

Chapter 1

A New Life

It is only now that I am a 94-year-old woman, I realize how brave my father was to come to America from Japan by himself in 1905. I wonder if he still would have made the journey if he had known that after living in the United States for almost four decades, he, his wife and four children would be imprisoned behind barbed wire for two-and-a-half years, simply because of our Japanese ancestry.

Knowing my father's ability to make the best of any situation, he probably would have come anyway.

My father, Yoshigoro Kawaguchi, grew up very poor in the mountains of Wakayama, Japan, where he was a farmer. At the age of 28, he boarded a ship bound for Vancouver, Canada. Upon arriving, he settled in Seattle, Washington.

Dad's good fortune began almost as soon as he started working in Seattle, when he met the Robeson family, who owned a candy store. The Robesons were relatives of a man named Hiram Johnson, an up-and-coming politi-

cian who became California's governor in 1911.

When the Robesons relocated to Los Angeles to live near Mr. Johnson, they invited Dad to come with them. He got work on the Johnson family's large farm, where they grew hay and beans. Father's job was cleaning the barn and horse stalls. It was not a very nice job, and he had to wake at 4:30 each morning to work. But it paid well: \$150 per month which was very good in those days.

The Johnsons must have liked my father a lot because they also provided him a place to live, health insurance and food. Over the 15 years he worked for them, they also paid for his trips to Japan three times.

The Johnsons apparently could not pronounce my father's name, Yoshigoro, so they gave him the name Henry. Dad kept that name until he passed away in 1967.

Even though Dad was a hard worker, he saved very little of the money that he earned for himself. He sent most of his wages to his brother in Japan to help support their family. But after 15 years, he had saved enough money to return to Japan to get a wife.



My mother, Okane Kawaguchi, was born in 1899 in Japan and grew up near the Pacific Ocean. She told me that as a little girl, she always enjoyed watching the large ships from the United States that came into port near her home.

As the youngest of three daughters, in a family that also had one son, my mother knew she was last in line.



*Me with my mother, when
I was about two years old.*

Anything the family owned would be given to her brother. As a teenager, my mother worked in a button factory. She knew there had to be more in life, and agreed to come to the United States with my father.

My father brought my mother to America in 1920. When they arrived in the port of Washington, the authorities were initially going to deport my mother because of an issue with her eyes. But thanks to Mr. Hiram Johnson, she was admitted to the United States. I don't know exactly what Mr. Johnson said or did, but my father told us that Mr. Johnson had intervened. What a blessing that my father had worked for someone so well-connected.

My parents found a small apartment in Seattle. Years later my father told me their apartment had been so small that at Christmastime, they had to tie the Christmas tree to their bed headboard. Typical of my father, he made the most of whatever they had, no matter how little it was.

At first my mother found it challenging to adjust to life in America, especially because she never learned to speak English well. Over time she learned that people liked her, regardless of how she communicated with them.

I was born in 1921. My parents named me Yoshiko, which means "good child" in Japanese.

I don't know what my Dad did to pay the rent while we lived in Seattle, but my mom told me she cut cabbage in the cold and snow. I'm sure it was a hard job. My father did all the cooking until Mom slowly learned how to use the kerosene stove.

I wish I knew more about my parents' early life, but when you are growing up, you only think of playing.