Module 1: Why Storytelling Matters (Especially Now)

Hi, and welcome. I'm so glad you're here.
Before we get into the "how" of this course, I want to pause and start with the "why." Because when we understand why something matters, we show up differently. We listen more deeply. We put our hearts into it.

This first module is about why storytelling matters — and why it matters *especially now.*

For as long as humans have existed, there have been stories. Long before books or podcasts or social media, there were firesides, kitchens, temples, and living rooms where people shared what they had lived through.

Stories are the way wisdom and love have always been passed down. They carry memory, they carry identity, and they carry emotion.

But today, in a world where everything moves fast and most of our conversations are digital, something is at risk. Our elders' voices can be drowned out. Our family stories can be forgotten. Our photos sit on phones, our files sit on hard drives — but the meaning behind them often goes untold.

That's why this work matters so much right now. Because if we don't take the time to gather and share our stories, there's a real chance they will be lost. And once they're gone, they're gone.

You may have felt this yourself. A relative passes away, and you suddenly realize: *I never asked them about their childhood.* Or *I wish I had recorded their voice telling those stories I loved hearing as a kid.*

Every family has these moments. Every family has stories that hold not just information, but identity. When we capture them, when we listen and ask and record, we aren't just preserving memories. We're building bridges across generations. We're creating something that our children and grandchildren will treasure as part of who they are.

For the Nikkei community in particular, this work has an added layer of importance. Many of your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents lived through things that were never fully talked about. For some, it was leaving Japan to start a new life in Canada. For others, it was the hardship and displacement of internment.

These are stories of resilience and survival, but also of identity and belonging. And if we don't take the time to hear and capture them, future generations may only know the history from textbooks — not from the voices of the people who actually lived it.

And that's a key difference. History books can give us the "what." Dates, locations, events. But spoken stories give us the "why."

They give us the context — the feelings, the fears, the hopes. And that's where connection lives.

As current and future generations, we may not fully relate to the exact circumstances our elders endured. We may not know what it felt like to be uprooted from your home, or to start over in a country where you didn't know the language.

But we *do* know what fear feels like. What hope feels like. What love feels like. We connect to the emotions behind the events.

That's what builds empathy. That's what creates belonging. That's what strengthens our identities.

And here's something even more powerful: storytelling is healing.

When a person tells their story, it helps them make sense of their experiences. It gives meaning to their struggles, and dignity to their journey. The act of speaking it out loud can be profoundly healing.

And for the person listening, there's healing too. Listening helps us understand, empathize, and sometimes even forgive. It draws us closer. It reminds us that we're part of something larger.

There's even science behind why storytelling works so deeply. Did you know that research shows we daydream almost half our waking hours — about 50% of the time?

But there are two times when our brains *don't* wander:

1. When we're in fight-or-flight, dealing with stress or danger.

2. When someone is telling us a story.

That means when you share a story, you literally take over the thinking of the other person. You capture their attention in a way nothing else can. You take them on a journey with you.

That's why stories are so powerful — they don't just inform, they transform.

Stories also build resilience and strength. When we share the hard parts — the times of struggle, the moments of loss, the lessons learned — it shows that we got through it. And when others hear it, they realize they can get through their challenges too.

In this way, stories give us courage. They honour the ones who came before us. And they become the foundation of our families' legacies.

Because in the end, our legacy isn't just the things we leave behind. It's the stories people tell about us, and the stories we've made sure to pass on.

So here's your first reflection: *Why does storytelling matter to you?*

Is it about remembering loved ones? Passing on traditions? Helping your children know where they come from? Or simply feeling more connected in a world that can feel disconnected?

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts in the worksheet. Don't overthink it. Just answer from the heart.

By being here, you've already said yes to honouring your story and the stories of those around you. That decision matters.

In the next module, we'll move into the *how* — gathering stories with respect and impact. You'll learn best practices to make it a safe, natural, and meaningful experience for everyone involved.

So take a breath, jot down your reflections, and when you're ready, I'll see you in Module 2.