

My Life Story

By

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Story Keepers



Nina Merwin

Idell Lewis

Acknowledgments

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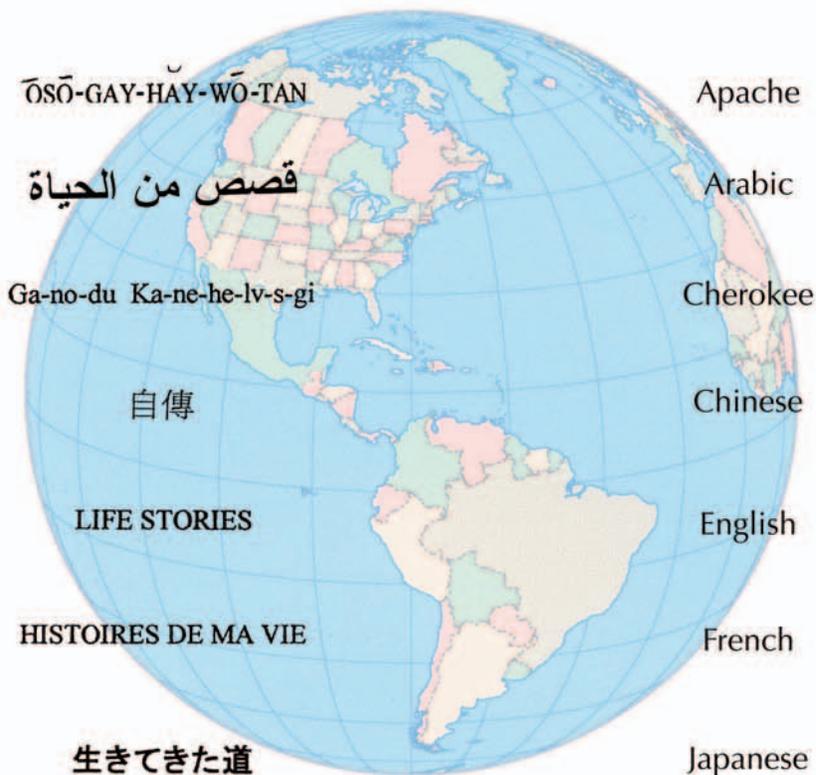
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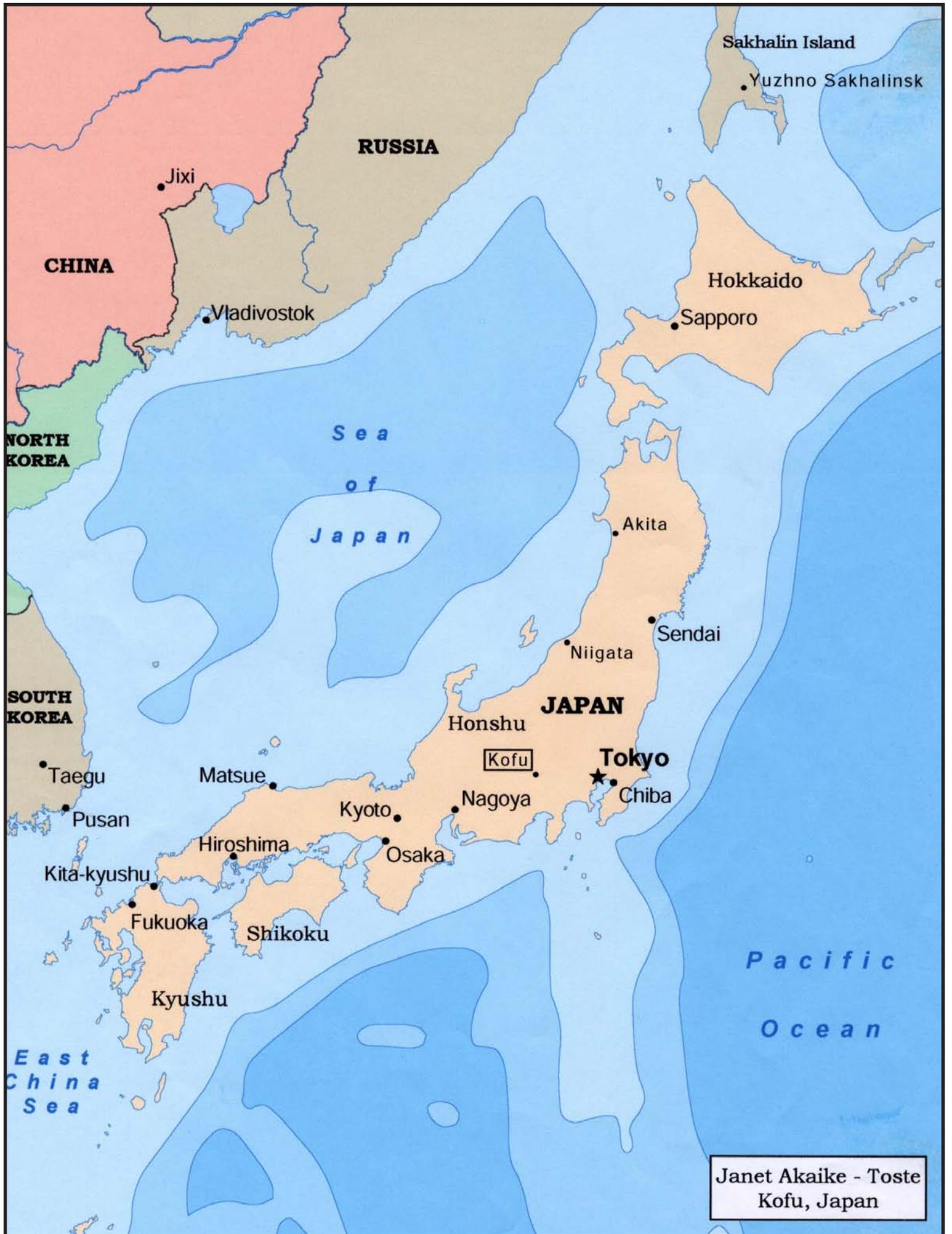
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Jim Mauldin, Coordinator
July, 2001

The Ethnic Life Stories Project . . . giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.





Janet Akaike - Toste
Kofu, Japan

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this story to:

My father and mother, Migiwa and Yoshie Akaike, who gave me life.

My husband, Anthony Paim Toste with whom it was possible to bear life, even to celebrate it, and without whom I could not have told half of my story.

Our beautiful, loving daughters, Eriko Maria Akaike-Toste and Emiko Natalia Akaike-Toste, who will continue their own stories.

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COMMENT ON THE JAPANESE
TITLE

"Watashi no ikitekita michi."

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美世子

The Japanese word "*michi*" means a road or a "way". It has been my favorite word for a long time. I have a saying. I'm not sure when I first wrote it, but it has become one of my favorite mottos. I think I may have copied it when I was in junior high. It does not use the actual word "*michi*" but it suggests it by using the word "*ippo*", denoting steps. It goes like this:

Ikanaru toki nimo
Jibun wa omou
Mou ippo
Ima ga ichiban daijina toki da
Mou ippo

Roughly translated, it means:

In times of trouble
I think to myself
One more step
"Now" is the most important time
One more step

This motto talks about life as a "road", a "way", encouraging one to take one step or one day at a time. It reminds us that life is an accumulation of one day at a time, everyday is "today", or "NOW", the most important day. It is a hard concept to actualize in one's daily life, but, nevertheless, I think it is important to aspire to it. The title for my story describes perfectly my motto and the way I have tried to live my life. In Japanese, the title is translated literally as "The way I have lived." I think I have been living my life, taking one step at a time, often stumbling, to this point of my life.

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CHAPTER 1

ROOTS



My full name is Janet Miyoko Akaike-Toste. My maiden name was Miyoko Akaike. Miyoko is my first name. "Mi" means beautiful. "Yo" means world. And "Ko" means child. It means "a child of a beautiful world". In Japanese, there are many different characters for the name "Miyoko", but my father wanted to use this particular combination. A more common combination of characters for "Miyoko" would be translated as "a child of a beautiful generation". I am very glad that my father chose "beautiful world". I interpreted my father's wish for me as "Do your best to be part of this beautiful world." It gives me something to live up to. I'm trying!

My last name, Akaike, means "red pond". My father said he was not exactly certain of its origin, but we are supposed to be the descendants of a noble clan that had been defeated and fled to the area now known as Yamanashi prefecture, especially around the town of Kofu, where I was born. There was a power struggle between the two powerful clans in the 11th century. The "red" in my name signifies the color of blood. My name is a rare one in Japan. Very few people have the name, Akaike, some in Kyushu, the southern island and many in Yamanashi, especially the Kofu area. Someday I would love to research my family background.

Janet, the American name, was given to me by an English teacher at a YMCA in Tokyo. I went to an English class for a few months before coming to America. My brother was given the name Jesse. I don't remember what we learned. By the time my brother and I walked back home, both of us forgot what we had learned. At least we'd been given American names. When we came to America my father said, "You know, your Japanese names are too hard for Americans to pronounce. So let's use Janet and Jesse." It wasn't "cool" then to have an ethnic name.

When I decided to get naturalized, I made a decision to make "Janet" my first name and "Miyoko" my middle name. Japanese people don't have the custom of having middle names, but I decided it was a great opportunity. One reason for making "Janet" my first name was that all my school records were listed in the name "Janet". Also everyone knew me as "Janet".

When I got married, I decided to hyphenate my last name. I did not want to lose the "Akaike" part of my identity. I grew up in the 60's and 70's with the "Women's Liberation Movement". It made me think about woman's status in society, etc. My husband embraced the idea. Actually, it came in handy, so to speak, when I started to teach Japanese. Students are able to identify better with my Japanese last name "Akaike".

I was born on April 2, 1949. I am an Aries. I am an Ox according to the Japanese 12-animal zodiac system. I am not sure whether I was born at home or at a hospital. But I know for sure my mother had a very good doctor. I was born and grew up in Kofu until I was around 3 or 4 years old. My parents were at the height of managing a very successful business. They had many employees. We even had an American car! I think it was a Ford, one of the first in Japan. We had a chauffeur, too. Unfortunately, they lost it all.

MY PARENTS

Interestingly, my father was born in 1917 in San Francisco, in the area now known as "Japan Town". He was born an American. His name was Migiwa, meaning "seashore". His father, my grandfather, Hajime, left Japan at age 16 and came to America. He lived here and there working on the west coast, and finally settled in the Bay Area. He married (an arranged marriage) a Japanese woman who was a kindergarten teacher. She died before my father was five years old. My grandfather went to an art school in San Francisco, but decided that art was not going to support him and his family, so he decided to go into the ministry, the Christian Scientist Church. I heard he was an ordained minister.

When my father was about 5, my grandfather took him back to Japan and then to Manchukuo (occupied Manchuria, China) where he started a Japanese language school. My grandfather remarried, so my father was brought up by his step-mother. He had two half-brothers. My father said it was a " typical" step-mother and step-son relationship. It was O.K., but not great. He finished high school in Manchukuo. Then, he enrolled at Doshisha University in Kyoto, still a famous

Christian university. He majored in economics. He met my mother when he was around 20 years old, while still in college. I am not really sure how my parents met, but I think that my mother was a waitress at a restaurant in Kyoto. My mother was five years older than him. He was a journalist for a while until World War II. He became a lieutenant and was sent back to Manchukuo. I remember my father laughing and telling us that he learned how to dig trenches in preparation for the Russians to attack China.

My mother, Yoshie, was born in Hiroshima in 1912. Her father abandoned the family, and took off to Hawaii; they never heard from him again. I don't remember how many siblings she had; a few sisters, I think. Her mother, my grandmother, raised them all by herself. To use the politically correct word, my mother came from a "dysfunctional" family. I think she started to work at a tobacco factory when she was 16 years old. She was a chain smoker till my father died in 1986. My mother had a third grade education, I believe. But she was intelligent and loved to read. She was very literate.

My mother had a child before she met my father. I did not know that I had a half-sister for a long time. I found out about her when I was 23, when I went back to Japan to visit my relatives in Hiroshima. My parents had me address her as " *Oneechan* ", a respect title for one's older sister. Occasionally I wondered why, but never questioned it! All those years I had thought she was my cousin. We've fallen out of touch. I'm not sure what she is doing.

My parents were not legally married until I was about to be born. My father told me they did not feel like they had to "legalize" their relationship. They thought that their union was sacred, without anybody sanctioning it. But, if they did not legalize their marriage, I would have been a "bastard" child. I call my parents Japanese Bohemians! They certainly did not fit the "norm" of Japanese people.

My parents stayed together until my father died. My mother helped with the business when they were in Japan. After we came to America, my mother worked at the same place as my father. They had plenty of fights, but they stayed together. As I was growing up, I talked with both of my parents. They both helped me to see myself. My mother used to tell me this: "It is endless to look up and endless to look

down." I think she was telling me to be "content" with who I am, what I want, etc. My father used to say "Try looking at things from the other person's perspective." Sound advice!

My father was born in the year of the Ox, just like me. My mother was born in the year of the Rat. Guess who I'm married to? Yes, my husband was also born in the year of the Rat. Interesting isn't it? My father died of liver cancer about 15 years ago. My parents never pestered me about having children, but my father was very glad that I finally had children, and he was able to watch them grow a little! He doted on them.

I think I'm like both my mother and father, but more like my father. Both had strong beliefs as to what is right and wrong. They taught us values in the way they lived, being self-sufficient, independent and honest. They reared us well. I'm very grateful. The way I'm bringing up our children is very similar to the way my parents raised me.

MY BROTHER

Besides my half-sister, I have a younger brother, who is one year younger. His American name is Jesse, but his Japanese name is "Shinya". It means "the truth". I think it is a very hard name to "live up" to. He was born in 1950. I forgot which month! He was a good student until he hit high school. Then he dropped out for a while and later got a GED. When I was still teaching at Berkeley, (more later), he took one of the intensive summer session course in Japanese. My students did not realize that he was my brother for a long time. They thought we just had the same last name! He has gone through many transformations throughout his life. He has married twice and divorced twice. He has a son that my mother named Taichi. It means a "broad, open, and generous character". I'm not sure what my brother is doing right now. I think he is living in our parents' old home in Oakland, California.

CHAPTER 2 CHILDHOOD MEMORIES



My Japanese first name is Miyoko, but my parents never called me by that name unless I misbehaved, which was not very often. They called me "*Oneechan*", a respect title for one's older sister. It is what my brother used to call me. So, my parents called me "*Oneechan*". I referred myself as "*Oneechan*", as well.

Although I was born in Kofu, we lived in Tokyo most of the years when I was growing up in Japan. We moved several times but I don't remember the homes except the last one. We lived right in the middle of Tokyo in a district called Kanda. We rented the entire second floor of a house. Most of the space was devoted to business. My parents operated a men's tailoring business. Quite a few employees also stayed there. I did not have a room of my own. It was not a really healthy living situation. My parents were both so busy with the business that my brother and I were often left alone. I don't remember any rules. I went to school, came home, and played with my friends outside. I also helped my mother with washing, cleaning and shopping. She never told me to do these chores. I just did them. I also took care of my brother. My half-sister was really the oldest, but she lived in Hiroshima, so I was the oldest; and the oldest was supposed to take care of one's sibling. I also did some errands for them. When both of my parents were gone at night, I even took phone messages for the business. I was only nine, or so.

As a student, I was only an average student. I don't remember much about what we did at school. But, I do remember bowing very low when a teacher passed by, and cleaning the classroom! I went up through the third grade in Japan.

I tended to be a loner. If the neighboring kids got into a fight, I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I refused to take sides. I didn't play with anyone until all the kids came to invite me to play. My parents were so preoccupied with the business, I was often left alone. I liked reading, and I remember my father buying me many books, including Shakespeare for young kids. I still have them. I brought them from Japan.

As I've mentioned before, my parents were "Japanese Bohemians" and didn't really care to celebrate traditional Japanese holidays. They did celebrate New Year's Eve by inviting all of their employees to a

restaurant and treating them. One thing they did was to send us to my paternal grandparents' house for Christmas. As I mentioned before, my grandfather was a Christian Scientist and introduced us to Santa Claus. Now, this was over 40 years ago. In general, Japanese people had no concept of Santa. My friends did not understand at all. Well, I didn't either, but I liked it because we received presents! On Christmas Eve, we would stay overnight at our grandparents' house. Of course, I tried to stay up to catch a glimpse of this Santa Claus, who was bringing us presents. But, of course, they waited until we went to sleep before setting out the presents. I still have one or two things I got from them.

My family differed from other Japanese families. We ate such things as cheese and salami. We were not typical Japanese of that time, because my father had grown in Manchuria and my grandfather had been to America.

One year before we came to America, at age 10, I contracted an early stage of tuberculosis called wet pleurisy. It is a build-up of water in the lungs. I stopped going to school for a whole year; I stayed home. At first, for several months my father forbade me to read, watch T.V. or listen to the radio. I had to lie quietly, not doing anything. It was tough! And our family physician came and gave me a shot of penicillin on my derriere, once a week. Later, my father gave me a mirror so I could "play" with it!

I lost touch with my school friends and neighborhood playmates because I did not see them for a whole year. Then, in August, 1960, when I was 11 years old, we came to America.

A half year before our departure, my father had already left for America. He sent us a thick catalog, a Sear's I believe. We were so fascinated by it. Other than that, I really didn't know where we were going. All I knew was that we were leaving Japan and joining our father in a country called America.

CHAPTER 3 VOYAGE TO AMERICA AND STARTING OUT



My father was already in America. When my mother told us that we were also going to America to join our father, I was glad. I really did not have any feelings one way or another because we were going as a family. I wasn't scared or apprehensive. At that time, I was not even worried about not knowing how to speak English. I was indeed a child.

My mother, my brother, and I joined him in August, 1960. We came to America on a cargo ship. It doesn't sound good if I say "cargo ship", but it was like a luxury liner! There were only a few passengers. I don't even remember how many, but I think there were only 10 to 15 at the most. There were quite a few graduate students going to universities in the United States. We were the only "family" with children. We had American-style breakfast in the morning, Japanese-style cuisine for lunch and continental-style for dinner.

The very first morning we had oatmeal. At that time, we had never seen nor eaten oatmeal so we didn't know what to do! We did not eat that morning. We had dinners with the captain of the ship and other officers in the formal dining room. There were so many forks, knives, and spoons that I did not know what to do. I watched the person across from me and tried to imitate him or her. I almost drank the water out of a finger bowl. It took about 10 to 15 days to cross the ocean. Sometimes the sea was so rough that we became quite seasick.

We arrived in San Francisco at the Fishermen's Wharf area. My first initiation to American women happened the time we docked at San Francisco. When a couple of women came aboard, I was totally taken aback. I have never seen such a huge woman in my life. I was totally scared for the first time in my life. Also, the custom officer was very mean to my mother, and made her open up the entire contents we brought from Japan. She was a packrat; I think she brought almost everything we had! I still vaguely remember how high our belongings were piled up in a middle of a room. I don't understand why the customs official made her do that. We were immigrants from Japan, after all, one woman with two children. All three of us came with permanent visas, yes, the green cards. I don't know how we got them.

My father met us and took us to Lodi, California. He had become a migrant farmer in Lodi, living in a camp. He had rented a one-bedroom duplex for us family. The initial shock of seeing "huge"

American women lasted for a while. Everything seemed "huge": eggplants, watermelons, onions, etc. etc. Also, I could not distinguish American people. They all looked the same, with huge noses. It was terrible!

My father became acquainted with quite a few Japanese people, so we were very glad! However, I thought it was strange that their children could not speak Japanese at all. I wondered why they looked so Japanese, but couldn't speak a word of Japanese. I realized a few years later that they were Americans who just happened to be of Japanese descent. But I thought it was a little sad to see a Japanese-American boy shouting " If those Japs attack again, I'm going to kill them all." It's too bad that the boy had no idea of his background. For a while, all my American classmates and friends spoke fluent Japanese in my dreams!

I started school almost as soon as we came to America. I began at fourth grade because I had only finished the third grade in Japan. It was tough. There were no ESL classes at that time. I was with a regular class. I did not understand anything for a long time. I only excelled in arithmetic. I had already learned division and multiplication in Japan, whereas my American classmates had not. I used to copy from an encyclopedia, verbatim, for reports. I think my classmates complained to the teacher that I was cheating!

My father also tried to teach us English. He had us memorize the conjugation of all the irregular verbs. Can you imagine? I did memorize them without knowing the meaning of the words. I could not pronounce them too well either. It worked though. To this day I can recite them. Now I know the meaning, too. My father also emphasized spelling. He used to give us vocabulary tests, and gave us a penny each for the correct spelling. The penny at that time had more value than it does today.

I remember just one traumatic experience. We used to say the Pledge of Allegiance every day, accompanied by the national anthem or other patriotic songs. Well, one morning I was asked to choose a song. I did not know any of the titles. I could not even recite the pledge very well then. I was so mortified that I cried and ran home, and did not return to school that day.

Living under the pressure of being "forced" to speak and write English, I demanded that my parents, who really did not have any spare money, to subscribe to a Japanese children's magazine for me. My brother did not care at all to read Japanese, but I craved it. Also, I demanded to be taken to the weekly Japanese movie night on Saturdays at a Buddhist temple. At that time, there was an itinerant person who traveled from city to city bringing Japanese movies. He was so tickled to see Japanese children coming to the movies that he only charged my parents and let my brother and me see them for free.

My parents were immigrants, and did not really have any extra money so I did not demand much. I did not ask for fancy clothes, shoes, etc. But, I did demand two things, and I used to rant and rave, and even cry, if they said no. I wanted my subscription to the Japanese magazine and a weekly movie. I did not think I was asking too much. When I think about it now, I wanted to keep my Japanese identity. I wanted to read and think in Japanese. I wanted to hear Japanese. In this way, I actually improved and increased my vocabulary in Japanese. After all, I came with only a third grade vocabulary. By my college years I was reading magazines for adult Japanese women.

We lived in Lodi for two years. The year that we came to Lodi, we heard that Lodi became a sister-city with Kofu. What a coincidence! Sister-city with my own birth town. Both of them are famous for grape vineyards. I'm not sure if they are still sister-cities or not. The second year we moved to a smaller town next to Lodi, but I don't quite remember the name. I think it is Woodbridge. There, we lived in a shack built within a factory where walnuts were processed. We did not have a bathroom. We had to go to the one at the campsite.

My father got a job as a foreman at a vineyard, doing irrigation, pruning, and picking grapes. Lodi is famous for growing Tokay grapes. I think they are used mostly for producing inexpensive wines. Since the grape vineyard was right in front of our "house", we ate a lot of grapes. One time my brother and I ate so much we thought our teeth were going to fall off from too much sugar!

Off-season, my father camped at other areas picking peaches, etc. He picked a quite variety of fruits and vegetables. The most memorable was celery. My parents brought back so much that my mother started to

pickle them Japanese style! But, my mother hated farming. She did not want to stay in a rural area. So, my father found a job as a custodian at Mills College, an all-girl college in Oakland, California. We moved there our third year in America.

CHAPTER 4 SCHOOL YEARS



Janet Akaike-Toste, 2001

We moved to Oakland and settled in a one-bedroom duplex near Mills College. My father was a custodian, and my mother worked in a kitchen at one of the dormitories. A few years later, my father started a second job as a dishwasher at a Japanese restaurant called Suehiro in Japan Town of San Francisco. Later, my mother quit Mills College and also started to work at the restaurant. My father could have gotten a white collar work in Japan Town because he had a college education. But, he did not like it, preferring blue-collar type work instead. A few years later my parents bought an old house near Mills College. My brother and I grew up there.

The first year in Oakland, I went to a neighboring grammar school as a sixth grader. However, the principle suggested that I skip the sixth grade and go to the junior high school because I was one year older than my classmates and I seemed like a "mature little girl". So, I did. I was sick for a whole week. I think it was a psycho-somatic illness. I had a fever from too much stress! The school put me in college-prep classes. I had to enroll in either Spanish or French right away. I chose French. I actually enjoyed French class, because I felt it was the only class I can compete with my classmates without having the disadvantage of not being able to speak and write English very well. When my French teacher told me that my pronunciation needed some work, my father bought me a record and I practiced everyday. I did not study English pronunciation. My father thought that I would "pick it up" naturally. Well, I did not. I still have a bit of an accent. It is too bad.

Throughout my junior and high school years, my parents had three jobs between them but never allowed us to work, even babysitting. They told me to focus on school. Study, study, and study. That's all they said. They had never pushed studying when we were in Japan. I studied a lot. I think that's all I did. A little later, I also took German. Imagine taking all those foreign languages, when I could not still speak English too well.

My father helped me a lot with homework and papers all through out my junior high years. I got all A's, but I always felt a bit bad because of all the help my father gave me. So, when I went on to high school I stopped asking for help. I tried by myself. When I look back occasionally, I think I should have gotten some help, especially in physics. I could not grasp the concepts at that time. I graduated from

high school with only one B! Fremont High had a record, if I remember correctly, of having one straight A student every year. I "broke" that record in 1968. I was the top student, but not a straight A student. I still feel a bit bad that I "marred" their record.

During these 6 years of junior and high school, I became very close with several girls. We have stayed in touch all these years. They are very special relationships. I can call them anytime, and they will listen to me, whether I talk about happy things, sad things or worries. They also share their joys and sorrows with me. They have known me since I was unable to express myself too well in English. Two of them, Diane and Sue, have come to see us here in Springfield. Another one, Janice, went with us to Japan when my husband and I took a group of my students on a study tour.

Janice used to organize lots of get-togethers like slumber parties, going to San Francisco boardwalk, etc. Those were the only activities I did with my friends. Otherwise, I pretty much stayed home, doing my homework, reading books, and watching some TV. I did not have any boyfriends. I did like some guys, but ...my parents told me that it was their "fault" that they brought us here to America, so we had our own choice of whom we might marry. They never told us we could not date. All they said was "study!" I don't think they would have prohibited me from going out with boys, but I was not ready.

By high school, all of my friends had boyfriends. I did not go to any school dances, football games, etc. If I remember correctly, a boy asked me out to a school dance, but I didn't say "yes". I was too afraid. I was very shy and could not express myself in English too well. I just talked with my friends. So, I missed out on all the school activities, including the senior prom. I think I cried that night! It was a boat cruise around San Francisco Bay. My parents gave me the proverbial parental advice, "why don't you go with your brother"? My first prom was when I chaperoned one as a teacher here in Springfield!

Also, everyone had driver's licenses except me. I was not too interested in hurrying to get one. I took buses everywhere. The transportation system in the Bay Area is very well laid out. If it hadn't been, I'm sure I would have felt the pressure to get a license. Also, I

relied on my friends! My father tried to teach me once, and he got sick. I think it was a coincidence, but I felt bad and never asked him again. I was close to thirty years old when I got my driver's license. To this day, I cannot parallel park. I failed the parallel parking portion of my driving tests in all three states I lived in, California, Washington, and here in Missouri!

In October, 1988, when we had just moved to Springfield, I went to our high school reunion in Oakland, California. It was the 20th reunion of Fremont High. I met up with my friend, Diane in Denver and went to the Bay Area together. There, we saw our other close friends, Sue, Janice, Sheila and Joan. I guess I have changed a lot since 1968, because no one recognized me, except my close friends, who have known me all along! It was a surprise for me. I thought everyone still looked the same and sounded the same, just a little bit older. But they didn't recognize me. I must have changed quite a bit since high school!

CHAPTER 5 COLLEGE YEARS



All throughout my junior and high school years, my mother told me over and over that I should become a dentist, or, better yet, an orthodontist. She reasoned that most Americans get orthodontic work, and it would surely be a good job for me, with good and steady income. She did have a point. It is a good occupation, but I was not interested. I liked French, and I was thinking of maybe majoring in French in college. I did not tell my parents, especially my mother. I listened to her for 6 years without any protest, because she meant well. I did not have the heart to tell her "no". When I graduated from high school, I had to tell her. I'm sure she was disappointed, but she did not get angry. My parents hardly ever got mad at me. One of my classmates became a dentist. When I heard that he became a dentist, I thought to myself that I could have been one too. Oh, well.

For college, I chose the University of California at Berkeley. There were many other colleges in the area, but I did not even apply anywhere else. My father suggested that maybe I should but my reply was, "If Berkeley does not accept me, the number one student from Fremont High, I will not go to college." It showed my pride. I knew my English was not that of a native speaker, but I still had my pride. All of my friends who could have gone to Berkeley were afraid, and went to the California State University at Hayward for the first two years, before transferring to Berkeley. Some stayed at Hayward. I could have been admitted to Mills College for free because my father was an employee, but I did not have any interest in a all-girl college.

Even after I graduated high school, I had problems expressing myself in writing. Berkeley had an entrance essay exam to determine if the new students needed a "remedial" non-credit English class. I knew I would fail it, so I decided to take an English class at a community college the summer I graduated from high school. In September, when the university started, I decided to take the exam anyway, knowing that since I had already taken the college English class, I did not have to take the "bonehead" English class even if I failed it. Well, guess what, I failed; but it was O.K..

When I started the freshman year, my father suggested that I try to graduate in three years. I thought about it, and said "O. K. I'll take the challenge." I did it. I went every summer session. When I finished, my father said "Congratulations!" That's it! Nothing special; no dinner, no

nothing. Now that I think about it, they could have given me something, don't you think? Well, they gave me the challenge. Besides, they paid for everything, the tuition and book money, etc. Why should I complain? Intrinsic value, isn't it?

I am not proud of my G.P.A.. I entered as a high school honor student and finished as an honor student, but, in the middle, I was a very mediocre student. I think I became tired of being a good student and went "the other way". I made "bad choices" when selecting classes to take pass/not pass. For some reason, I got better grades in those classes I took pass/not pass! I continued to take French at Berkeley for a little while. I loved French. I even took French conversation and pronunciation classes. When I received compliments from my professor on my French pronunciation and intonation, I was so pleased with myself. He asked me where I'd studied French! I guess you can acquire good pronunciation studying by yourself. But I decided to give up French, because I did not understand and grasp the intricate relationship of verb tenses. I was able to conjugate almost perfectly, but I did not understand it.

I did not understand English, either. I decided that I'd be a bad teacher so I changed my mind. When the time came for me to declare my major, I didn't know what to do. I asked my father for advice and he suggested that since I spoke and read and wrote a little Japanese, I should major in Japanese. I did. I was a typical college student, who did not know what to do. To finish my college degree in three years, I decided to take 15 credit hours of Mandarin for the last summer session. I loved it. I love to study languages, especially at the beginning stage when it is very simple, and not too complicated. That summer I "lived Chinese." All I did for 12 weeks was to go to school everyday in the morning and take the class, go home and study them, go back to the class in the morning, etc. Commuting by bus took 2 hours, one way, so you can imagine, I did "live" it. I studied in the bus, too. Also, my parents bought me the book and the record, so I could listen and practice pronunciation and conversation at home. Of course, I got an "A"!

So, again, even my college life was very "uneventful." I commuted to school, so I did not have many friends on campus. All of my friends were busy with their own college life, so I was all alone. When I finished my B.A. in Japanese language and literature in 1971, I

still did not know what to do with my life, so I decided to go to the graduate school. Even then, I was so afraid to fly out of my nest. I applied to Berkeley. I thought about the University of Washington in Seattle or Stanford, but I decided to stay at Berkeley.

Even during my college years I was not really interested in boys. I was pretty much still a loner. I did everything by myself. I stayed at campus so I could go see a Japanese movie at one of the movie festivals going on all the time on campus. I went home by bus, sometimes coming home around 11 or 12 o'clock in the evening because I did not have a car. My parents did not seem to be worried at all. Certainly, I was not afraid. It was still safe at that time.

GRADUATE YEARS

Looking back on my life, I think I had the most fun and carefree life while I was a graduate student. It was hard, but also I had a lot of fun, studying and teaching. I took three years to get a B.A., but, for my M.A., it took me 5 years. I procrastinated finishing my thesis because I started to get into teaching, and spent a lot more energy and time on it.

I still commuted from home. I started teaching as a teaching assistant (known as a T.A.) in September, 1972. I did not ask for it. A Japanese woman, a graduate student, said "How about Janet as a T.A.?". That's how I got the job. At first, it was hard. We did not get any training, what so ever. We just had to go to a section (about 20 students), and were expected to "teach them", doing oral drills etc.

I guess I was really nervous, because I overslept for the first class that started at 8 o'clock! It took me about 2 hours one- way to get to campus. Luckily, my brother was living with us so I woke him up and had him drive me to the campus. I went straight to my class, and did not stop by at our office. My colleagues got worried, and one of them came to see if I was in class. I did not even have time to get nervous about my first-time teaching. I went into my lesson right away.

I never had any experience teaching before, but I found myself liking it very much. Also, I received very good students' evaluations. Although I spoke Japanese and took courses for my major, I did not know how to "explain" any grammar. I was a "native speaker", although I myself did not think so. I bought a few Japanese textbooks, studied and took notes. Later, as the number of teaching assistants increased, we had a weekly meeting, which lasted for hours, discussing how to explain certain aspects of Japanese grammar and vocabulary. It was a great learning experience. It was a lot of fun. By this time, my level of Japanese had improved quite a bit. Many Japanese natives thought I had graduated from a Japanese college. I kept up the subscription to the Japanese magazine, and I also read a lot of Japanese novels, which increased my vocabulary. Also, being at Berkeley, I had opportunities to meet and talk with the Japanese foreign exchange students and to teach with some of the Japanese graduate students.

As one of the requirements for an M.A. degree in Japanese language and literature, we had to take not only classical Japanese literature classes but also a couple of classical Chinese courses. Also, many years of studying French came in handy because we had to pass a 2-hour translation exam in French. We had to translate into English with no more than about a dozen major mistakes. Well, I failed the first exam. My professor gave us a passage in old French. I did not expect that. Then I took a non-graded, non-credit French translation course for graduate students, just to brush up on my French. I passed the second time. If I had continued on to the Ph.D. level, I would have had to pass a German test. At that time, Berkeley was still one of those old, traditional schools for training scholars.

During the graduate years, I made a lots of friends, all graduate students in Japanese. I still keep in touch with some of them. As a matter of fact, I just saw one of them in Tokyo, this past July. The last time I had seen him was a bit over 20 years ago! Another one just got remarried.

When I was around 25, I decided to either get a car or to move to Berkeley and live in an apartment. I thought it was time. I was getting enough money teaching to support myself. When I told my parents about my decision, my mother did not seem to mind, but my father was completely against it. It was terrible. I don't remember why he did not

want me to go. I moved out anyway to a studio in Berkeley. My father did not want to talk to me for a little while but he calmed down and sometimes came to see me. It was the first time that I had lived alone. It was nice. I used to buy fresh flowers every week. I started to take yoga lessons from an East Indian Yoga master. I learned Hatha Yoga, which came in handy later when I had my first baby.

CHAPTER 6 MARRIAGE



When I was about 23 years of age, I thought I had to get married. I think I brainwashed myself into believing what the Japanese magazines said about "old maids". I had several friends, but I decided on one guy. My ideal at that time was to find a guy just like me. Similar in age, Japanese, of course, and "bilingual". Well, I found one. He came to the United States in 1960, the same year as me. And he was the same age. He also spoke Japanese and English. Unbelievable, isn't it? Well it did not work out. He fit the "qualifications" exactly that I had in mind, but about basics, the bottom line, we did not see eye to eye. Although he grew up in America, his values and way of thinking were very old-fashioned Japanese. He actually did not like America, so he returned to Japan. I like Japan, but for a woman, and overall living conditions, I think America is the best place to live. I like to visit and would stay in Japan, if possible, for a few years, but I would prefer to live here. But, I do miss the Japanese food, especially living here in Springfield.

It was during my graduate days that I met my husband. Some of my classmates (all girls) became friends with my husband's friends (mostly all guys) from the International House, where he lived the first year he was at Berkeley. My husband's full name is Anthony Paim Toste. His parents came from Portugal. He was born in San Jose, California. Technically, he is a second generation Portuguese-American. He has a brother 10 years younger, Joe and a sister, Lucy, my age. He had another brother who died of acute leukemia. His parents are both deceased now, but they used to live in San Jose, California. Now Lucy lives in their house.

At the beginning, we did things together as a group, his international friends and my classmates. Well, they did more things together like take a horse riding class. I just joined whenever they had parties. Soon, some of them became couples! A Dane became a close friend with a Philippina. They are still married now. An East Indian got together with a New York Jewish American girl. They are married and living in Boston. Another close friend of ours is a professor at Washington University in Saint Louis.

We lived together for a year. We decided to get married in 1975 before all of our friends were gone, moving to different parts of the United States. I was 26 and my husband was 27. Both sets of parents left it to us to plan and finance the wedding. Actually, my parents paid

for the reception dinner. The rest we paid for ourselves. I was still teaching at Berkeley, and he was getting paid as a research assistant. My M.A. thesis was still not finished at that time. I finished it after the wedding. My husband would finish his Ph.D. dissertation a little later.

Since my husband was brought up Catholic, we decided to have the wedding at a progressive Catholic church in Berkeley where our friends also had their wedding. We got married on the first day of summer, June 21st, 1975. It was Saturday. We wrote the wedding ceremony, and came up with our own wedding vows. Instead of being given by my father, I walked the aisle with my husband. For a long time, one of my professors kept talking about our wedding, saying that he never attended a wedding where the bride was not given away. We hired a guitarist to sing "Wedding Song." I did not wear the traditional wedding gown. I found a \$50 Gunny Sack long-sleeved dress in an off-white color. I still have it.

I cannot zip it up any more, though! My husband wore a Pierre Cardin "body suit" that we bought at Macy's. I carried a bouquet of red roses. I looked for a nice brimmed hat, but I could not find it. They were all too big.

We all went to San Francisco for the reception at the Japanese restaurant where my parents worked. It was a big restaurant. We had a sit-down dinner starting with a half lobster and all you can eat gourmet Japanese food including, of course, sushi and shrimp tempura. We also had entertainment of traditional Japanese musical instruments, dances, etc. And, of course, dancing. I think we had about 150 people. Later that night, with a few close friends, we went back to our house in Berkeley Hills and opened all the presents.

The next day was Sunday. I remember cleaning up all the boxes and wrapping paper from the wedding presents. The next day, Monday, I started to teach the summer session. Because of my teaching job, we decided to postpone our honeymoon. We went on the honeymoon, the next summer, to Europe for a month. We went to Luxembourg, London and Manchester, Paris, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen. We stayed at our friends' house in England part of the time and spent close to 10 days in Copenhagen, also staying at a friend's house. Our plan was to go to Germany but we never made it.

I taught continuously from 1972, including almost all the summer sessions, until 1980. After getting my M.A., I was hired as a teaching associate, and, later as a lecturer. As I said before, I had a lot of fun teaching! Teaching is a lot of work, not only preparing lesson plans, but actually trying to have students learn something. For the first couple of years, after teaching, I used to go home and sleep a couple of hours; that's how tired I was! I taught at Berkeley, except for one year at San Francisco State University. I don't know why, but I became tired of Berkeley; I wanted a change of venue. My parents thought that I had completely lost my senses. I was hired as a less-than-50% lecturer. I commuted to San Francisco for a year, but I did not like it. So, I asked my professors to take me back! I was so glad when they said "Yes."

We lived with my parents for a year and when they bought a tiny house next door, they rented us the house for free, in lieu of us helping them to remodel the house and landscape the yard. My husband used to love talking with my father and helping him with remodeling. He considers my father, not a father-in-law, but like his own father.

It is amazing how they were able to save money working on jobs that paid the lowest wages. And they were so generous to give us the house for free for almost four years.

CHAPTER 7

RAISING CHILDREN



After my husband received his Ph. D. in Biochemistry from Berkeley and worked at San Francisco Medical Center on a postgraduate fellowship for three years, he got a job in Richland, Washington. He worked as a research scientist at a think-tank called Battelle Northwest Laboratory. It was the first time that I had moved away from my parents and all my friends. I also had to give up my job as a lecturer at Berkeley.

I was in total shock. I did not and could not do a lot the first year. I think I spent a lot of time crying. I finally came out of the black funk, so to speak, and we decided that it was time for us to raise a family. I was 32 when I had our first child. We named her Eriko, a child of "reason and benevolence" and a Portuguese middle name, Maria, with my hyphenated last name, Akaike-Toste. She was born on June 28, 1981. I had a little bit of complication giving birth. Although my water broke, contractions did not start. So, I stayed the night hearing many women "screaming". My contractions did not start in the morning, so I was given some pitosin, a medication used to induce contraction. Still, it took a long time, with very strong doses of pitosin. I thought I was going to die! But I wanted to deliver as naturally as possible, so I did not ask for any pain killer. I tried to concentrate doing the Hatha breathing. It was something else. She was born at 7lbs 9 oz. and 21 inches.

The second baby was born on June 2, 1983. We named her Emiko (a child of "beauty and benevolence" and a Portuguese middle name, Natalia. Actually, Natalia was my mother-in-law's first name. "Beauty" is from my name and "benevolence" is the same as her older sister's name. Of course, her last name is hyphenated! This time I thought the labor went smoothly, dilating perfectly. But she was just a little too big! I had to have a C-section. I wanted to see the operation but my doctor did not let me. She was born at 10 lbs 1 oz. and 21 inches. She was a big baby! My hospital "roommate" had a big boy, close to 11 lbs. So, our babies were known as the "king" and "queen" of the nursery room.

I believe in nursing babies. I think human milk is the best thing for human babies. I know it is getting hard to have a family with just one income, so I am not adamant about it. Each to her own. I feel I was lucky to be able to stay home and nurse my children and to be with

them; but it was hard. I was very nervous with the first one, not knowing what to do. I was afraid to even hire baby sitters. I took her everywhere. Maybe my first one felt my nervousness because she literally did not sleep more than 2 hours at a time. She was up every couple of hours around the clock for about three years. By the time the second one came around, I was ready to hire a babysitter. I was very relaxed.

I talked to our children in nothing but Japanese until they went to preschool. I read Japanese books and sang about 10 Japanese lullabies every night. My husband spoke to them in English. They had no trouble. They were never confused. It is amazing to see the versatility of the young mind! We decided against Portuguese. We thought two languages were enough. They are not quite bilingual, but they know a lot of Japanese language.

In Richland, we met and became very good friends with quite a few Japanese women married to American men. They all had children a few years older than ours. We used to get together and celebrate Japanese and American holidays. We started with Thanksgiving, then Christmas, then a Japanese New Year Celebration, and later, Japanese Girls' Day on March 3rd. Also, I taught their children some Japanese. They did not want to speak Japanese to their children. Their husbands were more interested in having the children learn Japanese.

My theory is that these Japanese women more or less abandoned their country to marry an American. They wanted to learn English, and did not want to be bothered with Japanese. Of course they did not "abandon" Japanese food. They shared that with their children, but nothing else. On the other hand, I came as a child. I did not consciously choose one country over another. I was "forced" to come to America. I had no choice. That's why, I think, I insisted on getting Japanese magazines and books, and demanded that my parents take me to see Japanese movies. I wanted to have our children have some appreciation for my background. We did not push my husband's Portuguese background, but they grew up hearing Portuguese spoken between my husband and my parents-in-law. I even sneaked in some French and German books when they were little.

My parents also came to Richland to help me. We loved having them. They really helped. My father especially loved looking after our children. They also cooked Japanese festival feasts for us and our friends. When we went back to California, my mother-in-law also loved seeing our children and helped us a lot.

Besides raising the children, I still continued some teaching. The first few years, when our children were infants, I went back to Berkeley to teach summer sessions. My friends invited me back. In Richland, I taught Japanese at a community college to a class of scientists whose "hobby" was learning Japanese. I taught for one year, and they wanted to continue, so, for a while, I had them come to our house. As I mentioned earlier, I had a little children's class too.

We bought our first house in Richland. It was a three bedroom, 2,400 square-foot home. Two-and-a-half stories with a basement. My husband and my father even built a "Japanese room" with a *tokonoma*, an alcove where the Japanese put decorations, like a scroll and a flower arrangement. We even bought Japanese traditional *tatami*, straw mats in Seattle, Washington.

When we first moved to Richland, I told my husband I wanted to return to California as soon as possible. I missed my parents, my friends, and my job. After a few years, though, I got accustomed living there, busying myself raising two children and having fun with our Japanese friends. I was becoming very comfortable. We lived in Richland for nine years. About 6 years ago, we had a chance to go back to Richland. It was a blast! We stayed at our friends' homes. They had parties for us.

CHAPTER 8

SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

Cultivating cultures



The Toste family: from left, Emiko Akaike-Toste, Tony Toste, Eriko Akaike-Toste and Janet Akaike-Toste.

Mike Penprase/The News-Leader

■ **Portrait:** The Akaike-Toste family's home life resounds with Japanese, Portuguese and American accents.

By Patti Lindsay

The News-Leader

With respect and sensitivity, Tony and Janet Akaike-Toste not only bring the diversity of their cultures to their own family life, but also to the friends and students they welcome to their home.

"We love to entertain," Tony said. "We celebrate all the traditional Japanese holidays ... Our girls and their friends love to wear kimonos."

A native of Portugal, Tony met his Japanese wife while the two attended the University of California at Berkeley. Janet, born in Kofu and raised in Tokyo, came to the United States with her parents in 1960 at the age of 11.

"We came to start a new life," Janet said. "The 1960s were an economically depressed time in Japan."

Tony's parents immigrated to the United States from the Azure Islands of Portugal when he was 5.

"My father owned a dairy farm near San Jose," Tony said. "I was 6 before I began to learn to speak English."

With such diverse backgrounds, the two understand the frustrations faced by immigrants and are united in their wishes for their children.

"I grew up trying to learn another language," Janet said. "Today, there's really no language I feel comfortable writing and thinking. I count in Japanese and write in English. I cannot calculate in English. We want our girls to have a primary language in which they can feel comfortable."

To meet their goal, Tony said, Janet spoke nothing but Japanese when the girls were young.

"We wanted that to be their first language," he said.

Also proud of his own language, Tony said the couple decided that "two languages in the house is enough." He regrets that he no longer is fluent in his own tongue, though. Since his father's death, he has had little opportunity for Portuguese conversation.

"It's frustrating," he said. "I don't care how long you live in a country, if you don't use the language, you lose it."

Although Portuguese is not often spoken in the Toste household, a respect for the culture is emphasized.

Family meals are a combination of Japanese, American and Portuguese dishes, with

*Story concludes on Page 2E
(The family is active in the Sister Cities program.)*

In 1988, when my husband turned 40, after living in Richland, Washington for about 9 years, he said, "Honey, I'm tired of being a research scientist. I think I want to teach." He said there was an opportunity for an interview at a college called Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. I said, "Please show me a map, and let's see where Missouri is." Honestly, I did not want to go to the so-called deep South. I was afraid of prejudice. When I looked at the map, it didn't seem too far south so I said "O. K., go ahead." He came back with a big smile, and I said to myself, "Oh, oh! I've done it. Springfield, here we come!"

I did not want to repeat the "black funk" experience I had had in Richland, so, as soon as we settled in, I joined the SMSU's wives' club called the "SMSU Dames Club". I joined lunch and happy-hour groups! I was able to leave my children for a little while because my mother was with us. My father died of liver cancer several years before we moved. A few years later, my mother went back to her own home in Oakland.

We bought a very big house because we wanted my mother to have her own room and a bathroom. It is a very nice house, and we have decorated it with all sorts of art from all over the world. We like to collect things. We have paintings, dolls from Japan, Russia, mask collections, etc. Our friends say that we should charge an admission fee to people who visit our "museum."

The first year we came to Springfield, I did not work. Beginning the second year, I started to teach again. The first two years I taught classes at SMSU and at the secondary level. We came into town just in time to "satisfy" the Japanese interest. I was asked to start a program for the high schools. I was not certified, so I received a temporary certificate and I had to certify myself within two years. I decided to teach at the high school level and to stop SMSU because I did not have a Ph.D. I knew I could not stay too long at the college without one. I went to Drury for a certification program. For two years, I had two college and three high school Japanese classes to teach and one graduate course per semester to take. I also had to take courses during the summer. It was rough. But I survived. I am grateful for my mother's help while I was busy running around.

The high school Japanese program grew to 4 teachers besides myself. We received a federal grant for four years, bringing \$120,000 to the R-12 district. It was great. We also had Japanese teaching assistants who brought in about \$1,000 a year per assistant for teaching materials. We provided host families. It was great. We had, as a school district, the biggest high school Japanese program, at least in the entire Midwest. Also we were proud of the fact that all the teachers were certified in Japanese. Now we are smaller with two teachers, one employed full time at Kickapoo High. I commute everyday between the two high schools, Central and Glendale.

We have been very busy the past 12 years. After starting on a tenure-track assistant professorship, my husband is now a tenured full professor of Biochemistry and Chemistry at SMSU. Our two daughters grew up here in Springfield. They both went to Disney Elementary, Cherokee Middle School, and Kickapoo High School. They are both at SMSU now. They both have scholarships that pay full tuition. Emiko receives \$2,000 a year scholarship, besides her tuition. I am very proud of their accomplishments. They have to keep up their scholarships, so I still try to keep an eye on them. Motherhood never ends, does it?

A few years after living in Springfield, we became quite involved in the Sister-City Association. My husband was the president of the Springfield chapter for about 5 years. We were invited to our sister-city, Isesaki, Japan, a couple of times. We made many friends. One is a top Japanese calligrapher; another one is a very high-ranked tea master. We also became very good friends with one of the city officials, working together for 5 years on exchanges between Springfield and Isesaki. He brought his family here to Springfield a few years ago. Our daughters have been hosted by them. We have had many opportunities to take student groups to Isesaki. I have taken a group about 5 times. The last one was this past June, 2001. I was always jealous of my students at Berkeley who were able to go back and forth to Japan. But, ironically, after we moved here to Springfield, we have had many opportunities. I am planning to take a group again in the summer of 2003.

When we came to Springfield, I did not really experience anything special except that the people who saw us at stores and restaurants "looked" or "stared" at us like little children. I don't think they meant any harm. They were just curious because we don't have that

much of an Asian population here in Springfield. People tend to still look at us. But we are used to it.

I encountered the first experience of prejudice in Springfield through my first daughter. Her initiation to this town was getting kicked by a neighboring girl. Later that week, the same girl called my daughter a "Jap". Eriko came home and asked me what that meant. I told her. Since then, my daughters have been called "Jap" and "Chink" by some of their classmates. It is amazing, isn't it?

Because of their experience here, I think they are tougher. I always told them, "It is not our problem; it is their problem. Ignore them as much as possible." Now, they are avid humanists, and do not tolerate any kind of racial or other forms of discrimination. I am glad.

I have been called names by Central and Glendale students. There are some students who are racists, making "Oriental put-down words" as I pass by them. If I have enough energy that day, I may confront them; if not, I get mad but I let them go. Some of my students are taking my classes despite their peers' comments like, "Why are you taking Japanese or Chinese class, or whatever?" Or, their grandparents' comments like, "Why are you taking that Jap language." It does take tremendous courage for my students to take my class here in Springfield.

Our daughters and I feel much more "at home" in a more cosmopolitan environment where many more accents are spoken, but it is O.K.. Springfield is a beautiful place with hardly any crime. It is a quiet and safe place to raise children. I, myself, am determined to educate some of the children who are born here or at least raised here in Springfield. I want them to grow up to be global citizens. It is a never-ending proposition. But someone has to start it. I am not sure of my daughters. They may move because they are young and need to experience more. But, probably, I would stay here.

As for my husband, he is a Portugese-American. But, he was raised in a more cosmopolitan area, and he may feel he does not fit in either. But he likes a small college, like SMSU; and, as he says, there are many good points about living in Springfield. We have many good friends here in the Ozarks. As my mother said, "It is useless to look up and useless to look down."

I came to America when I was 11 years old. Linguists say that, by age 11 or 12, it is very hard to acquire a second language. I think so, too. It is also difficult to maintain your first one and develop it. I came with a third grade Japanese education. Almost all of my education has been here in America. But, it was still very difficult to acquire English. It took me a long time. I still think I cannot write as well as I should. As for my pronunciation, it is not bad, but it could have been much better if I had practiced. My father thought I would just "pick" it up, but it didn't happen. Linguists also say that one goes back to one's native tongue as one grows older. Yes, it's true. It is increasingly difficult for me to pronounce English, and I am reverting back to Japanese!

Also, although many people consider me bilingual, I feel my Japanese is not that good. It is O.K. Of course, it is better than most graduate students, but I don't consider mine good enough to be "native."

For a long time, Japanese people did not think I was Japanese, and, of course, American people thought I was an immigrant from Japan. Well, some Chinese people thought I was Chinese. So, besides the usual self-identity crisis one goes through as a teenager, I went through a "racial"/"ethnic" crisis. I felt I did not belong to either country. I felt caught in-between. As I grew older, I became more comfortable with myself, with my accents, with my inadequate Japanese and inadequate English. I came to like that new terminology, "global village". I like to call myself a "global citizen" rooted in the United States. I really feel America is one of the best countries in which to be a citizen.

Despite everything, I feel that one can maintain one's cultural identity and assimilate oneself in a country. I think we become "more rich" culturally, and in turn, enrich America and make America what it is, a country of diversity. We should not forget our heritage. We should teach our children our heritage. One's heritage and what America is do not have to clash with each other. It should be the cause for celebration. We don't have to choose between the two. The two can co-exist.

My father used to laugh and ask me what our daughters are going to do with their hyphenated last name when it is time for them to get married. I said it is up to them. But I hope they can keep part of their heritage somewhere.

CHAPTER 10 ON TEACHING

Inspiration, Integrity, and Destiny

She dances on the cloud of inspiration

Giving all her students a different thought, a new hope, and
a unique imagination

She flies upon the wings of strength and integrity

As she passes by we all learn of her loving drive of
patience and security

She leaps on the mountain of destiny

Letting every child experience what dreams the future
holds for their personal being

She is an artist of common love

But to me she'll always be my friend and my teacher of
inspiration, integrity, and destiny

Sensei, this is all you are to me.

Domo arigato gozaimasu,

Buu フウ

When I was a teenager, and even in college, I had no particular goal or ambition in my life. I was just an ordinary little girl growing up in Japan, and then became a super "nerd" throughout my junior and high school years. Still, I had no idea about what I wanted to be. As I mentioned before, I rejected my mother's suggestion and advice on becoming an orthodontist. I still did not have any alternative. At that time, girls were not really encouraged to be doctors, etc. Many people advised me to become a nurse. I thought to myself, if I were going to become a nurse, I might as well be a doctor. But I was not really interested in it. Even teaching, at first, I just fell into it. But, I think I discovered my life-long occupation when I started teaching at Berkeley. I loved it. I studied hard to become a better teacher. I started to see and think about how to teach day and night.

Sometimes I wonder if it is in my genes. My grandfather was a Christian Scientist, eager to proselytize, a form of "teaching", I think. Also, when he was living in Manchuria, he was running a Japanese school for the Chinese! My father's real mother was a kindergarten teacher. My father also loved to teach. He taught me a lot. He even tried teaching me German and French! Most of all, he taught me how to learn.

When we came to Springfield, and I started to teach at high school, I lost my nerve for a little while. I thought I loved teaching, but I did not realize how hard it was to teach high school students. I was blissfully ignorant. I had only taught at the college level, mainly to Berkeley students. I hardly had any trouble. But high school was different. I think I am finally getting used to it, after 12 years. Often, I became so frustrated I used to get angry, "rant and rave", and cry.

Because of my perpetual anger and frustration, and to find a way out, I started to read Zen books. It really helped, not only in teaching but also in living. I thought if I cannot change anybody, let alone teenagers, I had to change my own attitude toward them. Also, I had to figure out what I was supposed to teach. When I was teaching at the college level, I did not have to worry about anything, except teaching the materials given to us, that is, Japanese language and a little bit of culture. For high schoolers, however, more is required. I came to the conclusion that they needed more guidance in everything, not just in learning Japanese. I decided that at the high school level, I needed to teach students how to

become a life-long learners, regardless of subject matter. Some of my students call my Japanese I class, " Life 101". Of course, I teach the subject, but I also try to teach them how to think and how to see, especially multi-culturally. I have always thought that teaching Japanese, to have students learn how to speak and write, regardless of age, is equivalent to "teaching a rock how to talk". It is a challenge. It is also my goal to have students say, "Oh, is it already time to go? We were having such a good time!"

I "love" teaching and that I am pursuing the Art of Teaching. Or, as the Japanese and Chinese would say, the "Way" of Teaching.

CHAPTER 11

FUTURE AMBITION

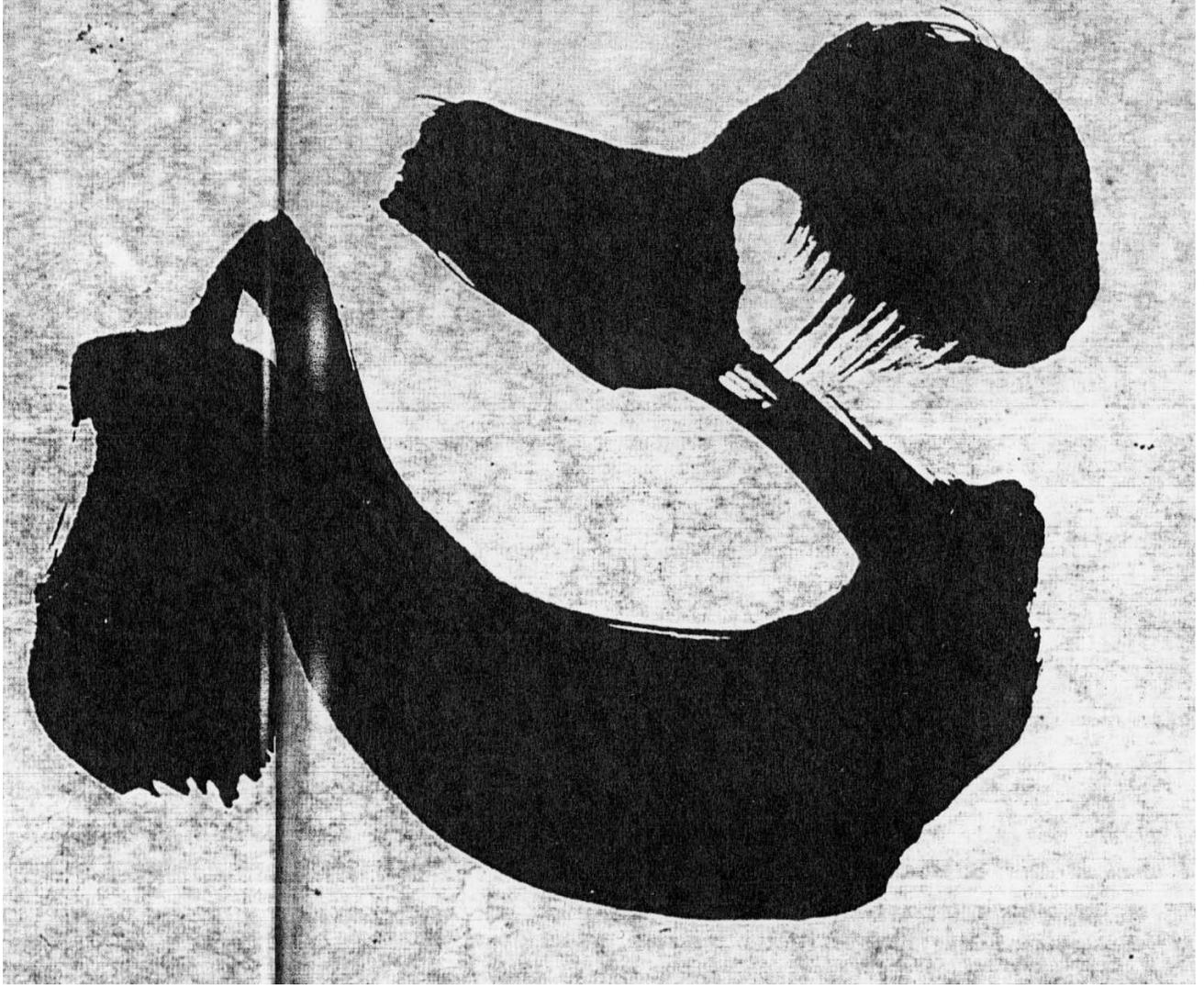


So far I have led a very ordinary life, nothing special or spectacular. I am glad and I am grateful for it. I hope to continue my life, as much as possible, as an ordinary life where one day turns into another day without any mishap. Looking back I feel that my "greatest" accomplishment is to have had our two children and watch them grow to become two beautiful human beings. It is a pleasure that words cannot express. Of course, there are daily hurdles raising them; but despite those, I consider them my "greatest" accomplishments, and I would like to see them grow more beautiful as years go by. I think my life mission is to be alive till they have children of their own, and to watch for them as my parents and my in-laws have done. Yes, I am coming to the age when I am thinking of myself as becoming a grandmother! But, let's not rush too much.

I have another goal. I would like to continue teaching until I retire with a retirement plan. As I mentioned before, I love teaching, although I feel I'm getting a little too old for the high school students. I like to see them grow as young global citizens. After retirement, or even before, I would like to embark on a Ph.D. program, and, perhaps, get a doctorate in teaching multicultural diversity. Also, if possible, I would love to start an Asian community center, with a small theater for movies and performances, and a library and a gallery of Asian "objects d'art." It will be a cultural resource center for Springfield. Springfield desperately needs it. So, in other words, I'd like to stay here in Springfield, and try to "enlighten" people of Springfield, in the area of Asian culture, especially Japanese, and, of course, other cultures, Chinese, Korean, etc.

Or, I may start a mail-order or E-mail business for Japanese goods. I think there is a big market out there! This way, although I may not be "teaching", I can still "educate" the general American public by providing authentic materials.

My father was forty years old and my mother was forty-five when they came to America. When I think about them starting their life over in a country where they could not even communicate at all, I feel that anything is possible.



“Heart”



“Life-long curiosity, Life-long learning”



Springfield, MO
2001