

# JAPANESE GARDEN, THEN AND NOW

APRIL 30, 2015 RUMI TSUCHIHASHIEDIT



The tea house at Seattle Japanese Garden, circa 1963.

Some places we visit stay with us for life.

When he first volunteered to be a guide at Seattle Japanese Garden in 2010, Forrest Campbell told his fellow trainees that the first time he'd visited the garden he was 18 years old—and on a date. He noticed a familiarity about the place that day; the stones, the water, the Emperor's Gate. It felt to him like he'd *returned*, even though he couldn't recall any prior visits. More than two decades later, Campbell—now a landscape contractor in Seattle—revisited the Japanese garden, this time as a student of a horticulture class at Edmonds Community College. The instructor, Barb Ingraham, impressed upon him the importance of honoring long-standing traditions. This lesson came to guide him in his professional life.

“Sometime in 2009, I saw this article in the paper,” he recalls, “and it said that the Japanese Garden was looking for people to give back to the community through giving tours.” Without hesitation, he joined the trainee class the following year.

Recently, going through his family’s archival photos, Campbell made a stunning discovery. As it turns out, there was good reason for feeling as though he’d *returned* to the garden that day in 1974.

Amidst the stack of old photographs, he uncovered a remarkable set of images of the Seattle Japanese Garden, including the original tea house that had been a gift from the City of Tokyo.

“The gentleman in the center of the photo, that’s my grandfather,” Campbell said, pointing to the details in the well-preserved Kodachrome photo, “and the lady he’s helping up the stairs, that’s my grandmother.”

He estimates the photos were taken around 1963, three years after Seattle Japanese Garden first opened to the public. Seeing these images brought back a flood of sensation of being at the garden himself as a child: the crunch of gravel underfoot, the sound of the water travelling down along the boulders, the sight of maple leaves swaying in the breeze.

Still, he couldn’t be absolutely sure he’d been there. Not until he located the final photo, taken even earlier than the ones of the tea house.





With Grandfather Campbell, circa 1961.

In the center of the photograph is young Forrest, five years old, with Grandfather Campbell, and Grandmother Campbell presumably behind the lens. While the garden has certainly evolved and beautifully matured over the 54 years since this photograph was taken, you can also see what has remained: the rock wall along the current *Roji*, the Kobe lantern on the north hill, the moon viewing platform, the harbor. Finally, the faint memories from his childhood had found roots. “And here I am, fifty-some years later, still coming back to this place,” Campbell remarked with a chuckle.

Sometimes, a place we visit makes an imprint on us and keeps calling us back to return, year after year. It asks us to be its steward, to speak for it, share it with other people it might touch.

For Forrest Campbell, Seattle Japanese Garden is most certainly that kind of place, a place that will likely stay with him for life.

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