

Resident Spotlight

Kimi Ito



Kimi Ito has been a Redondo Beach resident for 95 years. Throughout her life, she has been an extraordinary part of the Redondo Beach community. Her parents emigrated from Japan in 1902 to Hawaii, then to San Francisco, and eventually to Los Angeles. Kimi was born in 1915 on New Year's Day in Los Angeles. Her family moved to Redondo Beach in 1918 because the beach climate helped her older brother's severe hay fever. In 1918, they were one of the first Japanese families to own an automobile in Los Angeles County. Kimi's younger sister, Tak, is 94 and still resides in Redondo Beach as well.

Kimi attended Redondo Beach elementary schools and graduated from Redondo Union High School in 1931. Kimi is amazed at the changes and growth she has witnessed in Redondo Beach. She can remember when Redondo Beach was predominantly a farming community. She recalls when the site of Jefferson Elementary School was a pig farm.

In her twenties, she played on a women's semi-pro baseball team. She met her husband, Tomo Ito, a Geologist and Stanford graduate, in her mid twenties while she was a dental assistant. They were married in 1942 and spent their honeymoon in Arizona at the Poston Internment Camp.



During WWII, Kimi and Tomo volunteered to go early to the internment camp while the barracks were being built so they could welcome families and help them get settled. She remembers this time quite clearly, "The heat was intense. It was in the hundreds during the day and the thirties some nights. I handed out salt tablets to keep the people from dropping from heat and dehydration. The government provided barrels and barrels of sardines because they thought that Japanese people liked fish. We had never eaten sardines and had no idea how to cook them".

Mrs. Ito worked as a dental assistant in the internment camp and earned \$15 a month. Her husband was a block manager at Poston. Her father was in the fire brigade at Manzanar Internment Camp, located at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California's Owens Valley. Kimi and Tomo's first daughter, Teri was born in 1944 at Poston, and once back in Redondo Beach after the war, Mrs. Ito had her second daughter, Helene in 1946.



Once Mrs. Ito and her family returned to Redondo Beach, Kimi began to volunteer her time with various organizations. Through her volunteer experiences, she became passionate about working with the blind and Braille. Eventually she was hired by the Los Angeles County Special Education Department as a Braille Transcriber and worked there for 30 years.

One of her beloved students, Patrick Burke, is now the Coordinator of Disabilities and Computer Programs Department at UCLA. Mrs. Ito taught Patrick from kindergarten throughout high school. When asked about his experience with Mrs. Ito, Patrick says, "She converted all of my textbooks to Braille by hand because in the 70's and 80's there were few Braille text books that covered advanced classes". Mrs. Ito transcribed all subjects ranging from Chemistry to Calculus including maps, charts, and graphs. Patrick feels he owes much of his success to Mrs. Ito.

When Kimi's husband was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, she started a support group that is still going strong after 27 years. They continue to meet the third Wednesday of every month from 1:30-3:00 p.m. at Beach Cities Health District.

Kimi Ito has seen many changes in Redondo Beach, and throughout her life she has been a force for good in her community.

Photos on opposite page: Top Right: Kimi today
Middle Right: Kimi and sister in their family's first car 3 Bottom Left: Kimi (bottom right), her parents, brother and sister

Photos on this page: Top: The Fire Brigade at Manzanar (Kimi's father, back row, second to right) Bottom Right: Kimi and her former student Patrick Burke

