

Florence C. "Shizuka" Koura

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Question: Your name is Flo?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And is that your full name or is that a nickname?

Answer: Well, my parents did not give it to me.

Question: Oh they didn't?

Answer: No, I chose it myself.

Question: Oh you did?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: When you very young or..?

Answer: I think I was in my early teen's when I chose it because I had read the story of Florence Nightingale and I was very impressed with her... that's why I chose that name.

Question: Huh. So what name did your parents give you?

Answer: Shizuka, It's a Japanese name; it means quiet or serene. And I hated the name.

Question: I was gonna say was it fitting name? Are you a quiet, serene person or..?

Answer: No, I was a tomboy.

Question: Oh, is that right?

Answer: Uh huh. That is why... people used to tease me and say your name is Shizuka so be quiet, you know. And that's why I hate it.

Question: Now are you, I always get mixed up on the term... Nisei?

Answer: Yes.

Question: You're a Nisei?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: And so who were your parents and what did your Dad do?

Answer: My Father was Taro Yasutake and my Mother was Tomiko Yasutake My Father was a salesman in a produce store. Well, he bought produce from the farmers and then sold it to the stores. And my Mother was a Japanese language schoolteacher.

Question: Oh really? In Seattle?

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Answer: Yes.

Question: And that's where you were born?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did you... oh sorry..

Answer: In fact Art and I were born about two, three doors away from each other except his family had moved away before my family came there.

Question: What a small world, huh?

Answer: Yes.

Question: So you, so both of you were born in Seattle.

Answer: Yes.

Question: And then the Kouras moved to Bainbridge?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And then years later..

Answer: Well, we met in camp.

Question: Do you remember seeing Art the first time?

Answer: Yes. When the people from Bainbridge moved up to Minedoka, I lived in Block 42 and they moved to Block 44. And Block 44 didn't have a mess hall yet so they divided between Mess Hall 42 and 43 and Art came to 42. He sat right across from me the first night. And he commented that the meals at Minedoka were better than Manzanar so I said, Is that right? And that was the first thing I ever said to him.

Question: So were you attracted to him right away?

Answer: Well uh..

Question: Or did he have to grow on you?

Answer: I don't know... I guess so.

Question: Do you remember leaving Seattle and going to the camp and how that all happened?

Answer: Yes, I remember.

Question: What was that like?

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Answer: Well, it was, let's see.. I remember, before we left, about a month before the war started we had bought a brand new washing machine. It was the first time we ever bought one and I don't remember, I think it must have been about over, just over \$100 that we bought it for. And, war started and we had to sell everything. We advertised in the newspaper and someone came and bought it for about \$10 or something. I was so mad cause it was a brand new washing machine. That was one of my lasting impressions at that time and just before that we used to have nice dog in our back yard as a watchdog and somebody poisoned him and he died. And a couple nights after that a burglar got into our house and robbed us and that's another thing I remember from around that time. But after that well we went to a, we were sent to Puyallup as a gathering place before we moved up to Minedoka. We were in the fairgrounds, not the fairgrounds but what used to be the parking lot kitty-corner from the fairgrounds. That's where we were.

Question: Did they put you on buses and take you down there or..?

Answer: Yes, they put us on buses.

Question: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Answer: Yes, I was at a drug store in Seattle on 12th Avenue, there used to be a drug store there on, just north of Yessler Way... there was a Japanese drug store there and we used to go there for sodas after church. And I had gotten out of church and gone over there with some friends when we heard about it.

Question: So did you grow up in a Japanese community?

Answer: Yes, uh huh.

Question: Was there, I mean cause here you are, you're a part of this society and everything seems fine and then Pearl Harbor happened. Did you see a change in people that you interacted with?

Answer: Yes, I saw a Chinese girl that used to be in my class. I saw her on the street day one day waiting for a bus and she turned her nose up at me and she wouldn't speak to me.

Question: Huh. That must have been tough to.. cause I've heard a couple of other people talk about that.

Answer: Uh huh yes.

Question: People that had been their friends the day before and now..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: People you'd never done anything against..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: What, did you have relatives back in Japan?

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Answer: Oh yes, I had lots of relatives there.

Question: So do you remember what your parents talked about when..?

Answer: Well, no, I don't remember too much about their talking about the relatives in Japan.

Question: What was the camp like?

Answer: Camp? Oh at first, it was going out to visit with friends and I was out of school already so I, I was out of high school already so I visited with friends and did some needle work at home and didn't do very much of anything in camp. And then in Puyallup anyway and when I got to Idaho I looked for work and I worked in a business office down near the main gate. And I lived in 42 so I had to catch the truck at the corner of Block 42 and 44 to go down to work. And then after a bit my family was moved to Block 44 so Art and I used to meet where they get on the truck to go to work and he worked in the same area down in the offices where I worked.

Question: So this is, it's interesting cause I've seen photographs but you don't get a perspective really of how big it is. It's a big..

Answer: It was a big place, uh huh.

Question: Did, so was your family all together?

Answer: Yes, it was just my Mom and Dad and myself and my younger brother. My older brother had gone out to work somewhere. He was working on a farm somewhere.

Question: Outside of the camp?

Answer: Yes.

Question: So you could as time went by, you had opportunities to..?

Answer: Yes, as long as it wasn't on the west coast, they could go out and work.

Question: It just seems pretty absurd; the whole concept of well if you're on the west coast... and there was somewhere there was a line that was drawn.

Answer: Yes.

Question: Take and intern people and then, but if you're out there, now you're there, you can go off and work somewhere and..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: It didn't make sense.

Answer: No. In those days I don't think there were very many Japanese people working in the center, central district of the United States, you know, or not in

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Chicago and in, Iowa or Nebraska any of those places. I don't think there were very many.

Question: Huh. What... now getting married... what did your parents think about you getting married?

Answer: Who?

Question: Did Art have to come and ask for your hand or what?

Answer: No the thing is.. the Japanese style is to ask a, somebody to ask to be a go between. Well, before I met Art somebody else asked if they could be a go between and had asked somebody else. Oh no, somebody else had asked a go between to ask for my hand and I didn't know that person and I heard about it. And I didn't want to go through with it so and I knew who that person was because I'd seen him before down where the offices were and I knew who he was, so I was kind of bold, I went directly up to him and I said, I know there's talk about us getting engaged but I said, I'm sorry I don't have anything against you but I don't want to go through with it. I told him that directly and so he went and told his parents and his parents told the go betweens. And so my Mom and Dad were shocked that I went and did something like that but that was the old style I guess. And when Art and I decided to get married, well, his aunt and uncle acted as our go betweens and we were married in camp.

Question: So you, the aunt and the uncle would talk to the two sets of parents. Is that kind of..?

Answer: Yes, that's how it usually is, uh huh.

Question: And do you remember what your parents thought about you getting married and..

Answer: Oh, they thought it was fine.

Question: Even, now did you know that he had enlisted at this point or was..?

Answer: Yes, I knew it.

Question: So there wasn't any discussion of why don't you wait till after the war?

Answer: No.

Question: Huh. And do you remember the ceremony?

Answer: Yes.

Question: So where did you have your wedding ceremony?

Answer: It was in the what they call the... oh what did they call that... in a big building that was the recreation hall. They called it a recreation hall and they put up seats there and they had the reception at the mess hall.

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Question: So was that a challenge? Because, outside there was rationing going on and so did you have to all..?

Answer: I don't know where they got all that, the food, I don't even remember what they all had. I know they had a wedding cake but I don't remember what it was like.

Question: Now did you get to go on a honeymoon or not?

Answer: Well, my brother had our family car so we were able to use that and we went out for two-day honeymoon in Twin Falls. And then we came back because, see we got married on a, I think it was a Monday, the 20th was a Monday and then on Wednesday his sister was going to be engaged so we just had the two days and then we came back for her engagement. And then, two days after that my brother was getting married but we were leaving cause he had to go back to Camp Shelby. So I went with him and so we left on the 26th... left camp on the 26th. And on the way we stopped, train stopped at Denver and I nearly got lost from him. I mean we had to get off, change trains and at one point they said the military get on the train first and he had my ticket and everything and I was wandering around alone outside. I was scared I was going to be left behind but I told them he had my ticket so they let me on eventually and we ended up in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Question: And how was that, how was..?

Answer: Hattiesburg?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Well, we stayed at a hotel for a couple of days and then we went to stay at the Baptist Minister's home in Hattiesburg. We stayed there about three, four days I guess... maybe a week before he shipped out and after he shipped out I had to pack up and leave all by myself from Hattiesburg. I stopped in Chicago first because his brother was there and one of my girlfriends lived there. So I visited her there and then left Chicago for camp, back to camp. I was scared being on that train all by myself. I had a seat but it was full of soldiers, being wartime and all, so I spent the night in the ladies' room. I sat in the ladies' room all the time, all through the trip until I got to Shoshone, Idaho, and went back to camp.

Question: Were you afraid being a woman alone or..?

Answer: Being a Japanese alone.

Question: So you did see, there was a, you saw some prejudice then?

Answer: No, I didn't know if there would be prejudice or not but just was scared anyway.

Question: Huh. And that was probably the first time, not only being alone, but the first time you probably made a big trip like this I assume?

Answer: Yes.

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Question: Yeah. So in a whole different part of the country you'd never been and?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Wow... Do you remember saying goodbye to him when he, when?

Answer: Oh yes.

Question: I heard his story. What's your story? Do you remember him, seeing him off?

Answer: Yes, I remember his getting on the truck and all that, waving goodbye and then leaving there in Hattiesburg, from Camp Shelby to Hattiesburg they had a great big, they called it a cattle truck, I think. They had just bench seats on the side and then straps to hang on to and there were no seats cause every... people were sitting there. I had to hang on to the strap there, the tears were rolling down my face. I was crying and crying as I went back to Hattiesburg. That's how I remember that time.

Question: Were there lots of other brides?

Answer: Yes, there were.

Question: Yeah. That had to be a, I mean, did you... Now you're him thinking, I know I'm coming home. On the other side did you fear for him going away or did you try to get that out of your mind or..?

Answer: Well, I didn't think about it. I just kept praying and hoping and I didn't think about anything bad.

Question: Did you know that he had been wounded?

Answer: Oh yes.

Question: And so how did you find that all out?

Answer: Well, in camp I was working in the telegraph office and all messages of soldiers being killed or wounded came through that ticker tape where I was working and I was working there when his ticker tape came in. And it was addressed to his Dad saying that he was slightly wounded, that's why I was relieved, so I didn't worry too much because I'd seen the killed in action coming in so many times.

Question: So you knew..

Answer: Before his Father did.

Question: And with a lot of other parents?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: You knew too. Did you, were there friends that you lost in camp, I mean, were there?

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Answer: Yes.

Question: Kids that you knew that?

Answer: Yes, there were.

Question: Huh. What, so while he's over fighting you go back to the camp and go back to working in the office and back with your Mom and Dad?

Answer: I stayed with his Mom and Dad.

Question: With his Mom and Dad.

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: So when did you catch up with him after the war then?

Answer: Well, he came back to Barnes General Hospital in Vancouver, Washington. And from there he arranged for me to come out; he rented a room for us in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Conover. He was Vice Principal of the Vancouver High School and they were very nice people. So, they had a beautiful brick house and we stayed there with them and in those days they used to have gas ration coupons, and Mr. Conover had a nice car and he'd use our gas rationing coupons and take us out on trips on Sundays. He used to take us on drives all over; it was very nice.

Question: So how did he meet Mr. Conover?

Answer: Well, he went out to their house cause they had For Rent sign on their house so.

Question: Huh.

Answer: He went and asked them.

Question: And then do you remember coming back here to Bainbridge?

Answer: Yes. Well, let me tell you a comical story. He bought an old car, a Model A was it? Was it a Model A car that you bought in Vancouver... the one you taught me to drive. Anyway it was an old car and he was teaching me how to park, you know, next to a parking meter and I had to... it was on a slight hill like this and I had to back up, back up to, you know, to park it. When I was backing up he says, my motor would die all the time so he says, Press on the gas. So I step on it... so I'd stepped on it and I hit the parking meter and parking meter started to lean like this, and there was a man watching and he says, Tell her you're supposed to park beside it not on it he said. It was so funny.

Question: So that was your first driving experience.

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: Oh wow.

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Answer: I was learning how to drive. Well that was my first parking and a stick shift too you know so. And that was hard. But well, we left Vancouver after he got discharged. We left Vancouver in that car and came home to Bainbridge.

Question: And back to the farm?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: Do you remember what Bainbridge was like then?

Answer: Oh yes.

Question: When the war was over, was it like everything got forgotten and forgiven or was there this rebuilding of community or..?

Answer: Well, there was a rebuilding of community I think.. but it wasn't very bad because of the Woodwards. What they had in the "Review" all the time... when lady named Genevieve Williams was very, very friendly and nice to us. When we first came back she invited us over to dinner at her house. Her husband was a lawyer, I believe. His name was Melvin I think, Melvin or Mervin... Mervin Williams. That's all I can remember about that period.

Question: So the Woodward that, was it Woodward from the paper?

Answer: uh huh.

Question: Woodward was a real activist; I mean he worked in writing articles to..?

Answer: Yes, I think he did... to make it easy for us to come back.

Question: Huh. What about your parents? What happened to your?

Answer: My parents went back to Seattle and my Dad had a bout with Tuberculosis and he was at Firland Sanitarium in Seattle for two or three years, but he got well and came out again. And my brother in the meantime had bought some property in Redmond. And he was good at gardening and he became, what do you call it, oh, what do you call those?

Question: Not landscaping?

Answer: Yeah, landscaping.

Question: Oh landscaping, okay.

Answer: He became a landscaper and he moved to Redmond. He's a golf nut and he built a small 18-hole pitch and put behind his house where people would come to play. And he sold that eventually and bought another house in Redmond and sold that house to his son in law and daughter and he moved to Maristone Island; he's there now.

Question: Huh.

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Answer: It's a beautiful place over there.

Question: So when your Father got out of the sanitarium with the Tuberculosis, did he go back to doing what he was doing prior to the war or...?

Answer: No, he, let's see, he worked at the Seattle University for awhile as a clean-up, cleaning up the, janitorial work and he cleaned up the operating rooms too, after surgery and stuff.

Question: So the war really changed his life..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: I mean he had this business he'd built up.

Answer: Yes.

Question: And couldn't return to it.

Answer: Uh huh. And my Mother was working somewhere too. I forgot where she worked.

Question: Do you think that having been through this experience of where they chose a population and said nope?? we're going to take you out of society and put you into this camp... Do you think there's a message for generations to come about what happened that the history books don't tell us or the kids should know?

Answer: Huh. Well, people should never be evacuated like we were, pulled out of our homes just because of our race... that should never happen. If we'd done something wrong, that'd be different, but no it should never happen.

Question: That's one of the amazing things, I mean, I'm fourth generation German, third generation German and but yet my grandfather who was second generation German... we were at war with Germany.

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: Why weren't the Germans..

Answer: That's right.

Question: Interned and, you know, but it was, it was I guess easy to pick Japanese because physically you could..

Answer: You looked different.

Question: Somewhat identify. Yeah... you know, there weren't a lot of people, Japanese, Chinese they didn't know. I guess the Chinese even had a little pin they could wear that said I'm Chinese. And one teacher in Seattle said my children won't wear those pins... all my children are my children and they're all coming to my class regardless of... But yeah, it's a confusing part of history, you know, why it happened and how it happened. Well, thank you very much.