

Furusato (Home Sweet Home): Japanese Community on Terminal Island before World War II



The March virtual program was a panel with former Terminal Islanders Mary (Izumi) Tamura and her brother, Katsumi Izumi, and Mary's daughter, Barbara Tamura. The panel was assembled and moderated by Mitchell Matsumura, GLA JACL Co-President.

In a slide presentation, Barbara Tamura showed pictures of the former Japanese community on Terminal Island before WWII and pictures of her family. Mary Tamura and Katsumi Izumi shared stories of life on Terminal Island.

GLA did not have permission to show publicly the 2007 film "Furusato: The Lost Village of Terminal Island." The director himself did not have copyright to the music in the film.

A recording of the panel discussion is accessible in Programs on the GLA website glajacl.org and on YouTube. Also attached in the website is the report of the April 2018 program with Mary Tamura and Barbara.



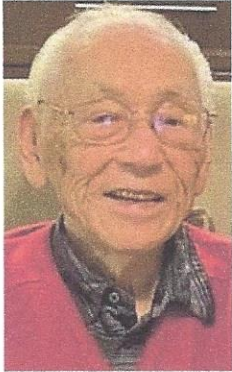
Mary Tamura

Mary Tamura: Biography

Before World War II, 3,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on Terminal Island formed a unique "Japanese fishing village." Growing up there was one of the happiest periods of my life. Fathers went fishing, mothers worked in the canneries, everyone looked after each other, and we celebrated holidays together like one big family. I attended grade school on the island, then took a ferry to San Pedro Jr./Sr. High School. I played the piano at church, sang in the choir, and learned Ikebana. On Dec 7, 1941, the Issei community leaders were arrested. On Feb 2, 1942, the FBI did a gigantic roundup by arresting 400 Issei men who went to Federal Prison. On Feb 25, 1942, remaining women and children were given 48 hours to leave their homes. The notice did not say

where or how, so we wondered where can we go and who will take us? Fortunately, some Quakers, the Baptist church, Buddhist temple, and volunteers came and drove people to stay in their churches, private homes or wherever there was space. We lived with 5 other families in a house in Venice, and my best friend lived in the LA. Buddhist recreation hall with 20 families. Since we did not know where our fathers and friends were, it was the most sad and sorrowful time in my life. In 1942 April/May, former Terminal Islanders went to WWII incarceration camps. We went to Tulare Assembly Center, before interned in Gila Relocation Camp in Arizona where I graduated HS and worked at Gila Hospital, then signed up to leave camp to obtain nurse training under the U.S. Cadet Corp. at Rochester, MN. In 1947, I graduated from St. Mary's School of Nursing, passed the State board examination, became a Registered Nurse, and returned to California to join my family.

In 1950, I married Robert Asaka Tamura. After he graduated from Art Center School of Design from a GI Bill he got after he served in the US Army MIS. We moved to New York City on our honeymoon, Bob worked as a graphic artist at Paramount and other studios before becoming a freelance artist in San Francisco. We resided in San Mateo for 19 years, raised David and Barbara, and in 1978, Bob accepted an Art Director job at Mattel in El Segundo, so we moved to Torrance. After 11 years, Bob retired. We traveled around the world, visited many museums and art shows before Bob was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and lived to be 91 years old. I still love to travel, so I took my children to Peru, New Zealand, and Japan, but now with COVID restrictions, I am content to stay at home remembering all the adventures and the good life I have been blessed with.



Katsumi Izumi

Katsumi Izumi: Biography

Our Terminal Island community was like a big family where neighbors watched kids when parents worked at the cannery or fished, and we rarely heard of robberies or assaults. We lived in homes without individual bedrooms or bathrooms - the narrow buildings had a hallway leading to rooms equipped with electricity and a wood burning stove with a 15' pole that hoisted a wire cage used to salt and dry fish. We attended Japanese school after English school, and when I was 10, Dad took me to Kendo lessons at 5am. The head instructor Fuji Sen-Sei was also my dentist. My hobby was collecting stamps found in bins we searched off huge docked ships. We loved fishing on skiffs with 100 hooks on the line my friend's father had, and caught king fish, tom cods, mackerels, smelts, etc., then sold them to a man who would fillet, salt, and sell them to farmers.

We worshipped at the Baptist church and many friends attended the Buddhist Church. I was 13 when I left Terminal Island, after the FBI agents came to our home the night of Dec 7 1941 and took my father to jail with other Issei's. We had to turn in our flashlights and pocket knives, while soldiers with guns and bayonets walked up and down the street. We had a family grocery store that was locked up. Later, the government gave a 3-day notice to leave. We thank God for friends not living on Terminal Island who came and helped. Many greedy merchants came with trucks to buy anything; offering only a quarter for an ice box, piano, etc. In 1946 I graduated North Denver High School, then was accepted to USC School of Engineering, but I lacked a Trigonometry course, so I went to LA City College and University of California San Francisco. In 1950 I enrolled in Dentistry School. The Selective Service notified me to report in 1951, but the school Dean wrote letters to have a deferral until graduation. In 1954 I joined the Dental Corp U.S. Army; after graduation, discharged after 1957, I began my Long Beach dental practice in 1958. I married Hatsune, and we had 3 children Steven, Nancy, and Kenny. I have been retired for 26 years, and am in good health. I still play par three golf course in Long Beach and go to the driving range almost daily.



Barbara Tamura

Barbara Jean Tamura: Biography

I was born and raised in San Mateo, California, and met most of my Japanese American friends through a small Christian church I attended weekly. In 1978, my dad accepted a job at Mattel, so we moved to Torrance. After high school, graduated CSU Long Beach with an Education/Minority Studies degree. My brother David illustrated the book "When Justice Failed, the Fred Korematsu Story" by Steven A. Chin. Before working in the auto industry, my parent's love of service to underprivileged people influenced me to teach at an inner-city school in Watts. I invited professional Asians and people of color to share their success stories to my students, teaching the kids art, writing, and history lessons by showing how discrimination shaped them to become positive compassionate individuals, despite their journey where they lost homes, were placed in

internment camps, and later volunteered to enlist in the US Military. I feel blessed to have an amazing Mother willing to share a story of courage, her love of community, and strong motto that matches the tagline "Patriotism in Spite of Prejudice" which is shown on the book cover Mom appears on, entitled "Nisei Cadet Nurse of WWII" by Thelma M. Robinson.

A Former Terminal Islander Shares Her Story

Mary (Izumi) Tamura, a teenager in 1942 living on Terminal Island, was the April program speaker. Her daughter, Barbara Tamura, accompanied Mary's presentation with a slide show that she assembled.

Before World War II, there were 3,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on Terminal Island. They formed a unique "Japanese fishing village." On Dec 7, 1941, the Issei community leaders were arrested. On Feb 2, 1942, the FBI had a gigantic roundup and arrested 400 Issei men. On Feb 25, 1942, the remaining women and children were given 48 hours to leave their homes.

"The notice did not say where we should go or how to go. Just 48 hours to get off the island. Where can we go? Who will take us? Can you imagine what was going through the people's minds? All the husbands/fathers were gone. Only the women and children were left. There were few Nisei in their twenties, but most families had only young boys. It was the most traumatic time. And a frantic time because we had to pack our bedding, clothes, pots and dishes because we did not know what was going to happen next...."

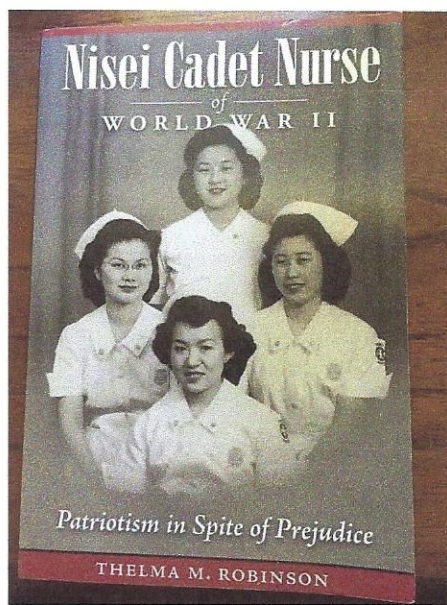
Fortunately, from Quakers, Baptist church, Buddhist temple, volunteers came to help pack and drive the people to their churches, private homes or wherever there was space. Our friend in Venice located a house and we were able to move there with five other families. My girlfriend told me that 20 families lived at the Buddhist recreation hall in Los Angeles. In 48 hours, the Islanders were all gone. We did not know where our fathers were. We did not know where our friends went. We did not know what was going to happen next. It was a most sad and sorrowful time in my life."

In April and May of 1942, the former Terminal Islanders next had to go to the WWII incarceration camps.



Barbara Tamura and Mary Tamura

In the background to the left is a painting by artist Robert Tamura, Mary's husband, who passed away in 2014. The painting is of the City of Hawthorne of his youth. In the background to the right is one of 15 panels by Kanji Sahara telling the history of Terminal Island.



Mary Tamura joined the WAVES. She is the one at the top. More than 350 Japanese American women joined the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, the WWII women's branch of the U.S. Naval Reserve.