



CENTENNIAL MUSEUM
AND CHIHUAHUAN DESERT GARDENS
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Celebrating Life in the Chihuahuan Desert



AUGUST 2021
Vol. 2 Issue 4

Hours of Operation:
Hours listed below will begin on
August 23, 2021.
Visit our [website](#)
for more information.

- Centennial Museum
Monday through Saturday
10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
- Chihuahuan Desert Gardens
Open every day
Dawn to Dusk
- Lhaxhang
Closed until further notice



Welcome

Daniel Carey-Whalen, Director

Welcome back UTEP students, faculty, and staff! The past year and a half has been long, yet on August 23rd in-person classes will begin again and the Centennial Museum will be open back on our regular schedule, yet with slightly shorter hours (Monday through Saturday from 10am to 3pm). We are excited about the semester beginning and have some amazing activities happening.

Our semester starts off with the delightful and inspiring exhibit, *Ties to Home: The Kimonos of Kitty Huntley*. Visually stimulating and creatively displayed with the help of the Department of Theatre and Dance, the kimonos on display tell stories of immigration, falling in love, and longing for home. Celebrating the life of Katsuko "Kitty" Huntley through the art she created with costumes and dance, in addition to the celebration of Japanese culture, this exhibit goes beyond the art of kimono to investigate what it was like to be a different type of immigrant in the Borderlands.

This school year also brings us a new Curatorial Assistant, Fayelee Overman. Read an interview with her as she acclimates to UTEP, El Paso, and the Chihuahuan Desert. Also new this semester is another one-day plant sale, Fall Florafest, on October 9. Read Kevin Floyd's article about why autumn is the best time to plant native trees, shrubs, and perennials. We know most of the community is familiar with buying their plants in the Spring, but hopefully all the green from the monsoon rains has inspired gardeners to think about planting more native plants this fall.

We hope that you come by to visit our new exhibits and events this semester. We look forward to seeing you.



Daniel Carey-Whalen



Ties to Home

Samantha Winer, Curator

In 2016, the UTEP Theatre Department received a large donation of kimonos, accessories, and performance videos that belonged to Katsuko “Kitty” Huntley. Mrs. Huntley, who grew up in Japan, immigrated to the United States in 1952; first settling in Kansas and eventually, El Paso. When Kitty passed away in 2015, a friend, Mrs. Carol Nymann, discovered her sizeable collection and donated it to the Theatre Department, with the requested that the pieces be used either in a theatrical production or as part of an exhibit to honor the memory of Kitty.

While we know little about how Mrs. Huntley acquired these objects, this unexpected inheritance gives us a glimpse into a previously unknown life. In her videos, Kitty appears in kimono for dance performances that tell stories from a home across the world. While we are limited in what we know about Kitty’s life, we can speculate that her collection of kimonos, and the dances she performed, provided a connection to Japan, her life prior to immigrating to the United States, and the Japanese American community here in El Paso. It was this

“While we know little about how Mrs. Huntley acquired these objects, this unexpected inheritance gives us a glimpse into a previously unknown life..”

story that inspired us to title the exhibit *Ties to Home: The Kimonos of Kitty Huntley*.

One of the first steps in creating this exhibit was putting together a committee that would ensure that we properly tell Kitty’s story. In addition to museum staff, we have Crystal Herman, a professor of Theatrical Costume Design, Nicole Read, a lecturer at the Theatre Department, Taeko Hiroi, Ph.D., a professor in the Political Science Department, and Selfa Chew, Ph.D., a professor at the History Department. Each member of the museum committee brings a unique perspective to the exhibit.

For *Ties to Home*, the kimonos themselves take center stage. Displayed on T-frames or dress forms, the public will have a chance to view these objects up close. Fortunately, Nicole Read conducted vast amounts of research about the history, traditions, and cultural importance of kimono

in Japan. For example, did you know that kimono translates as “thing to wear?” In addition, there will be various kimono accessories, dance programs, and my personal favorite, video clips of Kitty dancing. When I first saw these clips, I nearly fell out of my chair with excitement. After months of working on this exhibit, seeing her kimonos, and imagining what she might have gone through, it was wonderful to finally see the person behind



it all. It is clear from the lack of pretense in the videos, that the performances are for the dancers and their immediate friends and family. One feels like an outsider watching an intimate performance.

This exhibit has not been without challenges, as we know little about Kitty's personal history. We know the broad strokes of her life, but the details are sparse, making it difficult to create a narrative. When creating an exhibit, you are telling a true story that resonates with the public. In a 2018 study by the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), 1,000 people were asked about the trustworthiness of four history sources. "We (AASLH) found that 81% of respondents ranked history museums and historic sites as "absolutely" or "somewhat" trustworthy—making them more trustworthy than history textbooks and nonfiction, high school history teachers, and the internet as



sources of history information."

So how do you create an exhibit with such little to go on? Be open about it and invite the public to take this journey with you. While initially the lack of background information about Kitty was frustrating, in hindsight it adds another layer to the exhibit. Few things in life have a very neat ending, and

Kitty's story is a great example of that philosophy. Hopefully, this exhibit will inspire people to write down their stories or ask their loved ones for their history, so future generations can learn from the past.

"When creating an exhibit, you are telling a true story that resonates with the public."





*Welcome our new
Curatorial Assistant*

Faylee Overman,
Curatorial Assistant

*“Where are you from
and how did you end
up in El Paso?”*

I am from Stout, Ohio, which is at the edge of the Appalachian Mountains. The area of southern Ohio I grew up in is a beautiful, rural area with many Amish communities nearby, rolling hills, and beautiful views of the Ohio River. I lived in Kentucky for 4 years during my undergraduate studies at Berea College then moved to Dayton, Ohio for my Master’s program. I met my husband in Dayton and he decided to commission into the Army after we both finished graduate school. Our first military duty station was at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where we stayed for almost 4 years. Our next duty station ended up being at Fort Bliss.



I have a dual Bachelor's degree in History and Art History from Berea College and a Master's degree in Public History from Wright State University. I have experience working in art galleries, archives, and museums. Before moving to Fort Bliss, I worked at the Frontier Army Museum at Fort Leavenworth, where I discovered my interest in U.S. military history, but I love to learn about other areas of history. I am so happy to be at the Centennial Museum where I have the opportunity to learn about the history and culture of this area.

“What is your background?”

“How did you become interested in museums?”



I have always been interested in history. I think what really sparked my interest was the Mummy movies starring Brendon Fraser. I quickly learned that I would not be in this Indiana Jones-type role if I entered the history field, but that did not deter me. When I started studying history at Berea College, I was not sure what I wanted to do with a History degree in terms of a career. I explored archaeology for a bit and even participated in a dig in Rome, Italy, when I was a student at Berea. Although I enjoyed it and it was an amazing, unforgettable experience I decided I did not want to pursue archaeology as a profession. I eventually got a job as the collections assistant at the art gallery on Berea's campus (Doris Ulmann Galleries). That's how I became a museum nerd!

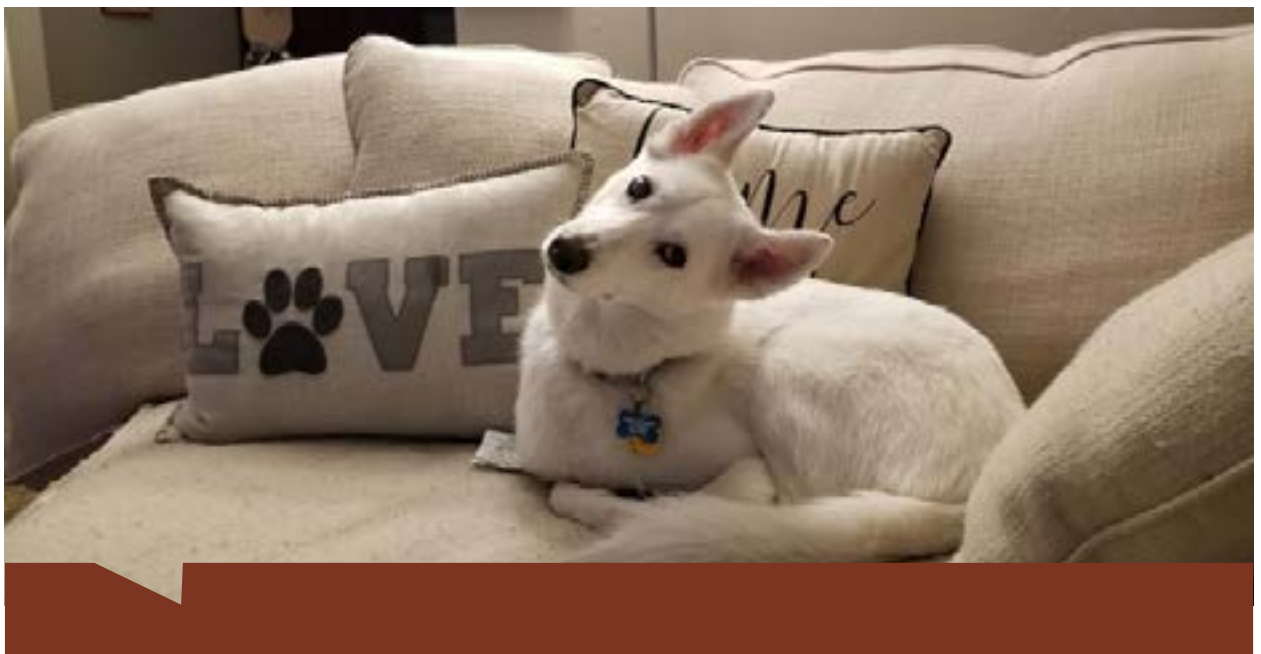
“What do you love about working in museums?”

I love making exhibits and graphic design. There is a lot of opportunity for creativity when forming exhibits. I also enjoy working in collections, specifically preserving, and protecting artifacts by making sure they are properly housed and displayed. Getting to interact with visitors is a joy too. It is great to see people get excited about an exhibit or artifact and learning something new.



“What are some interesting facts about you??”

I have a dog named Layla who is a Huskimo (Husky and American Eskimo mix) and is blind in one eye, but that doesn't slow her down one bit. I love to read, my favorite book(s) is the Outlander series by Diana Gabaldon. On lazy days, my choice of TV shows is The Office.



Fall is the best time to plant

Kevin Floyd, Botanical Curator

All the rain El Paso received in June, July, and August has turned much of the landscape green. Creosote, mesquite, and ocotillo are bouncing back from the dry conditions in 2020, and there are seedlings everywhere. The time that we spent giving

plants extra water by hand in May and June has switched into pulling seedlings from many of the beds. Plants that had low germination last year are showing up in several locations, like Globe Amaranth (*Gomphrena nitida*) and Wild Cotton

(*Gossypium thurberi*). Many of the plants are blooming, and it is an excellent time to visit the gardens.

We are excited to announce that we are going to have a plant sale October 9th to provide native and desert-adapted plants at the perfect planting time. Fall is the best time to plant most perennials, shrubs, and trees. The soil is still warm, allowing roots to grow. With more developed root systems, these plants will be ready to grow next spring and can handle the hot and dry early summer months. Cooler air temperatures in the fall cause less stress on the new plants. Plants are beginning to transition into dormancy, switching from above-ground growth of leaves, flowers, and stems to below-ground root growth and sugar storage. You might not see much growth when planting in the fall, but these plants will be ready to thrive next growing season.

Fall is also a much nicer time of the year to dig the holes for the plants! Remember to dig the hole 2-3 times the diameter of the plant, and just to the depth of the root ball. Keep the flare of the stem or trunk above the soil. Planting too deeply causes moisture to collect around the trunk, encouraging rot and disease. Once the



Desert Willow



Catclaw acacia

“Fall is the best time to plant most perennials, shrubs, and trees. The soil is still warm, allowing roots to grow.”

plant is out of its pot and in the hole, backfill with the same soil you dug out. Do not add any amendments to that soil, but do add a 2-3 inch layer of mulch around the new plant. Keep the mulch from touching the trunk to avoid disease. Organic mulch like shredded leaves, compost, or ground bark will add valuable organic matter to the soil as they decompose, but rocks and gravel do provide the benefit of retaining some soil moisture.

The plants we will have at the Fall Plant Sale depends on the availability at the wholesale nurseries. We are hoping to have trees like Catclaw Acacia (*Acacia greggii*), Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), and Pinyon Pine (*Pinus edulis*). For shrubs, we would like to have several varieties of rain sage (*Leucophyllus frutescens* and *L. laevigatum*), which bloomed so well after



Turpentine bush flowering October 2020

the rains that local news did stories about them. We should have some fall blooming shrubs like Turpentine Bush (*Ericameria larcifolia*), along with many other great desert plants.

We will have more information about the plants for sale and volunteer opportunities posted on our website, florafest.org, in September. We will also have a tour of the garden Sunday, September 19th at 9 am as part of the Celebration of our Mountains events. Come join us and learn more about the plants you might add to your own garden in October!



Wild four o'clock.



There are several varieties of Texas rain sage sold at nurseries, with differences in flower and leaf colors, along with overall size.

Save The Date!



FLORAFEST

native plant sale

Oct. 9th
9am
until sold out