

Report to Classmates

Grant Ujifusa

Shuichi Ujifusa, my grandpa, left a tiny village in southern Japan in 1904 to find work laying railroad track in northern Wyoming for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, a line founded by a notable Bostonian, John Murray Forbes. The CB&Q was good to the laborers who did its hardest work in territory among the last in the United States to be settled by white Americans.

But grandpa decided that easier work was to shovel and level a farm out of barren and erose desert terrain to grow sugar beets on land soon be irrigated by water from the Big Horn River. He began the shovel work in 1913, twenty years after Frederick Jackson Turner had declared the frontier closed. It was good that grandpa was not much of a reader.

I grew up on grandpa's farm and attended schools in the small town of Worland. The local people, very much including my mother, wanted the best education possible for their children, but writing an essay to answer a question on a high school examination was an unknown practice. Testable Information was assumed to be either true or false.

This meant that when I showed up in Cambridge, most of what was going on at the University was alien to me. Two things were not: the football team and the local newspaper, which in our case was *The Harvard Crimson*. I went to all the home games to cheer and decided to compete for the *Crimson*. I was elected to the Ed Board when I shouldn't have been really, thanks to Jay Featherstone '62, my tutor, to whom I shall always be grateful.

Once inside 14 Plympton Street, I read a piece by a fellow editor justifying De Gaulle's independent nuclear force. I didn't understand what he had written and asked him what it was about. He said it was about politics. I thought to myself that politics was about having enough votes to be elected County Commissioner, and I still think so.

At the *Crimson*, I also met Michael Barone '66, whose understanding of what politics was, was like mine. So after we left Harvard, we produced *The Almanac of American Politics 1972*, which described and analyzed in words and numbers all 535 members and constituencies that make up Congress. This became the handbook of the anti-war McGovern campaign in 1972 and the next year was a National Book Award finalist.

The Almanac then became a Beltway insider book published to this day, though I stopped working on the project after the 2000 edition.

Because of the book, I was asked by some Japanese American leaders

in 1982 to help the community to redress a wrong committed against 115,000 people who were forced into internment camps in 1942. It seemed an impossible task, but on August 10, 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed HR 442, legislation that apologized to Japanese Americans for what happened and provided \$20,000 to each victim of FDR's Executive Order 9066. For my work, I was knighted by the Japanese Government, but better for me was when old women in Seattle and Fresno would hug me and we would all start to cry.

I was a volunteer on redress, but during the lobbying effort, I was paid to work as an editor of general interest books at Random House. Among my writers were Andrew Grove, Sam Ervin, Lester Thurow, and Kevin Phillips.

At Random House, I met Amy Brooks, to whom I have been married for 36 years. Amy studied at Julliard and graduated from Sarah Lawrence. At age 45, she went back to graduate school in social work and now works as a clinical therapist. I am now mostly retired, but do some consulting work for some money managers in New York.

Amy and I have three children. Steven '01, Andrew '04, and an adopted son John.

Andrew is a journalist who covers Common Core issues for *Education*

Weekly, a magazine based in Maryland. He's married to Jen Beasley, the Washington lobbyist for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance.

Steven is the author of *A Man and His Ship*, a biography of William Frances Gibbs, a Class of 1910 dropout, who designed and built the SS United States, one of the world's most celebrated ocean liners. Published by Simon and Schuster, the book was named one of the ten best non-fiction titles of 2012 by the *Wall Street Journal*.

Steven is now at work on a book about the clipper ship trade. Perhaps the most important figure in the business was a notable Bostonian, John Murray Forbes, who left going around the Horn to San Francisco and China to become the lead investor and president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy railroad.

Amy and I adopted John in 2001 when he was 11 and a much battered child of Puerto Rican descent. He now says he's Japanese. John graduated from the local high school as a special ed student, and works as a stock boy in a supermarket. Not long ago, I was driving John and two of his friends back to our house when John said, "The Nabisco truck was late again today." To which a friend said, "Yeah, but at least baked goods has a nice manager, not like me in produce." After which the conversation turned to who's up and who's

down at Shoprite.

I was thrilled to hear it all. John had earlier been dismissed from two similar positions for inappropriate language and behavior. I now felt for the first time that John had a shot at an ordinary life. And then right in the car I became grateful for all that was ordinary in my life. But I don't think I will ever come to remember my experience at Harvard as ordinary, though I sometimes wish that my memories of The Yard and The House would quiet themselves.