

# Mindfulness in the city: Summer playbook



Finding ways to make life easier through hectic times

**Caroline Ishii**  
Columnist

OTTAWA — "Summertime and the livin' is easy," croons George Gershwin in the famous song, *Summertime*. Is it for you? How can we make our lives easier as we try to check off the many things from our to-do lists and enjoy the too-short summer season?

I've just moved, and anyone who has moved knows it always looks easier when you decide to move versus when you're in the middle of it.

Packing up, getting rid of things you've never used, and lots of boxes, many trips out to buy boxes and tape, or to drop off things at second-hand stores and to friends.

My dog Bounty is usually calm at home but became increasingly agitated and scared of the boxes. She doesn't like change, and while I like change, I'm not fond of transitions.

It's a messy, awkward time when you must decide what you will pack and how much you need to keep going. And surrounded by boxes, the peace and comfort that made it home before disappears.

In moving, there is always a time when it is more work than you thought. This is part of the process. Our naivety in not knowing how hard things would be is how we started in the first place. Otherwise, we would never embark on new adventures. Whether having children, starting a new job, or moving.

What do you do when transitioning and living through the

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mess and clutter? Or the times when we're not at our best? Do we scold and criticize ourselves?

I noticed I was doing this a lot. I often blamed myself when something went wrong, saying, "What's wrong with you?"

I knew I was hurting myself by saying this, but had difficulty

stopping. The first step is noticing!

What to do, then?

What would our best friend tell us if we were discouraged and exhausted from moving? They may say, let's go for dinner, take a walk, see a movie, and treat yourself well. It's a hard time.

What would our best friend say if we were discouraged and feeling low? Probably the same.

When times are hard, and I don't feel well—tired, exhausted, and sad—which is normal, I often resist these feelings and worry that they won't go away.

Sometimes we need to stand back and hold up our hands, like in the *Iron Chef* Kitchen Stadium when the time is up in the show-down. We let go of our long to-do lists and stop punishing ourselves to do more, be better, and finish what we started, at least for now.

It's summer, after all!

In doing this, we let go of our high expectations of ourselves and start nurturing ourselves, which we need through hard times and all times.

We become kinder to ourselves instead of waiting for a friend to permit us, which I used to do. I still lean this way, but I'm developing the muscle of compassion for myself. If I don't, who will?



PHOTO CREDIT: CAROLINE ISHII

While normally a calm dog, Caroline's pup Bounty found moving a stressful experience.

In doing this, while my external and internal environment can be messy and cluttered, I free myself and know I am not this.

This is what taking pauses, getting away, and letting go at times can do for you; at least, that's what happened to me.

Emotions coming through, positive and negative, are like passing clouds. When we can observe and appreciate them with curiosity but not attach to them too much or shun them if

we don't want them. Instead, we focus on them for what they are, just emotions passing through.

When we worry about what we can't control, it's wasted energy. If you reflect on how much of your worrying has been fruitful and positive, you will see what I mean.

It's a lesson I'm still learning, and I share it so we can learn together and put our energies to

See MINDFULNESS P. 17

# Introducing Mata Ashita's new facilitators/curators

Erica Isomura and Megan Wray join Mata Ashita's new season

**Erica Isomura and Megan Wray**  
Contributors

ONLINE — Mata Ashita is a series of online writing workshops for Japanese Canadian community members of all ages to write, share, and learn from established authors and storytellers. Leanne Toshiko Simpson, Sen Canute, and Nico Koyanagi co-founded this initiative in 2020 to make community conversations about mental health and well-being more accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Past seasons have featured guests such as Ruth Ozeki, Hiromi Goto, Tetsuro Shigematsu, and Randall Okita.

This forthcoming season, Mata Ashita welcomes Erica Isomura and Megan Wray as workshop facilitators and program curators. In this issue, *Nikkei Voice* invited them to share an introductory conversation. *To start, tell us a little bit about who you are.*

**Erica Isomura:** My name is Erica Isomura. I'm a Yonsei Japanese and Chinese Canadian writer and artist. I work in non-fiction, poetry, graphic, hybrid, and multidisciplinary mediums. I was born and raised in New West-

minster, B.C., and currently reside in Toronto.

On my dad's side, my Japanese great-grandparents lived in East Vancouver and Prince Rupert/Port Edward/Haysport before the war, when they were interned at Tashme and Greenwood. On my mom's side, my Chinese great-grandparents immigrated to Canada from Guangdong in Southern China. All these different places and cultures shape who I am today.

**Megan Wray:** Hello! My name is Megan Wray (she/her), and I'm a queer, mixed-race Japanese Canadian Yonsei writer, poet, and overall creative person. I'm based in Treaty 1 Territory (Winnipeg), where I also manage an independent bookstore called Willow.

My Japanese family lived and worked as sawmill labourers in Royston, B.C., later interned in Tashme, and as farmers in Haney, B.C., then uprooted to Sanford, Man. I've always felt disconnected from my culture, but I practice bridging the gap by veganizing my family recipes and creating art that explores my identity.

*What are you reading right now?*

**EI:** I just finished reading *The Waiting*, a graphic novel by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim, translated from Korean to English by Janet Hong. The brush painting is stunning in this book, and it taught me a lot about the Korean War that I didn't know before, as well as a deeply moving story. I highly recommend it.

**MW:** I really savoured Ross Gay's essay collection, *Inciting Joy*, for a while. I took up gardening this summer, and there's a few essays on the topic that made me weep. Now that I've finished it, I'm diving into *Where Things Touch: A Meditation on Beauty* by Bahar Orang.

*What has your life looked like outside of this work lately?*

**EI:** I'm spending the summer at a floating artist residency on the Fraser River in Steveston, B.C. I've been gathering plants from former Japanese Canadian sites and developing a series of cyanotype prints. I've also been reading and thinking a lot about my thesis project—I'm currently a Master in Fine Art creative writing student at the University of Guelph.

*What does it mean to you to be joining as a facilitator?*

**MW:** Before attending the first Mata Ashita session back in 2020, I remember being consumed by imposter syndrome and fear of not being "Japanese enough" to join. But the more I attended, the more I felt like I belonged to the JC community. Knowing I can (hopefully) help others feel this way as a facilitator warms my heart!

*Mata ashita means "see you tomorrow" and is an enduring promise to take care of each other. How do you care for yourself?*

**EI:** I need to eat a lot of snacks throughout the day. Ideally, I also need to move my body regularly



PHOTO CREDIT: MATA ASHITA

Mata Ashita, the writers' group for Japanese Canadians, welcomes Erica Isomura (left) and Megan Wray (right) as new workshop facilitators and program curators for the forthcoming season.

(e.g. biking or swimming) and express myself creatively, whether that's crafting or singing and dancing along to whatever music is playing. Being in or around nature definitely contributes to my well-being, too.

**MW:** Extending gentleness to myself is an ongoing practice (and struggle) for me. I'm trying to be more intentional with that.

Right now, it looks like spend-

ing lots of time in nature, tending to my flower garden, leaning towards community, reading lots, and enjoying creative endeavors for the process—not the result. Also, cooking always.

To stay up-to-date on this next season of Mata Ashita, follow along on our Instagram @mata-ashitawriting or visit our website [www.mataashitawriting.ca](http://www.mataashitawriting.ca).

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# Events

Nikkei Voice prints event notices free of charge. Please send in your event ahead our monthly deadline and include a brief description with date, time, and location.

## Opening Reception - Yuima~ru: Spirit of Coming Together

TORONTO — To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC), the Centre invites you and your family to the opening reception for Yuima~ru: Spirit of Coming Together.

This exhibition explores the rich history of the Kingdom of Ryukyu through the stories of the Okinawan diaspora in Canada and beyond. Embodying the spirit of communal support and working together, the Okinawan diasporic community's way of life and outlook resonate with many dispersed communities across Canada.

Nestled within the larger exhibit, Maru: Immigration Stories, Yuima~ru will take you on a journey of displacement, migration, community building, and a sense of belonging.

**When:** July 25  
**Time:** 5:30 p.m.  
**Where:** Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre  
**For more information:** <https://jccc.on.ca/event/2023/07/opening-reception-yuimaru-spirit-coming-together>

## Visit the Japan Pavilion at the Surrey Fusion Festival

SURREY — The Japan Pavilion will have displays about Japanese Canadian history, including the JC strawberry farmers before 1942, Hastings Park Interpretive Centre Plans, information about visiting and studying in Japan, cultural information about Japan, and activities for children, including making origami.

Celebrate food, music, and culture.

Other pavilions and schedule info at [www.surreyfusionfestival.ca](http://www.surreyfusionfestival.ca).

Japan Pavilion: [lorene.oikawa@gmail.com](mailto:lorene.oikawa@gmail.com)

**When:** July 22 and 23, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.  
**Where:** Holland Park, 13428 Old Yale Road, across from the King George Skytrain Station  
**Tickets:** Free admission

## Japan Festival CANADA 2023

TORONTO — Japan Festival CANADA has been hosted in one of the multicultural countries in the world, Canada, to introduce and promote genuine Japanese food, culture and technologies.

After holding our Festival virtually in 2020 and 2021, we were thrilled to host a successful return to our in-person festival with Japan Festival CANADA 2022.

We are now once again planning our in-person festival for Japan Festival CANADA 2023.

Japan Festival CANADA is the largest Japanese Cultural Event in North America with the exciting entertainments such as traditional and modern performance, Pop Culture stage performance as well as the tasteful Japanese foods and many more to experience and enjoy Japan.

We look forward to seeing you again at Japan Festival CANADA 2023!

**When:** Saturday August 19 & Sunday August 20, 2023  
**Where:** Mississauga Celebration Square  
**For more:** <https://japanfestival-canada.com/jfca-2023/>

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### From KIMIKO P. 11

The inclusion of strawberries also acknowledges the many prewar Japanese Canadian farmers who grew strawberry crops on the West Coast.

“It was a fairly common beginner crop for a lot of Japanese Canadian farms in the West Coast, and so it's wrapped up very much in West Coast Japanese Canadian life, as well as specifically, Kimiko Murakami's [strawberries] were world-renowned,” says Fraser.

“I like having meanings that maybe people wouldn't immediately get but are either meaningful to the families or just part of their story.”

Fraser and Healey worked with living descendants to ask for their consent to tell these stories and build a richer understanding of who the women were. Working with the families, elements and details that would never be in a history book were unveiled.

Murakami's story is further explored in one of Fraser and Healey's two new books released in May, *Kimiko Murakami: A Japanese Canadian Pioneer*. The second book is *Lilian Bland: An Amazing Aviatrix*, about a journalist believed to be the first woman to design, build, and fly an aircraft.

Born in Steveston, B.C., Murakami grew up and started her family on Salt Spring Island. During the Second World War, her home and farm were confis-

cated, and her family was separated. Kimiko and her children were first sent to Hastings Park, then to Greenwood internment camp, and then to labour on a sugar beet farm in Magrath, Alta.

Along with exploring the Salt Spring Island archives, Fraser and Healey worked with Murakami's daughter, Mary Kitagawa, who offered insight into what the camps and Alberta looked like and carefully reviewed the book. Kitagawa is a social activist whose work has shaped the Japanese Canadian community.

“She was so kind and encouraging and just so happy that we were telling her mom's story. It

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was so lovely,” says Fraser.

Murakami's story is a way to introduce young readers to Japanese Canadian history and open the door for further exploration and questions.

But it is also a story of hope and perseverance. The book introduces young readers to the Japanese word *ganbaru*, meaning to push through hard times. Despite the racism, hardships, and injustices Murakami experienced, she never gave up.

“She was so determined to go back to the place that she called home, and she managed to get there,” says Fraser.

Murakami and the women featured in *Her Courage Rises* are stories often overlooked in histo-

ry. These women have shaped the landscapes and lives of the people around them for generations, but many of their stories are not in the school curriculum, no monuments dedicated to them, or films based on their lives.

“The books that Haley and I have [created] have been really lovely for bringing forward stories that are either untold or under-talked about, particularly when it comes to people who lived what, from a historian's perspective, we would see as a very ordinary life. But to be able to show them as extraordinary and interesting people because they lived their convictions or made a difference,” says Fraser.

By highlighting diverse stories, Fraser also hopes young readers can see themselves reflected in these stories. For Fraser, who shares a name with Murakami, she always wished to see herself reflected in the world around her.

“It was really lovely to be able to tell a story that has touched so many Japanese Canadians, especially on the West Coast, it's in a lot of our histories, and it's stuff that a lot of us growing up didn't know about,” says Fraser.

“To have something successful and available to help tell that story was really meaningful to me and a resource I would've loved to have as a kid.”

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To learn more about Kimiko Fraser, visit [www.kimikofraser.wordpress.com](http://www.kimikofraser.wordpress.com).

### From MINDFULNESS P. 8

better use, like enjoying the summer.

“You are the sky. Everything else—it's just the weather,” says Buddhist nun, teacher, and writer Pema Chödrön.

In unpacking and settling into my new home, and with the summer here, I go to easy-to-prepare meals and drinks. They are in my summer playbook of kindness to myself.

I'm sharing a few recipes so that you can create your playbook. All recipes begin with kindness to yourself. Have a wonderful summer!

**Green-Berry Power Smoothie**  
Yield: about 2 cups  
**Notes:** The chia seeds, hemp seeds, and spirulina powder are optional. I add them for energy and protein from the hemp seeds.

You could also use a protein powder, like pumpkin, instead of hemp seeds. For the greens, I use whatever greens I have on hand, including the green tops of organic vegetables like carrots. Be creative! The world is your smoothie!

To freeze ripe bananas, peel them and place them in a freezer bag before storing them. They will be ready for your smoothies and provide sweetness without adding sugar.

1/2 cup frozen or fresh blueberries, or other berries  
1 cup spinach greens or other greens  
1 cup soy or non-dairy milk  
1 ripe banana, previously peeled and frozen  
1 tablespoon chia seeds

1 tablespoon hemp seeds  
1 teaspoon spirulina powder  
1 small piece of ginger  
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Combine all ingredients in a blender until smooth. If you like a thinner smoothie, add more milk or water.

**Barb's Go-To Salad**

Here's a simple-to-make salad and dressing from my dear friend Barb, who doesn't like to cook but loves to make and eat this salad for lunch. I've fallen in love with it and make it often. It's sweet, bitter, spicy, and delicious—like my life.

Start with spicy, bitter greens—our favourite is arugula—in a bowl. Drizzle tahini on top of the greens, sprinkle sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, then the extra virgin olive and balsamic/apple cider vinegar. Toss lightly. Add some nuts, avocado slices, or protein if you wish.

**Rustic Tomato Salad**

I love my friend Rossana's rustic Italian salad with ripe tomatoes; my favourites are heirlooms from the farmers' market. Or if they are from your garden, even better!

She said there was no recipe but gave me the ingredients: ripe summer tomatoes, fresh buffalo mozzarella (from water buffalo milk, it's a softer, creamer mozzarella) or bocconcini (bite-size balls of fresh mozzarella), fresh basil, red wine/balsamic vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, and sea salt.

For protein, you can add canned tuna or chickpeas. Scoop up the liquid with crusty bread. In my view, heaven on earth!

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