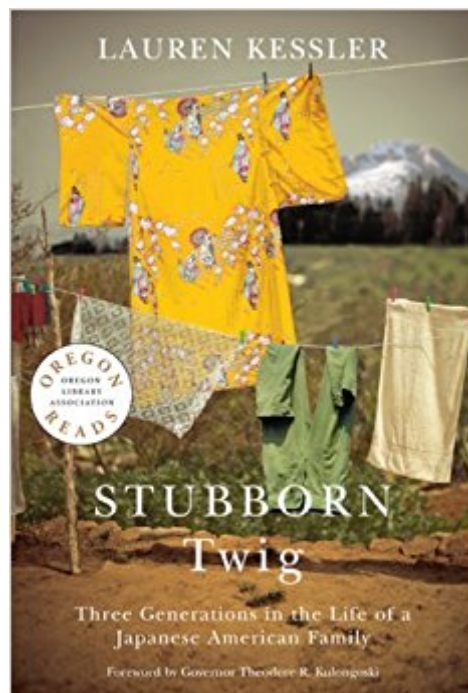


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# Stubborn Twig: Three Generations In The Life Of A Japanese American Family (Oregon Reads)



## Synopsis

Stubborn Twig is a classic American story, a story of immigrants making their way in a new land. It is a living work of social history that rings with the power of truth and the drama of fiction, a moving saga about the challenges of becoming an American. Masuo Yasui traveled from Japan across the other Oregon Trail; the one that spanned the Pacific Ocean; in 1903. Like most immigrants, he came with big dreams and empty pockets. Working on the railroads, in a cannery, and as a houseboy before settling in Hood River, Oregon, he opened a store, raised a large family, and became one of the area's most successful orchardists. As Masuo broke the race barrier in the local business community, his American-born children broke it in school, scouts and sports, excelling in most everything they tried. For the Yasuis' first-born son, the constraints and contradictions of being both Japanese and American led to tragedy. But his seven brothers and sisters prevailed, becoming doctors, lawyers, teachers, and farmers. It was a classic tale of the American dream come true; until December 7, 1941, changed their lives forever. The Yasuis were among the more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry along the West Coast who were forced from their homes and interned in vast inland relocation camps. Masuo was arrested as a spy and imprisoned for the rest of the war; his family was shamed and broken. Yet the Yasuis endured, as succeeding generations took up the challenge of finding their identity as Americans. Stubborn Twig is their story; a story at once tragic and triumphant, one that bears eloquent witness to both the promise and the peril of America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Kessler portrays a Japanese American family from the early 1900s to WWII internment camps and after. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

YA-A factual account of three generations of a Japanese-American family living in the Pacific Northwest. It begins in 1903, when Masuo Yasui arrived in Hood River, Oregon, to seek his fortune. This part of the story is similar to other immigrants' tales-years of hard work, loneliness, and struggles with a new language and customs. The striking distinction appears around 1919, with the rise of anti-Japanese sentiment. Yasui, his brother, their wives, and children had sacrificed much to establish a thriving general store and owned several orchards. Yasui, who spoke fluent English, was the acknowledged leader of the Japanese community in the area and an active member of the orchardists' cooperatives, the Methodist Church, and the Rotary Club. His family continued to have great success despite discrimination. Their lives were painfully disrupted, however, on December 7, 1941. Yasui was arrested as a spy and imprisoned for the rest of the war; his relatives were scattered and some were interned. This book puts human faces and emotions to the events of that period. Readers learn how racism and internment continued to affect the choices and decisions of second-generation family members. Part sociological study, part American history, part family saga, this title will make a significant addition to any library. Penny Stevens, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Stubborn Twig - by Lauren Kessler. This well-researched story of three generations of the Yasui family was of special interest to me because it parallels the time frame and journey of my own family's experience, though we were not as successful, and, therefore, didn't have as much to lose as the Yasui's. Their saga begins in Japan in the late 1890's, and explains the reasons that first generation of issei emigrated to the U. S., the visa processes, the voyage across the Pacific in steerage. Each segment was fascinating to me because I imagined that my grandfathers underwent the same kind of process, and it filled in the many blanks in my family history. My family also made its start in farming the Pacific Northwest and in Southern California. However, both branches lacked the drive and ambition of our protagonist Masuo Yasui who built up a mini empire in Hood Valley,

Oregon - of apple and citrus farms, a local store, loan arrangements and multiple other businesses. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, his was the head that stuck out the most and, hence, got pummeled as mercilessly and irrationally as any whac-a-mole. We learn that the racial paranoia and animus that rose at that time did not come from nowhere - it was part of the underlying atmosphere of fear and hate Asians experienced all along the west coast for decades. It was especially prevalent in Hood River. Since my father hardly talked about his experiences in the internment camp at Gila River, I never knew (till reading this account of the Yasui family) about the everyday insults and indignities that accompanied life for the first generations of Japanese and Chinese. Masuo spent the whole war and even months afterwards in a prison on unproven charges of being a spy. (In fact, no evidence was ever found to prove that any internees were ever guilty of espionage.) He and his wife never returned to Hood River where his many properties were sold at basement prices just to pay loans and taxes, and where he had mistakenly thought he had gained the trust and friendship of his white neighbors over the many decades he and his family lived there. Though there were white neighbors and friends who stood by them, they, too, paid a price in threats and ostracism. Masuo, his nisei children and their experiences take up the bulk of the book. The third generation sansei (of which I am a member) inhabits the last quarter of the book and is not nearly as compelling as they continue their transition as Japanese- Americans into the social and economic fabric of the U. S. The author has found the perfect family to represent the plight of the Japanese through three generations. Within its members, the Yasui family experiences success, persecution, rebellion, incarceration and ultimate realization of their quest to be Americans. There are truly sad moments in this book where the clash between the old and new cultures have a terrible outcome. And where the realization that no matter how hard you may try, you are not going to fit in. It breaks your heart.

This is a well written book about the Japanese experience prior to and after World War II. Being a sansei, I had always asked 1st and 2nd generation family members about those experiences but they rarely gave significant information or they minimized the shame and humiliation. This book gave me great insight into what actually happened in an interesting and captivating way. It also gave me greater knowledge in the Japanese philosophy of life, work, community and family. Thank you Ms. Kessler for the insights into those silent and hidden experiences. This has to be a "must read" especially for anyone of Japanese ancestry or anyone interested in history or human nature.

A wonderful book about an amazing people and their hardships during the war. They were treated

horribly. It sadden me to know these fine families endured such hardships. They were a precious part of my growing up in Oregon. I admire their with courage and dignity. The book was just perfect in the telling.

Amazing story of a family from Oregon. Would recommend that everyone read this history of a family that has achieved so much despite the odds. Really enjoyed the story. Made me realize how strong we are even when injured and mistreated by people we think are our friends.

Oh my! Everyone should read this. This family is amazing with the story taking place in Hood River, OR. Very close to home. My husband had first hand experience with this era as he was raised in Hood River. Even mentioned his family name in the book. He had a childhood friend that was taken away with his family during this shameful process.

This was a touching, heart-wrenching, yet also inspiring account of a real Japanese American family. The author took us through the daily, normal and even mundane early life of these children, so that as the terrible events of World War II unfolded, the reader could see the nonsense and horror from their point of view. The treatment of Japanese Americans by friends, neighbors, fellow citizens and our own government is inexcusable.

Interesting story but I had to skip a lot as I found it very dry. Read more like a text book than a novel. Gave me a good insight as to what it must have been like for this courageous family at this time in history. I live in Oregon and this helped me appreciate the book even more as I could visualize where a lot of these events took place. Overall, a solid historical account of the events that this family endured, and an important story, but not a great book. The writing style was way too dry.

Anticipated this accounting of the Japanese in America at that time---had been touched by this treatment of them as I lived in Southern California at that time---preteen--- and experienced air raid sirens and search lights---as well as losing my best friend to a concentration camp. The book is definitely an historical accounting of the affect on one family---but I found it overly discriptive in a repetitive style and lacking those stories---even little glimpses of those who did not own stores, or orchards or went on to higher education. Guess that is what I hoped it would be. My book club is discussing it tomorrow night at my home and several have echoed my thoughts---should be an interesting discussion.

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