

Tillie Sakai

By Jack Cummings and Reese Thompson

Tillie Sakai was born around 1925 on Vashon Island, Washington.² She lived with her father, Ensuku, and mother, Miyoka. She had five siblings named Harry, Sumi, Metcko, Masato, and Mori, two of which did not live with them on their berry farm in the Glen Acres area. She completed her first year of high school at Vashon Island High School before they were removed and sent to the camps.¹

Tillie and her family were taken from the Island on May 16, 1942 and finally got to the camp on July 23rd after temporarily being housed at Pinedale Assembly Center.¹ They arrived at an internment camp in Tule Lake, California, which was located on a dried out lake bed. The camp was covered in small shells from the days when it used to be a lake and it was dusty with little vegetation. The summers were dry and hot and winters extremely cold and long. Tule Lake, including farming areas, was between 4,500-5,000 acres. The camp alone was roughly 1100 acres.⁵ Being such a large camp, it contained just under nineteen thousand people at peak population.⁶

The family did not like internment and didn't feel necessarily loyal towards the U.S. so they were kept at Tule Lake segregation center instead of being sent to the military or put in roles supporting the war. The family stayed there for around 3 years, getting released in 1945 and being sent to King Hill, Idaho with a grant for relocation.¹

Tillie Sakai married her husband, Ichiro Katusura, in 1951 Alameda, California.³ They stayed there and had a child together the next year named Alan. Tillie and Ichiro moved and had four more children; Alan, Wayne, Harold, Randall, and Robert, through 1962 in Walnut Creek, California.³ They are all still alive today, including Tillie.

¹-, N.A.P Staff, By, -, N.A.P Staff <http://napost.com> "N.A.P Staff." Seattle's Japanese Community News North American Post, March 18, 2021. <https://napost.com/2021/a-bittersweet-return-to-vashon/>.

²Year: 1940; Census Place: Vashon, King, Washington; Roll: m-t0627-04346; Page: 8B; Enumeration District: 17-200

³"Teruko Katsura - Phone, Address, Background Info | Whitepages." Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://www.whitepages.com/name/Teruko-Katsura>.

⁴Ancestry.com. *California, U.S., Marriage Index, 1949-1959* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013.

⁵"Tule Lake." Tule Lake | Densho Encyclopedia. Accessed February 16, 2022. https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule_Lake/.

⁶“Tule Lake (U.S. National Park Service).” National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed February 16, 2022. <https://www.nps.gov/places/tule-lake.htm#:~:text=Tule%20Lake%20became%20the%20largest,contained%20more%20than%201%2C700%20structures>.