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Memories of Peter Oda

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Commentary



Memories of Peter Oda

By Alice Murata

He was inducted on February 9, 1942 at Fort MacArthur, California from 1660 W 36th place, Los Angeles.

Japanese Americans on the west coast were placed into concentration camps after Pearl Harbor and war was declared. Helen was interned at Camp Rowher and because she agreed and wanted to leave, Peter went there and married her on October 31, 1942 in Desha County Arkansas. He took her to Camp Grant Illinois which was a Medical Replacement Training Center which had a Cooks and Bakers School. It was here that Peter learned to be a cook and that is how he made his living after leaving military service.

Peter was an instructor of Japanese Language with the MIS at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. In February 5, 1946 he was discharged from the army at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. He earned three medals: The American Theater Service Medal, The Good Conduct Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. His highest rank was staff sergeant.

The MIS Language School moved to Monterey in 1946. Peter decided to follow them because his restaurant business relied on Japanese American soldiers for business. Peter and Helen opened a drive in restaurant in Monterey and

This family identified uncles in a unique way. Arizona ojisan (uncle) farmed in Arizona, Otake ojisan remained on the family main house, Kure oba-chan was the aunt who resided in Kure. Shigeo was known as the gakko ojisan or school uncle because he completed a PhD from University of California and worked as a teacher. He had secured a teaching position in Sacramento but decided to return to Japan to see his parents before beginning his new job.

Before WWII Japanese were engaged in arranged marriages. The bishakunin or matchmaker selected Helen Harada for him. She did not know him and went to check him out at the Hollywood market where he was employed.

Before WWII began, Peter was drafted in the military.

Peter Iwaho Oda known to everyone as Uncle Peter was born on July 14, 1917 in Visalia, California to Kazuho and Asano Muramoto Oda. He was named for his paternal grandfather, Iwaturo. When Peter was about three years old he was taken to Japan to be raised by his paternal grandparents. At this time Japanese education was considered to be good and it was easier to perform farm work without caring for children.

Both mother and father died when Peter was still a child. After completing high school, Peter joined many Nisei in returning to the United States. He was 19, when he returned on December 19, 1936 to Los Angeles. Without proper documentation, he was detained until his Uncle Shigeo got papers proving Peter's citizenship.



Peter Oda (R) stands in front of Hollywood market.

purchased a home there.

Helen's sister and husband owned a nursery in San Jose. She operated a Japanese gift shop on the premises. Peter and Helen had a Japanese restaurant, Fujiyama Gardens there for many years. Peter and Helen rented an apartment across the street from the restaurant and returned to Monterey on their free days.

They changed homes and purchased the current one with a beautiful view of Monterey Bay in 1959. When the nursery was sold, Peter and Helen moved back to Monterey. During this time Peter visited Chicago for long periods of time and worked with brothers, Ted and Dick on home repairs. Peter considered renovating properties and also wanted to open a restaurant on the wharf. Because Helen was hesitant, he worked as a sushi chef at the Robata in Carmel for many years, way past the time of normal retirement. Residing in the center of the Technology movement he invested in tech stocks.

After Helen died in 2001, Peter considered moving but resided alone in Monterey until 2010 when he visited Chicago. He decided he wanted to live here because of many family members in this area. In November 2010 Peter moved into the Breakers. He liked that it had a beautiful view of Lake Michigan which



Peter Oda in military service

Congressional Gold Medal of Honor in November 2011. He liked going to Washington D.C. and being a part of the ceremonies. He enjoyed the camaraderie with fellow soldiers.

Peter died on March 12 at the age of 96 of congestive heart failure. Uncle Peter was a popular person because he always had a smile and a nice greeting for everyone. His optimistic outlook was uplifting for all and friendliness will be missed by his family and friends. Still we imagine he will be happy joining his wife, Helen, parents, and many relatives.