

Surveying Alameda's Japantown

Up ^{on} the Roof

with Fumiko "Nellie" Itahara

Nellie stepped carefully out of her second story window, and perched herself on the roof next door to where her parents rented an apartment in the late 1920s.

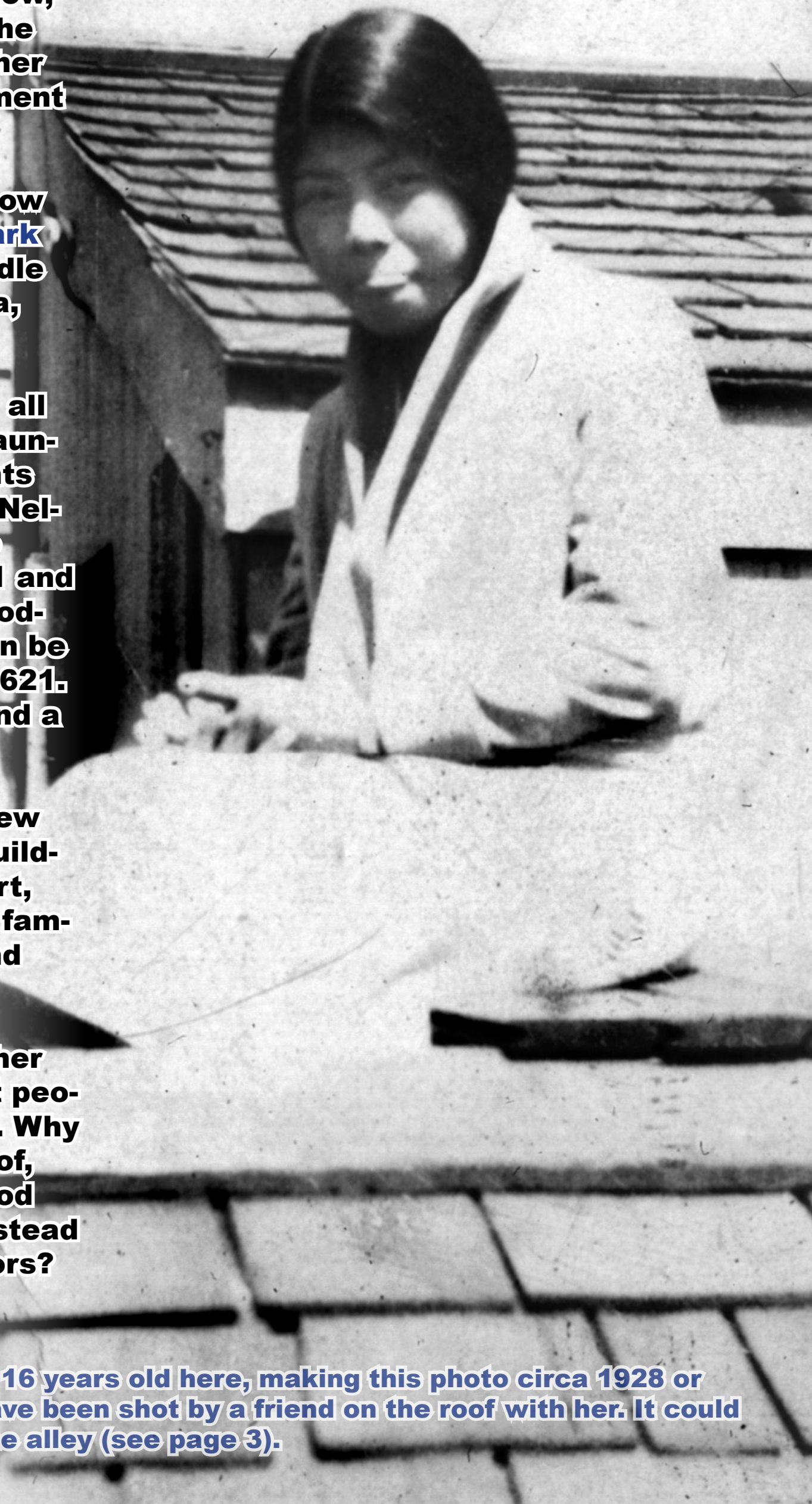
It was her personal window into the world of **1621 Park Street**, smack in the middle of Japantown in Alameda, CA.

"There were storefronts, all those barbershops and laundries, the little apartments were upstairs," recalled Nellie's second daughter, **Jo Takata**, speaking of 1621 and Japantown in general. Modern apartments today can be quite spacious, but not 1621. "Rooms with a kitchen and a bath," **Jo** said.

Nellie had a bird's eye view of the alley behind her building, and also Pacific Court, where several Japanese families lived, including friend Shizuto Kawamura.

If there is anything that her friends would say, is that people were drawn to Nellie. Why not spend time on the roof, overseeing a neighborhood filled with her friends, instead of being cooped up indoors?

Nellie would be about 15 or 16 years old here, making this photo circa 1928 or 1929. This picture had to have been shot by a friend on the roof with her. It could not have been made from the alley (see page 3).



1621 and the buildings next door would also be the location for activities, some not so legal.

Prohibition would not end until 1933, and Hiroshi Kido recalled seeing Issei* men and women walking up the stairs of these buildings, doing their business, then walking down with their hand in their coat pocket... hiding a flask of booze.

Someone was brewing alcohol up there and it attracted the attention of Japanese men, including Nellie's father, Yoshio Itahara.

"Papa was well known for making plum wine," said Jo, speaking of Yoshio. "Of course, in those days, it was bootleg."

"Taken on the roof where she and

dad were married," wrote oldest daughter **Judy Furuichi**, referring to the rooftop photo of her mother, Nellie. Bill and Nellie were wed inside their 1621 apartment on January 19, 1941.

"Dad's 'long gun' is still in the walls there (of 1621)," Judy said. "Didn't want to be caught with it!" Bill buried it inside a wall in his building when WWII started and it may still be there. Japanese in America had to turn their guns into the U.S. government after Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941.

If only the walls and rooftops could talk...

**Issei ("E-say") are the first Japanese to immigrate to America. They would be Nellie's parent's age group.*

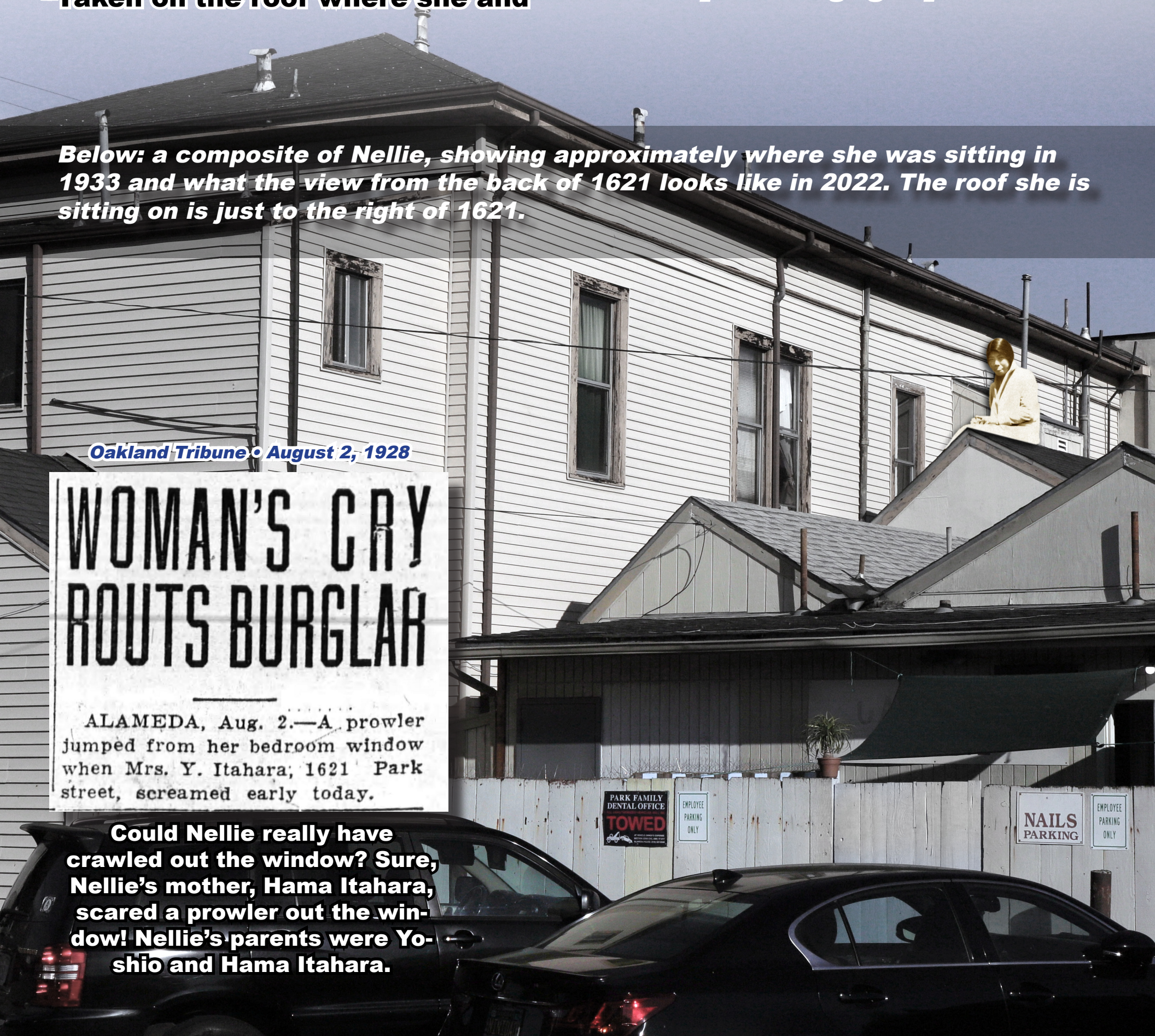
Below: a composite of Nellie, showing approximately where she was sitting in 1933 and what the view from the back of 1621 looks like in 2022. The roof she is sitting on is just to the right of 1621.

Oakland Tribune • August 2, 1928

WOMAN'S CRY ROUTS BURGLAR

ALAMEDA, Aug. 2.—A prowler jumped from her bedroom window when Mrs. Y. Itahara, 1621 Park street, screamed early today.

Could Nellie really have crawled out the window? Sure, Nellie's mother, Hama Itahara, scared a prowler out the window! Nellie's parents were Yoshio and Hama Itahara.



GIRLS FETED IN ALAMEDA

Miss Nellie Itahara Gives Party for Saita Sisters

ALAMEDA, April 14—Miss Nellie Itahara, popular local second generation girl, was a charming hostess at the delightful card party given in honor of two-out-of-town guests, Misses Kiyo and Kimi Saita, of Walnut Grove, Thursday night at her home on Park street.

The guests spent an enjoyable evening playing cards, snapshot gazing, and other delightful pastimes. Refreshments were also served by the hostess.

The Saita sisters were delegates to the eighth annual Bay Region Young People's Christian conference held last Sunday in Alameda. They left for their home in Walnut Grove early Friday morning.

During their brief stay in the Island City, they were guests of Mr. and Mrs. T. Hanamura on Pacific avenue.

April 15, 1933 • Nichibei Shinbun

M. NUKAGA TO TALK NOV. 20

Miss Nellie Itahara Will Preside at Service

ALAMEDA, Nov. 16—Makoto Nukaga, who is taking a graduate work at the University of California in the political science department and a member of the Oakland Japanese Independent church, will be the principal speaker at the Thanksgiving service of the local Japanese Young People's league to be held Sunday night, Nov. 20, 8 p.m., at the Alameda M.E. church, south.

The Intermediate leaguers will join the seniors in the service.

Miss Nellie Itahara, vice-president of the organization, will be the chairman.

November 17, 1932 • Nichibei Shinbun

To call Nellie popular would be an understatement.

These news articles, from the same time period as her photo on the roof, testify to her involvement with the Japanese Methodist Episcopal church, Alameda's Japantown community, and even families from out of town.

A search for her name in the *Hoji Shinbun* Japanese newspaper archive results in 296 entries.

Is it any wonder that everyone loved Nellie?

DRAMA WINS APPLAUSE IN E. L. BENEFIT

Nellie Itahara Stars As 300 Enjoy Show In Alameda

[Special to Japanese American News]

ALAMEDA, Mar. 13—An audience of about 300 people, both old and young burst into spontaneous applause when the curtains came down on the charming little one-act Japanese play, "Friendship," given as the feature of the benefit show of the local Epworth league Saturday eve in the M. E. church hall.

The cast of this play included Pumiko Itahara, Emiko Kono, Hisako Kajiwara, Haruko Nakata, Hiroko Hakata, Yoshio Nakata, Sakae Date and Roy Teshima.

Nellie Itahara Stars

Another player who received much praise was Nellie Itahara for her portrayal of Edna Van Alstyne in "The Tale of a Shirt." Other players include Alice Sera, Robert Mizokuchi, Toshio Kono, Shigeshi Madokoro. The play was directed by Henry Yamamoto.

Kazuo Date, Sakae Date, Leroy Kajiwara and Roy Teshima gave a Japanese skit, and Masao Yoshida rendered a whistling solo. Henry Yoshino in "Bing Corsby," accompanied by Dorothy Towata, was commendable.

March 14, 1932 • Nichibei Shinbun

WHO'S WHO

By O.S.T.

ALAMEDA



MISS NELLIE ITAHARA

Some day in the very near future I've got good reasons to believe that Miss Nellie Itahara is going to land a fat-salaried secretarial job at a banking firm or maybe as a personnel secretary of a department store.

How do I know? Well, for one thing she's very trim and neat, with pleasant lines from head to foot. Easy to look at sitting across the table waiting for dictations or copying on the typewriter. Speaking of rapid typing she makes me look like the proverbial snail with a rheumatism stuck on a bottle of glue. As for shorthand, it's Greek for me and Gregg for her.

With all her business intelligence, she's still a young girl of middle 'teens and a senior at the local high school, and that's why I say she'll make a good secretary for some nice office which needs young life, young ideas, and young form.

Alameda M.E. Church and Epworth League occupies a great deal of her out-of-school hours and Sundays. Nellie has a big radio at home that plays everything from sharps to flats and flats to sharps. She's really very

fond of it, and that's another one of her weaknesses.

The boys respect her for her sympathetic soul and cheerfulness. The girls envy her popularity, but just the same they'll have to admit she's nice and straight forward about everything.

Nellie lives at 1621 Park street in case your typewriter goes on the blink or your radio tube blows out or if your mother runs out of sugar.

YOU MAY BE NEXT!



*Sincerely yours
Fumiko
Kobayashi
'02*