

This monthly article highlights one of our branch members. We hope that you enjoy knowing a little more about your fellow members and the interesting life they have had. If you have someone you would like to nominate or if you would like to help author an article, please email the editor, Ron Nakamoto, at [ron.nakamoto\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:ron.nakamoto@yahoo.com).

## JAMES YOSHIDA — Member



Americans come from many countries, backgrounds and circumstances. The “American Dream”- to work hard, be opportunistic and benefit for family and oneself - has always been a beacon for energetic immigration. The diversity of races, cultures and religions many say is what makes our country great. Here is one such immigrant whom we are proud to call a fellow Sir.

James was born in September 1932 in a small village near the Mikimoto Pearl Island, Mie Prefecture, Japan. His father was in the forestry and postal service businesses. In Japan at the time, one’s livelihood was passed down from grandfather to father to son. James, like his father, was a stamp collector but both their lives were overshadowed by world events of this period. Japan was celebrating the recent annexation of Manchuria against the wishes of Emperor Hirohito. In

James’ own words “...as a young child I was bombarded with the message that the nation would dominate the Pacific ...it was their destiny.” *(Editor’s note: From 1894, Japan built an extensive empire that included Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, and parts of northern China. The Japanese regarded this sphere of influence as a political and economic necessity which prevented foreign states from strangling Japan by blocking its access to raw materials and crucial sea-lanes. Japan’s large military force was regarded as essential to the empire’s defense and prosperity.)*

James, as a young child, recalled the continuous broadcast message; “Our Shinto God would save us from defeat with the help of Kamikaze, ‘Divine Wind’”. *(Editor’s note: In the spring of 1281, Kublai Khan, after a number of failed emissary attempts to seek submission, assembled a massive fleet of 4,400 ships and 140,000 troops from Korea and China and set sail for Japan with the intent to conquer it. The Japanese army was heavily outnumbered. It was only a matter of time to annihilation when miraculously a massive typhoon swept in for two days and destroyed much of the Mongol fleet. Japan remained a nation that was never conquered.)* On August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Three days later the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On August 15th the Empire of Japan surrendered. James recalls, “With the occupation of Japan, we had to change our orientation by 180 degrees. We didn’t understand such words as ‘democracy’, ‘public opinion’ or ‘individual rights’. All our textbooks with any reference to wartime events were ordered burned. The study of Japanese history was forbidden.”

After the arrival of General MacArthur the Japanese people began to realize that what they had been taught about the Americans was wrong. Re- education was begun and the study of English became a requirement in school. James, who was in Junior High, enjoyed English having started to learn the subject early in his life with the assistance of his father. He excelled in the subject and won an English language oratory contest which eventually led to a full scholarship at Pepperdine University. At eighteen years old, with a high school diploma in hand, he boarded a cargo ship that was scheduled to dock in Los Angeles but instead ended up in Vancouver, Canada. James scrambled and found a Greyhound bus destined for Los Angeles and arrived at midnight at the downtown terminal. Exhausted, he found a cheap room and tried to check in but did not understand what the lady at the counter was asking. Finally the lady showed him a quarter which he gave her and subsequently received back when he returned his key. This was his first introduction to the word "deposit". (*Editor's note: Welcome to America!*) James worked for his room and board and graduated with a Bachelors degree from Pepperdine and a Masters in Arts in International Relations from the University of Southern California.

One of the affiliations James is very thankful for during his college years in a foreign country was the friendship and support he received from the many members of the Rotary Club. Often, he was invited to be a guest speaker at their luncheon meetings reciting his wartime experiences. His local talks lead to an invitation to tour America. This eight weeks tour covered over 7,000 miles of travel. While in Louisiana, James recalls visiting a huge cotton plantation that had a sign in book for visitors. He put down his favorite phrase "...the government of, for, and by the people..." from Abraham Lincoln. Unfortunately he discovered a new English phrase, "politically incorrect", in the Deep South.

In 1956, James was the Chairman of the Visiting International Students Association on a three-day convention at Disneyland. On the last day he met his wife-to-be, Sumiko, for the first time at the dance that followed their dinner meeting. Prior to their engagement she disclosed that she was a victim of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. She had miraculously survived even though she was within five miles of the epicenter. Sumiko and James were married in 1957 at the church on campus at Pepperdine University.

James started his career as a simultaneous interpreter for the State Department in Washington D.C. During that time, he translated for then President Harry Truman at the AFL-CIO Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. He also met Mr. George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO. The "American Dream" was certainly becoming a reality for James with a young family, a good job, a two-bedroom home and a brand new 1960 Ford Falcon. It was time to file for citizenship.

Not long after applying, James and Sumiko received notification from the State Department's Immigration Services that their current student visas would be valid for only 30 more days. The action came as a complete shock to the couple and they did not know what to do. In the end, they were forced to return to Japan. However, whether it was serendipity or destiny, Japan was growing and the need for a bi-lingual, bi-cultural person like James was in high demand. With the industrial know-how of America and

the low cost Japanese labor market, Japan was quickly moving to become the second largest economy in the world.

James thrived in Japan working first for a Mitsui-DuPont joint venture, then for Scientific Design Co., and finally for BASF-Japan, a part of the German BASF Group. He specialized in the chemical business - production, licensing and construction of chemical plants. At 61 years he was ready to retire consistent with the practice of his German co-workers. Then a Japanese company, Toho Chemicals, approached him to represent the company in the U.S. selling carbon fiber. His American born daughter sponsored the couple for their green cards. It had taken 32 years in Japan to come full circle since their first aborted attempt to obtain U.S. citizenship. He established Toho Carbon Fibers in Charlotte, NC and subsequently moved to Menlo Park where he hired staff and grew the business for the next ten years. *(Editor's note: Three Japanese companies manufacture more than 80% of the total carbon fiber product in the world. The raw material is used in sports equipment (tennis rackets, golf shafts, etc.), racecars, helicopters, airplanes, satellites and windmills to mention a few products.)*

James's second attempt to retire was successful in 2002 and since that time he has been enjoying his life with his wife, two daughters, wonderful son-in-laws and five grandkids. The couple plays tennis twice a week, attend exercise classes at the Senior center, babysit and enjoy traveling to historical sites around the world and back to Japan to visit family kin and old friends. He is also deep into compiling a unique five-volume autobiography interwoven with the history that surrounded him. The first volume is titled "Yoshida and the Pacific War 1932-1951".

James's biggest regret is not being able to play a musical instrument. He confesses that the closest he came to embracing music was with Karaoke, "... if one could call it music." His daughters inherited his love of music and one has a Master's Degree in Music and the other played flute for the La Jolla Symphony while she was at UCSD. All of the grandkids play musical instruments.

James's parting message to his fellow SIR members is "...cherish your valuable citizenship."

We conclude this profile of one immigrant that lived the American Dream ... and lost it ... but so loved this country that given a second chance, he did not hesitate to take it. Citizenship is a right for anyone born on American soil but ... it is also a privilege to cherish and protect, as many of our fallen military know all too well.