



Video Story Transcript

ONARA

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/hrdnTXRaeZ4>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hello. My name is Alton Takiyama-Chung. The story I have for you is called “Onara.” It was written by a woman by the name of Mako Nakagawa. It is with her permission that I can tell it. It’s in a collection of stories that I call “Kodomo No Tame Ni.” (For the Sake of the Children) Now, “Onara.”

For the first five years of my life, I grew up in Seattle and I was surrounded by friends and family, mostly Japanese people. See, we were Nipponjin, Japanese people, and I didn’t know much about white people or know very many of them. We called them Hakujin. And I knew there were differences between us Nipponjin and the Hakujin. I mean, they were foreign, “strange,” and very large!

Most of what I knew about Hakujins came from magazines or movies. I mean, they were filled with Hakujin people. But even as a child I knew that the Hakujins were the ones with the power. That became very evident when they came and took my dad and threw him in jail, after Pearl Harbor. And again when they took me and the rest of my family and put us in Camp Harmony in Puyallup, Washington in 1942. Later in Minidoka, Idaho and Crystal City, Texas.

All the teachers and all the guards were all Hakujins. We learned to be wary of them. One day about a dozen of us second graders were all gathered together making a sound of onara. Oh, we were having a wonderful time, making all these wonderful sounds using our hands and our fingers and our lips. We knew if the adults caught us, we would be in big trouble, but it was so much fun being naughty.

Each kid had a different sound and we critiqued each sound. we tried to imagine what kind of person would make that kind of sound. And then, Akira made what we considered to be, hands down, the best onara sound ever. We fell on the ground laughing, our sides were hurting. You know, “onara?” (*Sound made through blowing in hands that sounds like gas.*) “Onara!” And then one kid said, “How come the Hakujin don’t onara? Huh?”

Hmm. Half of us thought they did. Half of us thought they didn’t. I always wondered what it would be like, not to onara. One person said, “No no, no, they have to, they are human beings!”

“Oh yeah, if they did, wouldn’t they have an English word for it?”

“Yeah . . . Hmm.” Since none of us could come up with an English word for onara, we concluded the Hakujins didn’t do it. Then my friend Janet said she thought she heard one coming from her teacher, but she wasn’t sure because her teacher moved her chair at the same time. Hmm, inconclusive. I mean, who could we ask?

The only Hakujins we knew were our teachers and the guards, and we didn’t think it was a really good idea to ask them anything. It seemed strange to me that they wouldn’t have an English word for onara. I knew there were differences between us, but we weren’t that different. I decided to ask my mom, see what she thought. My mom, she looked at me, and then she smiled and said she had no idea. I don’t think she wanted to know the Hakujins that well.

Anyway, one day, again, I was playing with my best friend Janet, and the whole idea came up again. We finally concluded that onara was the result of what you ate. Logical! And we knew that the Hakujins ate differently than us. Therefore, the Hakujin food must not produce onara. But when I was in camp, I ate a lot of Hakujin food and I still onara. I never discovered the non-onara-producing Hakujin diet, but I did discover the meanings for certain key phrases, such as “angel whispers,” “breaking wind,” and “cutting the cheese!” Hakujins did do it! That’s when I realized, maybe we’re not so different after all.