

**2021-2022 Ransome Prize Winner
Jeanne Goka**



“My story is neither unique nor interesting, but it’s my story that has both informed and formed me.”

Jeanne Goka’s parents and older sister were placed in a Japanese-American internment camp after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. They lost most of their personal possessions, some of their dignity, and for years considered themselves betrayed by their government. Yet, her father three times tried to enlist in the U.S. Army and three times was rejected as an “undesirable alien,” though, like his wife and young daughter, he was a citizen of the United States. Soon after her family was permitted to leave the camp to work for a family who sponsored them in Washington, D. C., her father was drafted, leaving her mother to scramble for a place for her and her daughter to live.

After the war, the Goka family, now four, moved to Houston, where neighbors routinely threw garbage onto their front lawn and circulated a petition to “get rid of the dirty Japs”.

Jeanne’s sister was the first Japanese-American to graduate from their local public high school, her brother the second, and Jeanne, the third. The first time Jeanne saw the internment camps mentioned in any history textbook was the first year that she started teaching.

Jeanne began her career teaching at a middle school in Southeast Houston, where she had completed her student teaching. It was a challenging first year, as she witnessed students rioting, the student council president brandishing a knife at a meeting, colleagues and administrators resigning, and ultimately a resolute principal who met the challenge the school presented.

From Houston Jeanne moved to a middle school in East Texas where she would discover a thriving Ku Klux Klan chapter and racism that seemed transgenerational and inevitable. She was learning as she was teaching and became even more resolute in her belief that education is an antidote to racism and hatred.

Decades later, Jeanne was the founding principal of the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders (ARS) in Austin, Texas— a public school that houses grades 6-12, with the majority of students coming from economically disadvantaged families. Every member of the ten classes to graduate since the school opened its doors in 2007 has been accepted at a college or university. As part of the Young Women’s Preparatory Network (YWPN), the Ann Richards School, like its nine sister schools in Texas, has received commendations locally, state-wide, and nationally. Notably, sixty-five percent of ARS graduates are the first in their families to go on to post-secondary education. Following these young women through college, graduate and professional schools, and then to rewarding careers has affirmed Jeanne’s belief that education can lift entire families out of poverty.

After retiring from ARS, Jeanne was able to create the YWPN Campus Council, as the YWPN leadership recognized the importance and urgency to advance diversity and equity on their campuses. Last year, Jeanne, collaborating with representatives from the ten YWPN schools, developed a book-selection criteria to promote broader representation in student reading and this year has designed microaggression lessons for middle- and high-school students and professional modules for faculty and staff.

Prior to being selected as the Ann Richards principal, she was an English teacher and then dean of academics at Austin’s Saint Michael’s Academy, and the curriculum coordinator and subsequently director of the magnet program at Austin Independent School District’s Kealing Middle School. She was voted as the community’s choice to be Mother Ginger in Austin Ballet’s *Nutcracker* performance, was honored as a Woman of Distinction by the Girls Scout of America of Central Texas, received the Corazon Community Award from Con Mi Madre, and the DIVA (**D**aring. **I**ngenious. **V**ictorious. **A**ltruistic.) from DIVA Con, named the Principal of the Year by Austin’s Boys and Girls Club, and inducted into the City of Austin’s Women Hall of Fame. She appreciates all that she learned from her colleagues on the board of the National Coalition of Girl Schools where she served as the first representative of public all-girls schools.

Jeanne lives with her husband, writer Lou Dubose, on the island of Kauai and is proud of her children, Michael, a musician in Austin, and Emiko, a psychologist and doctoral candidate in counseling in Bend, Oregon. Jeanne still considers herself Mother Ginger to her Ann Richards students and faculty and staff.