

Granddaughter of a Samurai: Kichi Murakami

By Elise Yamamoto

Mrs. Komarek South Elementary, Cedar City, Utah

Nicole Yamamoto: 808.693.5576

I have chosen to write about Kichi Murakami, my great-great grandma who never gave up. Kichi was born on the 27th of August, 1891 in Yuno Village, a small fishing and farming community near Fukushima, Japan. She was the eighth child of ten kids, with seven brothers and two sisters. At age 18 Kichi left home by herself to be a picture bride in the U.S. territory of Hawai'i.

When Japanese men working on the Hawaiian sugar cane plantations wanted to get married, they sent a picture of themselves to their families in Japan with a note saying, "I want to get married!" The guy's family would then find a single girl from a good family, and show her the picture of their son. If the girl said "yes" she would send her picture to the guy in Hawaii. If he said "yes" the girl would move to Hawaii and marry the guy!

Kichi traveled over 165 miles from her village to Yokohama Harbor, where she boarded a boat called the USS Manchuria on New Year's Day, 1910. She was on the USS Manchuria for 23 difficult days before getting to Hawai'i. Once there, she met the man she was supposed to marry. His name was Matsugoro Murakami. He was born on August 27, 1887, and was 22 years old at the time. They got married on January 25, 1910, two days after she got there.

Soon after that, Kichi started helping Matsugoro cut and burn sugar cane on the Big Island in Hawaii. Cutting sugar cane requires a lot of hard work in the hot sun. Ten years later they moved to Kahuku on the North Shore of the island of Oahu, to work on a plantation there. After another 10 years, they moved to Honolulu and lived in the same neighborhood where I moved from last year!

Matsugoro and Kichi had six kids. One of her six kids named Chiyoko died after getting injured by some farm equipment on the plantation. In 1931, her husband Matsugoro died at the age of 44. Kichi lived as a widow for 45 years after.

Kichi lived in Honolulu during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which was only about 10 miles away from her home. Many people in the United States were suspicious of Japanese people, because of the war. In February of 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive order 9066, which sent 120,000 people with Japanese blood, including Japanese-Americans to concentration camps on the mainland. There was one concentration camp on Sand Island, but Kichi, and many other Japanese people in Hawaii, didn't have to move to the camp or be shipped to the mainland. At this time, there were over 160,000 people with Japanese blood living in Hawai'i, and they made up over 1/3 of the people. Even with the order from the President, local military leaders General Walter Short and his replacement Lieutenant General Delos C. Emmons, disagreed. They didn't find any cases of disloyalty or betrayal from the local Japanese, and thought that removing that many people, would be bad for the community.

Instead of being sent to a concentration camp, she and her neighbors were placed under house arrest in their neighborhood, that was mostly Japanese. Soldiers with machine guns were placed at each end of their street. I don't know how Kichi felt about this, but living with soldiers and machine guns at the end of your street requires a lot of courage.

The US Government forced the Japanese people in the camps and under house arrest to prove their loyalty by burning their Japanese cultural items, school books, and family photos. Since the Murakamis were descendants of Samurai, Kichi had to burn swords, family crests, and a photo of her grandfather riding a horse next to the Emperor of Japan.

My great-great grandmother, Kichi Murakami died at age 85 on the 27th of September, 1976. She is buried at Nu'uanu Memorial Park. So as you can see Kichi Murakami was a very courageous and hard working woman!



Kichi Murakami

SHARE

