

Phyllis (Matsushita) Takekawa

1924 - 2018

Phyllis Takekawa Memorial Scholarship
Twin Cities JACL

Kyoko Phyllis (Matsushita) Takekawa was born on April 6, 1924 to Shigeshi and Kumi Matsushita in Compton, California. Her parents were from Kagoshima, Japan. Phyllis died on August 20, 2018 at the age of 94.

Phyllis' given name was Kyoko Matsushita. Because her Sunday School teacher couldn't pronounce the name, the teacher gave her the name "Phyllis". Since then, she had gone by that name.

Phyllis had five siblings, two older sisters and an older brother. Following Phyllis, she had a younger brother and then a younger sister.

The Matsushita family were farmers in Compton. The family lived in a farm house built by friends. It accommodated the family of eight with two bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, and a bathroom outside. Phyllis worked the fields planting and weeding daily.

Phyllis' favorite holidays were Christmas and New Year's Day. Christmas was celebrated at Sunday School by a Japanese Minister who came from Los Angeles to educate the children on religion. New Year's Day was celebrated for three days. The men would get happy on sake celebrating from house to house for those three full days. Women would cook with mochi as the main dish. Phyllis loved seeing the adults so happy and seeing her dad dance! Christmas gifts came from church, typically candy and things they made. One Father of the church made things out of wood. Their parents weren't able to give gifts due to lack of money.

At the outbreak of World War II, the Matsushita family was sent to the Assembly Center. They were then sent to Gila River Concentration Camp in Arizona for two years. After her internment at Gila River, Phyllis went to Cincinnati with her sister, Lucy. Their oldest sister, Bessie, was living there doing housework.

After a time in Cincinnati, Phyllis moved to Minneapolis with Bessie where they lived at 25th and Hennepin.

Phyllis' working career spanned over 30 years. She worked at Midland Bank, Richfield Bank, and Metropolitan Airports Commission. She retired in 1978 due to blood pressure problems.

Phyllis joined First Christian Church in 1946.

She had a very active athletic life. Upon coming to Minneapolis, Phyllis played on the all Japanese Women's Softball team with Tats Ogata, Margaret Yoshinaga, Hisa Osada, Mit Kawamura, Lil Tanaka, and Helen Tsuchiya. They played under the lights at Parade Stadium. She also played on Tait's Super Valu with friends until she retired.

Phyllis bowled in many leagues and went to tournaments with May Tanaka, Helen Tanaka, Helen Tsuchiya, Amy Sugimura, and Sue Nelson.

Phyllis also played golf in multiple women's leagues.

Phyllis married John Akira Takekawa on April 23, 1948, the result of a blind date set up by her friends Mit and Juni Kawamura. Phyllis and John were married for over 70 years. They had four children, Joyce, Carol, Scott, and Susan, seven grandchildren and ten great grandchildren. In 1953, they bought their first house in Richfield. At that time, the real estate agent had to ask all the neighbors if it was okay for a Japanese couple to move in. All the neighbors said yes. Phyllis and John lived there for over 30 years. They later moved to a townhouse in Burnsville and lived there for some time. From there, they lived for five years at Summerhouse in Bloomington, a senior independent living apartment. They then moved to Episcopal Homes, an assisted living facility, and finally to Friendship Village in Bloomington for three years.

Always active, Phyllis was in a card group with Lucy Kiriara, Reiko Sumada, and Jan Monson. They would meet once a month for over 20 years making origami cards.

Phyllis was a great cook and always prepared whatever was requested for birthdays. She truly loved her family and friends.

In 1977, Phyllis and John traveled to Japan for the first time. One of her aunts was to meet them at the airport. When asked how Phyllis would know who the aunt was, her aunt said, "I will be holding a rose".

Phyllis could not graduate from college due to her internment in Gila River. In 2010, she went to the Nisei graduation ceremony at Compton Junior College. About 40 people attended who had taken classes there in the '40s. Those students were given a graduation ceremony complete with cap and gown. This was one of her favorite memories.

Phyllis started the Day Out Program for the Nikkei Project in the 1970s. She wanted to help the Issei since her own parents were gone. She came up with many craft projects for the ladies in the program.

Phyllis was a caring and generous friend. Her daughter Joyce was married to Charlie Grady in the '70s. At the time, Charlie's mom (Lorraine Grady) was dying. Her passing would leave no close relatives for Charlie's younger brother, Bill, who was in high school at the time. Their sister lived in California. On Lorraine's death bed, Phyllis told Lorraine not to worry because she would take him in to be a part of the Takekawa family. As a result, Bill Grady became part of the family as an adopted brother and came to all birthday celebrations and holidays.

Cathy Swanson, from Senior Helpers, has become a good friend. Cathy had been with Phyllis and John for over seven years and has become member of the family.

Phyllis volunteered at her church, a big part of her life. She was a great organizer and organized a family reunion for over 60 people held at Ruttger's Bay Lake Lodge in 1991. She was great with her hands, making origami animals to put on Christmas cards. In the '70s she worked for an earring company making hundreds of earrings at home.

Phyllis lived her life to the fullest, always helping people, cooking delicious food at the drop of a hat, and treating everyone kindly. She was a giver in every sense of the word!