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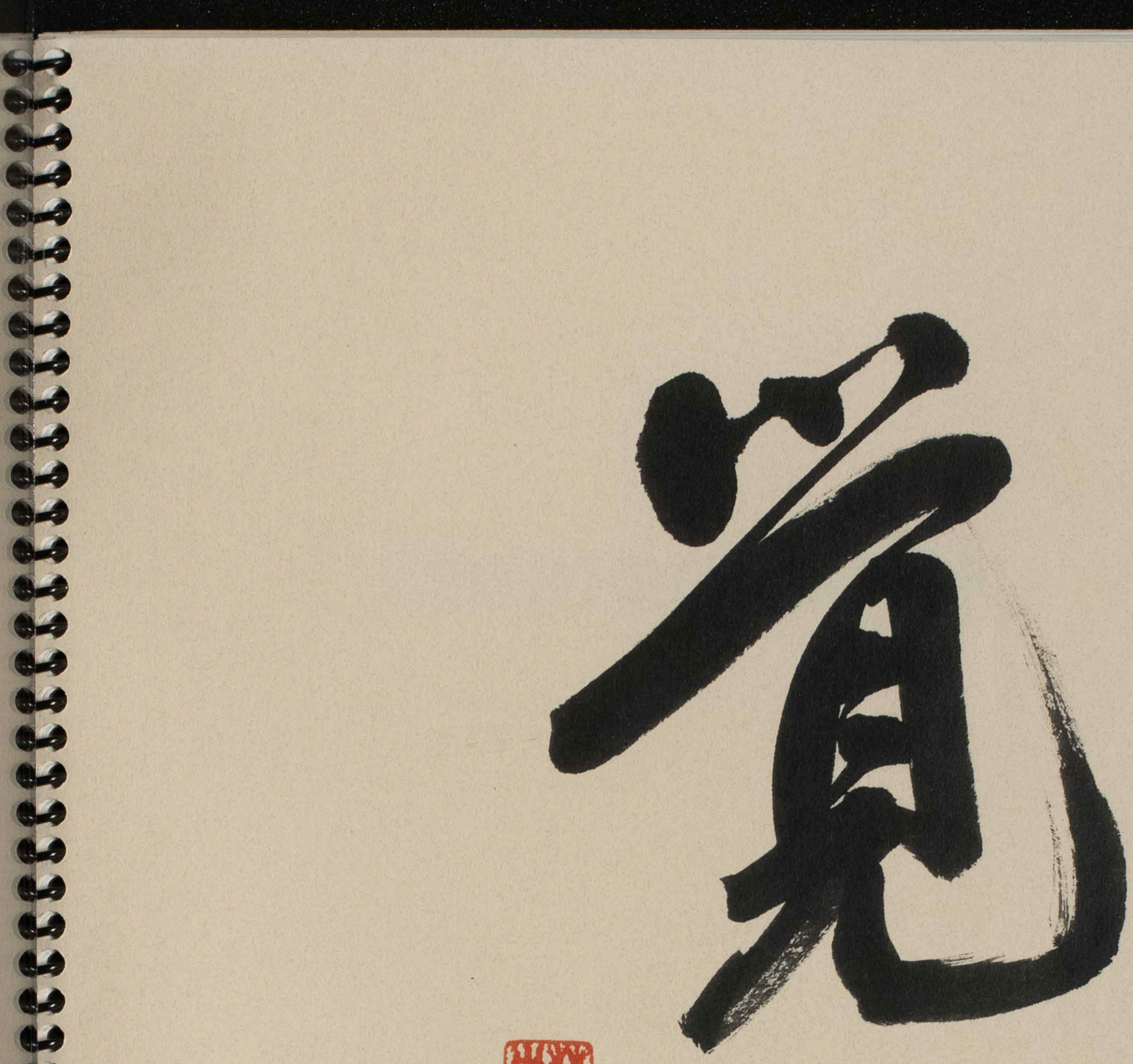
Spring



Memory

Memory Book

Yabe Family Reunion
Seattle & Vashon Island, WA
August 11, 12 & 13, 2006

Acknowledgments

We are all indebted to Barbara, who was the driving force in getting this gathering started, and with her email, letters and telephone calls, kept everyone in touch and informed about the event. It was she who directed activities until our plans became a reality She was responsible for compiling the genealogy of the American Yabes, the directories, and other amenities which we are enjoying at this time. Truly, the reunion couldn't have happened without her leadership and efforts.

We are also grateful to our cousin, Kenjirō Yabu, of Shuri, Okinawa, who by his decade-long study and compilation of the Yabu *koseki tōhon* (genealogy), got us interested in the family's history. He has continued to answer our questions and help us understand the nuances of things Japanese, of which we are unfamiliar. It is he who did the beautiful brushed calligraphy of *oboe* , or memory, for the cover of our reunion booklet. Thanks to Kanako, Kenjirō's daughter, who promptly relayed our messages to her father and back again, to allow us to keep in close touch with each other.

We are grateful to Joe Svinth for allowing us to print and include his excellent article, "Karate Pioneer Kentsū Yabu, 1866 - 1937", in this booklet. He has graciously shared photos and information with us in the past which we have always appreciated. Two other karate writers are Charles Goodin and Patrick McCarthy, who have helped us immensely by sharing their knowledge, photos and writings with us.

Kazumi Heshiki and Misao Minagi were our consultants when we ran into difficulty with the Japanese language. Thank you both for being available when we needed your valuable advice.

Arlene, Kenji and Emi responded to our call for articles and stories about the Yabe families and they appear in this collection of memories. Thank you for helping to make our work easier, and to make the reading more enjoyable.

Finally, most of all, I appreciate all the help and encouragement given to me by Homer, who was the computer specialist, the contributing writer, the historian, and the telephone answerer of the house, so that I could get back to my work. He has been involved in this booklet production with me from the beginning until the end. *Domo arigato.*

Miyuki Yabe Yasui

Preface

In August second of last year the extended families of Kenden Yabe and Kenshirō Yabe met in Denver for a mini-Yabe family reunion. The Hayman, Yasui and Flory descendants of Kenden met with the descendants of Kenshirō — the Norman Yabes, Carters, Waylands and Taylors.

It was a casual get-together of some of the descendants of the Yabe brothers of Okinawa, Kenden and Kenshirō. The Yasui group consisting of Homer and Miyuki Yabe Yasui; and daughter Barbara with husband Bob Hayman and children Danny and Mari; and daughter Meredith and her child Tazi, met with hosts Arlene and Doug Wayland; and Arlene's daughters Kiyomi and Chera Taylor; Norman Yabe; Kris and Dan Carter and their daughter Elizabeth; and Suz Yabe and her dog, Chloe.

The Yasuis had just spent a busy and exciting weekend at a reunion of the Yasui family — about 80 people strong at Estes Park — and some of us stayed on to meet with our Denver cousins before returning home. This was the first such gathering of the two family branches.

We had a marvelous time — the Denver relatives put on a delicious spread of food and drinks — and we spent several hours talking together and getting to know each other. It was so enjoyable that before parting, we decided to plan a reunion of the families again, this time in the Pacific Northwest.

So here we are — together again. To make the most of this gathering during these next few days, we thought that we should have a better understanding of what happened in our past. To that end, we have assembled a brief history of the Yabe families, and stories and recollections from various family members.

This book is a work of love, and of those we have loved. We hope that you enjoy it.

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 30, 2006

Table of Contents

Yabe Genealogy

The information used to create this genealogy of the American Yabe was derived from Kenjirō Yabu's book, "Genealogy of the Surname 'So' Family: the Okushima Family Line". Kenjirō's work was completed in 1986, following which it was translated into English by Ben Kobashigawa and Yōko Fukumura in 1993. Other references used were "Okinawa: The History of an Island People" by George H. Kerr; and "History of the Okinawans in North America" by the Okinawa Club of America; and "Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawaii" by the Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Hawaii.

"Yabu" is the Chinese reading (*on yomi*) of the *kanji* (ideographs) used to write the family name. It is how our surname is pronounced in Okinawa.

In the United States, the same *kanji* are read in the Japanese fashion (*kun yomi*), and is pronounced "Yabe".

Hereafter, the surname "Yabe" means both the Yabu in Okinawa and the Yabe in America.

* * *

Before getting into the genealogy of the family, it might be useful to discuss the cultural, diplomatic and political relationships that the independent islands of Okinawa had with China and Japan before it formally became part of the Japanese Empire in 1879.

Some time in the 1300s and for the next 500 years, Okinawa was closely bound to China. In fact, it was a suzerainty of its huge neighbor. A suzerain can be defined as "a dominant state controlling the foreign relationships of a vassal state, but allowing it sovereign authority in its internal affairs". Thus, Okinawa had its own system of government controlled by her own kings, but it was highly influenced by Chinese culture, language, traditions and thought. In fact, even today, much of the Okinawan customs and traditions can be traced to origins in China.

For centuries the Okinawan government paid tribute only to the Chinese government, by sending her gifts of material goods, crafted articles, and minerals such as silver and sulfur, carried by special ships, and represented by officials of the Okinawan government. But in 1609, the Satsuma domain of southern Kyushu conquered Chuzan (the middle kingdom of Okinawa) and seized military control of the island and the so-called Twelve Southern Islands. From then until 1872, Okinawa sent tribute to BOTH China and Japan — or strictly speaking, to the Shimazu clan who controlled the Satsuma Domain.

For such an impoverished country, this dual system of tribute was a painful hardship. Nevertheless, since neither China nor the Shimazu interfered with the internal politics or the economy of the island kingdom, Okinawans in general prospered, because of the huge success of their expertly managed, unrestricted maritime trade. Some of our Okinawan Yabu ancestors were the envoys in charge of the tribute missions to China; and some were the officials in charge of the mission to Kagoshima, which was the main port for the Satsuma Domain. The Yabu archive tells of these tribute ships, and describes the activities of at least two of their men, the story of one of which will be told later.

Karate

There is a widespread notion that because the Japanese overlords defeated Okinawa in 1609, the Satsuma victors proscribed the losers from carrying — or even having — offensive weapons of any sort. And that it was because of this order, that the Okinawans developed karate as a method of weaponless self-defense, first learned from the Shaolin monks of China.

But that is wrong.

It was the Okinawan King Sho Shin, son of King Sho En, who in 1586 ordered that swords could no longer be worn as personal equipment. In 1587, Sho Shin further ordered that all *anji* (chiefs or minor lords of various places) must bring ALL weapons to Shuri to be stored in a warehouse that was under the supervision of one of the king's officers. This was a remarkable feat and a testimony to the peaceful nature of the Okinawan people, because there was no resistance to this disarmament. And as a matter of fact, Okinawa never really had much of a military class, which was very unlike its counterparts in China, Japan and Korea.

There seems to be some argument as to whether the original meaning of *karate* was "China hand" or "Empty hand", because there is a *kanji* for China, which can be read as "Kara" — but "kara" can also mean "empty" — so it depends upon which *kanji* was originally used to describe karate. Even today, although these words are not in wide use, there are some Japanese words that begin with the Chinese "kara" — such as *kara hafu*, which is the Chinese style of the curved rooflines that are frequently seen on temples; *kara jishi*, which are the stylized stone lions frequently seen on both sides of an entryway to homes and shrines — and meaning "Chinese lions". For centuries in Okinawa, it was customary to bestow a Chinese name on the male children of the hereditary aristocracy — this name was called *kara na* (Chinese name). It also seems that chicken *kara age* means Chinese (style) fried chicken, which is a popular order in many Japanese restaurants today.

It's also been suggested that the meaning — and the *kanji* — of karate had been changed from "China hand" to "Empty hand" during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1936 onward. That's not so strange, considering that in our own United States we've had multiple examples of hubristic super-nationalism just like that.

But to get on with the genealogy:—

According to Kenjirō's research, the Yabe family can be traced to around the 1470s in Okinawa, Japan.

The story goes like this.....

In the earlier part of the 1400s, a commoner by the name of Kanemaro was born on Izena Island in the Okinawan archipelago. This man was the son of a farmer, but because of his unusual abilities, he rapidly rose politically and socially to become the Royal Treasurer to the First Sho Dynasty, which was the ruling class in Okinawa. But Kanemaro resigned in disgust when his lord, King Sho Toku of the First Sho Dynasty, started spending money on "frivolous pursuits".

Then, something strange happened, because King Sho Toku mysteriously died at the age of 29, and the next thing we know, Kanemaro has ascended the throne, changed his name to King Sho En, and has founded the Second Sho Dynasty of Okinawa. This was in 1469. His dynasty lasted for the next 400 years.

King Sho En had an uncle named Sogenji, who was his trustworthy advisor for the 8 years that he ruled before he died. The King didn't make Sogenji a royal member or a noble, because he didn't confer a last name — a surname — on Sogenji, and to be any one of those, one had to have a last name. But King Sho En did give Sogenji's son a first name, and also a Chinese surname, which was very, very important in those days. King Sho En called Sogenji's son, Kengi, and his Chinese name (*karana*) became Chōhei So. So that's why the Yabes have descended from the So Family — because from Kengi the founder through Kenten Yabu of the 11th generation, the Chinese surname of our family has been So. It's only from the 12th generation — that of Kentsū Yabu — that this distinctive Chinese name disappears from the record.

Remember that Kengi's father was Sogenji (also known as the "Kurautchi Sobe Shīdu", an Okinawan designator which can be translated to mean something like 'Director of the Warehouse in the Sobe District' — which was a very important post at that time) and that Sogenji was King Sho En's Uncle. Therefore, Kengi and all his descendants are royalty of sorts, if we don't look too closely at how King Sho En ascended the throne. However that may be, the Yabe have always been part of the gentry of Okinawa, if gentry can be defined as "people of good family or superior social background". Several Okinawan kings have appointed different Yabu men to be *Pēkumī* or *Pēchin* — magistrates in charge of villages, and in some cases, of entire districts. As used here, magistrates means an appointed public official with the power to administer and enforce the laws.

Actually, the family PROBABLY is "higher class" than that, because the mainline Yabe have lived in Shuri for generations; and even today, it is generally believed that the permanent residents of Shuri are the descendants of those who served the King directly, and for that reason are at least "aristocrats". This is almost certainly true for the Yabe, because in Kenden Yabe's *koseki tōhon* (official, legal, Japanese family register) he was classified as *Shizoku*, which means "of the Samurai class". In the old nomenclature,

which has long since been abolished, the social ranking from top down — excluding the Emperor's family, which was unclassified — was *Kazoku* (nobility), *Shizoku* (samurai) and *Heimin* (commoners). This presents a problem, because strictly speaking there was never a samurai class in Okinawa, although of course from time to time in Okinawa as anywhere else, armed men fought each other for wealth, influence, prestige, territory, or any combination of the above. Still, in Okinawa this did not constitute a trained warrior class whose main purpose in life was to support the ambitions of his lord by any means, including war. In Kenden's case, the *Shizoku* classification must have meant someone who was born into a hereditary aristocracy — which the samurai of mainland Japan surely were — but whose service to his master required the exercise of his brain, not the sinews of his sword arm.

* * *

Another interesting fact about the Yabe family is that from the time of Kengi the founder, the *kanji* for "Ken" has always prefaced the first name all male Sos, who later became the Yabe. This is true even for Norman Yabe of Denver, whose given Japanese name is pronounced "Norimasa" in *kun yomi*, but which is read as Kenshō in *on yomi*.

This seems to be a Japanese and an Okinawan tradition called *nanori-gashira*, in which the same root *kanji* is found in all the given names of the men in a family, or even in a greatly extended family. One meaning of *nanori* in Japanese, is to "claim kindred with such and such a person". While still in quite common usage in Japan to this day, the system never seemed to have been applied to women

* * *

Now comes a tale about the Yabe toper to add spice to the story:

Kenki was the firstborn grandson of Kengi, so he was a *honke chōnan*, and like all others before him and many others after him, he had a childhood name which was called a *warabina,* as well as a Chinese name, so he was important.

Kenki was born in 1606, and by 1649 he had been appointed a gunnery officer (yes the Okinawans had guns by then) on one of the tribute ships that sailed to China. His ship was unable to make port in Fukien in 1654 because of civil unrest there, so it stopped at Haitandao, an island in the estuary of the Fukien River, for provisions. But by this time, Kenki had become a roaring drunkard, so he was left behind on one of the Kerama Islands, which was a bit southwest of mainland Okinawa.

In those days, some of the Kerama Islands were inhabited, so presumably Kenki was marooned on one of these, the largest two of which were called Tokashiki Island and Zamami Island. Whatever the case, Kenki stayed in the Keramas for the next 18 years, until he was allowed to return home in 1672. Nothing is reported of him after that, but the record does say that Kenki had no children.....which is no big surprise.

* * *

It appears that the So Family persisted until the 5th generation, when the First Yabe appeared some time between 1715 and 1752. The Yabe line began when Kenpō So branched off from the So family, and changed his name to Kenpō Yabu. Nobody seems to know why Kenpō did this, but maybe it was because he wanted to start his own MAIN family line.

In the Japanese family tradition — and very probably in the Chinese hierarchy too — the first born son occupies an extremely important position. This son is called a *chōnan*, and the importance of this position can hardly be overstated; and it has been going on in Japan for countless generations. The *chōnan* is the head of any main branch of any given Japanese family; and this main branch is called the *honke*. The side branches; that is, the families of the sons of other than the *chōnan* are called *bunke*, and these families are second class in theory — not considered to be very "important".

So, what Kenpō Yabu MAY have done — since he was the second son in his birth family — was to establish his own Main Line family. And he might have done this simply by moving away from his old home town, changing his name to something other than "So", which was his original, real family name; and becoming a "Yabu". Presto! A new family named Yabu/Yabe — and since he was the founder of the line — his family was indisputably *honke*. And the interesting fact is, that after Kenpō Yabu, the families of the *chōnan* of Kenpō's line have all been considered *honke* — but with some really baffling exceptions.

* * *

A summary of the Yabe generations goes like this:

The So family — which was the forerunner of the Yabu Family Line — was founded by Kengi (Chōhei) So around 1470. There were 5 generations of the So Family, but Kenpō

So was the second son in the 5th generation, so around 1740 he changed his name to Kenpō Yabu and became the founder of the Yabu Line.

When Kenpō split, there had been 4 generations of So before him; and although he was of the 5th generation, he was no longer counted as a 5th generation So — because he became the 1st generation Yabu when he founded his own family line. The So Family of course continued on without Kenpō.

Altogether there have been 11 generations of Yabe to date, including Kenpō Yabu, the Founder. In the United States, the 11th generation is represented by *Yonsei* (fourth generation), such as Lauren, Elizabeth and Conrad Carter; Tazi Flory; Mari and Danny Hayman; Zachary and Ryan Hubbard; B.J. Kenny; Maia and Devan Wiitala; Marcella Yabe; Athena Kiyo Yabe-Cordova; and Amanda and Justine Yasui. Kanako Yabu — Kenjirō and Shigeko's daughter — is the last of the Yabu in Shuri of child-bearing age, but she is of the 10th — not the 11th — generation.

These 11th generation American Yabe may well be the last of the *honke* line of Yabe, because there are no males left to carry on the family name. There are close relatives named Yabu who live in the Yaeyama group of islands of Okinawa, and there is a related family of Yabu living in Shizuoka-ken, Japan, but in both instances their progenitor appears to have been *bunke.*

The Yabe can claim 15 generations of descent (4 So + 11 Yabe), covering 536 years of recorded family history. Whether or not they have descended from Okinawan Royalty, Nobility, or Hereditary Aristocracy is a moot — but very interesting — point.

What the Yabe certainly DO HAVE, is an unusually deep connection with the past. And they have a marvelous story to tell.

# # #

Homer Yasui
July 17, 2006

The Last Samurai
Kentsū Yabu
(1866 - 1937)

He may not have been a samurai in the classical sense, because the Japanese government abolished this exclusionary group shortly after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. But his koseki tōhon (official family register) classified him as Shizoku (samurai), so in the eyes of his government, he did in fact descend from a line of warriors. Possibly to live up to this expectation, Kentsū enlisted in the Japanese army, and rose through the ranks to retire as a Second Lieutenant, which entitled him to wear a sword — which is what samurai did.

Information used to create this story came from multiple sources The most important source was the Yabe family records and photographs from Okinawa and from America. But helpful information also came from "History of the Okinawans in North America", and "Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawaii".

* * *

Kentsū Yabu was the Grandfather of the Yabes in America. He didn't stay in the United States very long, but two of his sons did — his eldest son, Kenden Yabe, and Kenshirō Yabe, his youngest son — left their island home in Shuri, Okinawa, in 1906 and in 1921 respectively, and never returned, not even for a visit. Both Kenden and Kenshirō married *naichi* (Japanese from the main islands of Japan) women in the United States and started their families here, where they live today.

Kentsū was born in 1866 as the first child of Kenten Yabu, who was a skilled calligrapher employed by the Shuri District Calligraphy School. Kenten had 4 sons and 3 daughters by his first wife, who was a former Morinaga. After his first wife, Shun Morinaga Yabu, died, Kenten married a woman from the Shimabukuro family and had 3 more daugthers. So Kentsū had 3 brothers, named in order, Kenchō, Kenkyū and Kenshō; and 3 sisters, named in order, Maguji, Manabi and Mōshi; and 3 half-sisters named Majiru, Makadu and Majini. There were 10 children in all in Kentsū's family.

In the late feudal days of Okinawa when Kentsū was born, there was an interesting mix of Chinese, Japanese and native Okinawan influences in the lives of the citizenry. The court, nobles and aristocrats were highly interested in things Chinese, including the study of Confucian thought, so they sent some of their brightest students to China. And by this time, the standard language seemed to have been Japanese, so students were also sent to mainland Japan. Buddhism seems to have been the most common religion, and several impressive temples had already been built, but powerful virgin priestesses called *Nōrō*, still carried on the rites and rituals of old animistic Okinawa.

It was in this setting that Kentsū was born, and in accordance with the standard Okinawan practice of bestowing childhood names, he was called *Kamadé*. These childhood names were called *warabina*, an old Okinawan tradition, and which meant "child" from the Japanese word, *warabe*. Kenjirō Yabu says that the pronunciation has changed a bit, but the meaning is the same. Kenjirō also says that oftentimes family, relatives and friends continued to use warabina among themselves, even in adulthood.

This practice extended to at least two of Kentsū's sons: Kenden Yabe's warabina was *Yama,* and Ken's (Ken'yū) was *Kamadé,* the same as his father's warabina. This system of childhood names may also have existed in mainland Japan at one time, but by 1868 (Meiji Restoration) it had disappeared.....no American Nisei of my acquaintance has ever heard of warabina for the *Naichi* (Japanese from the 4 main islands of Japan).

The system of given and family names in old Okinawa was extraordinarily complex. Not only did the children, including girls, have a warabina, but at least in the aristocracy and above, they also had Chinese first and last names, which were called *karana*. For boys in the gentry class when they became entitled to an adult name — this probably was true for Yabu women as well — they were named in accordance with the rules of *nanori-gashira*. Nanori-gashira was an ages-old tradition of naming children in a nuclear family, or even in a widely extended clan, with a hereditary first character in personal names — different ones for the different sexes — that prefaced all their given names. This was designed to say without saying it, that "I'm related to such and such a person".

Still, this name business was much more complicated than that, because when an Okinawan male or female received his or her adult name, the next problem was to determine how the name was to be pronounced. In the old days in Okinawa, this might not have been a problem, because most of the *kanji* apparently were read in the Chinese way, *on yomi*. But at the same time, there was a way to pronounce the *kanji* in the Japanese fashion, and this was called *kun yomi*.

For example, in *on yomi*, the character for "mountain" is pronounced "san", but in *kun yomi* that very same *kanji* is pronounced "yama". So "Fuji-san" does not mean "Honorable Fuji" in *on yomi* — it simply means, "Fuji Mountain". But in *kun yomi*, the mountain is usually pronounced "Fuji Yama" — Fuji Mountain — the very same MEANING as in the Chinese reading. But quixotically enough, many Japanese also call this beautiful mountain, "Fuji-san".....but whether they mean Fuji Mountain, or Honorable Fuji beats me..... because in Japanese, "san" can also mean honorable.

And if the problems of tracking names in Okinawa is already not enough, there is also the Buddhist custom of giving posthumous names to the deceased. This is called *hōgō*. Fortunately, *hōgō* names are not commonly used. Still, there is the well-known example of Kōbō Daishi, which is the posthumous Buddhist name for an extraordinarily talented priest who called himself Kūkai. Today, few people know who Kūkai was, but most Japanese have heard of Kōbō Daishi.

The *warabina* for both Kentsū and for his second son, Kenyū, was Kamadé. But as far as we know, Kentsū did not have a *karana,* a Chinese name. The Yabu Genealogy stopped after the 11th generation of their method of counting, which was to count from the So founder through the Yabu generations. In this last recorded generation (4 So + 7 Yabu) there were at least 4 males, who were named Kenshi, Kenkō, Kenji and Kenten. The genealogy gives the *karana* for the first 3 men listed above — for Kenshi Yabu, it was So Hōshō; for Kenkō, So Hōgi; and for Kenji Yabu, it was So Rinshō. This is very interesting because up to Kentsū Yabu's time, our family had both Japanese and Chinese personal names as well as surnames.....and that has not been clearly understood by most of us, excepting Kenjirō Yabu, the modern-day compiler of this genealogy. Actually, since Kentsū was born in 1866, two years before the Meiji Restoration, and Okinawa did not become a formal prefecture of Japan until 1879, there would seem to be a very strong probability that Kentsū also had a *karana.* But the problem is that, if he did, this information has so far not been found.

In or around 1878 the new Meiji government dissolved — abolished — the samurai class, making them instant *rōnin* (masterless samurai, except they were no longer samurai). Then the government really created confusion, because although it had abolished the samurai by edict, it forgot to de-list them from the koseki tōhon. It was not until many years later that the government removed the Shizoku classification from these official family registers. So that's why Kentsū Yabu's koseki — and that of his eldest son, Kenden Yabe — showed that they were Shizoku — samurai, a classification that no longer exists.

Neither do we know if Kentsū Yabu had a hōgō, because nobody knows if he had a Buddhist funeral, and nobody seems to know where he was buried.

* * *

There are some reports that say that Kentsū Yabu was "one of the first Okinawans to serve in the Imperial Japanese Army", and that he entered the service as an enlisted man and worked his way up to officer rank. The record shows that he was a Second Lieutenant when he retired, presumably after 20 years of service.

In the United States Marines today, an enlisted man who is promoted to officer rank after years of service is called a "Mustang". There are not many such men, especially in peacetime, and those who do become officers, are treated with a great deal of respect and deference — not so much because they are officers, but because of the hard road they had to travel to become one. And as is so common in our own armed forces, monikers — nicknames — such as "Gunny" for a Marine Gunnery Sergeant, or "Gunner" for a Warrant Officer, are affectionately hung on certain favorite soldiers.

So it was with *Gunsō* (Sergeant) Yabu, even though he later became an officer and sometimes wore his officer's sword when in uniform. Gunsō Yabu never seemed to object to being called a Sergeant, and maybe he preferred it that way. Anyway, there are three stories concerning swords and Gunsō Yabu.

The first one says that Toki Higa, who was one of his acquaintances who enlisted in the Japanese Army about the same time that Kentsū did, gave him a fancy sword that had been presented to him by none other than Sun Yat Sen, the first president of the Chinese Republic. The story doesn't say why his friend earned this mark of distinction, but Kentsū in turn donated it to the museum in Shuri Castle. This sword apparently was lost or destroyed during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 when Shuri Castle was reduced to rubble by air and sea bombardment by American forces.

The second story was told by a family friend, Mrs. Tomi Hokama, who had known Kentsū and Kenden Yabu in her childhood in Shuri. Mrs. Hokama said that she was afraid of Kentsū, because he always wore his sword, which to her, was threatening.

And finally, there is a family story that says that when Kenden Yabe asked his father Kentsū to visit him and his wife in America, Kenden pointedly asked his father to leave his sword at home. This visit to the United States may or may not have been Kentsū's first and only visit to this county

* * *

It has also been said that Kentsū was one of the first "Karate Masters" of Okinawa, and that he taught his art to many students, some of whom — very old as they now may be — are said to be alive today. Almost any book or article on karate will usually mention Kentsū as one of the old master teachers of karate, and some of them will have detailed stories about our old "Grandpa Kentsū".

Our family has a photograph of what appears to be the teaching staff at Okinawa Shihan Gakko (something like a Teacher's College) in Shuri, and among them, standing in the top row, is Kentsū Yabu. This picture was taken in 1908, so Kentsū would have been 42 years old at the time. According to Patrick McCarthy, who studies the history of karate, Kentsū had been hired to teach karate at this school, and it was his students at this college who were responsible for the widespread teaching of this art throughout Okinawa.

Whether or not Kentsū had retired from the Japanese Army by 1908 is unknown. It's possible that he may have enlisted at, say, age 20 in 1886, and to have retired as a Second Lieutenant of the army by 1906 at age 40. If so, that would explain his full time employment as a Physical Education teacher at the Shihan.

* * *

There is a great deal of confusion and uncertainty regarding Kentsū's visit to the United States.

On the one hand, Charles Goodin, another student of the history of karate — in his case, karate in Hawaii — believes that Kentsū came to the continental United States in 1919, and stayed here until 1927, when he returned to Okinawa after first stopping at Hawaii for a few months to sight-see and to demonstrate karate. This would seem to say that Kentsū had been in the continental United States continuously for 8 years, which seems incredible.

Yet, there is a family photograph of Kentsū Yabu and Kenden and Mitsuye Yabe, believed to have been taken shortly after Kenden and Mitsuye married in 1919 in El Centro, Imperial Valley, California. This picture must have been taken in America, because Kenden never left the states except for one short visit to Mexico in the 1920s. In this photograph, Mitsuye could easily have been the 22 years of age which she was when she married Kenden.

Then, there are several reports in the book, *History of the Okinawans in North America* that details Kentsū's whereabouts in various parts of California in the 1920s. For example, many years after the fact, a dear family friend of the California Yabe's, Takashi Higa, wrote that in the Fresno area in July, 1921, there was a great impromptu Okinawan sumo match that had been promoted by "Gunsō" Yabu, who was the father of Kenden Yabe. Kentsū had been working in the grape fields near Fresno that year.

The family also has a copy of the April 18, 1921 passenger manifest of the S.S. Siberia Maru, the ship that carried Kenshirō Yabu from Okinawa to the United States, where he was to join his father, Kentsū Yabu in El Centro, California.

Also, Emi Yabe Wiitala, the eldest of the living Yabe children in the United States, remembers that "Grandpa Yabe" (Kentsū) loved sweets — she is the only Yabe who personally remembers Grandpa Kentsū's visit here.

So, the preponderance of evidence says that Kentsū Yabu did in fact come to the United States in 1919, and that he probably stayed on for 8 years, moving from place to place. Since by 1919 he must have had a military pension, he probably didn't have to work very hard to provide for his family, which by then consisted of only his wife, Oto Takehara Yabu — who was waiting for him in Shuri — and his minor son, Kenshirō Yabu/Yabe, who had joined him in the Imperial Valley.

This presumptive 8 year stay in mainland America and in Hawaii, is mind boggling because one wonders what Kentsū was doing all this time in the United States, and for what purpose? Eight years! How did Oto manage while her husband was away for so long? Nobody knows the answers.

And then, there is this legendary story in the Kenden Yabe family that says that Grandpa Kentsū came to America in 1926, pending the birth of Mitsuye Yabe's fourth child. As the story goes, if this baby turned out to be a boy, Grandpa Gunsō Yabu expected to

take the boy home with him to rear in a proper Okinawan fashion. Well, this did not happen, because Mitsuye's fourth and last child turned out to be a girl named Miyuki Yabe. So Grandpa probably went home in disgust, and certainly empty handed — *kara te.*

Next, we can track Kentsū to Hawaii in 1927. There have been several published reports, as well as some pictures, of his being there at that time. Charles Goodin believes that Kentsū stayed several months in the Hawaiian Islands, giving demonstrations of karate, and leading "kata" (formal karate exercises) for some students of the martial arts.

While in Hawaii, he was also said to have become interested in the Okinawan *samisen* (a three-stringed banjo-like instrument), sometimes called a *jamisen* (if the sound box is covered with snakeskin) and sometimes called a *sanshin.* Kentsū wasn't interested in learning how to play the sanshin; he was interested in collecting them. And according to Shigemori Tamaki — another longtime Los Angeles Yabe friend — he was instrumental in saving some famous pieces after his return to Okinawa.

The next time that Kentsū comes to our attention is in 1936. Another karate *aficionado* named Joseph Svinth wrote that in that year, several of the old karate masters of Okinawa met in Naha to decide how, and what, to call karate. They were to recommend how the *kanji* (Chinese characters) should be written for karate. This group of elderly masters recommended that the kanji for "empty" — *kara,* and "hand" — *te,* be used for karate from then on. The origjnal kanji for "Okinawa-te" and for "Kara (China)-te" were abolished. This should come as no great surprise, because in 1936 Japan and China were again at war; and wartime is when nationalism and jingoism becomes the rallying cry of the "patriots" of any country in the world.

According to Joe Svinth, Kentsū Yabu traveled to Tokyo in 1937 to get help for his medical problems, which turned out to be tuberculosis. But help was not forthcoming because nobody knew much about tuberculosis in those days.

And so, Kentsū Yabu died that year at age 71.

# # #

Homer Yasui
July 23, 2006

Journal of Combative Sport, Jun 2003

Karate Pioneer Kentsu Yabu, 1866-1937

By Joseph R. Svinth

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During the late 1990s, I was researching sumo and judo in the Pacific Northwest before World War II, and this got me in touch with Homer Yasui of Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center. One day, Homer asked, "By the way, are you interested in karate, too? My wife's grandfather did karate."

Sure, I replied, I'm interested in all kinds of things. So who was grandpa?

"Kentsu Yabu," replied Homer. "Ever heard of him?"

Actually, I had. He was a well-known Shorin-ryu karate teacher of the early twentieth century, a peer of Funakoshi and others of that generation. He was supposed to have introduced karate to Hawai'i during the 1920s, but as far as I knew, there weren't too many pictures or reliable English-language about him.

"Oh," said Homer. "Would you like some?"

***

The eldest son of Kenten Yabu and Morinaga Shun, Kentsu Yabu was born at Shuri-shi, Yamakawa-cho, Ni-chome #8, in 1866. Known in childhood as Kamadu, Kentsu Yabu had three brothers, three sisters, and three half-sisters. [EN1] Second brother Kencho, a graduate of the Ishi Isei Kyoshujo (Medicine and Biology Institute), died at age 25. Third brother Kenkyu was a well-known painter and calligrapher whose pen names included Kinto and Muka Sanjin (Yabu, 1986, 98-99).

Kentsu Yabu circa 1927. Courtesy the Yabe/Yasui Family Collection.

The family's rank was *pechin*, or middle aristocracy, and had been ever since the Keizuza, or Ryukyuan genealogical bureau, was first established in 1689. Men of the *pechin* class generally worked in jobs involving civil administration and domestic law enforcement. So, besides having acquired some proficiency in methods of physical restraint, male members of this class typically received training in calligraphy, politics, and Confucian pedagogy (McCarthy, 1994, 1). What this meant for the Yabu family was that Yabu's paternal grandfather Ken'yo was the archery instructor for Lord Ikegusuku, while his father was a court calligrapher (Yabu, 1986, 98-99; Yasui, Sep. 6, 1998; Yasui, Dec. 12, 1998).

As a young man, Yabu received training in what became Shorin-ryu karate. Tetsuhiro Hokama has written that Yabu's teacher was Sokon Matsumura (Hokama, 1998, 35). On the other hand, Dave Lowry has written that Yabu's teacher was Yasutsune "Ankoh" Itosu (Lowry, 1985, 11). Because both Matsumura and Itosu were well-known karate teachers of the day, probably Yabu studied with both men at different times.

When Yabu began this training is unclear. Dave Lowry writes that as a child, Yabu was bigger and stronger than his playmates, and so he was naturally attracted to karate (Lowry, 1985, 11). If this is correct, then probably Yabu started circa 1880. On the other hand, in *Karate-Do Nyumon*, Funakoshi Gichin wrote (1988, 25-26):

> During the Sino-Japanese War [of 1894-1895] a young man trained earnestly with [Ankoh] Itosu for several months before joining the army. When he was assigned to the Kumamoto Division, the division medical examiner, noticing his well-balanced muscular development, said, 'I hear you're from Okinawa. What martial art did you train in?' The recruit replied that farm labor was all he had ever done. But a friend who was with him blurted out, 'He's been practicing karate.' The doctor only murmured, 'I see, I see,' but he was deeply impressed.

So perhaps Yabu only began his training after deciding to go into the service in 1891.

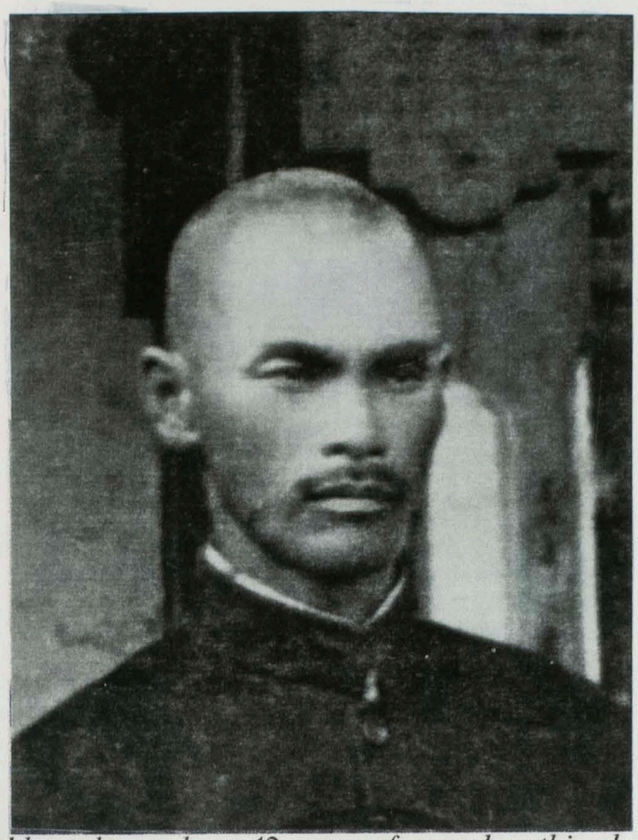
During the 1890s, Okinawans were generally exempt from Japanese military conscription. In addition, being a married man with a child (Yabu married Takahara Oto in 1887 and the couple had a son, Kenden, the following year) also provided exemption from military service. Nonetheless, Yabu was still among the first Okinawans to enlist voluntarily in the Japanese Army. His goal was evidently to prove to the Japanese that Okinawans could be every bit as good of soldiers as any home island Japanese (Yabu, 1986, 98-99; Yasui, Sep. 6, 1998).

Kentsu with his three oldest sons in Meiji 39, or 1906. The standing youth is 18-year old Kenden. On the left is Kenyu, who later shortened his name to Ken, and on the right is Kenshin. Courtesy the Yabe/Yasui Family Collection.

Because he was a volunteer, the Japanese Army sent Yabu to a school for prospective noncommissioned officers. Upon graduation, he received promotion to sergeant. He was then sent to Manchuria, where he saw service during Japan's 1894-1895 war with China (Kim, 1974, 64-65; Noble,1988, 32; Yasui, Sep. 6, 1998).

Before getting out of the army, Yabu received promotion to lieutenant. Apparently, he was the first Okinawan to do so in the modern Japanese army, and there is a story that his uniform and sword were subsequently kept in Shuri Castle (Kim, 1974, 64-65; Noble, 1988, 32; Yasui, Sep. 6, 1998). Although there is no reason to doubt the story, it is not verified in documents available to the family. And, no matter what his final rank, Yabu's subsequent karate students usually called him *gunso*, meaning "sergeant," rather than *chusa*, meaning "lieutenant."

I am unaware of any further documented information concerning Yabu's military career. However, at speculative levels, Richard Kim wrote that Yabu perfected his karate on the battlefield against the Chinese (Kim, 1974, 64-65). George Alexander added that "Yabu fought over sixty lethal *karate* duels and was never defeated" (Alexander, 1991, 64). Such accounts are probably folklore. However, on a more plausible level, Graham Noble has cited hearsay evidence to the effect that one of Yabu's military subordinates died after being struck by Yabu. According to this story, Yabu told investigators that he struck the man with his open palm (which was legal under Japanese military law) rather than with his fist (which was illegal). [EN2] The court accepted his statement after seeing him breaking some boards with his fist, and consequently, the manslaughter charge was dropped (Noble, 1988, 32). However, I am reluctant to cite even this story as fact without seeing further evidence.



Kentsu Yabu, 1908. He would have been about 42 years of age when this photo was taken. Courtesy of the Yabe/Yasui Family Collection.

Following his discharge, Yabu returned home to Okinawa. After settling in, he began studying at Shuri's Prefectural Teachers' Training College. While there, he frequently helped Ankoh Itosu, who was then leading a campaign to have karate made part of the Okinawan public schools' physical education curriculum, by giving public demonstrations of karate kata, or practice forms.

Yabu's favorite kata was reportedly *gojushiho*. Apparently based on older Chinese forms, *gojushiho* ("54") was modified during the nineteenth century by Sokon Matsumura. Matsumura's version of the kata was perhaps influenced by classical Ryukyuan dance, and there is no doubt that it emphasizes open-handed palm-heel and finger strikes (Noble, 1988, 32-33). [EN3] Nonetheless, Dave Lowry writes that Yabu's version of *gojushiho* was nothing at all like a dance. Instead, it was "more like the motion of the surf, soft, soft, soft, as it comes in, then *smash* -- hard like a rock" (Lowry, 1985, 12).

In 1902, Yabu became a karate instructor at Shuri's Prefectural Number One School (Hokama, 1998, 88). Former students recalled that his instruction stressed endless repetitions of *naihanchi* kata. Toward that end, Yabu liked to say that students should do 10,000 kata a year (Noble, 1988, 33). The statement may have been hyperbolic, as in Japanese, when one says "ten thousand," one is not necessarily being literal. On the other hand, if he was being literal, then he evidently didn't expect students to know lots of different kata. After all, to do *naihanchi* 10,000 times a year, one must perform at least 28 repetitions per day. In either case, however, the statement gives an idea of the level of dedication that Yabu expected from his karate students.

A photo taken in Meiji 41, or 1908, in which Kentsu Yabu appears third from the right in the back row. The location may be the school where Yabu received his training as a teacher. If so, then the building would have been part of the Prefectural Teachers' Training College, where Ankoh Itosu taught karate from 1905. However, as this has not been verified, an alternative is the Prefectural Number One School where Yabu worked as a teacher. The original photograph belonged to a man named Tetsushijo Nakahara, and it is presently in the collection of Ryukyu University history professor Teruo Hiyane. Miyuki Yabe Yasui got her copy from her cousin Ikeda Yabu Yohko while visiting Shuri in 1993. Courtesy of the Yabe/Yasui Family Collection.

Shotokai karate teacher Mitsusuke Harada has speculated that modern karate's tendency toward doing things "by the numbers" may be attributable to Yabu, and his military background (Noble, 1988, 33). However, because Japanese scholars have since shown that *all* Japanese athletic training was heavily militarized during the 1930s and 1940s, that is probably exaggerating things a bit (Abe, Kiyohara, and Nakajima, 1990, 27-43).

During his life, Yabu's peers frequently honored him. For example, during the mid-1910s, he received the gift of a sword from Toki Higa, who had received the weapon from the Chinese leader Sun Yat-sen (*History of the Okinawans in North America*, 1988, 12-14). [EN4] In 1924, Yabu was asked to become a charter member of the Okinawa Tode Research Club, an organization dedicated to protecting and preserving *tode*, as Ryukyuans then called karate (Bishop, 1989, 153). Finally, in 1936, he was asked to join the council of distinguished karate teachers that ultimately agreed to change the name of karate from its traditional characters (*kanji*) meaning "Chinese hands" into its modern characters meaning "empty hands" (Funakoshi, 1973, 3-4; Funakoshi, 1988, 24-25; Hokama, 1998, 36, 93). [EN5]

Eight of the men who agreed to change the name of karate to its modern characters, October 25, 1936. Back row, left to right: Shinpan Shiroma, Tsuyoshi Chitose, Chosin Chibana, Genwa Nakasone. Front row, left to

right: Chotoku Kyan, Kentsu Yabu, Chomo Hanashiro, Chojun Miyagi. The first known publication of this photo was in Karate-do Taikan (1938). Courtesy Graham Noble.

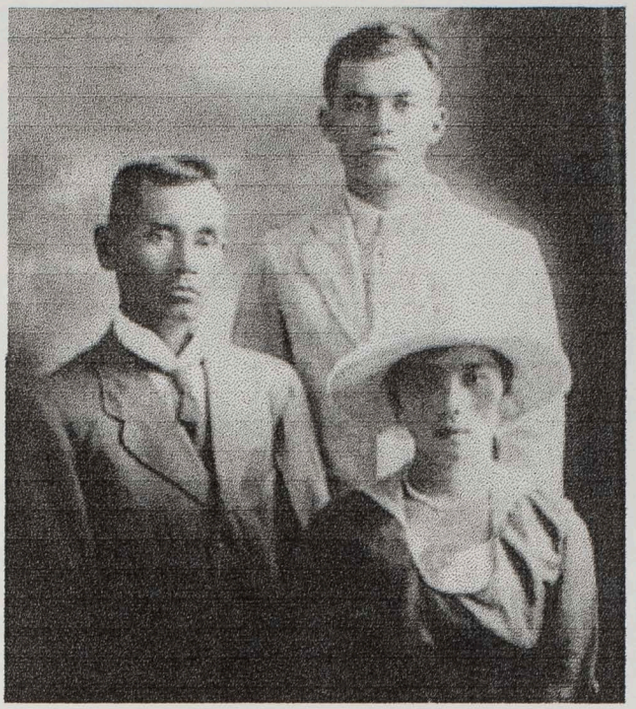
Both George Alexander and Richard Kim have written that Yabu once defeated the famous karate fighter Choki Motobu during a private contest held at Motobu's Okinawan estate (Alexander, 1991, 64; Kim, 1974, 64-65). Kim wrote that during their battle, "The air cracked with the sound of loud kiai, feet shuffling, punches and kicks landing on human flesh, and the excited gasps of the few privileged viewers" (Kim, 1974, 64-65). [EN6] Less breathless researchers, however, have been unable to find evidence proving that the two men ever fought, let alone found such vivid contemporary descriptions of their contest (Noble, 2000; Silvan, 1998, 93).

Dave Lowry has therefore speculated that the contest between Motobu and Yabu was not in karate, but in *tegumi*, or Ryukyuan sumo (Lowry, 1985, 13). That sounds plausible, especially since Yabu went out of his way to organize *tegumi* matches during the Okinawan celebrations held near Fresno in July 1921 and August 1922. [EN7] Says the *History of Okinawans in North America* (1988, 339):

> Sergeant Kentsu Yabe [EN8] was a great fan of *sumo*. In Okinawa, he had been so enthusiastic that he got involved in every match that came up. His talking of *sumo* fired up all the younger men, and they decided to hold a big match. Considering the absence of entertainment in the life of the issei [first generation] immigrant, those who participated in the *sumo* returned home pleased and happy.

Yabu was in California visiting his eldest son Kenden. Although this visit is sometimes described as the first visit of an Okinawan karate practitioner to the North American mainland, this is not quite correct. According to the *History of the Okinawans in North America*, Seijo Nakaza, who moved to San Francisco around 1902, used karate during various physical confrontations with people who enjoyed harassing Japanese. In addition, Yabu did not teach karate while in California. Instead, he was simply visiting his son, who had specifically asked his father to not "wear his sword" while visiting the United States (*History of the Okinawans in North America*, 1988, 341).

Yabu's son Kenden emigrated to Hawai'i around 1908. After four years there, Kenden went to California. His "Certificate of Fact of Issue of a Passport" signed by the Japanese consul in Los Angeles in 1912 says that his purpose for going to California was to study Western theology. However, in Hawai'i he worked as an agricultural worker, while in California he worked as a gardener. Because of these working-class experiences, Kenden eventually became more interested in socialism than theology (Yabu, 1986, 99; Yasui, Sep.6, 1998; Yasui, Dec. 12, 1998).



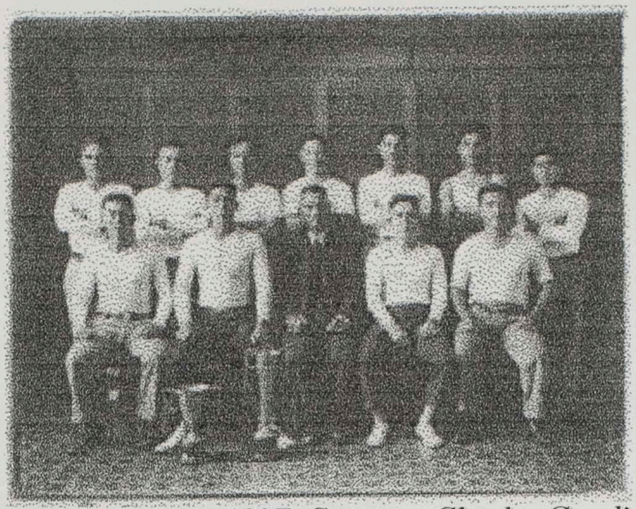
Kentsu Yabu with his son Kenden and daughter-in-law Mitsuye. The photo was probably taken in 1921-1922, when Mitsuye was pregnant with eldest daughter Emi. Courtesy of the Yabe/Yasui Family Collection.

In 1919, Kenden married a Japanese woman named Mitsuye Jyoko, and by 1921, she was pregnant with the couple's first child. The family therefore believes that Kentsu went to California in hopes that his eldest son would give him a grandson. Writes Kenden's son-in-law Homer Yasui (Sep. 6, 1998):

> Since Kenden was Kentsu's firstborn and a son at that – the *chonan* – it was very important that a male child be produced. It didn't happen that way, because their fourth child was also a girl. That child is my wife, Miyuki Yabe Yasui, who was born on September 18, 1926. [EN9]
>
> The story goes that it was Kentsu's intention – if the child was a boy – to take him back to Shuri to raise in a proper Okinawan fashion. Japanese fathers in those days were very powerful, so it wouldn't have been a bit surprising if Kenden and Mitsuye would have allowed that. Even in my generation, our fathers were powerful, and the *chonans* quite a bit less so, but still powerful nevertheless. Anyway, since Miki turned out to be yet another girl, Grandpa Kentsu returned home, probably disgusted, and certainly empty-handed.

The Yabes' oldest daughter Emi was born during Grandpa Kentsu's 1921 visit, and she was aged about seven years during his second visit. All she remembers of the second visit was that her grandfather dearly loved sweets, and her mother complaining about Grandpa always wearing shirts that were about an inch too big around the collar. The couple's other daughters (two of whom were still alive in 1998) were too young to remember anything of this visit (Yasui, Nov. 7, 1998).

On his way back to Okinawa in 1927, Kentsu Yabu SPENT almost nine months in the Territory of Hawaii. During his stay, Yabu gave two public exhibitions at the Nuuanu YMCA, then located at Fourth and Vineyard in Honolulu. [EN10]



Yabu in Hawaii, 1927. Courtesy Charles Goodin.

Yabu's exhibition in March was essentially a lecture for a luncheon club. However, his exhibition on Friday, July 8, was a major production, and the guests included a Waseda University baseball team, US military and naval officers, and sportswriters (*Nippu Jiji*, July 6, 1927). Afterwards, the sportswriter for the Honolulu *Advertiser* wrote (July 9, 1927):

> Compared with jiujitsu, karate is more destructive. Jiujitsu is the art of throwing and holding and is slow compared to karate. No weapons of any kind are used and blows are struck with the clenched fist and aimed at vital spots such as the solar plexus, point of jaw, and other nerve centers. It enables a little man to successfully defend himself in hand-to hand conflict with a larger adversary.
>
> Lieutenant Yabe stated that boxing was being introduced into Japan but he doubted if it would ever be as popular or used as universally as karate. Legs as well as arms are brought into play.
>
> The various holds and poses of karate were shown and described as follows: Kusanku, Gojushiho, Naihanchi, Sanchin, preparatory drill, Pinan… Passai, etc.
>
> The talk and drill were highly pleasing and instructive. The big crowd appeared to be duly impressed with the possibilities of this sport.

The latter statement was not simply hype, either, as there were at least 200 people in the audience. Moreover, the demonstrations encouraged Hawaiians such as Thomas Miyashiro to establish karate dojo that offered instruction to everyone, rather than just people of Okinawan descent (Haines, 1968, 119-121).

During 1927, Yabu also traveled to Kauai and Maui. "Although we digress a bit," says the *History of the Okinawans in North America*, "Yabe learned a great deal about *samisen* (the stringed musical instrument) and the performing arts in Hawai'i from one of his students there, Ryokin Nakama" (*History of the Okinawans in North America*, 1988, 341). The connection to musical instruments becomes clear when you realize that Yabu financed his trip by taking orders for Ryukyuan artifacts such as musical instruments, and then mailing them to Hawai'i upon his return to Okinawa (Personal communication with Charles Goodin, Apr. 9, 1999).

Kentsu Yabu with family and friends, mid-1930s. The original photo is in the collection of Yabu's grandson Kenjiro; this copy is courtesy Patrick McCarthy.

During 1936, Yabu visited Tokyo. He had terminal tuberculosis, so I wouldn't be surprised to learn that he was visiting physicians. Anyway, while there, Yabu watched the young Shoshin Nagamine practicing karate. Apparently, Yabu warned Nagamine that karate's kata were undergoing rapid change in Japan. Therefore, it was up to Nagamine and other young men of his generation to preserve the Okinawan kata in their traditional forms (Bishop, 1989, 86).

The following year, Yabu died. Although the ancestral home was destroyed during the fighting in 1945, second son Ken Yabu rebuilt the house after the war, and his widow Emi lives there to this day.

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Endnotes

EN1. "From early times until fairly recently, " wrote the Hawaiian scholar Shunzo Sakamaki (1964, 13), "every [Ryukyuan] child was given a *domyo* (or *warabe-na*) -- literally, his 'childhood name'. For a long time, it was generally his only name throughout his lifetime, since most members of the upper classes did not have surnames and formal names (*nanori*) until after 1689, and commoners did not have surnames until the 1870s." In general, the oldest son took the same *domyo* as the paternal grandfather while younger sons took the names of relatives or friends. Although there were probably no more than fifty individual *domyo*, suffixes such as "Big " and "Little" distinguished between grandfather and grandson, while differences in pronunciation distinguished between aristocrats and commoners.

EN2. Until 1945, the Japanese military encouraged its commissioned and noncommissioned officers to use corporal discipline as a form of what would today be called "tough love." Indeed, the usual euphemism for the practice was *bentatsu*, or "act of love." For an introduction to the topic, see Chang, 1997, 217.

EN3. The source for this statement was a French translation of an interview between Shinken Gima and Ryuzo Fujiwara (Noble, letter dated 11/98).

EN4. Higa, who arrived in San Francisco in 1896, is believed to have been just the second Okinawan to live in the continental United States. (Keizo Kawatsu, who came to California via British Columbia in 1889, was apparently the first.)

EN5. Although the Okinawan karate teacher Chomo Hanashiro proposed the new name as early as 1905, he was referring to self-defense rather than anything spiritual. In addition, the new name was not formally adopted until October 1936. The fact that Japan was then at war in China undoubtedly had something to do with the timing of the name change.

EN6. Literally "a blending of vital energy," the word *kiai* properly refers to a manifestation of inner harmonics and discords transmitted directly from the *hara*, or psychic and physical center of the body. In a classic short story called "The Shout", the English writer Robert Graves once wrote of an audible expression of such energy, "My shout is not a matter of tone or vibration but something not to be explained. It is a shout of pure [energy], and there is no fixed place for it on the scale." In North American and Japanese karate classes, however, the word is more narrowly defined, and usually used to describe the noise that the athlete makes while executing a technique.

EN7. In Okinawan sumo, officials restarted bouts whenever one of the players was thrown to his stomach or knees. Also, judges only counted falls to the back. A typical outdoor tournament started about 10:30 a.m. and continued until dark. To give everyone a better chance of winning, American competitors were sometimes divided by age and weight. If so, then divisions were usually 150 pounds and over, 130-149 pounds, and 129 pounds and under. Hawaiian blue laws, by the way, required players to wear a pair of shorts under their wrestling belts. For further details, see Kenji Yamashiro, "Sumo, Okinawan Style," in Adaniya, *et al.*, 1988, 37-38, and "Okinawan Sumo," *Okinawa Times*, 1999, http://www.okinawatimes.co.jp/eng/ryukyu/ryu4_10.html.

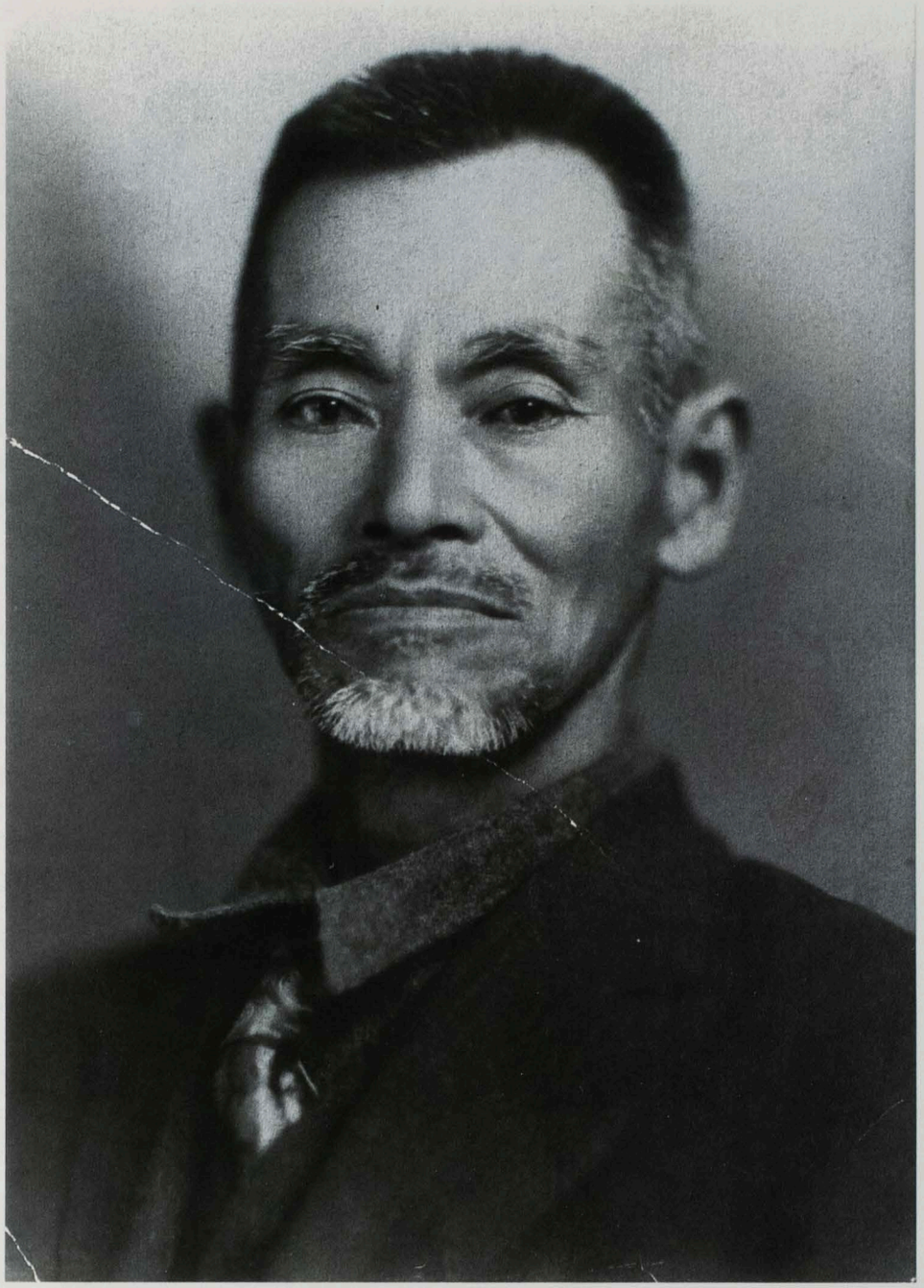
EN8. Yabe is the Japanese pronunciation of the two Chinese characters pronounced Yabu in the Shuri dialect of

the Ryukyuan language. The change in pronunciation and transliteration was sometimes made unilaterally by individuals (to include Yabu's son Kenden in 1910); it was also made officially by the Education Society of Okinawa in 1937. However, the changes "in the reading of surnames were more effective in overseas areas than in Japan proper," noted Shuncho Higa (in "On Okinawan Surnames," in Sakamaki, 1964, 38). "The reason for this was that in Japan proper, although a person announced a change in the reading of his name, the written characters were not altered, and other people did not readily accept the changed reading. On the other hand, in overseas areas, names were spelled out in Roman writing and there was immediate acceptance of the pronunciation indicated by the Romanized version."

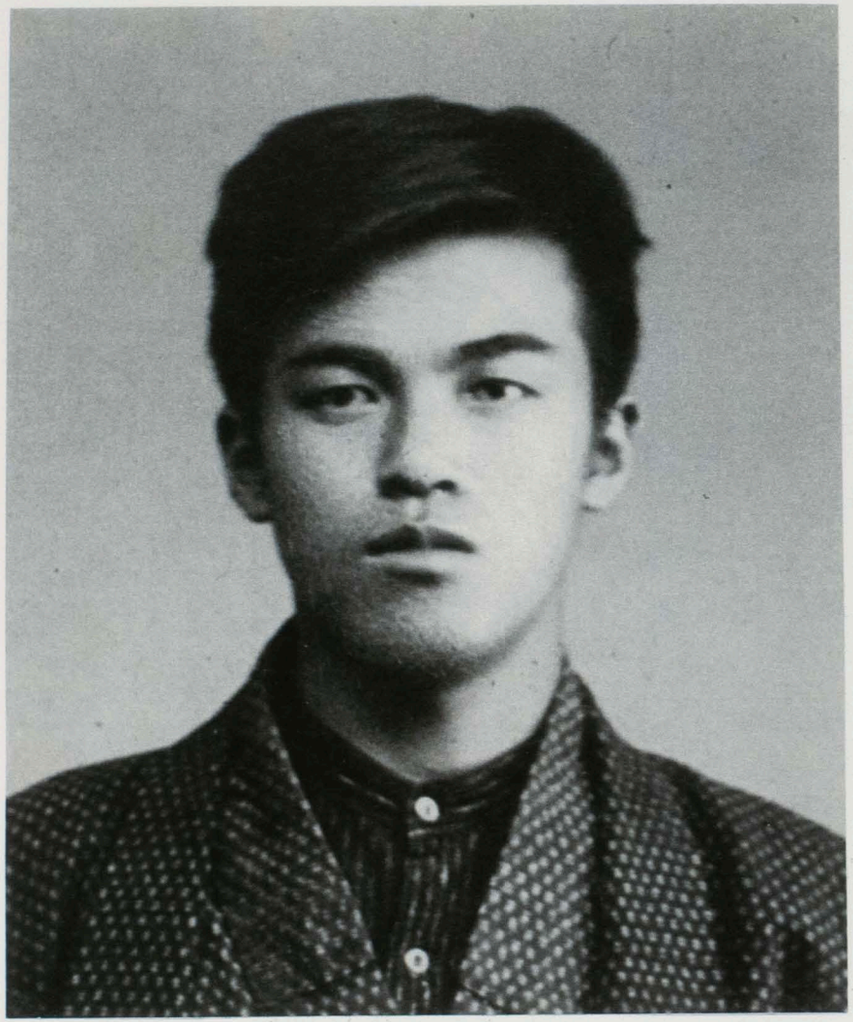
EN9. In 1910, Kenden Yabu legally changed his name to Kenden Yabe.

EN10. In those days, YMCAs were racially segregated, and the Nuuanu YMCA was Honolulu's Asian YMCA. Its history is this. In 1899, Reverend Takie Okumura organized a Honolulu baseball team called the Excelsiors. A year later, Okumura helped organize a four-team league, and after that, ethnic involvement in Hawaiian sport became widespread. Meanwhile, Asian students attended the YMCA's college at Springfield, Massachusetts, and joined the YMCA in Tokyo and Shanghai. Thus, in 1911 a clerk at the Japanese consulate applied for membership to the YMCA at Hotel and Alaska streets in Honolulu, and this caused significant controversy -- should an Asian be allowed to join an American YMCA? After months of heated public debate, the Japanese was finally offered membership, but by then of course he was unwilling to join. Consequently, in March 1912. B. M. Matsuzawa of the Tokyo YMCA came to Honolulu for the express purpose of opening a Hawaiian YMCA that would cater to Asians. In September 1912, a Missouri missionary named Lloyd Killam joined Matsuzawa, and between them, they began offering English and Japanese-language Bible classes in a room at the Central YMCA. During a sabbatical to the Midwest in 1915, Killam convinced several friends to join him in Honolulu, and in 1916, these missionaries began campaigning for an interracial YMCA in the Islands. The existing (white) leadership of the Hawaiian YMCA opposed this, so in March 1917, the missionaries set about raising money for a dedicated Asian facility. Gifts and public subscription soon raised the necessary funds, and the Nuuanu YMCA's first meeting rooms opened in April 1918. During the dedication, 600 Japanese sailors were marched into a membership luncheon for the Korean members. "When the eight Koreans sat calmly and enjoyed their lunch meeting and did not throw a sugar bowl or a dish at one of the naval men," said Killam afterwards, "I knew that the inter-racial plan would be a success." Over the next five years, membership grew, and so did the facilities. The large gymnasium, for example, dated to 1922, while the swimming pool opened in 1924. So, by April 1937, as Killam proudly noted in articles published in the *Nippu Jiji*, there were 119 boys' clubs affiliated with the Nuuanu YMCA, and 2,766 young men using the facility on a regular basis.

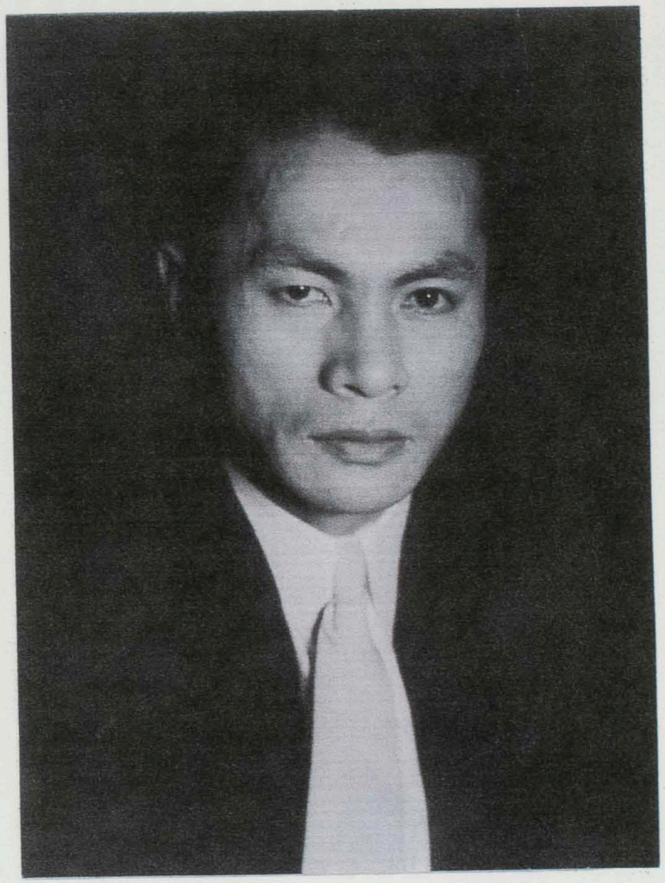
JCS Jun 2003



Kentsu Yabu, 1925



Kenden Yabe, ca. 1906



Kenshiro Yabe, ca. 1948

Two Brothers

Whence sprang today's reuniting Yabes

Kenden and Kenshirō were the oldest and youngest (respectively) of four brothers in Okinawa, and the only two who came to the United States. There was an approximate difference of twenty years in their ages. Both men were handsome, both were taller than the average Issei. Both were gentle, quiet men. Beyond that, they were different individuals.

Brother I

Kenden was the father of Emi, Elosa (died as a child), Rayko and Miyuki. Because he bore the responsibility of a family during the depression, his life was all work. We never saw him napping or sitting around drinking soda (a teetotaler's beer). He was a very literate man. When he wasn't working, he was reading. He and some friends formed a cultural society where they produced a magazine and shared their creative works with each other. Kenden wrote articles for the magazine and plays for our picnics and programs.

It was said that he played the violin and mandolin in his younger days, but that he laid them aside when he became a family man. We had the instruments but we never heard him play them.

Because he was once involved in the restaurant business, Kenden could also cook. Mom cooked Japanese and Dad cooked American. One Thanksgiving we invited another family, and he prepared a turkey dinner all by himself. That amazed the young son of our guests because he had never seen his father do anything in the kitchen.

Kenden died too young (51) of a stroke. At his funeral, Rev. Watanabe, who knew him only from having heard him deliver the eulogy at several of his friends' funerals, spoke of his admiration for the man and likened his short life to Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. The daughters of two life-long friends played the piano (Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata and Chopin's Prelude). To a grieving teenager this seemed a beautiful and most fitting finale to a wonderful man's life.

Brother II

[Aside:

After Bill's death, I received many cards and letters including some from the kids (now grown) of old and close friends. They wrote of the impression Bill (and I) had made on them. One thought of us as a "fairy tale" couple, while another wrote of our "good Bohemian influence" on their lives. One never knows what goes on in those very young minds. I mention this only because what I say about Kenshirō in this article may be just such figments of an immature mind. When I was still a little girl, Kenshirō moved away to San Francisco, and we rarely saw him after that.]

Kenshirō was the father of Kenji, Norman and Arlene. When WWII started the family was interned at Topaz, Utah, then moved to Denver, thus creating the Colorado Yabes.

To me, Kenshirō was a dashing young man who played the steel guitar, who played tennis and bridge, and who drove a car with a rumble seat. I was a proud girl to have such an uncle.

My mother told me that when Kenshirō came from Okinawa, he was a teenager and I was a baby. He put me in the buggy and would race up and down the sidewalks as fast as he could run. Mom, just in the mid-twenties herself, would watch nervously. Because we "went back together" so far, I was his favorite niece (according to Fumi). When he brought me a present, there was just one for me, none for my sisters (as Miyuki well remembers). And such presents they were — pretty, grown-up, and totally inappropriate for a child. But I thought they were wonderful and I cherished them. After he and Fumi were married, there were always three gifts, and very appropriate for our ages.

Like his brother, Kenshirō was a teetotaler. On a rare visit to Denver, I remember our pulling a little red wagon to the store to buy a case of soda pop. I was told that Ken worked as a bartender — a non-drinking bartender.

In 1975, I telephoned Denver one day, spoke to Norman, and learned that his father was in the hospital. The next day he died. Fumi thought that "something" had let me know that Ken was about to die. Unfortunately, I was unable to go to Denver for his funeral, but the next year, my mother and I made the trip to visit with the family and to visit Ken's cinerarium (place where cremated ashes are kept).

What those two brothers started now extend to include the Yasuis, the Haymans, the Florys, the Konoshimas, the Wiitalas, the Yabes, the Carters, the Taylors, the Hubbards, the Waylands, the Yabe-Cordovas, the Kenneys, and the Potters. This Reunion 2006 will be a happy occasion to look back upon.

# # #

Emi Yabe Wiitala
July 20, 2006

Mitsuye & Fumi

Were the wives of Kenden Yabe and Ken(shirō) Yabe

Mitsuye

She came from Ehime-ken, Japan, to join a man to whom she was married by proxy. But she didn't like what she saw, and refused to go with him. She stayed, instead, with her sister and brother-in-law. Their daughter told me years later that by refusing to be married to the man, she had disgraced, and been disowned by, her family. They could not have been too serious about it though, because while we were growing up, we never got a hint that there was anything wrong in her relationship with her family. When she finally was able to make a trip back home, she was welcomed by them all. She left her sister's home to work as a live-in domestic where she was treated as a pampered lap-dog instead of a servant, according to an envious friend.

Mitsuye met and married Kenden. At age 24 she gave birth to Emi. Kenden, having come from a family of all boys, was elated. This amazed a friend who was almost apologetic every time a baby was born, until his wife, after three daughters, finally had a son. But even Kenden, after a fourth daughter, was reported to say that one of them could've been a boy. Although they had four daughters, only three survived. The second, Elosa, died at age two before Rayko and Miyuki were born. All we knew was a little headstone which read simply "Elosa 1922 - 1924" where we would place flowers every time we went to Evergreen Cemetery.

Mitsuye was a beautiful woman. A neighbor in Heart Mountain who had known her in her youth, told us that none of her three daughters could measure up to her beauty. She was vivacious as Kenden was reserved. I grew up thinking it was feminine to be talkative, and masculine to be taciturn.

Mitsuye was only 42 years of age when she was left a widow with three daughters to support. I had some little jobs but nothing very helpful. Thinking back now, I can only imagine how frightening it must've been to be in that position, especially with her limited English and lack of any special work skills. But, as Miyuki says, she was a gutsy woman, and she did whatever needed doing to keep her family going. Fortunately, we had a young friend who had gone away to work as a bell-hop at a Grand Canyon hotel. He saved his money because there was "nowhere to spend it out there". He returned to Los Angeles, bought a small hotel, and hired Mitsuye to run it for him. This assured her of shelter for her family, and a modest but regular income.

Not long after that, the U.S. entered WWII, and we were evacuated from the West Coast. In Heart Mountain, she had the weight of economic problems lifted from her shoulders for the first time in her adult life. But Mitsuye, like most people, preferred the uncertainties of the outside life to incarceration. She went to New Jersey with Miyuki, then lived in New York for a few years with Rayko. Eventually, she returned to Los Angeles to a familiar territory where she had many friends.

After a few years of living in hotel rooms, crummy apartments and working at minimum wage jobs, we suggested she put her name on the waiting list at Little Tokyo Towers, a government-subsidized apartment building for seniors. She was reluctant at first, saying that people who went there died. I reminded her that those people were all elderly, and they would die no matter where they were.

She finally got into Tokyo Towers and there began a happy period of her life. She had a nice apartment, building security, many friends and endless activities and trips available for the residents. She took advantage of a lot of the opportunities and had herself a ball.

In 1985 she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I was very angry at the lousy luck of such an end to a plucky life. She told me that she had enjoyed herself at Tokyo Towers, and that she was ready for anything. Miyuki took her home to Portland where she and Homer took care of her until she died in August. During her last days, Rayko, Fumi and I were there also.

* * *

Fumi

Fumi was Kenshirō's wife. They were married circa 1937. Kenshirō brought her down to Los Angeles to introduce us to his bride. I thought she was a lovely lady, but what really impressed me was that she wasn't that much older than me.

We didn't see them again until 1939 when Ken with Kenji came to visit. He invited me to return to San Francisco with them to spend the summer. The World's Fair was on that year. The family would drive up later in the summer, take in the fair, and drive me home.

Kenshirō and Fumi lived in an old Victorian house. They occupied the first floor and had roomers (all male) on the second floor. One night I got the fright of my life. I knew that Fumi and I were the only females in the house, and we were both in bed. I was awakened in the middle of the night by a woman's voice singing high and clear. It was almost enough to make me believe in the supernatural. When I told Fumi and Kenshiro about it in the morning, Kenshirō laughed. He said the first time he heard her singing in her sleep, he wondered what kind of a woman he had married.

Towards the end of her life we saw Fumi a little more frequently, because she came out to the Bay Area to visit relatives and old friends. I got to know her better and because of the closeness of our ages, the relationship was more like that of friends or sisters rather than aunt and niece.

Emi Yabe Wiitala
July 26, 2006

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Mama Was a Gutsy Lady

One doesn't generally describe a lady as gutsy, and particularly an Issei woman, but Mama was not only a lady (according to Funk & Wagnalls:...showing refinement, the head of the house, a wife...), and I add...proper, beautiful, gracious, but she was also gutsy (again F &W...tough, courageous, bold...), and I add...spirited, pluck, persevering. But single words do not adequately describe the qualities that make me describe Mama as a gutsy lady. Let me tell you about her.

Mama, Mitsuye, was the second daughter and second child of Senyu and Yoshi Jyōkō. Senyu was a school teacher, and mother Jyoko kept busy caring for her large family of eight children. They lived in a small fishing village, Anai, in Ehime-ken, on Shikoku Island, where everyone knew each other, and they grew up secure and happy.

Around 1914, Mitsuye's older sister, Asao, emigrated to America to marry Chōgoro Shimamoto, also of Anai. They settled in Baldwin Park, California, where Chōgoro ran a hog farm.

In 1916, Mitsuye married, by proxy, or as a "picture bride", a man of a neighboring village, who was in America. Mama was probably adventuresome and eager to go to the country where her sister had moved to, and was willing to marry a stranger to get there. *Shashin kekkon,* the Japanese term for picture marriages, was popular in those years, and most of the unions turned out well enough for the marriage to last. However, as the story goes, when Mitsuye reached America and met the man with whom she was to spend the rest of her life, she refused to go with him as his bride. Instead, she went to her sister and brother-in-law's home and stayed with them for awhile. She found work as a housekeeper, then, sometime within the next two years, met Kenden Yabe, or Papa, and the two decided to marry. Most Issei women would probably not have had the courage to reject her betrothed and back away from her promise to "love and obey".

Our parents were married during hard times, and it was a struggle for them to make a good living. Papa came to Hawaii first as a teenager, and then to mainland USA six years later, and he tried his hand at various jobs...laborer in the cane fields in Hawaii, teaching English to fellow workers, immigrant farm worker in California, restaurant co-owner (with friends) and cook, produce stand owner, and probably other jobs before he got married. Despite not being able to amass funds to provide a comfortable living for his growing family, he always looked out for his friends and took them into his home to share whatever he had with them. Mama, helped him with his work, and when I was old enough to attend pre-school, she spent the days working beside him at the produce stand. Then she'd come home late at nights, cook dinner and tend to her motherly chores.

One evening, when my sisters and I, and Mama, were having our dinner in the kitchen, Mama suddenly jumped up, grabbed some pots off the stove, and hurled them against the back door, scaring the gee willikers out of us. She, apparently, had heard someone jimmying the door lock and purposely created a racket to ward off the would-be burglar.

She was right, and it worked! Later, that night when Papa returned home, and tried to open the door, he discovered that the lock had been broken. Now, that took quick thinking and guts!

For many years, our parents operated a fruit and vegetable stand in a section of a Chinese-owned market. It was some distance from our home, and because we kids would be alone after school — Emi was the baby-sitter – until Mama and Papa closed shop, and returned home, we moved to a house across the street from the store. What hastened this move was the great earthquake of 1932. Rayko and I were crowded around Emi who was sitting in a rocking chair reading to us. Suddenly, instead of rocking back and forth, we were swaying from side to side! Then we heard screaming outdoors and a lot of commotion, and we realized what was happening. Our parents arrived shortly afterward, worried, of course....and greatly relieved to find us unharmed. It was so much nicer being in the same neighborhood as the store, and being close to the folks.

Once in America, Mama didn't have the chance to study Engllish, so what she knew of the language, she picked up on her own until we girls started teaching her, or correcting her. She spent most of her time running the store business and spoke to her customers in broken English, with gestures and many smiles. She was loved by the people she served, and got along beautifully with friends as well as strangers. She never let language stand in the way of doing what she wished to do. I remember that she attended our grade school's PTA meeting, not so much to find out what was going on, but rather to give her daughters support. Much later, when all of us girls were married and lived at opposite coasts of the U.S., she would board a Greyhound bus and travel across the continent alone, to visit us. We worried about her traveling alone, and offered to put her on a plane, but she would have no part of that, the Greyhound bus was her bus, and she enjoyed the cross country rides.

Papa was in an auto accident in 1939, and suffered a blow to his head which kept him convalescing at home for a long time. The folks sold the business and Mama went out to do housecleaning work for now she was the breadwinner. Emi worked part-time in a restaurant after school, and Rayko lived with a family and was given room and board in exchange for washing the dinner dishes and doing light housekeeping chores on Saturdays. Papa died on November 21, 1939, at age 51, and we all had to adjust to living without him.

Mama was widowed at age 42, and because she had us three teenaged girls to support, a family friend bought a small hotel just outside of Japantown in Los Angeles, and asked Mama to be the resident-manager for him. It was perfect, she could now work at home and be there for her daughters. We lived there for less than two years, until the outbreak of WWII.

In 1952, after the passage of the Walter-McCarran Act, which allowed people of Japanese descent to become U.S. citizens, Mama attended English and citizenship classes so that she could take the examinations. Because she moved from Rayko's house, to ours, and then to Emi's, and enrolled in classes at each place, it took her many years before she felt qualified to be tested. It was easy for her to remember the

names of the early presidents of the U.S. because she was already familiar with the names of the streets near the store...Washington Blvd., Adams Ave., Jefferson St., and so on. When it was time for her to be tested, the examiner, probably seeing this little elderly lady walk in, asked her to name the first president of the U.S. After she answered confidently, "Washington", the examiner said, "OK, you pass". How disappointing... after she had studied so hard...she answered, "That's all?" But, Mama was proud to become a U.S. citizen, after all those years.

Mama returned to Los Angeles after having lived in New York with Rayko and her family for many years, and living with her sister in Chicago for awhile, and then moving to Los Angeles where her friends had an apartment house. We asked her to live with us, but she wanted to remain independent and insisted on living alone.

In 1984, rather than having a big party to celebrate her 88th birthday, or *beiju*, an auspicious occasion in Japan, she wanted to travel to Japan to visit relatives and to see her old home in Anai. She traveled alone to Tokyo, and was met by her nieces, and they took her to her *furusato* (ancestral home). Not only was she able to see her Anai relatives, but also her sister-in-law, Emi, and her daughter, Yōko, who had traveled from Okinawa to meet her, and the three of them toured Shikoku together. She had a wonderful time.

She couldn't shake her fatigue after her return, so she was checked by her physician, and the dreadful diagnosis was given...pancreatic cancer. Although Mama thought that she could take care of herself, we brought her back to Portland, where we could care for her and she could spend her last days comfortably. Emi and Rayko came out to be with her, as well as Fumi, Kenshirō's widow from Denver. Mama was uncomplaining and stoic, and seemed appreciative of all of us fussing around her. She was with us for two months, but one day as she neared death, she whispered, *Manzoku-shita,* meaning I am satisfied, I am content.

She died on August I5, 1985, in Portland. We took her ashes back to Los Angeles, where she was buried with Papa at Evergreen Cemetery.

# # #

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 23, 2006

Papa

My dad, Kenden Yabe, whom we always called Papa, died early, at age 51, when I was only 13 years old. That was a long time ago, so between my young years when he left us, and the fading memories of my old age, it will be difficult to portray an accurate image of him. But there are some things that I remember about him.

Papa was a kind and gentle person, quiet and contemplative. He never shouted or raised his voice, even in anger, but we could always tell if he was displeased. He'd reprimand us by saying gently, don't do that, or don't say that, and it would be as effective as a stern lecture. I remember one day, we children were getting ready to ride in the back of our truck, and Papa and one of his friends were to ride in front for a short jaunt somewhere. I must have been quite young, and dumb, to do whatever my sisters dared me to say or do...and this time Emi, who is five and a half years older than I, goaded me into saying some unkind remark about Papa's friend. Of course, they heard me, and Papa stopped what he was doing, and walked around to where we were and said, "what are you saying?" and looked straight at me. I could tell that he was angry, and to this day, I can recall the whole scene, feel the humiliation again...and I'm sure that Emi can also. There were times when Rayko and I would argue about whose turn it was to wash the dishes, or perform some chore, and while we were fussing, Papa would rise from his chair, and without saying anything to us, would begin doing the dishes himself. Then, we kids would feel terrible, and properly chagrined. But then, on the other hand, when he was pleased, he'd take us to the neighborhood Curry Ice Cream store for a nice treat to try one of their famous "48 flavors". He must have had a weakness for ice cream because oftentimes, on our return from visiting, we'd stop at Curry.

Our parents worked long hours seven days a week, and we kids were left alone with big sister Emi in charge. But when something special was happening, they'd make the time to take us children to see the event. Papa took us out to watch the Zeppelin, a large dirigible, land and take off again. We had seen them flying overhead sometimes, but this was the first time that we had watched them land. We also met and visited a Japanese training ship when it came to the Los Angeles Harbor. Papa drove us down to San Diego to an Exposition, and up to San Francisco to attend the World's Fair, and for a rare trip to visit his brother, Kenshirō, and family. Emi had spent the summer with them and we were taking her back home. There was also a camping trip at the beach with family friends. Papa drove us there, pitched the tent, had dinner with all of us and slept, and was up early the next morning to drive back to the city to go to work. And he came back again the next evening. These outings may not have occurred often, but they were very special.

Once Emi started UCLA, she sometimes stayed at the library after school to study, and would return home after dark. Because there were at least three long blocks to walk to get home, she would call home at the drugstore where she got off the bus, let the phone ring two times, then hang up. That was a signal to Papa that she had arrived, and he would go out to meet her so she would not have to walk home alone in the dark. He was thoughtful like that. I can't recall that we were ever smothered with hugs and kisses by

our parents...I suppose that the Issei just didn't show their emotions that way, but we knew that we were loved by what they did for us.

Rayko was the sister between Emi and me, and she was the most athletic of us. She excelled in sports, and could outrun her peers, and kick the ball harder and farther than any of her friends. In Junior High School, she started taking judo lessons. There was a *dōjō* (a training hall) in the neighborhood, and our folks thought that Rayko would do well with the lessons. There was a Caucasian woman who was also learning, and I believe that they were the only women taking judo at the time in Southern California. Rayko had a lot of notoriety because of that, and the boys seemed to be tougher on her because they didn't want to lose a match to a girl, or they would be teased unmercifully by the other fellas. Her bruised legs showed for it, but she worked her way up to a high-ranking brown belt, as far as she could advance without being certified in Japan. The folks attended her practices, and we all went to the tournaments. She could no longer continue with judo lessons after Papa died, and we moved to another part of town.

Papa was artistic and very creative. He designed and made sets for the *kenjin-kai* stage productions, and designed landscapes when he worked as a gardener. He spent much time reading and writing. Despite his quiet demeanor, he was frequently called upon to be the spokesperson for the organizations to which he belonged. Some say that he was musical, but although we grew up in a house that had a foot-pedaled organ, a piano, a mandolin and a violin, I never heard him play. I know he loved classical music though, for he'd listen with obvious enjoyment, and he' take all of us to a movie if it was about or featured a musician or composer.

But Papa was not a performer. The Okinawans, generally, loved to sing and dance, and they'd have a good time whenever they gathered together, but Papa would much rather be a spectator and enjoyed just watching. He had many friends and I remember that our house was always open to them for discussion, a meal, or to stay until things got better.

I've regretted not having known my father other than as a kid. I wasn't aware of his thoughts and ideals, or his ultimate goals; we never had serious discussions. He taught me good citizenship, right from wrong, and the value of perseverance, and though he couldn't provide us with the luxuries that kids often wish for, we grew up happy and secure in a home surrounded with love and respect.

# # #

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 30, 2006

Ken Yabe

Family Stories

Ken was very athletic and as a young man in San Francisco, he and another friend started a Japanese boys athletic club, which still exists. He got a job working at the San Francisco Racquet Club and learned to play tennis. Played and learned from many greats such as Don Budge.

Athletics ran in the Colorado Yabe family with Kenji playing high school and college football. As a senior in H.S., he played center and earned the honor of All American, the first Japanese to be awarded this title. He went to Colorado State College on a full sports scholarship and earned an All Conference title. Norman played baseball and swam. He held several high school swim records in the breaststroke and went on to the University of Denver on a full sports scholarship and became an all-conference champion. Arlene also swam as a teenager and held several records in breaststroke. She later took up tennis and at the age of 42, went to nationals with a 4.0 woman's team in Denver. All continue to be very active as senior citizens. Kenji lives in Phoenix and plays golf. Norm is in Denver and has won several running races including a ½ marathon. After banging up his back, he turned to biking and has just completed his 4th year in "Ride the Rockies", a grueling 6 day bicycle event that takes riders across several mountain passes in Colorado. Rides range from 400 - 435 miles. He is also a proficient skier. Arlene continues to play tennis, has also been a runner, practices Tai Chi and skis.

Arlene's daughter Kiyo lives in Sonoita, AZ, and has her own business, designing custom-made silver jewelry. She is also very active in the local rodeo circuit, barrel racing. Daughter Chera lives in Tulsa, OK where she is a TV anchor at the Fox station. She has worked in Yuma and Phoenix, AZ, Santa Monica, CA and Las Vegas. Chera ran her first marathon 2 years ago in Orlando FL.

Arlene's husband, Doug, has 2 sons. Doug has worked with Ted Kennedy during his first congressional campaign and upon arriving Denver, was in the state legislature for 2 terms. He and Arlene are avid hikers.

# # #

Arlene Yabe Wayland
July 20, 2006

Ken Yabe Family

Funny Stories

River Burial

As Fumi's illness progressed, she requested that after she passed away, her ashes and Ken's should be scattered in the big Thompson River, where we fished frequently during our early years. She passed away Dec. 11, 2003 and the following June, we had a family reunion, at which time we took our parents' urns to the river. Fumi was a very stubborn woman all her life with much determination and fortitude. She had emphysema but smoked almost until her last day. When her ashes were put into her urn, it was sealed and Norm took her home. The day came when we all went to the Big Thompson. Norm placed both urns on a rock by the river and proceeded to open Ken's and we released his ashes. He loved this area and we could feel his spirit spread through our fingers. Now it was time to open my mother's urn. It was sealed and there was no way to open it. Norm tried to open the seals around it. When that didn't work, we went to the car and got some pliers, then a hammer. That didn't work. We tried to jab the point of a knife into the top of the metal. That didn't work either. We finally got a can opener. How dignified was that?! Her urn was finally opened, jagged edges and all and Norm threw her ashes out. Our crying slowly diminished and was replaced by quiet chuckles and finally, outright laughter.

* * *

Paint Your Wagon

Ken loved the Denver Broncos. We were all sitting down for dinner and Ken was nowhere to be found. We waited and waited and finally went ahead and started eating. The lights went out. Fumi went out to the backyard and found him in the garage, yelled at him to fix the fuse box. He did. We continued with dinner. Lights went out again. Fumi told him to fix the lights and come in. This was repeated a couple more times and finally she went out to the garage, only to find our green and white Chevy station wagon had been painted bright orange, the Broncos primary color in those days. Explain that one when you're trying to trade in your car.

* * *

Bridge Under Troubled Waters

My father was a masters tournament bridge player and Fumi learned how to play only recreationally. She was literally a bridge widow. I believe that they won one tournament together but it was gruelling for Fumi. Apparently he didn't have a lot of confidence in her bidding and her shins showed it. Martial arts under the bridge table was not her idea of fun.

\# \# \#

Kenji Yabe Remembers

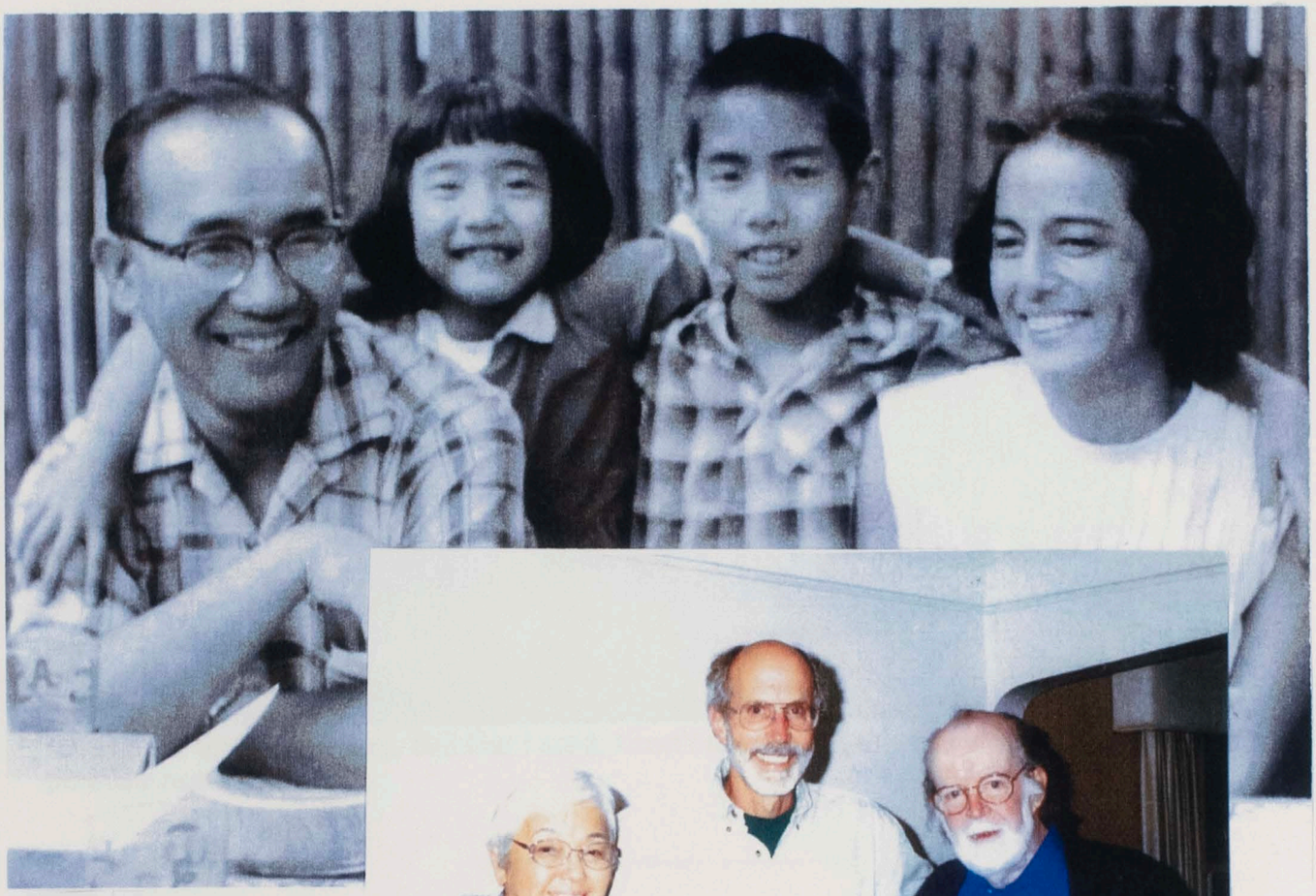
".....It seemed like my dad was always working and my mom always making sure that we had something to eat and clean clothes to wear. Although my brother Norm and my sister Arlene participated in sports, I can't remember my mom or dad ever attending these events. My dad went to the swimming meets my brother was in, swimming for the University of Denver. My sister went to school out of town so I don't know how active the communication was between my parents and her to determine how she was doing. I left Denver over 50 years ago, planning to return but I found the warm weather during the winter in Phoenix more alluring and satisfying than to struggle with the cold winters in Colorado. When I was in college, my dad came up to the university in Greeley, CO — University of Northern Colorado — to watch me play football (I was on the varsity team for 4 years and was All Conference my junior and senior year).

"I remember my dad being a very strong man with strong convictions. His influence had a strong impact of what was right and wrong, good or bad. He instilled pride in not only the activities we participated in, but in our Family name — all the kids with the Yabe name have stood proud of it. My mom was always the comforting spot whenever we had a need for understanding. But like I said, I can't remember any activities that were on a positive note.....

Suz Yabe Remembers

Grandma was a wonderful cook, and everyone remember her great meals. But whenever we complimented her on her chicken teriyaki — or whatever — she'd answer that it wasn't as good as the last time.....or wasn't it too salty?

It was fun visiting Grandpa, because he was full of surprises. He'd often ask, "Do you want to go for a ride?" but there was no way of telling where we'd end up — McDonalds, Elitch Gardens (an amusement park), or even Estes Park (which is over 50 miles from Denver).



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In Memory of Bill Wiitala

For those of you who didn't know him, Bill was Emi's husband, John's father, Alanna's father-in-law and Maia and Devan's Grandpa. When this reunion was first mentioned, we assumed he would attend, but soon it was questionable because he didn't feel up to it and finally he died on April 28th, and couldn't make it at all. Bill was born in South Dakota. His family lived on a farm until 1936 (Dust Bowl period) when they moved to Oakland, California. His sister and younger brother remember him as a cool and easy going brother. When he would baby sit them and they would act like little brats, Bill would just laugh unlike their oldest brother LeRoy who was a strict disciplinarian.

After graduating from high school, Bill worked in shops where he acquired experience as a machinist. When WWII started he was drafted and eventually ended up in New Guinea. Instead of being issued a rifle, he was assigned to repairing army equipment. No one ever heard wartime stories from him. He didn't like military life, so as soon as he was discharged, he proceeded to forget all about it.

He had an inventive mind and was able to design machines that automated certain procedures in his customer's manufacturing plants. An example: he created a machine which would take a piece of cardboard off a pile, put it through a sequence of folds, and staple or glue it, to form the boxes in which individual Schlage Locks were sold.

Bill was a man of few words, with a unique sense of humor and very definite, progressive ideas and tastes. His older brother tried to get him to play baseball, but it wasn't his "thing". He was more interested in music. He was given a 5-string banjo, and he picked away at it, trying to emulate Earl Scruggs and especially Pete Seegar whom he admired not only as a musician and performer, but also as a thinker and activist.

Bill's great love was boats. When he was in New Guinea, he built a small sailboat and got sailing into his blood. After the war he had several boats, among them one that he built with his brother Bob. They bought two surplus landing crafts (one for the hull and one for the engine), and outfitted the hull to make it a party fishing boat. But after a couple of years they had to sell it due to lack of funds. His final boat was a 136 foot surplus mine sweeper.

After he retired, we totally remodeled the interior and moved aboard this boat, and had it towed to the San Joaquin River near Isleton. And that is where we lived aboard the "Sunrunner" for 14 years, until it sank on Christmas day, 2000. For the past 5-1/2 years, Bill and I have lived with John and his family in Alameda, until Bill died this year in the late spring.

# # #

Emi Yabe Wiitala
July 31, 2006

Emi

In compiling our family memories, a name that keeps surfacing as part of my growing up years, is that of my sister Emi.

Emi, the first daughter of Kenden and Mitsuye Yabe, was born on March 15, 1921, in El Centro, California. She was born prematurely at seven months because Mama — that gutsy woman again — tried to take a short cut by jumping across an irrigation ditch, and in doing so, fell. But in spite of her jarring entrance into this world, Emi seemed to fare quite well. Physically, at five feet, five inches, she grew taller than her sisters and many Nisei women, and mentally, she did very well, graduating high school at age 16, and as a member of the honor society.

What was unfortunate was that she lived at a time of economic hardships and also when growing up Nisei was sometimes difficult. If an Issei couldn't speak English — or spoke it poorly at best — their children, particularly the oldest, would translate for the parent or speak for him or her. And if a mom or dad couldn't run an errand, the child would be the one to get the job done. Papa, luckily, could speak, read and write English, and Mama could get by speaking when she had to, so Emi probably didn't have that problem. However, since both our parents worked from morning to night at the little fruit stand that they owned, someone had to watch the children, which in our family were Emi, Rayko, and me. Young as she was, Emi was tall for her age and sensible as well, so she was well-suited to look after her two younger sisters.

Each morning our folks would take Rayko and me to the pre-school at the Church of All Nations which was not far from our home; then take Emi to grade school, after which they went to work. After school was over, Emi would stop to pick up Rayko and me, and we'd return home. Emi would keep us occupied by reading to us, or by supervising our play with the neighborhood kids until our parents came home. It doesn't sound too bad, does it? But, Emi is, and was, only five and a half years older than I, and if I was attending pre-school then, I must have been five or so. And that would have made Emi just a little over ten — and saddled with such responsibility! After the Great Los Angeles Earthquake of 1932, when buildings crumbled, and electrical power was cut by downed trees, and there were fires in many parts of the city, our parents rushed home frantically, and were greatly relieved to find all of us scared, but unharmed. Shortly after that, we moved to a house close to the store, and Emi was no longer a full time babysitter.

I remember, however, some years later, that when Emi had a date to go to the movies, she had two sisters tagging along! Emi was the one who taught me how to sew and knit, and eased me through the bewildering years of growing up.

After Papa was injured and convalesced at home, Emi stopped going to UCLA where she was a sophomore, and took odd jobs to help out. Mama was the breadwinner by then, as well as the nurse, so the times were really tough on them. Rayko took a schoolgirl job, working for her room and board in exchange for washing dishes at nights and doing light housekeeping tasks on the weekends.

After Papa died, a young family friend who had worked and saved his money, bought a small hotel in Los Angeles and asked Mama to be a resident manager/operator for him. Things began to look up after that. It was nice to have Mama at home, and it was so much easier for her to work without having to leave the premises.

But then, WWII began and the people of Japanese descent were forced out of their homes into internment camps. Our family ended up in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, where we stayed for two and a half years. In camp, for the first time in her adult life, Mama was able to do some of the things that she enjoyed doing, but had never had the time before then. After work, she still had time for a class in embroidery, she started to knit again, she raised a victory garden, and she was able to watch the *sumo* (Japanese wrestling) matches, and the ball games that Rayko and I participated in. Emi worked as a third grade teacher for awhile, and then was employed in the Social Welfare Department in the camp office.

Mama and I left camp for a food processing plant in Seabrook, New Jersey, where food was dehydrated and sent to our soldiers overseas. Mama was starting all over again to earn a living, and I was working to save for college tuition. My sisters went to New York City to live with friends and to work. After Emi had saved enough funds to return to school, she moved to the Bay Area, and enrolled at UC Berkeley. She worked after graduation and marriage until she became a mother to her only child, John.

Emi is now in her mid-eighties, and has experienced many ups and downs in her life-time. The boat on which she and her husband Bill lived, sank on Christmas morning, 2000, and they were able to get off just before it went down. She was widowed this spring, and lives with her children: son John, and his wife, Alanna, and grandchildren Maia and Devan. She gets a lot of pleasure being with them.

Emi is a resilient ol' gal, having survived many trying times. And she has the *daruma* spirit (a Japanese toy Buddhist priest who, when knocked over, bounces back up), and you can't keep someone like that down.

I think about the innumerable hours that she devoted to her sisters, and I hope that we weren't too hard on her. I also hope that she knows that we appreciate all that she has done for us, and the sacrifices that she made for us. Thank you, Emi.....we love you.

# # #

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 31, 2006

Growing up Uchinanchu

Like a great many of the younger generations today, I, too, am a *hapa* (a person of mixed heritage). Well, sort of. Papa was from Okinawa, a person called *Uchinanchu* in their island dialect, and Mama was born in Ehime-ken, Shikoku, and thus, a *Naichi* (someone from one of the four main Japanese islands). My sisters and I are products of the two islands, and to some folks, it is akin to having been born of people from two different countries.

As far back as I can remember, our family social life during our early years revolved around relatives; the cousins on Mama's side, the Shimamotos; or the second cousins, the Takeharas, on Papa's side. We also met frequently with the Okinawa *kenjin* (prefectural) folks, so that some of my fondest childhood memories are from growing up Uchinanchu.

The *kenjin kai* (prefectural organization) is a *Nikkei* (Japanese American) innovation. These clubs were formed in most large cities shortly after the immigration movement brought a steady flow of people to the United States from Japan. Their purpose was to help make the folks from their same home prefecture to have an easier transition to their new country. They helped them find housing and jobs, explained the laws and customs of America, supported and helped each other, and thus, became good close friends. So, there was a kenjin-kai made up of folks from Hiroshima, another of people from Okayama, of Okinawa, and so on. As the groups grew in size, so did their activities.

The Okinawa kenjin were a very close-knit group and met perhaps once each month (I don't remember for sure), and it was probably on Sundays, when most people had a work-free day. The families would begin to arrive around noon at a designated host house, and there would be much visiting and a splendid potluck lunch. After eating, the children would go outdoors to play, and the men would bring out their *jamisen* (Okinawan *samisen* [a three string banjo] sometimes covered with snake-skin) and their *kodaiko* (little hand drums) and the singing would begin. Before long there'd be dancing too...of the familiar folk dances, or the free-style *Eisa* dancing. Okinawan music is very rhythmical, not too different from the beat of Native American music, and much livelier than the regular Japanese tunes. It was always enjoyable, and we'd all have a good time. We gathered together for other occasions also — wedding parties, graduation celebrations, and sadly, the unavoidable funerals.

The big event of the year however, was the picnic which was held each summer at a city park. Preparations would begin months in advance to teach the young folks some of the folk dances and songs which they would be performing, to rehearse parts for skits, and the women would be busy sewing costumes. Generally, it was the men who were the musicians and they, too, were getting ready for their performances. Of course, this meant that we had to get together oftener, and that was fine with us.

We all looked forward to the summer picnic. Having lunch with the community was always fun, and it was a wonderful time to see friends. Besides the program, there were

competitive races and various sports activities...and lots of prizes. This event was continued until the start of WWII.

On occasion, we journeyed to the Imperial Valley to attend their Okinawa Community Picnic. There we'd meet people whom we've seen before at some Los Angeles event, or who lived briefly with us. It was customary for some families to send the mother and children to the city during the summer months to escape the intense valley heat, and as a result, we became fast friends.

While growing up in Los Angeles, in the internment camps, while going to college, and after marriage, I've encountered many of the family friends of the pre-war years, and I've immediately felt comfortable with them. The *Issei* (first generation Japanese American) who are now all gone, were *yasashii* (kind and gentle), and this includes our Papa. Perhaps this is due to their peace keeping traditions as a country, and up-bringing to be courteous and hospitable. Their Shūrei-*Mon* (Gate) is the "Gate of Courtesy", and their castle has no towers because of their disregard for fighting. These Issei, it seemed to me, were more easygoing than their counterparts from other areas, more understanding, and broad-minded. And even from my earliest years, I felt *kawaigare-ta* (endeared) by them all.

Even to this day, I feel a special closeness to people I meet who are *kenjin,* and hope that I can continue this part of my heritage to them and to others.

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 22, 2006

Mensōrē

"Mensōrē", in Okinawan dialect means welcome, just as "Yōkoso", in the Japanese language. However, like the word "Aloha" in Hawaii, it evokes the feeling of love and special friendship.

My first visit to Okinawa was quite unexpected. Our daughter, Barbara, and her husband, Bob, were living and working in Fujinomiya in Shizuoka-ken, and she called to ask, "How would you like to visit Okinawa with us?" "Would love to", was my excited response, and shortly thereafter, I was flying to Tokyo to meet the kids. Unfortunately, Homer was still in his surgical practice at the time, and couldn't get away on such short notice, so I was alone.

We stayed a few days in Fujinomiya – a beautiful city located at the foot of Mt. Fuji – so that I could adjust to Japan time, to see where the children lived, and to visit the trout hatchery where Bob worked. Then, we began our Okinawan odyssey.

This was to be the first time that any of the American Yabes were going to the homeland since my father, Kenden (we called him Papa), left Okinawa in 1906, and his youngest brother, Kenshirō, emigrated in 1921, so there was plenty of excitement among the three of us.

Our plane was racing with a tropical storm which was also headed for Okinawa, but when we landed in Naha, the capital of Okinawa prefecture, the weather was still dry. We checked into the Naha Tokyu Hotel, which looked out towards the East China Sea, and I called Emi *Obasan* (my aunt).

Emi was a tiny, sprightly woman, 73 years old, and the widow of Papa's brother, Ken, who died in 1952. The Yabus (Okinawans use the Chinese pronunciation of the kanji in our name, whereas in America, the Japanese reading is used) lived in Shuri, the old historic part of Okinawa, which served as the capital of the islands until Okinawa became a part of Japan in 1879. From then on, Naha became the capital and the two cities were incorporated. It is interesting that despite the immense destruction of the islands during WWII, Emi Obasan's address today is identical to the one given when Papa left for Hawaii a hundred years ago. I should explain here that when Papa, the first born son of Kentsū, and thus the *chōnan*, left Okinawa and had no intentions of returning, Ken, the second son became the chōnan, and Emi, eventually, the matriarch of the family. Emi lived with her son, Kenjirō (a *shodō* [calligraphy] instructor, just as his great-grandfather Kenten was), and his wife, Shigeko (a librarian), and daughter Kanako (10 years), in one house in the family compound, and Yōko, her daughter (a teacher), lived next door. Yōko had two children, Masato and Asako who worked on the mainland of Japan. It was Emi Obasan who Barbara first contacted to ask if we could visit.

By evening after our arrival, the threatening storm had caught up with us and it rained furiously and continuously. For dinner, we ran to the nearest restaurant down the street from the hotel, and as we ducked inside, we were greeted by the wonderful aroma of cooking food and the warmth of the room and the people who welcomed us. This was Chikara Restaurant, *chikara* meaning might and strength, and appropriately named since the owner and manager was a former *sumo-tori* (wrestler). The dining room was simply a raised *tatami* (padded reed mat) floor with recessed burners on which the food was cooked. Their specialty was *chanko nabe,* the traditional fare for these giant sized men and their comparable sized appetites. We sat on the floor, around a large pot, that looked somewhat like an oval galvanized washtub, which contained a simmering broth, and into which morsels of chicken, seafood, vegetables and tofu were added. With a bowl of rice in our hands, we dipped into the cook pot and helped ourselves to the delicious food which was bubbly, hot and savory. We couldn't have picked a better place to eat on such a stormy night. Years later, on a subsequent trip, we ate at another Chikara Restaurant which was located right in the busy downtown area of Naha City. It was more gentrified with tables and chairs and tablecloths, but the food was not as good as the first time we had chanko nabe, nor was it as exciting.

The next morning was bright and clear, and the ocean a sparkling turquoise blue. Barb and Bob got up early to run, and because Bob had a head start, and Barb wanted to catch up, she began to cut across a field of grass. *"SO'CHI WA DAME YO! HEBI GA ORU!"* came a loud warning from some workmen nearby. "Don't run there, there are snakes!" Fortunately, Barb must have understood what they were saying, or it was the urgency in their shouts, because she quickly returned to the pathway. Okinawa is known for their poisonous snake (*habu*) population; they even have a "snake city" where the critters can be seen.

Emi Obasan met us at the hotel later that morning, and meeting her was *mensōrē* in the truest sense...and we were all very much touched. She said that our being in Okinawa was like a dream....at one moment there was Kenden leaving for Hawaii, and then, they had completely lost touch with him, and he never returned. Then, out of the blue, she'd heard from Barbara, and now we were actually visiting with her! She was ecstatic that we could speak and understand Japanese well enough to converse with her.

She happily led us around Shuri and Naha. The Yabu family compound was very closely situated to the old Shuri Castle and the Shūrei (graceful courtesy) *Mon* (gate), although in 1979 when we visited, there was no castle; it had been destroyed during WWII, and the gate was nearly gone. In 1993, on our third trip to Okinawa, the Shuri Castle and the Shūrei Mon had been rebuilt and stood beautifully as they did long ago, atop the highest hill in Naha City.

When we toured with Emi Obasan, we walked all over the city and took a bus only if we were going some distance. We were amazed that this tiny woman, in her seventies, and wearing heeled pumps, could walk over the rough cobbled streets and stairways (laid in the 15th century, and miraculously survived the war bombings) with such boundless energy. We did all we could to keep up with her. She took us to meet Papa's cousins,

Mr. and Mrs. Kamiya and Nae Maeshiro (the two women were sisters), and to the *kasuri* factory to see how these beautiful fabrics were dyed and woven, and to the *bingata* shop to watch the creation of the intricate designs on fabric.

That evening, we and all our relatives, which included Emi Obasan, Yōko, Kenjirō, Shigeko, Kana, Teruko Takehara Takayesu (grandniece of Grandmother Oto Yabu), and her husband, Seirō, went to Matsunoshita Restaurant, the renowned Tea House of the August Moon. It was a popular party place for entertaining guests and for tourists where everyone sat on the floor in one huge room, and were served many traditional Okinawan dishes. A program followed, and there was much singing and dancing, and as is characteristic of Okinawan audiences, approval was shown by rhythmic clapping and whistling. The music crescendoed to the *Eisa* (a lively Okinawan dance) finale when the audience was invited to mount the stage to participate in the rhythmical, unstructured folk dance, where each person did his or her own thing. Even after a busy day of tour guiding, Emi Obasan was up on the stage dancing! And, Bob, the ever fun-loving good sport, was up there too.

We also had the opportunity to visit the royal tombs of kings, queens and other members of the second Sho Dynasty, constructed in 1501. Tombs and caves were used to honor and hold the remains of the dead on these islands, and during wartime, many families found shelter in these hallowed places. On one subsequent visit to Shuri, I asked where the family tomb was located. We were taken there by car since the family now had auto transportation, and some of the young folk had learned to drive. It was quite far away and even after driving there, we had to continue on foot and finally climb up a grassy slope to some sealed caves (you can be sure that I was on the lookout for snakes!). The women carried water, food and flowers for their deceased family members and we all paid our respects. I then noticed several beautiful blue butterflies flitting by, a variety that I had never seen before, and when I told Emi Obasan about them when we returned (she didn't make the trip with us), she said that the butterflies were our ancestors' spirits and they had come out to greet us.

Okinawa, like Hawaii, Tahiti, the Caribbean Islands, is made up of many white sand islands surrounded by crystal blue waters and is lush with beautiful flowers. It is truly a paradise. Many exotic fruit grow there, and there are innumerable kinds of sea-life. If one is not a water-sports enthusiast, a trip to the local market will give a sampling of what abounds nearby. It is truly amazing and beautiful. Okinawa will call you back again, and again.

Our trip was drawing to an end, and it had been a wonderful three day visit. We were able to experience our *furusato*, the ancestral family home, and to meet our kinfolk who welcomed us warmly, took us in, and showed us a good time. It was sad to have to say goodbye to Emi Obasan when it was time to leave, so I gave her a big hug, and as the Japanese say, "*Ja, matta neh?*" Until next time.

* * *

Epilogue

I returned to Okinawa in 1986 with Homer and sister, Emi. We had been on a two weeks' tour of Japan earlier with Homer's sister, Yuka, and her Cedar Lane Church group from Maryland. The three of us were touring independently now, and we were taking Emi to visit her ancestral homes. We journeyed to Anai, Ehime-ken, on Shikoku Island to visit Mama's birthplace afterwards.

It was at this time that I was given the Yabu *koseki tōhon* (the family genealogy) which Kenjirō had so carefully researched and recorded. There were two volumes, but since they were written in Japanese, and Homer and I couldn't read the language, with Kenjirō's permission, we finally had them translated in 1993, into English. That proved to be a wise undertaking; the books have been an invaluable resource for our family research projects.

Homer and I visited Okinawa once again in 1993, this time with sister, Rayko. Though we were retracing our footsteps from previous trips because it was her first time in Japan, we were traveling at a different season of the year...fall...and it was very nice

July 19, 2006

I just telephoned Kenjirō in Okinawa to inquire of the family. Emi Obasan is now 99 years old and will have her 100th birthday on September 10. She fell two years ago and can no longer walk on her own. Her hearing is dimming, but she is still mentally healthy. She lives in a nursing home. Kana, Emi's granddaughter, is now 26 years old, has graduated from Meiji Shinkyu Daigaku (University of Oriental Medicine) in Kyoto, and is presently living at home awaiting new work. Kenjirō still teaches *shodō*, and writes extensively about Okinawan culture. His wife, Shigeko, is now retired and enjoys her hobbies, gardening and attending *Kiko-Taikyokuken* (Chinese athletics) classes. Yōko no longer teaches, and her two children are married. Masato and his wife, Mayumi, have three children; a daughter, Wakana, 9 years, and two sons, Jo, 5 years, and Taku, 10 months old. Asako is married to Sou Tatsumura and lives in Tokyo. They are all well.

* * *

The calligraphy on our reunion memory book cover was especially done for us by Kenjirō. The kanji says *oboe*, and it means "memory".

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 22, 2006

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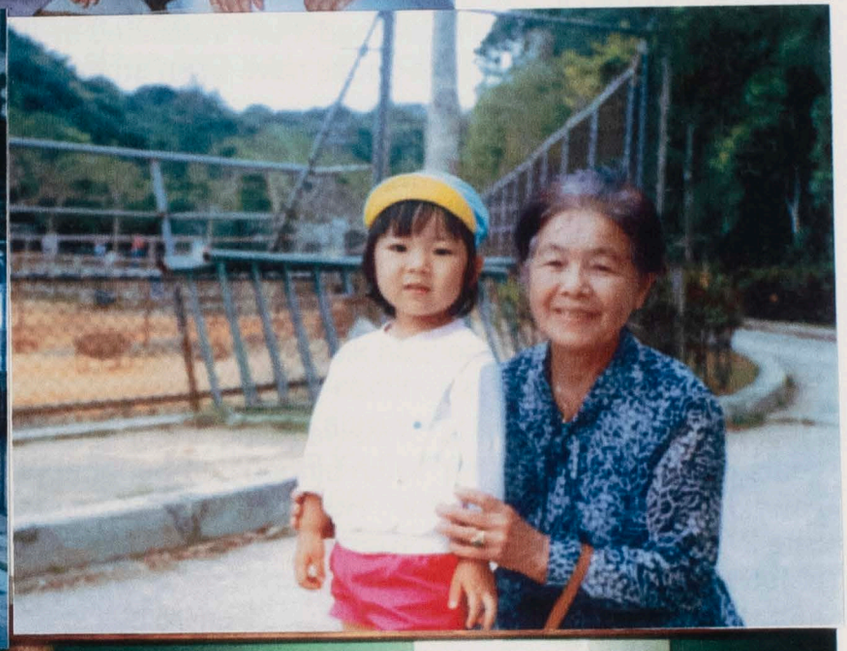

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Yabu family of Shuri, Okinawa

What If.....?

Over the past adult years, in talking with others, and when researching our family history, I've been told that my grandfather, Kentsū (Kenden and Kenshirō's father), came to America in 1919, and returned to Okinawa in 1927. We have no records of what he was doing during the intervening years, but, eight years is a long time to be away from family and home.

There are others who are pondering the hiatus in his time in America, and we're hoping that we'll get an answer to the big question pretty soon. Charles Goodin, head of the Hikari Institute, and Hawaii Karate Museum, in Aiea, Hawaii, wondered if he came in 1919 to attend the wedding of his oldest son, Kenden, to Mitsuye Jyōkō (my parents), who were married on September 18, l919? Perhaps so, and we have a formal photo in our album of the three of them. But, to stay seven more years?

In an article by Mr. Goodin, "Kentsū Yabu's Senior Students in Hawaii", he states that according to tradition in Okinawa, a grandfather would teach karate to his oldest son's first son. Do you suppose that Grandpa hung around to greet that first son? Emi was born in 1921, a girl. Elosa was born in 1922, gosh, another girl. Rayko was born in 1925, darn, a girl again. By the time I was born, it was already known that if Kenden's fourth child was a boy, that he would take the baby back to Okinawa with him. I can imagine the great disappointment and dejection that he felt when the fourth baby was also a girl....me.

He headed back home, and perhaps it was then that Ken, his second son, was named *chōnan.* Ken and Emi were already married, and their first child, a boy (!), was born in 1926.

# # #

Miyuki Yabe Yasui
July 27, 2006

The Last Yabe

The extinction of most things is usually a pensive process that is associated with feelings of sadness, guilt and regret.....and that is how it's probably is going to be when there are no more mainline (*honke*) American Yabes descended from old Grandpa Kentsū Yabu of Shuri, Okinawa.

This extinction is forecasted because there are only two such Yabe males left in the United States, and their total of 6 children have all been girls. This is not to say that the Yabe girls cannot keep their maiden names when they marry, maintaining the Yabe name for awhile longer, but the problem would be in what to call their children.....would they have a hyphenated surname, such as Yabe-xxxx? And what would happen when their children marry?

Through many centuries, Japanese families to whom lineage can be extremely important, have developed a counter to the extinction of a family name. They commonly have, and often still do, adopt a male child to carry on their family name if they have no boys. This adoption, called *yōshi* in Japanese, can occur at any age, but it is frequently done upon the marriage of one of their daughters — the bridegroom agrees to be adopted into the "boyless" family, thereby guaranteeing the survival of the family name for at least one more generation.

In Okinawa today, as far as we know, there is only one child left who carries the mainline Yabu family name. This is Kanako Yabu, Kenjirō and Shigeko's sole daughter and child, and she is of marriageable age.

There are other Yabu relatives living in the Yaeyama Islands of Okinawa, and there are a considerable number of Yabus living on the main island of Okinawa itself; as well as several Yabu families living in Shizuoka-ken and elsewhere in the four main islands of (*Naichi*) Japan. Altogether, according to an account in Kenjirō's book, there are over 1000 relatives who have descended from our common ancestor, Kengi So. Most of these relatives, however, have one of four other surnames: Higa, Kudeken, Okushima and Tanabaru, and I do not know which, if any, of the Yabus listed above are in the main line of descent.

I believe that Kenjirō Yabu of Yamakawa-cho, Shuri, Okinawa-ken, Japan, is the last *honke* Yabu man in Japan. And I believe that Norman Yabe of Denver, Colorado and Kenji Yabe of Phoenix, Arizona are the last male counterparts in America.

Will the last survivor please turn off the lights.....

# # #

Homer Yasui
July 27, 2006

Glossary

Anai	Mitsuye Jyōkō's home town on Shikoku Island
anji	a lord or chieftain of a village or a district
beiju	the 88th birthday
bingata	a type of Okinawan fabric
bunke	a secondary, collateral, branch of a family
chanko nabe	a hot pot favored by sumo wrestlers
chikara	physical strength, power
chōnan	the first born, the eldest, son
Chuzan	the middle of three ancient Okinawan kingdoms
cinerarium	a place for keeping the ashes of a cremated body
daruma	Japanese doll that comes up after being knocked over
Ehime-ken	Ehime Prefecture
Eisa	a type of Okinawan dancing
gunner	Marine Corps slang for Gunnery Sergeant
gunny	Marine Corps slang for a Warrant Officer
Gunsō	Sergeant
habu	a poisonous viper of Okinawa
hapa	slang for "half blood", usually concerning ethnicity
Heart Mountain	a relocation camp in Heart Mt., Wyoming, as used here
hebi	a snake
Heimin	Commoner
Hōgō	posthumous Buddhist name, commonly sacred
honke	main branch, or head, of a family
Issei	the first generation of Japanese living outside of Japan
jamisen	a samisen with a snake skin sound box
Kagoshima	a port city in southern Kyushu, formerly part of Satsuma
Kamadé	Kentsū Yabu & Kenyū Yabu's childhood name
kanji	Chinese character, ideograph
Kara	China, Cathay [*Kenkyusha Jiten* (dictionary), 1931 edition]

kara age	fried in the Chinese style
kara hafu	Chinese-fashion roof line
kara jishi (shishi)	stylized stone lions of China
kara na	Chinese name
karate	empty hand
kasuri	a type of Japanese fabric
kata	formalized karate exercises
kawaigareta	treated with endearment, sympathetic love
Kazoku	Nobles
kenjin	people from the same Japanese prefecture
kenjin-kai	association of people from the same Japanese prefecture
Kōbō Daishi	posthumous, sacred Buddhist name of Kūkai, a priest
kodaiko	a small, hand held drum
koseki	official family or census register
koseki tōhon	copy or duplicate of an official register
Kūkai	the earthly name of a famous Buddhist priest
kun yomi	Japanese pronunciation of kanji
Kurautchi Sōbé Shidu	Head of the Storehouse and Lord of Sobe in Naha
manzoku shita	satisfied, satisfaction, contentment
Meiji restoration	emperor system of governance restored to Japan in 1868
mensōrē	Okinawan welcome with love and friendship
mon	a gate
mustang	a Marine officer who rises through the enlisted ranks
Naichi	Japanese from the main islands of Japan
namae	name; sometimes abbreviated to *'na'*
nanori gashira	the hereditary first character (kanji) in personal names
Nikkei	persons of Japanese ancestry living outside of Japan
Nisei	second generation of Japanese living outside of Japan
nōrō	Okinawan priestess of native religion
obasan	aunt, as used here; but it can mean 'woman', 'lady'
oboye	memory, recollection

Okinawa Shihan Gakko	Teacher's College
on yomi	Chinese pronunciation of kanji
pēchin	a magistrate, usually of a village
pēkumī	a magistrate, usually of a district
rōnin	a masterless samurai
samisen	a three stringed banjo-like musical instrument
samurai	Japanese warrior of feudal days
sanshin	Okinawan word sometimes used for samisen (shamisen)
Satsuma	one of nine provinces in Kyushu in feudal times
Shaolin monks	from the Fuchou area of Fukien Province, China
shashin kekkon	literally, "picture marriage", usually called picture bride
Shimazu	the hereditary ruling clan of Satsuma Domain
Shizoku	military or warrior class of feudal Japan; samurai
shodō	Japanese calligraphy
shūrei	beautiful, graceful
Shūrei Mon	Graceful, Courtesy Gate
Shuri	capital of Okinawa before 1879
sumo-tori	a sumo wrestler
suzerainty	a dominant state controlling affairs of a vassal state
tatami	a padded reed floor mat
teetotaler	an abstainer from alcohol
tōhon	a certified copy of a document
toper	a drunkard
Uchinanchu	Okinawan word for themselves (Okinawans)
warabina	childhood first name
yashashii	gentle, soft, kindhearted, tender
yōkoso	welcome
yōshi	adopted

Photo Identification

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Page	
25	Kentsu Yabu, 1925, Los Angeles, CA
26	Kenden Yabe, 1908, just prior to emigration, Okinawa Kenshiro Yabe, submitted by Arlene Yabe Wayland
31- a	Kenshiro Yabe family, ca. 1946, Denver, CO Ken (Kenshiro), Kenji, Norman, Arlene & Fumi
31- b	Fumi in Portland when Mitsuye was terminally ill, August 1985 Fumi, Meredith & Rayko
31- c	Fumi with sisters Chiyo, Fumi, Mitsie, & Tomi, and Arlene & Norman. Submitted by Suz Yabe
32- a	Mitsuye (seated) with sister Haruko, Anai, Japan, ca. 1910
32- b	Kenden & Mitsuye with Emi & Rayko, 1925, Los Angeles, CA
32- c	Mitsuye, Los Angeles, CA, 1977
41- top	Fumi's family gathering at Big Thompson River, CO, to scatter her and Ken's ashes, June, 2003
41- bottom	Mitsuye's family at Shelter Island, NY, 1979 (rear) Meredith, Homer, John, Emi, Bob & Bill (front) Barbara, Miyuki, Mitsuye, Rayko & Isaku
42- a	Konoshima family: Isaku, Kimiko, Richard & Rayko, ca. 1964, NY
42- b	Emi, Mark Wiitala (nephew) & Bill, Portland, OR 2001
42- c	John, Emi & Bill; San Francisco, CA, June, 1977
47	At Okinawa Kenjin Kai picnic; Elysian Park, Los Angeles, CA, 1937 Yemiko Taira & Miyuki
52- a	Emi Obasan, Kana, Kenjiro & Shigeko, ca. 1981
52- b	Yoko and children, Asako & Masato, ca. 1981
52- c	Kana with her grandmother Emi, ca. 1982
52- d	When we visited Okinawa in 1993 (rear) Teruko Takaesu, Yoko, Shigeko & Kana (front) Rayko, Homer, Miyuki & Emi
53	Emi Obasan's 97th birthday, *Kajima*, a celebration for prayers for her health and longevity Emi, Yoko, Shigeko, Kenjiro, Kana