

Suako Otsuka

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Suako's parents, Tsuto Otsuka and Niki Otsuka, moved to Vashon from Japan to grow berries^[1]. Before internment, 6 year old Suako, born in 1934, lived on Vashon Island with her two parents and older brother^[2]. Tokio, her older brother, was 17 in 1940 and just graduated when they left for the camps. Suako was enrolled in the Island's grammar school. She lived in the Quartermaster precinct and owned a strawberry farm. Her family had many hobbies; for example, Tokio played football at the highschool while Haruka was a girl scout. Suako was a part of the tight knit community of Vashon before they were taken to the camps^[3].

The Otsuka family was forcibly removed from Vashon Island on May 16, 1942. They were first taken to Pinedale, an assembly center in Fresno, California, not far from the Fresno Assembly Center. Pinedale was different from the others in that much of its population was from far away, mostly from Washington state and the Seattle area. The Pinedale barracks were about 20 x 100 feet, were divided into even smaller living spaces, and had either concrete or asphalt floors. There was virtually no

privacy, including in the shower rooms and latrines^[3]. After Pinedale, the Otsuka's were taken to Tule Lake, California. It was known to be the biggest and most conflict-ridden of the camps and was the last to close. Security at Tule Lake included a battalion of 1,000 military police, tanks, and a "man-proof" fence that was eight



feet tall^[4]. The Otsuka family was moved to Heart Mountain, Wyoming (seen above) in October 1943 because of the overcrowding of Tule Lake after the "loyalty questionnaire" forced more people deemed "disloyal" into the camp^[5]. At Heart Mountain they lived in a 740 acre fenced area, wringed with barbed wire and guarded by nine towers. There, the incarcerated grew crops on about 1,100 acres of land^[6]. The Otsuka's were interned from 1942 to 1946 when internment ended. Haruka and Suako's older brother, Tokio Otsuka, served in the military during the war and fought in France^[7].

After internment, the Otsuka family moved back to Vashon where they continued to farm fruits such as strawberries. Their farm was fortunately not destroyed. Suako Otsuka completed high school on Vashon at Vashon Island High School^[8]. The older brother, Tokio, continued to farm on Vashon. Their father Tsuto Otsuka passed away at the age of 72 on January 10, 1948^[9] and Niki Otsuka passed away at the age of 69 on February 17, 1965. Both were buried in Vashon Island Cemetery.

Shirley Suako Otsuka who was the younger of the siblings moved to Seattle around 1952. Here she married Terry T. Kameda on October 13, 1962^[10] and worked at a bookstore as a bookkeeper in Seattle. She lived near the YWCA which was a group for empowering working women in the Seattle area^[11].

Haruka Ishikawa Otsuka, Suako's sister, was an experienced dressmaker but primarily worked picking fruits in her parents' fruit farm. She was able to speak in both English and Japanese^[12]. She married Shigeto G. Ishikawa on May 20, 1950 at the age of 24^[13]. She passed away at the age of 77 on October 10, 2004^[14].

The oldest sibling Tokio Otsuka would own a strawberry farm after serving in the war. After the war he returned to vashon to farm strawberries. He farmed at Hogsback Farm on cemetery road, his parents farm, and Northbourne Farm on Gorsuch road, his own^[15]. He sold Hogsback Farm in 1996^[16]. He was unfortunately killed on February 3rd, 2005 due to a farming accident.



Suako Otsuka at graduation (age 18)^[8]

¹McMurdo, Jenny. Japanese Internment Biography, October 2, 2015.

<https://classroom.google.com/c/Mzc5NDUyMTM5NDE0/a/NDU1NzQ4NDE0NTM4/details>.

²Japanese Census Data. VashonHistory.com, December 29, 2015. [https://www.vashonhistory.com/excel_files/Japanese%20Census%20data.1900.1940.dec29.15%20\(1\).xlsx](https://www.vashonhistory.com/excel_files/Japanese%20Census%20data.1900.1940.dec29.15%20(1).xlsx).

³Brian Niiya. "Pinedale (detention facility)," Densho Encyclopedia [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Pinedale%20\(detention%20facility\)](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Pinedale%20(detention%20facility)) (accessed Feb 7 2022).

⁴Takei, Barbara, and Judy Tachibana. "History." tulelake, 2012. <https://www.tulelake.org/history>.

⁵Cherstin Lyon. "Loyalty questionnaire," Densho Encyclopedia

<https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Loyalty%20questionnaire> (accessed Feb 7 2022).

⁶"Relocation Center Camp: Life in the Camp - Heart Mountain Wyoming." Heart Mountain. WWII JAPANESE AMERICAN CONFINEMENT SITE, January 13, 2022. <https://www.heartmountain.org/history/life-in-the-camp/>.

⁷"Tokio Otsuka: Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber." Vashon . Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber, December 9, 2016. <https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/obituaries/tokio-otsuka/>.

⁸"Shirley Otsuka." Ancestry Login. Accessed February 7, 2022. [https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/discoveryui-content/view/337468624:1265?](https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/discoveryui-content/view/337468624:1265?tid=&pid=&queryId=a4cebf21da25c302ff82f4203c68ba8&_phsrc=WSL27&_phstart=successSource)

[tid=&pid=&queryId=a4cebf21da25c302ff82f4203c68ba8&_phsrc=WSL27&_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/discoveryui-content/view/337468624:1265?tid=&pid=&queryId=a4cebf21da25c302ff82f4203c68ba8&_phsrc=WSL27&_phstart=successSource).

⁹“Tsuto Otsuka” Ancestry Login. Accessed February 7, 2022. https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/search/?name=Tsuto%2B_Otsuka&event=_vashon%2Bisland-king-washington-usa_65596&birth=1875.

¹⁰“Terry T Kameda” Ancestry Login. Accessed February 8, 2022. https://search.ancestryclassroom.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2378&h=768154&tid=&pid=&queryId=866a850affd7e9f72be0c391a82e2250&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Fbf7&_phstart=successSource.

¹¹“Shirley Suako Otsuka” Ancestry Login. Accessed February 8, 2022. https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/discoveryui-content/view/992495723:2469?tid=l&pid=&queryId=7543f1fcd0564fb49970d78f6a1dde30&_phsrc=WSL26&_phstart=successSource.

¹²“Haruka Ishikawa Otsuka.” Ancestry Login. Accessed February 8, https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/discoveryui-content/view/59992546:2442?tid=&pid=&queryId=bfb686e9e16eea5174bab1b0b744f3d0&_phsrc=Fbf10&_phstart=successSource.

¹³“Shigeto G Ishikawa” Ancestry Login. Accessed February 8, 2022. https://search.ancestryclassroom.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2378&h=973291&tid=&pid=&queryId=97d4bc00196ed341c7d6d744b838b73c&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Fbf11&_phstart=successSource.

¹⁴“Haruko Ishikawa” Ancestry Login. Accessed February 8, 2022. https://www.ancestryclassroom.com/discoveryui-content/view/29814687:60901?tid=&pid=&queryId=eda902db5793ed2bd25d1816fb1f2a56&_phsrc=WSL35&_phstart=successSource.

¹⁵“1945 - When Once Exiled, Imprisoned Families Returned Home: Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber.” Vashon Beachcomber. Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber, December 10, 2020. <https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/1945-when-once-exiled-imprisoned-families-returned-home/>.

¹⁶Fogt, Anneli. “Longtime Island Farm up for Sale: Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber.” Vashon Beachcomber. Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber, November 7, 2016. <https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/longtime-island-farm-up-for-sale/>.