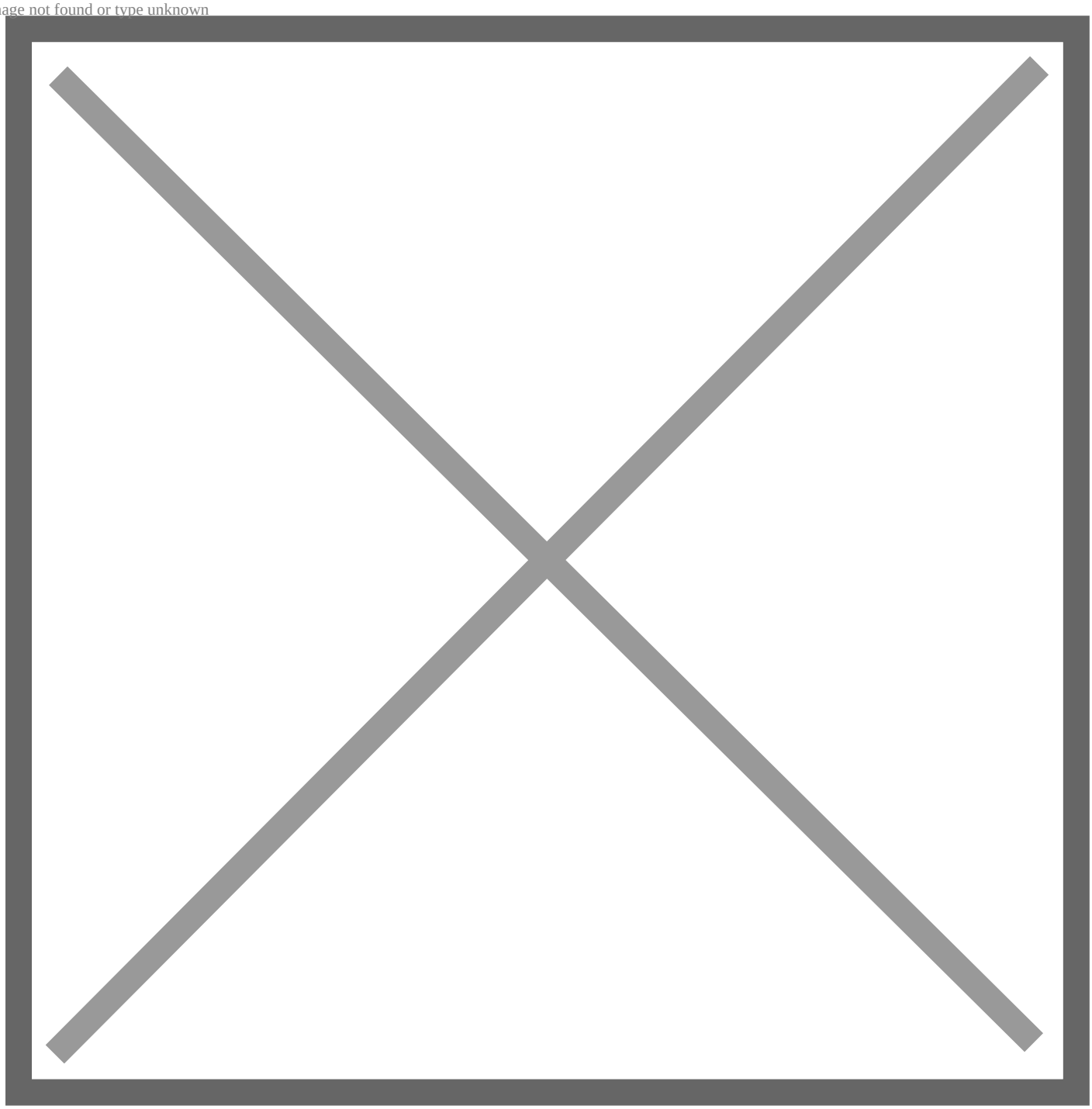
The Details of Our Past Stories Can Enrich the Futures We Have Yet to Write

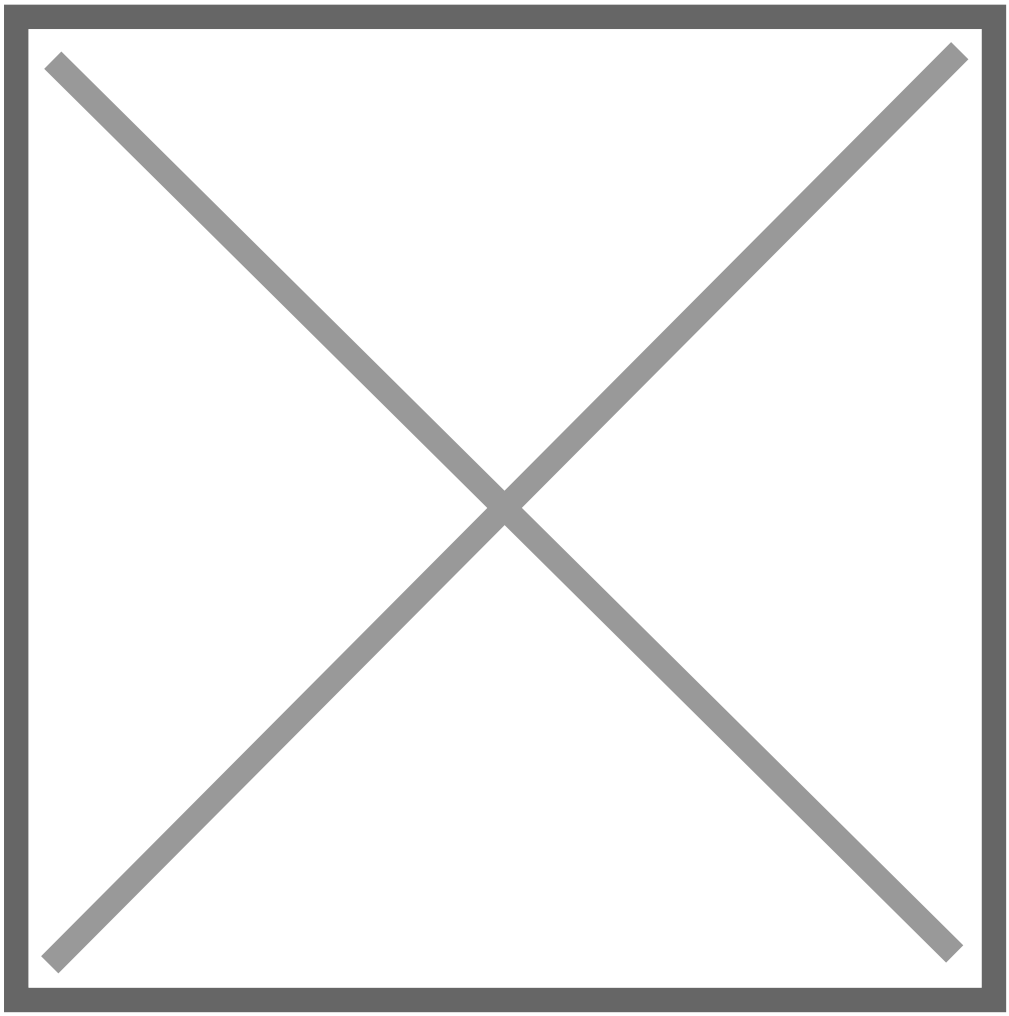
September 08, 2020

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Knowing our history – all aspects, including the beautiful moments and the unfortunate ugly truths – is crucial in how we build a stronger, more inclusive future for all Americans.

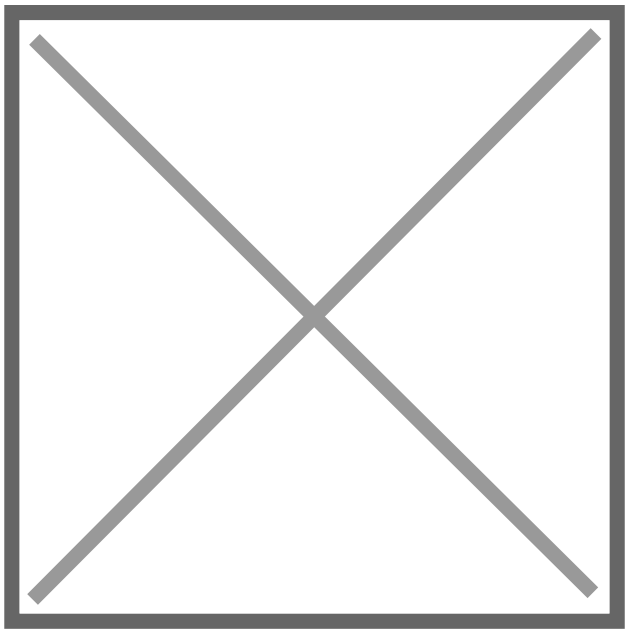
Tracey Doi, group vice president and chief financial officer for Toyota Motor North America (TMNA), refers to the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) as "the very heart of the Japanese American community." Because of generations of support and commitment to documenting the history of Japanese Americans by JANM, Doi and her 92-year-old father were able to trace back their family's lineage with immense detail.



Doi's paternal grandmother's family (grandmother seated on the left).

The archives available through JANM provide so much more than a history lesson. "When I've seen grandparents and grandchildren exploring the museum together, eyes are widened and minds are opened," Doi says. "The younger generations learn to not take the freedoms and opportunities they have available to them today for granted. It's been a climb. And it's an ongoing journey."

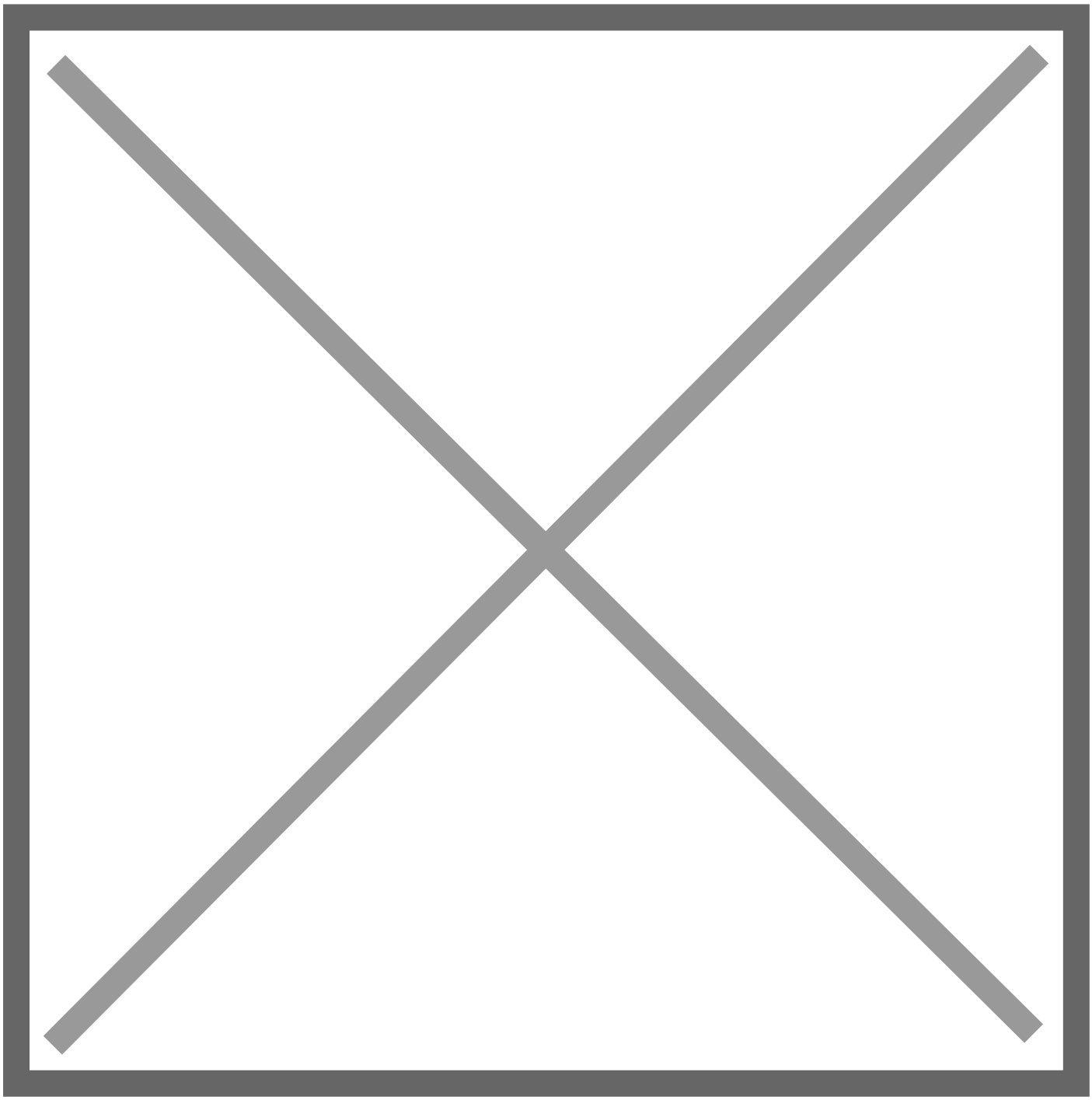
Doi serves on the museum's board of governors, among other leadership positions in the Asian Pacific Islander community. She was recently honored both by Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP) as the recipient of the 2020 Margaret Ashida Leadership Award, and also by the Texas Women's Foundation as a 2020 Maura Women Helping Women Award Recipient.



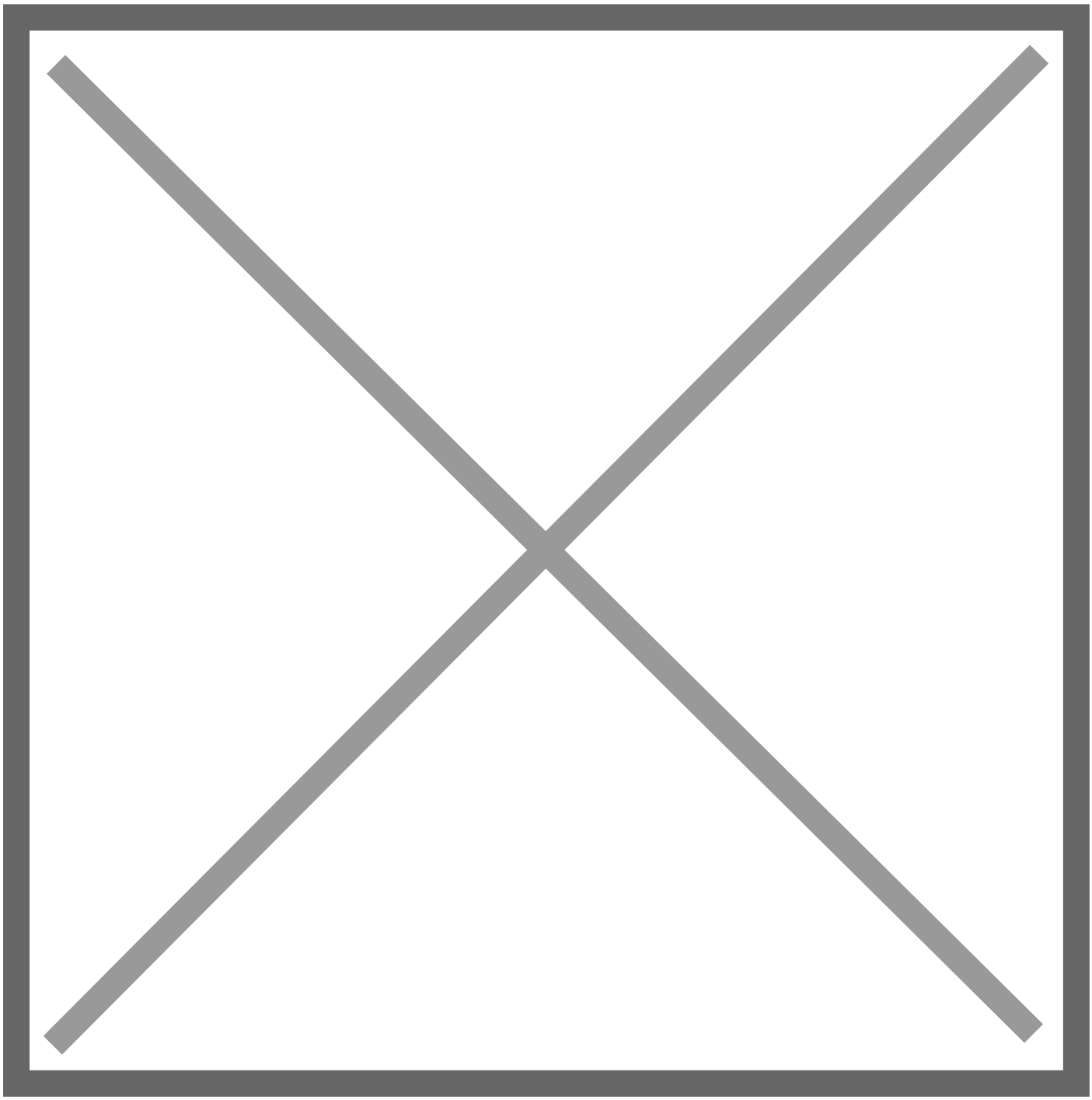
Through the archives of JANM, Doi learned that her grandmother arrived on October 5, 1913 aboard the 'Shinyo Maru' from Yokohama to San Francisco. She later wed Doi's grandfather.

Doi pauses for a moment. Her eyes sink a little, and she says, "this is also the first time in my adult life I've experienced a shift backwards" – referring to the recurrence of racism and xenophobia directed against Asian Pacific Islanders amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. But this is not a single pandemic. It's both COVID-19 and social and racial injustice, threatening equal opportunities for marginalized people.

The Japanese American story is one in which we can all find parallels. Aside from Indigenous people, American roots are all immigrant. Whether first generation or fifth generation, American families built their story, seeking freedom and hard-fought new beginnings.

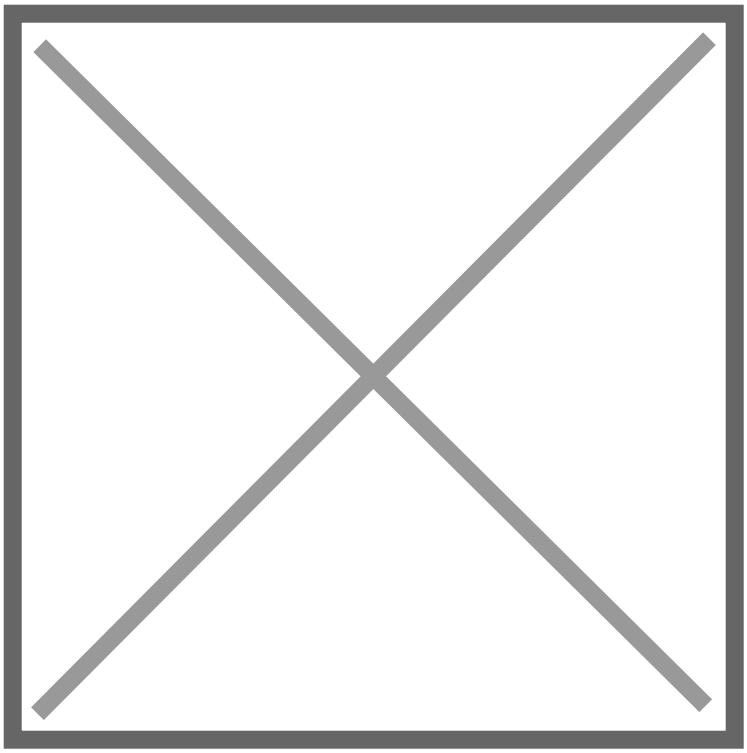


JANM protects the courageous stories of Japanese Americans. It preserves the inspiring oral histories of first-generation immigrants, or *Issei*, and the artifacts, photographs, written records and other materials documenting the lives of Japanese Americans before, during, and after the World War II mass incarceration, when the U.S. government violated the Constitutional rights of 120,000 individuals of Japanese Ancestry. They were forced from their homes with only one suitcase per person, loaded on buses and trains, and imprisoned behind barbed wire in American incarceration camps in desolate areas.



Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo (currently the historic building of the Japanese American National Museum) became a roundup point for the Japanese Americans who were sent to "assembly centers" in 1942. (Jack Iwata photo. Gift of Jack and Peggy Iwata. Japanese American National Museum [93.102.102])

Doi's grandparents, parents and aunts and uncles were among those that lost their homes, businesses and personal belongings. JANM preserves and shares the experience of Japanese Americans to help us all gather the courage to respond and speak out, to oppose racism, prejudice and discrimination in all forms.

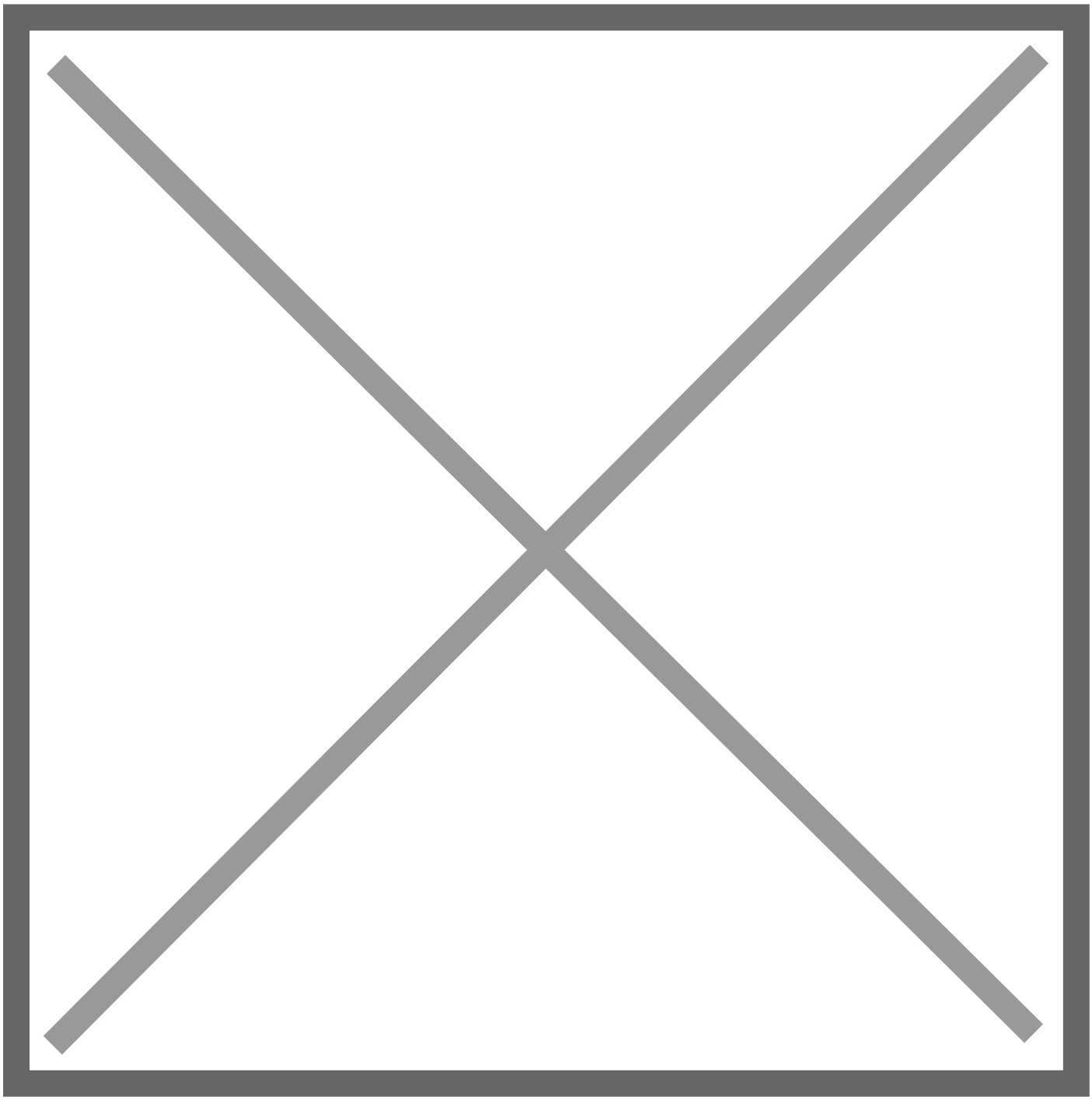


Doi's grandmother and infant father.

Toyota was there when the museum first opened its doors in 1992. And it remains a proud supporter to this day. Knowing and respecting the Japanese American story is respecting the American story, and the diversity of our country. Now more than ever, when a pandemic disproportionately affects minorities and when rhetoric can be incredibly divisive – we must understand our complex American history, so we're not condemned to repeat past mistakes.

Although the 85,000 square-foot Pavilion may currently be closed to the public due to COVID-19 health guidelines, its doors are open virtually, with online programming, a film festival, and a behind-the-scenes look into the curation and archives, as well as guided tours. Online visitors come from the U.S., Japan, Brazil – the world's largest Japanese community outside Japan – and many other countries, netting up to 128,000 views with every virtual tour.

Toyota's ongoing support of JANM ranges from executive involvement, such as leaders like Doi with board membership, to funding virtual programming and assisting the organization with raising funds during events. Earlier this year, returning as the Signature Sponsor of the 2020 JANM Virtual Gala, Toyota donated a 2020 Lexus RX 450h as a raffle prize, helping JANM raise an additional $108,000 to support programming during this unprecedented time. The lucky winner of the RX 450h was one of JANM's longtime volunteers, Nahan Gluck, who started volunteering as a docent at the museum in 1994 after a college friend sparked his interest in Japanese culture and the Japanese American experience.



Raffle winner Nahan Gluck

Toyota has proudly sponsored JANM for 28 years. Each of our own unique backgrounds and dreams adds richness that is the American story. It's evident in Doi's story, the thousands of visitors to JANM – whether in-person or virtually – and it is evident in all the stories yet to be written. By supporting organizations like JANM, Toyota is recognizing the past, while pushing for a more just and equal society for all. That's what Respect for People is all about.