

Shigeko Morikuni Kirihara

1926 - 2010

Shigeko Kirihara Memorial Scholarship Twin Cities JACL

Shigeko Morikuni Kirihara was born on May 6, 1926 in Los Angeles, CA. Her parents, Jiro and Misao, were 1st generation immigrants from Kochi Prefecture on the island of Shikoku, Japan. "Shig" had an older sister and 2 younger brothers.

Shig spent the first 16 years of her life in various locations in southern California including Los Angeles, Westminster and Escondido. She was a standout student at Rosemount Elementary, Virgil Junior High and Belmont High School in Los Angeles.

Following the Pearl Harbor attack, her family was sent to temporary quarters at the Pomona County Fairgrounds/Assembly Center, in May of 1942. In September of that year, the family was moved to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming.

Shig's father wanted to move his family to Japan, due to past racial prejudice and the injustice of the internment. As a result, the family was moved in 1943 to Tule Lake Segregation Center near the California/Oregon border. Tule Lake was the designated location for "disloyals" desiring to be repatriated or expatriated to Japan.

Shig's older sister Toshi was adamant against moving to Japan. Along with the other Morikuni children, she was a US citizen and had never set foot in Japan. She openly defied her father and convinced Shig to do the same. As a result, the father relented and the family remained at Tule Lake until the end of WW II.

Shig graduated from high school at the Tule Lake Segregation Center. Although she had earned a 4-year college scholarship, she was unable to accept it because of the lengthy uncertainty over the deportation of her family.

Following the conclusion of WW II, the closing of Tule Lake resulted in a Morikuni family decision to relocate to Chicago, IL. Shig and her older sister led the way to Chicago in September of 1945; the rest of the family joined them shortly thereafter.

Shig met her future husband Jim Kirihara in Chicago. He was a GI then living in Minneapolis while stationed at Fort Knox, TN. Jim and Shig married in 1953 and settled in Minneapolis, with Jim's promise to take her home to Chicago every year to visit her family. Jim and Shig had 2 sons and 1 daughter, followed by 5 grandsons and 1 granddaughter.

Although Shig worked as a seamstress and waitress in a family Japanese restaurant called Tokyo Cafe, she is best remembered as a devoted wife, mother, grandmother and friend. She was a wonderful cook, devoted church member and enjoyed traveling the world. She was the epitome of self-sacrifice who would do anything for her loved ones. She was also a strong advocate of furthering one's education.