

I REMEMBER

Hazel Okino Ritchey

A pretty lady, a genuinely kind person, a fine teacher-my mother, Alice Oda Okino.

The first time I thought my mother pretty was in Stockton, California, before World War II. She and Dad were going out, and she was wearing a light blue gown she had made herself. Since then - I was in first grade or younger - I realized she was truly pretty - high cheek bones, a slim nose, and a widow's peak that shaped her face like a heart.

More important than good looks, however, was my mother's kindness. She often talked about her father in Hilo, Hawaii, who did kind things for everyone; she wasn't aware that she was like him. I believe that my brother Jim's buddies - Sumio Okabayashi, Hank Wakai, Tabo Tsufura, Gabby Hirata, and others -- and my friends Miiko Sasaki Horikawa and Tako Hirata spent as much time visiting my mother as visiting Jim and me because she was so nice.

My mother taught at the Child Care Center in Seabrook in the mid 1940's after our family arrived from the Rohwer, Arkansas camp. Jim remembers helping by mopping the floors at the Center. I didn't help much, but I did observe my mother's teaching skills and her rapport with the children, among them Howard Sakata, Ricky Kunishima, and the Nagao twins. They would sing "High-Stepping Horses" and "Open, Shut Them" accompanied by hand and body motions.

In the late 1950's, my mother took courses at Glassboro State College to upgrade her normal school certificate from the University of Hawaii to a Bachelor of Arts Degree. She substituted in the Bridgeton School District then taught first grade at Seabrook Elementary School. At that time I was living with my parents on Orillia Avenue while Al was in the army. My mother and I would stay up together at night to work on lesson plans! (I was teaching at Clayton High School).

Our basement was full of things collected for my mother's arts and crafts projects, one of which was the making of pigs from large plastic bleach jugs with the addition of felt eyes, ears, and pipe cleaners tails. This may be a strange recall, but I remember it

because the children had such fun working on the craft--and we had many empty jugs stored in the basement!

As my mother's students grew up, many wrote or visited her, appreciating her kindness and teaching skills. I hope that they and others who read this description will remember Mrs. Okino fondly!

By Hazel Okino Ritchey
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