

Shigeko Yoshida

By Celena Becerra and Myra Butler

Shigeko Yoshida was born on October 18, 1924 to Tomi and Toyokichi Yoshida on Vashon Island. She was the second youngest of seven kids, four daughters, Haruko, Toyoko, Kiyoko, and three sons¹. She lived in Burton with her family on their farm, which she worked on with her mother and siblings². Her father was a clerk at a jewelers. Shigeko was 15 when she and her family were removed in May, 1942.

Shigeko was a sophomore at Vashon Island High School in 1942, before she was removed from the island. In 1939 during her freshman year, she played on the JV girls basketball team³. She made honor roll and worked in the library as a librarian during her sophomore year⁴. She worked on her family's farm during this time with her mom and siblings as well.

Following their brief transition from the Pinedale camp, the Yoshida family made the more permanent move to the Tule Lake internment camp. The climate of Tule lake had cold winters, and hot dry summers. A common and competitive pastime was collecting the shells of mollusks that once lived in the waters that no longer exist. It was also previously a tribal land that was taken over by the government. From this camp, distorted realities were being portrayed through the media that the interned were being "coddled, enjoying a leisurely life eating steaks, ham and roasts while the local town folk suffered wartime shortages and rationing." This was far from the truth, though, since the Japanese had a "lack of promised goods and salaries," it led to the Japanese strikes and protests, which to the public were seen as acts of disloyalty. The loyalty questionnaire given to the prisoners was "mishandled," leading to a large group of people refusing to answer it, which led to fines and imprisonment of Japanese, primarily men, and even furthering the animosity. Also resulting from the questionnaire led to ideas that people who did not respond in the "loyal" way, were now being seen as even more disloyal than before. In time, Tule lake would use these problematic questionnaires to determine who would stay or be moved to the camp, if seen as disloyal, or would be transferred to another camp otherwise. Considering that the Yoshida family was transferred from Tule lake to the Topaz War Relocation Center during the span of their internment, the family was likely determined to be loyal to America through their questionnaire which could be an explanation for their move⁶.

The Topaz War Relocation Center was in the dusty, arid Sevier Desert in Utah. Topaz had one of the most "homogeneous" populations with nearly all of its interned coming from the San Francisco Bay Area. Topaz incorporated a system where inmates elected a representative government to give some power to the camp, but it was still limited. Though Topaz had no major "disturbances," the majority of tension within the camp was due to conflict between inmates and administration that would lead to strikes and other acts going against administration. Topaz did have a few K-12 schools where they put emphasis on the arts⁷.

After being released from Topaz War Relocation Center, Shigeko returned to Vashon Island. She returned to Vashon Island High School and graduated. After graduating, Shigeko left the island and moved to New York where she got a job⁵. Unfortunately, Yoshida passed away at the age of twenty one on September 30, 1946, and never had any children.

¹Ancestry.com. *1940 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

²Year: 1930; Census Place: *Burton, King, Washington*; Page: 4A; Enumeration District: 0252; FHL microfilm: 2342223

³Vashon Island High School, *Vashonian* (Vashon, WA: 1939), Vashon Maury Island Heritage Museum.

⁴"Japanese Presence Project." Vashon Maury Island Heritage Museum, n.d. Accessed February 7, 2022.

⁵New York City Department of Records & Information Services; New York City, New York; *New York City Death Certificates*; Borough: *Manhattan*; Year: 1946

⁶"Tule Lake." Tule Lake | Densho Encyclopedia. Densho Encyclopedia, 2022. https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule_Lake/.

⁷"Topaz." Topaz | Densho Encyclopedia. Densho Encyclopedia, 2022. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Topaz/>.