

Garden of Remembrance, San Francisco State University, 2000 - 2002

SUSAN STAUTER: At its 2002 dedication, this Garden of Remembrance was filled with a very special group. It included two of the Japanese American students who had been forced to leave San Francisco State University during World War Two, and enter internment camps. 76-year-old Ruth Asawa was also present. She had designed this Garden to memorialize their experience - which had so many parallels with her own.

To create the Garden, Ruth was assisted by her friend, San Francisco State art professor Mark Johnson. Like her, he'd been a student of the great German artist, Josef Albers. She also worked with two expert landscape gardeners, Isao Ogura and Shigeru Namba. Here's Mark:

MARK JOHNSON: *First, on this grassy area, she wanted to disperse boulders and these boulders for her were memories or evocations of the internment camps. And she laid out these boulders more or less how the camps were dispersed in the continental United States.*

SUSAN STAUTER: In 1942, Ruth, then a high schooler, took the train to Rohwer Relocation Center with her mother and siblings. It was in Arkansas, almost two thousand miles from their farm in Southern California. Her father was already incarcerated in a men's detention camp, in Lordsburg, New Mexico. The Asawas were among 120,000 detainees. After the war, Ruth's family, along with other interned Japanese American families, painstakingly rebuilt their lives from scratch.

MARK JOHNSON: *She said it's important to remember that the community thrived after internment, and it's a resilient community. So she then planted a beautiful garden. She went shopping herself for many of the plants.*

SUSAN STAUTER: At the top of the garden a bronze scroll tells the story of the students' internment. Nearby, there's a glorious waterfall.

MARK JOHNSON: *And she said the waterfall for her represented the renewal of the community. One thing Ruth enjoyed was that it becomes a place where students study, they lean against the boulders, so that it is not a place of sadness, it's a place that the students love, to relax, to congregate. And so it's a very joyful place.*

SUSAN STAUTER: Here's her daughter Addie:

ADDIE LANIER: *I think it is absolutely the most fitting last commission for her, because she started life on a farm and she had this very kind of organic, crazy, nature-driven life. It's such a beautiful living memorial for her in some way.*