

## The Story of the Iino's in America

This story was started by having dinner with our cousin Masako Iino and her sister Minako Miyazaki. I happened to talk about my father Shinichi Frank Iino, how he pioneered coming from Japan to the United States of America. Masako recommended that I should write his story. Being over 80, all that I could remember is what, collectively from my mother, father and my sister Carol, told me historically of his life here in America. What I am writing may not be completely factual and hope you will forgive me for any errors.

Shinichi Iino was born in Takasaki City near Tokyo on December 20, 1885. When he was 17 years old he worked as a stock boy at the now Mitsukoshi department store. It is there that he was introduced to Christianity when he had met Makoto Igarashi. (Mr. Igarashi started the Hakuyoshi Laundry & Cleaning Co., which became the largest laundry, cleaning and towel company in the world.) Mr. Igarashi would like to read the Holy Bible during their lunch hour and Shinichi would listen attentively. Eventually Mr. Igarashi was terminated from employment with the Mitsukoshi department store because they



didn't want him to influence other co-workers there. Through all these years he kept a friendship with Shinichi.

At 19 years old Shinichi left Japan for America to seek his fortune with the plan of returning a wealthy entrepreneur. He was an eternal optimist. In Seattle, WA, Shinichi's first job was at a hotel where he worked in the kitchen. His job was to make coffee, but he blew up the coffee pot, so he was terminated. A short time later he decided to go to California where he worked on a farm. He eventually went into raising sugar beets as a sharecropper because there was a premium price for sugar. As time went by he later opened a restaurant near Sacramento. He was not very successful in that enterprise, so he moved to Santa Cruz and opened another restaurant with a Mr. Ono. After a short while he went out of business. He was bankrupt at the time so he and Mr. Ono walked from Santa Cruz to Oakland. He was able to find employment as a cook for the Schilling family (of the renown Schilling Spice Company). As time went by he began attending the Oakland Japanese Methodist Episcopal church and also started a new job working for the Stuart Hawley family, again as a cook. Shinichi was now ready for marriage. He had a very good friend named Mrs. Tomi Yamashita who went to Japan to see his brother's wife



to inform them that Shinichi wanted to get married. They had recommended a family friend, Taka Iizuka, who accepted the proposal. Taka was a distant relative to the Iino's. She came to America around 1915 via the NYK shipping line and landed in San Francisco where she went to Angel Island. That is where the newly arrived immigrants had to stay during the quarantine period. Once her quarantine period was over she was met dockside in San Francisco by Mrs. Tomi Yamashita and Shinichi. This was Shinichi and Taka's very first meeting. Shinichi was able to get temporary living quarters upstairs from the Nos Cleaners. Soon they were married at the M.E. church and moved to the Hawley's home where Shinichi continued to cook and Taka did other chores around the house.

In 1919 Taka gave birth to a girl that they named Kazuko Carol. During that time, while still working for the Hawley's, Shinichi attended Heald Business College where he learned Penmanship in which he was awarded a prize for his remarkable talents, along with a diploma. He was also an accomplished accountant. At the same time he was taking a course in typing. He was a truly remarkable person to be able to finish Business College with a diploma. His grandson Steven Iino in New York has that treasured original diploma. After



finishing college Shinichi worked for a Japanese import/export company for a few years. During this time he rented a house on 17<sup>th</sup> & West Street in Oakland. His monthly rent was \$15.00 a month, which was a great amount at that time.

In 1922 his friend Mr. Hirata informed Shinichi about a vacant grocery store that was for rent in West Oakland. Shinichi had never been in the grocery business before. At first it was very difficult because he did not have a truck, instead he had to use a bicycle to transport the produce he purchased from the wholesalers.

After a few years he gradually prospered in the business and was able to purchase a truck and hire employees. In the beginning they lived behind the store but eventually they were able to move upstairs to a two-bedroom apartment. During the depression Shinichi started a second grocery store. The building owner offered Shinichi free rent for three months and because of his good credit the wholesalers offered him three months credit. Shinichi made one of the workers from the first store a partner in the second store that was on 10<sup>th</sup> street in Oakland.



Shinichi continued prospering, opening another five stores, and eventually built three larger self-service type markets. In the market he had in Richmond he ran the grocery and produce department and a Chinese butcher ran the meat department. This was prior to World War II in which there was a tremendous amount of workers in the nearby Kaiser shipyards building the Kaiser's Liberty and Victory ships that enabled the market to flourish. Around 1935 there were quite a few Japanese who were in the grocery business. Shinichi formed a cooperative (Kumiai) so they could purchase different merchandise at a cheaper rate by volume purchases, benefiting the smaller grocery stores. They rented a vacant building to start this enterprise. Because of the war evacuation they dissolved the organization.

Because of the attack on Pearl Harbor, any person of Japanese heritage on the Pacific coast were evacuated and eventually sent to internment camps. On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1942 Shinichi's eldest son, William (Bill) was inducted into the U.S. army, later to be followed by his brothers David and Edward. Shinichi and Taka were incarcerated in the Topaz relocation camp in Utah. After the war they resettled in Waukesha near



Chicago, Illinois where Shinichi worked as a cook and Taka cared for the children of the Dennehy family.

Bill was discharged from the army after serving with the 442<sup>nd</sup> infantry in Europe. Bill, with his very close friend Tom Yamashita, decided to go back to California to retrieve Bill's stored vehicle, and to sell the Iino's house in West Oakland, and then they planned to return to Chicago. However they remained in California and Bill called his sister Carol, who was in Minnesota, to join him in Oakland. Shinichi requested that they purchase a home in Oakland, which they found on 63<sup>rd</sup> street. After a few months Shinichi and Taka returned to California to join Bill and Carol.

After the war the former grocery group was able to get together and continued their friendships, and together they formed the Intermediate Financing Corporation. Their purpose was investing in real estate, mainly the purchasing of second notes and Deeds of Trust at a discounted rate. He went to night school to prepare to take the test to become an American citizen, which he passed on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1964.



After returning to Oakland, Shinichi worked as a cook for different families in the Bay Area, but as soon as he was able to collect his Social Security benefits he retired and helped his son open a little grocery store in West Oakland. During retirement in 1950 he purchased a six-unit apartment building in Oakland for \$17,000, later trading it for a new six-unit apartment building in Berkeley. He had a wonderful foresight about speculating in real estate. Around this time he also studied for his American citizenship in which he passed proudly.

In his retirement one of his happiest moments was to take an automobile trip to Idaho, Oregon or the state of Washington to enjoy the scenery and the people. He loved working in his garden, studying the Bible, and practicing 'Shigin' (a type of Japanese singing).

In 1956 Shinichi was diagnosed with cancer.

In 1958 Mr. Shinichi Frank Iino peacefully passed on at home with his family at his bedside.