

Felicia Hoshino's Story

My name is Felicia Shizu Hoshino. Here is my story as far as I know...

MY FATHER'S FAMILY, THE ARIKAWAS

SETTLING IN AMERICA

My great-grandparents on my father's side were "Issei" first generation immigrants from Japan. Masutaro and Koto Arikawa gave birth to my Grandpa Minoru on March 12, 1910 in northern California. At a young age they decided to send their oldest son to Japan to be educated. It seems it was common for this to happen, to send first-born "Nisei" sons to Japan and have them return to the states after their education. My Grandma Chizuko was born November 19, 1917 in southern California. Her parents Koinichi ("Ji-chan" to my father) and Toshi Takahashi were farmers and grew, among other things, lima beans. The farm thrived, but unfortunately, because they were not citizens and could not own the land, the farm was taken over by the landowner. Minoru and Chizuko were married and in 1938 gave birth to a daughter, my Auntie Jane. Two years later my Uncle Thom was born.

RELOCATION

Shortly after Executive Order 9066 "authorizing the internment of tens of thousands of American citizens of Japanese ancestry and resident aliens from Japan" my father Ed Eiji Arikawa was born March 12, 1942 in Orsi, California. He was just two months old when the family was forced to move to the Poston Relocation Center in Arizona where they were interned for three years. My father's younger sister Doris was born in the camps.

To this day, my father still holds a deep bitterness towards the internment, even though he was a very young child and doesn't personally remember much about the experience. Growing up he did not understand what the internment was about and he never questioned it. It wasn't until the 1980s when the reparations process started that he was exposed to images of the evacuation with dates of March, April, and May 1942. It finally dawned on him what harsh circumstances his parents had to go through. Grandma Chizuko, a young mother of two small children and an infant son swaddled in her arms boarding a train bound for such an uncertain destination. He believes that those early years are significantly formative for a person and that he is left with the legacy of imprisonment.

Though he has strong negative feelings about the internment, my father was not involved in any formal political activities around reparations or government apologies. However he truly admires those responsible for making it happen, the younger more outspoken Sansei giving voices to the older Issei and Nisei generations. As a result, the reparation payment to my family helped to fund my college tuition.

RESETTLING

After the war in 1945 the Arikawa family was released from camp and decided to move north settling in San Francisco. Mrs. Norio, who was a close friend of Toshi Takahashi,

(Grandma Chizuko's mother) invited them to help her run Norio Company, a miso business located in Japantown. (Later Mrs. Norio along with my great-grandmother Toshi, would return to Japan to live out their years.) There the family moved into a Victorian house at 1532 Post Street and ran the business from the basement. In addition to miso, they would also make tofu, aburage, konnyaku and natto and made deliveries to local restaurants and stores. Proudly, my father recalls that Norio miso was well sought after. Japan Foods Corporation (JFC) would sometimes order 400 lbs at a time (Ten, 40 lbs tin containers) distributing their miso to restaurants as far away as New York City.

My father attended Raphael Weill Elementary, Benjamin Franklin Middle School and then Washington High school. He had a diverse group of friends, yet he also felt the legacy of racism and the war directed at him because he was Japanese-American. Perhaps for their own protection, even other Asian American minorities didn't want to be associated with the Japanese, so growing up in San Francisco's Fillmore District most of his friends were either Japanese-Americans or African-Americans.

While Auntie Jane helped with the office work, Uncle Thom and my father helped out with the business by making the miso and tofu on the weekends. Eventually Uncle Thom would become the first minority to work for the Golden Gate Bridge authority. After graduating high school my father attended CCSF for a short time and then enlisted in the army. He spent a tour stationed in Korea in 1963 (he remembers this year because of the JFK assassination). While in Korea he took an R & R and traveled to Japan, his first and only trip there so far. He was always very impressed by this "foreign" country. Then he was reassigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In 1965, towards the end of his eighteen month assignment Grandpa Minoru had a stroke and so my father had to return to San Francisco to help run the miso business.

That was when he started working full-time along side Grandma Chizuko and also a Mr. Sujishi. Uncle Thom helped work part-time. It was strenuous work, laboring through the long process of fermenting soybeans into miso paste as well as spending the early hours of each morning soaking, grinding and boiling soybeans into tofu.

During the 1960s, redevelopment of the Western Addition was proposed and home and business owners were evicted so the city could re-make the neighborhood. Norio Company stayed in business as long as possible. Rather than move the business to another part of the city, my father, with some encouragement by his parents, decided to pursue some other kind of career for himself. He began taking night school courses in computer software. By the early 1970s Norio Company closed and their home on 1532 Post Street was demolished. My grandparents purchased and moved into a four-unit apartment building in the Outer Richmond District. My father eventually went to work in the growing computer field starting out at GSA and ending in computer networking for the Federal Reserve Bank where he was employed for twenty years before his retirement.

MEMORIES

Growing up I knew Grandpa Minoru to be a man of very few words. He'd suffered from several strokes so rarely did we communicate. I knew he loved to fish for striped bass in his younger days. There is a photo of him that I like which dates back to the 1950s or so. He is wearing a baseball cap and plaid flannel shirt, (perhaps he's just returned from fishing?) smoking a cigar, smiling and playing the piano.

Grandma Chizuko was a bit more talkative, never hesitating to politely speak her mind. I was taking Japanese Classical Dance lessons and she never missed a Michiya Hanayagi Dance Recital that I was in. From the stage I could always count on seeing her in the dimmed audience, head slightly tilted with her glasses reflecting the stage light. She made a delicious and warming Japanese chicken rice which is a recipe that I follow to this day.

MY MOTHER'S FAMILY, THE UMINOS

SETTLING IN AMERICA

My great-grandparents on my mother's side were also "Issei" immigrants from Japan. Ginjiro and Kisa Umino gave birth to my Grandpa Teruji on June 6, 1907. He was the younger son in the family so his older brother Harutaro was sent to Japan to study. My Grandma Dorothy was born August 3, 1914. She had two sisters, Rosemary and another one who died very young. From what I understand, this third sister was an artist and one of her paintings hangs in my parents home. Grandma Dorothy's father Tamezo Oshio settled in Seattle, Washington before sending for his fiancée, Kiku Nosé to join him in America. According to my grandma, Kiku was an excellent seamstress and there were stories of her being ahead of her time, wearing pants and driving a car, which at the time made quite an impression on her daughters. At the age of 42 Kiku became very ill. She wanted to return to Japan to be with her family so she and Grandma Dorothy, twenty-one years old at the time, returned to Hiroshima where they stayed until Kiku died of kidney failure. Both Grandpa Teruji and Grandma Dorothy were born and raised in Seattle where my grandfather worked for the Bank of Tokyo. They were married in 1938 and gave birth to their first son, my Uncle John.

RELOCATION

During WWII and while they were preparing for the evacuation, family friends Mr. and Mrs. Karl Anderson graciously offered to store my grandmother's most valuable possession, an old upright piano for the unknown duration of their internment. (The piano still sits in my grandparent's home in Seattle today.) Eventually my grandparents, along with their eldest son John who was just four years old at the time, were relocated to the Minnedoka Relocation Center in Idaho. Later in 1943 my Uncle Gordon would be born inside the camp.

RESETTLING

After being released, my grandfather and his family settled in Spokane, Washington where my mother Alice was born August 16, 1946. They lived there for a short period before returning to Seattle. My grandmother's father, Tamezo Oshio would return to live in Japan where he would eventually adopt a son to inherit the family land. After the war it was very difficult for Grandpa Teruji to find employment so for a while he returned to Spokane and worked as a taxi driver and tv repairman for Mast's TV Repair. He commuted the three to four hour drive returning to his home in Seattle only on the weekends. My mother still has a tattered letter that she wrote to him telling him that she missed him. Eventually, Grandpa Teruji would find work at Boeing as an electrical technician where he worked until, at the age of sixty-two, he became very sick and was forced to retire. Grandma Dorothy took care of him for ten years at home before his death on January 17, 1980.

Grandma Dorothy worked for Levitt Brothers Dry Cleaning and then as a clerk for Seattle City Lights where she was employed for twenty years. There she became very close friends with Larry and Shirley, my mother's first encounter with a lesbian couple!

Since my mother was born after the camps she obviously has no memories about the war, but this doesn't mean that it was an easy life growing up (she'd later point this out when she learned that she wouldn't qualify for the reparations). Before the war, working for the Bank of Tokyo was a prestigious job for her father, but after the war it was a struggle to support the family. As a child, my mother remembers her father coming home with a used rag doll for her. Her mother was so disgusted that the doll had no clothes.

My mother and her two older brothers continued to grow up in Seattle. Mom would attend the University of Washington for a few years taking various courses including art (she'd pass on her old art supplies to me when I began to show interest in drawing). In 1967, while vacationing in San Jose, California and staying with her cousin Aiko Nakahara and her husband Pete, she was at a social dance where she met my father for the first time. He actually had his eye on the girlfriend she was with, but they danced together instead. They were married on December 1, 1968 in Seattle.

MEMORIES

I do not hold one memory of Grandpa Teruji in my mind, although we made yearly trips up to Seattle to visit, and I've seen photos of us together, myself, and my brother perched upon his lap at the airport. What I do vividly recall is the evening when my mother received the phone call about his sudden death. I was seven years old and was on the floor drawing a picture of Bugs Bunny. When I saw my mother crying, I had wanted to give her the drawing, perhaps to make her feel better, but my brother stopped me saying that it just wouldn't help. What I also know about him was his love for photography. In their Seattle home where Uncle Gordon still resides, in the hallway closet above the bath towels are countless albums full of images that Grandpa Teruji cropped and studied through the lens of his camera and developed and printed in his basement darkroom.

There was a simple way about Grandma Dorothy that I related to. She didn't wear much makeup and didn't dye her hair, letting it turn grey and finally all white. She also loved to play her organ. My mother remembers her mom's quirky sense of humor and twinkling eyes. When she was asked to remember something she'd close her eyes really tight trying to visualize it. Sometimes she'd spend all afternoon in the dim living room with her eyes closed reminiscing about the past. The only internment camp story she would share was about another family. She had met a woman whose husband was a farmer. This woman had many children, six or more, so when they were relocated to Minnedoka she was actually relieved! Life in the camps for her was so much easier than life on the farm. She didn't have to cook and clean and look after the children on her own. Was it Grandma Dorothy's way of making light of what must have been a stressful and uncomfortable situation for her own family?

GROWING UP JAPANESE-AMERICAN IN SAN FRANCISCO

My older brother Terence Arikawa was born May 30, 1969. He and my parents lived in an apartment on 9th Avenue in the Sunset District. After a year, they moved into the same apartment building that my grandparents owned. And then 4 years later I was born on July 25, 1973. My brother and I attended Alamo Elementary until my parents bought a home on Vicente Street in the Sunset District. Terry graduated to Aptos Middle School while I transferred to Lakeshore Elementary and then A. P. Gianinni Middle School and finally Abraham Lincoln High School. After graduating from Lincoln I spent several years at CCSF taking a variety of art classes. I finally decided to pursue a career in the arts and transferred to the California College of the Arts (formerly California College of Arts and Crafts) majoring in Illustration and obtaining a BA with distinction in 1998.

It occurs to me now that I'd rarely encounter other students of Japanese decent during my younger school years. Many other Japanese-American children were sent to Japanese bilingual schools and then attended schools in the Richmond District. Perhaps it was the make up of the Sunset District where I grew up. Many of my friends were from a variety of Asian (and some non Asian) backgrounds all the way through high school.

Since my mother Alice was originally from Seattle, she always thought of herself as an outsider from those native to the San Francisco Japantown community. But despite this "isolation" my parents did try to stay involved. They still maintained relationships with other Japanese-American families by having my brother join the same Boy Scouts Troop 58 while I was a Campfire Girl. I also went to summer day camp at the Christ United Presbyterian Church in Japantown and for a while attended service there on Sundays. Other extracurricular activities included the Japanese basketball leagues Associates and Enchanteés and the Michiya Hanayagi Japanese Classical Dance Group. This kept us active with annual Japantown festivals such as Sakura Matsuri.

Unlike many of my other friends whose parents emigrated from countries like China, Korea, Vietnam, Burma and the Philippines my parents were "Sansei" third generation so many Japanese customs, along with the language were lost. (Grandma Dorothy recalled that she was specifically told by her son's elementary school teacher not to speak Japanese to him at home.) All of my grandparents were bilingual and so we conversed in English. I was the only so-called "Japanese" to enroll in the Japanese language class in high school. Sensei Nori was always so disappointed in my lack of hiragana, katakana and kanji writing skills. This language issue intensified when I started working at a Japanese restaurant. Japanese patrons as well as those studying the language would assume that I spoke "Nihongo" so I'd constantly have to embarrassingly explain that I was "Yonsei" fourth generation Japanese-American. The confused expression on their faces made me wish that I could just say I was Chinese instead.

RELOCATION

Growing up, I didn't hear much from my family about their experiences in the internment camps. They did not offer information about it and I was told that it was too painful for my grandparents to discuss. So I didn't ask. Other than a brief paragraph in the history books, it was also not brought up in school. In 2005 I was assigned to illustrate "A Place Where Sunflowers Grow" a children's book about the art school established in the Topaz Relocation Center in the Utah desert. I began to investigate and research life in the camps thus connecting the experience of

the characters depicted in the story to my own family's experience. Although all of my grandparents had already passed away, Grandma Chizuko just a year earlier in 2004, I started to ask questions.

The book "A Place Where Sunflowers Grow" was written by Amy Lee-Tai, who is the daughter of Ibuki Hibi Lee and the granddaughter of artist Hisako Hibi. Fortunately I was able to meet with Ibuki who graciously shared her mother's sketches and paintings through which I was able to gain insights into the real conditions in the camps and inspiration for my illustrations. I was surprised to learn that the Topaz Art School had a formal art education program run by internees.

On December 30, 2005, our son Sora was born. The evening before I was deeply immersed in the past, as I was finishing up illustrations for "A Place Where Sunflowers Grow" and reflecting on my father's early years of life living in the Internment camps and then that morning, I was deeply immersed in the present as our son Sora was born to us, his life just beginning. Since becoming a mother, I've often reflected on the fact that both of my grandmothers were also young mothers of small children during their internment. The same image of Grandma Chizuko with my father, just 2 months old swaddled in her arms suddenly asked to evacuate the comfort of her home and leave everything familiar behind. I never got the chance to ask her what she was feeling, but now understand why she would prefer not to revisit that experience. I can't imagine what it must have been like for her... I hope I will never have to.

MY FAMILY, THE HOSHINOS

My husband Yoshikazu Hoshino is from Saitama, Japan and came to America in the early 1990s. He made his way to Hayward, California where he attended English school. We were friends for many years and eventually he transferred to the same art college I attended majoring in Industrial Design. On January 11, 2002 we had a simple City Hall wedding followed by a home cooked family dinner. Later that year we moved into the same apartment building that my grandparents bought so many years before and continue to live there today, now with our son Sora and daughter Yume.

Though difficult to express as I'm living it everyday, I want to share my experience of being married to Yoshi, a native to Japan as we raise our two young children in such a culturally diverse city as San Francisco. I am eager to learn, embrace and expose our children to the Japanese language, foods and customs that Yoshi brings with him and holds so dear to his heart, but at the same time, I do not wish to completely dismiss what my very Japanese-American family has established here for four generations. Our identities and values and those of our children, are constantly being negotiated, but I strive to create a bridge bringing together the strengths of both of our worlds. I truly hope that Sora and Yume will continue to grow and flourish in a society where they can be proud "Nisei" AND "Gosei" Japanese-Americans, no matter how they decide to define it for themselves.