

The Ishikawa Family Who Came to America

On January 12, 2012, I, Joseph Ishikawa, am trying to remember what I can of my parents who came to the United States in 1905 Or 1906.

PARENTS

Kahchan was what we children called my mother, a Japanese diminutive for "okahsan" meaning "honorable mother." Tohchan was what we children called my father, a Japanese diminutive for "otohsan" meaning "honorable father." Our parents will generally be so-called. Kahchan's name was Mura, maiden name Shimatani. Tohchan's name was Rintaro (the Japanese ideograph calligraphy written with a "shika hen.") Kahchan was born March 15, 1879, to Chohei and Iwa Shimatani noted in Jesse's records of geneology as being commoners

Tohchan's birth in our son Jesse's genealogical records has his birthday erroneously listed as 2/2/1865. We celebrated his birthday on November 2. In the Japanese records which Jesse had translate, the birthday is 12/2, but Tohchan's passport, I think has his birthdate as 11/2. His parents were Shuhei and Mineko [nee Eijiro] Ishikawa who were Samurai in the Hiroshima clan of Lord Asano. Mineko was also from a Samurai family. Her seal was a floral figure in a circle. Fujiko, Henry's wife, in a crafts class made the seal in a worked sheet of copper. The Ishikawa seal is geometric, a diamond in a circle. Kimi, when she was a student at Carlton was at a program abroad at Doshisa University in Kyoto, bought several miniatures of this seal made of bamboo with a key chain link attached.

My parents were married in 1903 and Fusae was born that year. and I would think that it was love and that was demonstrated even as I noted their mutual affection. Shuhei had decided that he would abdicate his position to Tohchan in 1907. Tohchan had a job with the government in Taiwan which Japan had occupied. He abdicated his future responsibilities of the head of the family to his younger brother who was a naval officer. He and Kahchan and Fusae came to America in 1905. Someone said that he came earlter and either went back to bring them back. Kimi had that version and may have gotten that information when she was in Japan. It was terrible that I was too unimaginitive to have the curiosity to learn something when I had the opportunity when I was in Japan.

I have several theories why Tohchan decided to come to America. He had a job [necessary because the Samurai class was discontinued when he was five years old] and did not come for economic reasons. From ideals that I inherited from him, he probably came to be displeased with being part of a colonial occupying nation in Taiwan. My favorite theory is that because Fusae was a girl, he probably felt that she could not get a full education in Japan. There she could get an elementary education for girls. but he wanted to be somewhere where she might learn something to fit her for a career. Parenthetically if he ever thought of future children he might have planned something more since there was an assumption that we would all go to College. He didn't line us up and state that one would be an MD, another a Lawyer, another a banker, etc. We took what we wanted to. Whatever the reason, he wanted America to be his permanent home. He kept in touch with his brothers and sisters, but his letters always urged his nephews and nieces to come to the United States. To get back to Fusae I was four when she died but I think she must have spoken English well since she kept a well-written diary when she was 12. Supporting the theory that Tohchan's decision to come to the United States was partly to see that Fusae could get higher education because after graduating from high school, she went to USC, the first Methodist University to be located in a large city. Since she was in the school of Pharmacy Tohchan must have been working at the Hyland Pharmacy.

To get back to the chapter theme of my parents: I understand that they landed in Seattle. I don't know how they got to California, but they did. At first they lived on a farm, but finding the country schools at that time were inadequate they moved into the city of Los Angeles. Initially they did not discuss everything because, Tohchan would go out every evening and one night came home to find Kahchan crying. When he asked about it, she complained that he would go out every night and she did not know where. Unlike many Japanese men at that time who would be angry at their wife's Inquisitiveness, Tohchan explained that he was attending night classes to learn English. It is a pity that Kahchan had to stay home to care for Fusae and that she couldn't study with him. Being more extroverted, she would have made faster progress and would have helped him. At least, from this point on they discussed things openly,

KAHCHAN

Kahchan being more extroverted naturally was fearless to face new situations. Without seeking it, she [at 4'10"] she was the one whose leadership people sought. Even our grammar school sought her out to plan the activities of the Japanese stand

during School Fairs on the playground. Even though she did not read or write English except for "two quarts of milk," "one pound of butter," orders she would leave for the milkman, but she was not embarrassed by her accent [but being an insensitive thoughtless brat I'd be embarrassed] and would go to PTA conferences with teachers where they would draft her to organize a project. Hiro Hishiki knew her before he knew me although he was only a year older than I. Fortunately, when on a visit from Italy at Johnny's, he, Olivia and I visited Hiro a few years ago and he was reminiscing that she was very clever about amusing her women friends and entertain them with stories. I had known Hiro for years but he had never mentioned this. He may have known Kahchan because he taught Japanese when he was under twenty..

Kahchan also gave children free lessons in playing the samisen [Japanese stringed instrument] and in Japanese dancing. It was her nature and she was by no means a show-off. She had a lot of friends, not just from her church, but including Buddhists. She would take four or five among the neighbors on a street car downtown to shop. She was well aware that there was a pecking order of stores in Downtown Los Angeles with Walkers at the bottom of the list that my mother usually didn't enter, Broadway considerably above that closely lead by the May Company. Bullocks was generally the best of the lot and opened branches in the more affluent suburbs. Robinsons was a specialist store and she didn't use it much. Since our family had to economize my mother (who did all the household bookkeeping) never bought on credit until we moved to Benton Way (ca. 1931) where she bought a washing machine. at the May Company. When she made the installment payments in cash I generally went with her, I was about 12 and usually when I went downtown the Moore brothers would take a streetcar from the other side of Virgil jr high school and would be leaning out of the window to show that they were on that car. I very seldom had to wait for the next car. Getting back to Kahchan and the washing machine, she caught her hand in the wringer on top and had shriveled fingers but she used her fingers as usual. Maybe a doctor could have done something, but she didn't use doctors much. When I was four a carpenter came to her with the tip of his finger that he had lopped off. She put the pieces together by using an egg membrane to hold the finger together. I don't know if the nerves knit together. The Washing machine was on the back porch, didn't spin dry and required a wringer on top which passed the water back into the machine. My mother did a load of white clothes and used the same water for colored. There was a long hose for drainage which she used to water the garden. It Sounds complicated but it was a smarter use of water than draining down the stationery tub. The machine was better than using a washboard, wringing the clothes on a hand cranked dryer attached to the stationery tub with clamps.

I said that she never used doctors much, but as far as the children were concerned, she knew about clinics usually far from our neighborhood where we went by street cars, medical, also dental clinics. They were free, I believe.

Brother Hank started working for Frank Zaima, our brother-in-law, who had a coveted fruit stand in Grand Central Market in Downtown LA on Saturdays when he was 14; he added to the family's budget. It was his suggestion that we get an electric refrigerator which Kahchan also had had delivered on the time plan. .

At some point my mother would also clean houses. I don't know how she found that work. Frequently if I was available, I would go with her and might have done some dusting, helped her make some beds, but was hardly indispensable. Kahchan was resourceful in helping the family income: She kept the family books and did the shopping although she avoided some obvious economizing: When I asked why we couldn't have liver, she said the older children didn't like it and I probably wouldn't. Besides going to neighborhood markets, she ordered from a Japanese salesperson who would come to customer's homes with both Japanese goods as well as things to be found in neighborhood stores. She economized, but she always ordered boxes of chewing gum, Hershey kisses, candy bars, cases of soda pop, etc. We had water dispenser in the kitchen and the water man would bring carboys of spring water.

I had mentioned our brother-in-law Zaima who had married Fusae who died of a miscarriage. Kahchan still regarded him as a son-in-law, and when he married Hatsuko from Florida, Kahchan treated her like a daughter. At that time travel was so difficult and her mother never visited, she was grateful to accept Kahchan as a mother and treated her as such. Kahchan always helped out at the time their four children were born. While Kahchan often cried often about Fusae but it didn't complicate her relation with Hatsuko. All in our family followed Kahchan's example.

My mother was thoughtful and compassionate. There is a friend, a woman who had been run over by a streetcar and was paralyzed and had to spend her life in bed attended constantly by her husband, who did so cheerfully. My mother visited by public transportation which required a little walk to their house. Once she took me with her and asked me to play my harmonica to the patient. I played several songs for her and for this little offering, the hosts both beamed and the husband went to a jar and gave me a little inch and a half harmonica with no more than an octave of notes, but I put the whole thing in my mouth and learned to play simple tunes using by tongue to blocke certain hole. The streetcar company must have given her some compensation since her husband could not go out for his work.

Kahchan administered punishment whenever I was naughty [I don't know if the others were] and never passed the word on to Tohchan. Her friends if they did mete out punishment also told their husbands who doubled the penalty.

Kahchan contracted tuberculosis in 1938 and went into a sanatorium in Easter 1939. She committed suicide in the sanatorium and I feel very guilty because I did not go to see her. I think that she felt that the sanatorium was more expensive than we could afford. Since her entry to the sanatorium was close to Easter I think that as a devout Christian she chose that day for her action as symbolic. Her attitude toward suicide was more Japanese than western.

TOHCHAN

Tohchan was quite different from most of the immigrant men from Japan, most importantly because he wanted to settle here permanently. Many came with the idea that they would accumulate money and return. Some, when they found that the accumulation of money was not easy, they sent to Japan for picture brides. One Nisei whom I met at the school for foreigners in Japan took pride in his fathers sending several back to Japan when he found them unsatisfactory. Tohchan had not abandoned his family in Japan. He wrote regularly and Kahchan too, and much of that was to get some of his nephews to come to the United States. When Kahchan and Tohchan first lived on a farm when they moved to California, he could see that the country schools at that time were not very good and moved into Los Angeles. I don't know when he got a job or how he began to work at Hyland's, but it must have been soon after the family moved into the city. Another example of his difference was the way he reacted to Kahchan's asking about the evenings he was absent.

He also treated the children differently than the fathers in the neighborhood. Most nisei boys I knew all had burn marks on their arms where their fathers had used a punk that you would use to light firecrackers to burn the boys as a punishment. Tohchan would try to reason with us if he thought we had done wrong. We were probably the only nisei kids who were not sent to Japanese school. The only time he touched me in anger was when I was 19 and he was trying to give me a crash course to prepare me for my trip to Japan and in my frustration I burst out that Japanese was a terrible language and Japan a bad country. He spanked me and I did not resist him although bigger than he since I thought he was right to lose his anger. He cooled quickly and just walked quietly around the room to calm himself which he had done during an earthquake when I was trying to get him under the table where I had gone.

Earlier Johnny and I were loudly quarreling over a checker game we were playing. It got louder and louder and Tohchan could not stand it and took the checker board up and tore it apart. Kahchan thought he had overreacted, but Tohchan calmly walked around cooling off. He never punished us but got rid of what was causing our verbal fight. He was supposed to have been an active drinker, but in this country he was a teetotaler. When one of Johnny's girlfriends came over, I got a root beer for her. He objected that it was beer I was giving her, but I persuaded him that it had no alcohol. Tochan had no hobbies that I recall. He read the Los Angeles Times faithfully and had several scrapbooks with clippings from the Times pasted therein.

His idea, Kahchan having died a few months earlier at Easter, 1939, and giving him the realization of his own mortality was that all connection with his family would be lost. His idea that our family having become Americans should not lose its roots and despite his having given up responsibility for his Japanese family left behind did not mean that he did not love them and he did not want the familial connection to be lost. I was the one chosen to go since Hank and Johnny were working while I was a student just finishing my junior year. It was not Tohchan's intention, but I felt that it was my punishment for not going to see Kahchan at Easter. I still feel guilty that she would not have committed suicide if I had visited her.

At any rate I left for Japan in September of 1939. I suppose the date of my passage was selected because Oliver Honda, the only son of several girls in the Honda family, close friends of my parents. The Hondas had a prosperous farm among the irrigation canals in Imperial Valley just north of Mexico. Each summer the mother and children would come and stay with us until they found a house to rent in Los Angeles. This continued for several years until they discovered that San Diego was much closer to them and cooler as well.

Oliver had gone to Japan a year or two earlier and attended Waseda University where many Nisei from the US attended. The passage was selected because the new school year was about to begin. Japan's academic calendar was much like America's. On board the ship he assured me that I would love Japan since it was A MAN'S COUNTRY. Knowing that he had grown up among seven or eight sisters I could understand his feelings, but I couldn't agree with him since Japan had a lower status for women at that time. Nor could I agree with loving Japan whose government had an imperial feeling about Asia was at war with China which was called euphemistically as the China incident than a war.

But I don't want to go into my stay of fifteen months in Japan since this section is about Tohchan. His idea was that I should stay there three years. He arranged that I would enroll at the school that the Japanese Foreign Office had set up for the children of overseas Japanese on scenic Masugats Yama just outside of Tokyo in Kanagawa prefecture. I was to learn Japanese and then try to get into a University, visiting Hiroshima on the holidays. When I arrived in Japan, My cousin. Hango Hori. met my boat and I stayed at his and his wife's house until the school opened; later I met Shiro, a wonderful cousin who agreed that Japan should not have invaded China {but could never say so publicly,} I'd never heard of him before, but he showed me the ropes. Later when it was time for me to go to Hiroshima, he took me and visited other relatives I'd not known of. In any case Japanese-America relations deteriorated and the USA abrogated the 1910 trade treaty and US citizens received a letter from the US consul that we should return to the US. Tohchan agreed and I got back in December, 1940, a year before Pearl Harbor.

Hank and Fuzzy had moved in with us {Tochan, Johnny and I} at Benton way shortly before I left, and I believe Tochan used to walk around the neighborhood but I believe he did less.

Benton Way where we lived from 1931 until 1940 or so where the square block that we were on was predominantly of African Americans. Whenever Joe Louis had a match, the whole block would rock and people would shout at each other out their windows, Otherwise it was pretty quiet. Across the street to the north it was mixed with Japanese and Caucasians, to the east it was all Caucasian and at least one Jewish family although the Jewish neighborhood was about a mile to the East. That family was Robert Koff's. He had been my friend from Rosemont grammar school, Virgil Junior High and Belmont High.

The African American neighborhood was quite different from the largest collection on Central avenue, several block south of downtown with more poverty. Where Hank lived when I got back from Japan was Jefferson which was an area associated with African Americans, but I don't know that there were blocks of them; the neighborhood was quite mixed very close to the north was the big estate, Pickfair (Mary Picford and Douglas Fairbanks. Somewhere near us was the most prominent African American, Eddie Robinson, who played Rochester in Jack Benny's show.

After a few months after Pearl Harbor, this was the kind of place where buses came to pick us up to take us to Santa Anita Assembly Center. This was being enacted in several neighborhoods in California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona and Nevada,

these were the states from which all Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent were banished, This was an illegal act and made possible by President F. D. Roosevelt's Executive Order. The assembly centers were temporary quarters while permanent quarters were being prepared in remote places in Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Arkansas and the flat altiplano area of Colorado. Although California was a forbidden State, the Manzanar camp was built at the eastern base of Mt Whitney and the desert that stretched with a mountain range and Death Valley in between to the Nevada border; a prison camp at Tule Lake for those who were to be deported to Japan.

Before being in an assembly center the Japanese and their progeny could voluntarily leave the forbidden states, but the fact that so few took advantage of this is that they did not know where to go for work. To go away to school or having made connections outside, you could leave camp, but only with permission of the camp administrator,

Tohchan was in his seventies and had no activities with Japanese organizations, he was not required to go to the camps and Mr George Hyland offered him the shelter at his home in Beverly Hills, but he preferred to stay with Johnny and me. I had been accepted into the graduate program at the University of Nebraska but my permission did not come from the War Relocation Authority until my third week at Amache about a week after the term opened. Johnny left about a year later after getting word that he could work in New York City.

Tohchan was one of the last to leave Amache. I don't recall all his movements, but he stayed with children in different parts of the country. The one thing that I remember about his staying in New York City with Johnny and Ken and Yuki Matsuo is that once everyone came home from work he wasn't there and they were frantic. Eventually he returned and his explanation was that he had stepped into the Pacific Ocean and had gone to Coney Island so that he could step into the Atlantic Ocean. None of us realized that he was a romantic poet.

In the meantime, Betty Quinton had found an apartment for me on E street in what was called Russian Bottoms. They were progeny of the German Congregationalists that Catherine the Great had imported to Russia. They still spoke German and had fled the Russian Communist revolution. When I got the apartment, I suggested that that Tohchan stay with me and in due time he came from California. I went to Omaha to meet his train.

Tohchan explored the neighborhood and started to go to the German speaking Congregational Church. I suggested that he come with me to the Congregational church I attended, but he explained that language was no barrier for God. My father said that he was hard of hearing and it didn't matter which language he wasn't hearing. He walked the mile up

to R Street and got what he thought was a German Gothic script Bible and could not make anything of it and couldn't find many words in his German dictionary. I looked and couldn't make it out either. So I went to the title page and found that it was a Danish Bible. On my way to work I exchanged it for a German Bible.

One day I took some people west of the house to look at the river which had been dredged; deepened and widened. I pointed out that when a heavy rain would fall, the narrow shallow river would overflow its banks and all of Russia Bottoms would be flooded. But deepening and widening the Salt River, it never flooded. The next day we had a meeting that went late into the night. Finally it was over and when I got to E street I found that rains had overflowed the drainage, the neighborhood was lower than the banks, I couldn't get to the house, but one of the boatmen rescuing people from their homes and ferrying them to high ground said that he had gotten my father out and that he had gone to the school a couple of blocks away

I don't recall clearly, but it seems that we stayed in a hotel and I might have been ferried to the house. To pick up clothes. We had the front apartment of the Bish family who had the back. It was high enough so that the water came up as high as the porch and our apartment stayed dry.

One day I came home from work to find him gone. My anxiety was scaled down from Johnny's when Tohchan tested the Atlantic waters. Since Lincoln was much less complicated than New York. He did eventually come back and told me that he had gone to Omaha. Don't know whether he saw the Missouri or the stockyards. I was grateful that he was back. I was impressed that he could find the bus station and get a ticket to Omaha. I don't know what the word Omaha means in Indian but Tohchan always called Omaha Ohama which in Japanese means Big Beach. I don't think Tohchan planned to set his feet in the Missouri although a few miles upstream there is a beach where people swim. I don't know why Johnny and I were worried. After all the United States was much more a greatest mystery when he came.

Tohchan had come to Lincoln some years after I had gotten the swimming pool available to the African American part of the community and he approved of my doing it as no else had bothered although many of the community approved, especially most of the returning veterans of World War II. Johnny was afraid that I might hurt my standings but I was forced into it by circumstances of my summer work on the playgrounds and I couldn't pass the buck. In any case he told Hank and Johnny that they should be more like me. Hank was griped since they had done a lot to support me while I was taking classes.

Tochan was more liberal than his children. He had met young women. I was dating [as well as the bratty 5 year old girl next door.] He advised me that it would be

fine for me to marry a "Hakujin" (Caucasian.) I asked if it was all right to marry an African American, and he immediately replied that it would be all right if I loved her and was not trying to prove a sociological point.

I was courting Olivia very seriously and we decided to marry despite the objections of her parents. Liv had the opportunity to go to Inglewood, California to teach for a year and we told her parents that we were going to give them a year to get used to the idea. Liv's sister Adeline Costello was a capable nurse and a widow. She could get a nurse anywhere so they sent her out to live with her and presumably to talk Liv out of her intentions. In the meantime my sister, Chiyo had moved back to West Los Angeles and was very hospitable to Liv, later she said that she hoped that Liv would find an eligible man there and that I would find a Nisei girl in Nebraska. Tochan never doubted that we would marry. He asked if Liv spoke German and I said, "Very well." He thought that he could communicate with her better in German. So I said, let me have a sample. He said; "Whassu isto Rossu?" with the American translation., "Whasamatta?" (Was ist los? Translated into What's the matter?) I burst into laughter which was unkind and may be the reason he didn't stay with us when we moved to Des Moines as we were expecting to.

After Olivia and I got married in Denver (details left for later.) we got back to Lincoln and found Tochan gone with the explanation that a young couple should be by themselves. He had gone to California to Chiyo and Jitsuo's place. After more than a year. Johnny came from New York to see us en route to California. Tochan was going to Japan. Johnny said that I should go since it would be the last time to see Tochan who was in his late eighties. But Livvie was about two months from delivering Bruce; since she shouldn't travel, I couldn't leave her. Tochan would have agreed. I think that he wanted to Christianize the relatives since he was in touch with the Christian minister, the one I believe mentioned by Hershey in his book about Hiroshima and the atom bomb. Hank asked for his ashes, but they said that he wanted to be in the family grave in Hiroshima so that his children might go there to renew ties with the family. I believe that some ashes were sent to be sprinkled on Kahchan's grave. The people in Japan also said that the telegram I sent about Bruce's birth was received early enough that Tochan knew.

PARENTS

For the years since they had lived in America, Kahchan went back with Chiyo and Jitsuo. Kahchan was partially there to baby sit Alice while Jitsuo was claiming an

inheritance that would have gone to his aunt, Another time Tohchan and Kahchan went alone. On one of these trips Kahchan was treated as an honored guests and given sashimi so fresh that the flesh was still quivering. She wished that she was not so honored. When Livvie met the relatives when she went at Christmas to visit Kimi who was in Kyoto after her year abroad at Carleton College, Kimi who had met the relatives before took Liv to Hiroshima. The relatives were reminiscing about Kahchan what fun she was and so stylishly dressed.

This was Tohchan's 2nd visit since his chosen exile and I could not understand his wanting to go there to die if it were not for not wanting to keep the connection between the two countries,

So be it!

August 23, 2012

KAHCHAN: A POSTSCRIPT

October 10, 1912

I had forgotten about an event in 1932 which enriched our whole family (and the whole world) in which Kahchan played a role in what was special to us. Kahchan had a group of women who came over once a week and sat around our table on Benton Way and knit, or crochet or mended socks or whatever each one wanted to and then chatted. One of them when the Olympic Games was in L.A. surprised us when she brought over her cousin, Mikio Oda, who was the captain of Japan's track team who had won the triple Jump in Amsterdam in 1928 and a friend, Chuhei Nambu) who finished second and was the first in the world to long jump over 26' (not in Amsterdam but between the games.) They were kind enough to talk to me, an 11-year old, Through them we grew interested in the Japanese in equestrian events. Hank and Johnny and I earlier had gone out to watch a polo game which was the place where the Japanese practiced. The competitors were all army officers. Colonel Yusa, captain of the equestrian team, gave me a carrot to give to a horse and as I was about to, he showed me how to put it on my spread out palm so that the horse wouldn't bite my fingers. He distinguished himself in one of the finals when he was far in the lead when he noticed that the horse could finish but appeared to be in trouble so he dismounted and walked the horse, gentling him walked to the finish first, but not a winner. Yusa said he didn't want to win a race and have his mount drop dead at the finish. The most popular competitor was Baron Nishi, a handsome man who was always surrounded by American society women and Hollywood starlets. He did win a gold and is depicted in Clint Eastwood's "Letters from Iwa Jima."

For the track jumpers, Nambu finished behind two Americans. Oda hurt himself in practice, but Nambu made up for his bronze in the long jump to get the gold in the Triple Jump.

It all happened because my mother had her group of ladies around our table chatting and doing busy work.