

# Shigeiko Ide, Japanese Heritage in Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini

In her Lafayette home, Shigeiko Ide teaches an Ikebana class in the purest Japanese style (Ikenobo style). The ancient art of flower arranging keeps her going in spite of the difficult times life has sent her way. On December 7th, many American families will remember a sad anniversary: The 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Japanese Navy. The attack was a shock to the nation and America formally declared war against Japan the next day. But for Ide, whose family is of Japanese decent, this anniversary has quite a different meaning.

Two months after Pearl Harbor, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 that marked the beginning of the banishment of all Japanese-Americans living on the West coast of the United States. Some 120,000 ethnic Japanese were held in internment camps for the duration of the war, 2/3 of them were Americans born of Japanese ancestry. At the time, 1/16 of Japanese blood was enough to send anyone living on the West Coast to a detention camp. The exiled included orphans as young as 3 months, the elderly, the sick, and the blind. There, in one of the nine camps that were hastily built in deserts or swamps, they fought to rebuild a community.

Among them was Shigeiko Ide. The soft-spoken 86 year old, wife of the late Harry Ide of Harry's nursery (now Mt. Diablo Nursery and Garden), was sent to Rohwer internment camp in southeastern Arkansas with her new husband in 1942. Ide says she has vivid memories of this experience, but no bitterness.

Ide was born in Stockton in 1921 of Japanese parents who came to the USA in 1916 thinking "the streets of America are paved in gold." Her parents ran a Japanese grocery store. After she finished high school, she went to work for the DMV in Sacramento; her school counselor had warned her that because of racism, finding a job in the private sector was difficult for Asian-looking Americans.

Around that time, her parents introduced her to Harry Ide, another young American of Japanese decent. Shigeiko remembers that for Harry, it was love at first sight; as for her, she would have liked to pursue her career a bit longer. Three months after their marriage, Pearl Harbor happened and they had a few days to sell all their belongings before being shipped away. Shigeiko's parents were lucky enough to be able to store some of their belongings in a neighbor's basement. At the time of deportation, with not much time to sell all their life's possessions, many Japanese were easy pray to unscrupulous Americans.

The Ides ended up in Arkansas. Before the camp was built, they were first herded for months in horse stalls at the Tanforan Center in San Bruno. They stayed three years in the wood barracks, in small rooms separated with paper walls, and no running water. Shigeiko remembers the small garden they grew to try and get fresh vegetables, the constant walks to common bathrooms and cafeteria, the monotonous diet of beets and mutton stew, the cold winters and the hot summers.

In camp, Shigeiko and Harry lived with their family and were blessed with the birth of two daughters. Japanese doctors delivered the babies in the camp.

Harry, who had previously wanted to give up his Japanese citizenship and keep only his American one in order to assimilate, refused to confirm that choice when presented with a questionnaire in camp. As a result of not wanting to give up his Japanese citizenship, he was considered disloyal and sent to Tule Lake camp. There, his mail was stamped "enemy mail." In 1946, Shigeiko was sent back by bus to Stockton, she was re-united with her husband a year later.



Shigeiko Ide, Ikebana teacher by one of her creations

Photo Sophie Braccini

When asked about her feelings at the time of the deportation, Ide says she remembers not being surprised to be sent away: "We were used to being discriminated against, we were different, we had darker skin, it was normal." The chilling statement may partly explain why her generation was called "the quiet generation." They wanted to forget about that period of their lives, and it took the fighting spirit of the new generation to finally get Ronald Reagan to apologize for the US Government in 1988. But maybe as a result of this early experience the grandmother of eight young Americans and honored "Sensei" who lives peacefully in Lafayette, confides that she never wanted to give up her Japanese first name and never felt totally assimilated.



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