

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF KAY KUSHINO

The Kushino Family Scholarship, being offered under the names of Mrs. Kay Kushino and Dr. Norman Kushino, reflects the desires of the Family to perpetuate the strong belief that both had regarding the importance and value of education to improve the life and well-being of every person who strives to achieve his maximum potential.

Mrs. Kay Kushino was born in Los Gatos, CA, and as a child yearned to grow up to be a writer and a poet. As a young teenager, she achieved some minor success in getting her poetry published in the Japanese vernaculars and in national magazines of her period like the Family Circle. Sadly, like many Nisei of her day, her dreams were not to be realized because of the harsh realities of that period in their lives. Discrimination, prejudice, pervasive barriers to economic opportunities were obstacles they faced daily in their lives and deprived them of choices to improve their circumstances and that of their families. Nearly all the Issei and Nisei of that time recognized that the only way to escape their poverty and forced hardships would be through better education which brought the skills and knowledge to fight the economic discrimination faced by all of them.

Kay was married at age 16, and she and her husband, Tad, established a small business. Like many of the Japanese small businessmen and farmers of that time, they could not readily get access to capital and insurance from commercial lenders to assist their businesses because of racial prejudice. To get capital, Tad turned to a device used by the Japanese of that time. He formed a "Tanomoshi", enrolling members of the Japanese community around Los Gatos and San Jose. A "Tanomoshi" is like today's Credit Union. The members contributed an amount of money each month to the organization, and the pooled money was then lent to any member who needed capital for his farm, business, or home. The money lent was to be repaid by the borrower so that the Tanomoshi could enlarge its capital base over time.

During the 1920s, many Nisei realized they needed to organize formally in order to fight the economic and political discrimination they faced. In 1929, in Northern California, they formed the beginnings of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). Many of Kay's friends were involved in this nascent group, which attracted her interest as well. In 1931, at age 18, she formally joined the JACL and became a life-long, active member. She helped organize chapters in her area, gathered the Japanese community in Los Gatos when they were ordered to evacuate after Pearl Harbor, and actively promoted its goals and programs in the Internment camps despite opposition from some internees angry with the incarceration. After relocating to the Twin Cities, with other former JACLers, she helped form the Twin Cities Chapter of the JACL. Because some of the Nisei who joined were still unhappy with the proactive policies of the JACL in the internment camps, the organization was originally named the United Citizens League (UCL). She also helped to establish the UCL Credit Union, the new "Tanomoshi" created to assist the Twin Cities Nisei gain access to capital. Over time, as the JACL became more successful overturning discriminatory laws, enabling the Issei to gain citizenship, and obtaining an apology and redress from the United States Government for its role in the Evacuation of the Japanese, the opposition of some of its chapter members waned, and the chapter formally changed its name to the Twin Cities Chapter of the JACL.

Because she believed that education was the key for opening the doors to a more productive and challenging life, Kay imbued in her children the idea that their formal education did not cease until they had completed college. She also believed, as many of the Issei and Nisei of her age did, that the Japanese American community at large needed to achieve higher levels of education to better fight discrimination and economic disparity, and for its children to achieve their maximum potential. Thus she believed strongly in the Scholarship programs promoted by the National JACL and its Chapters.

Today, the children of our community face many more challenges as our society becomes more complex and technically sophisticated. Higher education is now a necessity for its young people to survive, much less succeed, in their future lives. This scholarship is being offered so that, in one more small effort, it can help another youth achieve his or her potential in life.