

Searching for Grandfather

From: Ken
Sent: Saturday, April 12, 2008 8:31 PM
To: Nakamoto, Brenda
Subject: Sakaoka

Hi Brenda,

I've found Shunjiro Sakaoka in the passenger records of the ship, "Minnesota." Below is what I found in the index, and attached are the two pages which list him on line 14. His mother's name is given as "M. Sakaoka" [who lived in] Hiroshima.

These records are not easy to read. It is easy to get one line mixed up with another. On page two, there is a description of your grandfather: 5 feet, 2 inches tall with brown complexion, hair and eyes. He lived at Nihojima Mura, Hiroshima Ken, Japan. His father paid his fare, and, while the boat was bound for Seattle, the ship would travel on to "Frisco," where he would disembark. From there he would go with the \$50 he had to Sacramento. He was 17 years old, and apparently had to leave his mother in Japan in order to join his father in the U.S.

Virginia

Seattle Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1957¹

Name:	Shunjiro Sakaoka
Arrival Date:	1 Sep 1909
Age:	17
Estimated Birth Year:	1892
Birthplace:	Japan
Gender:	Male
Race/Nationality:	Japanese
Ship Name:	Minnesota
Port of Arrival:	Seattle, Washington
Port of Departure:	Kobe, Japan
Line:	14

Microfilm Roll Number:M1383_10

¹Seattle, Washington. *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Seattle, Washington, 1890-1957*. Micropublication M1383: Line 14. RG085. 357 rolls. National Archives, Washington, D.C. C.f. in (Ancestry.com. *Seattle Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1957* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA): The Generations Network, Inc., 2006. Original data. <http://www.ancestry.com/> (accessed April 12, 2008).

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Shunjiro Sakaoka, my grandfather, my *ojiisan*, I never knew you. How a self-inflicted bullet to the head separated you from me before I was even conceived, before Mommy and Daddy were even married. And I would never be able to rock in your arms or drool on your shirt or make gurgly sounds in your ears or see your lips crease into a smile or hear your hearty laugh.

Instead, my mother-in-law many decades later finds traces of you in the ship's registry of the Minnesota that departed from Japan and docked in Seattle before arriving to San Francisco. She says there's only sketchy information. You were 17 years old, 5'2", had \$50 in your pocket and approval from your mother to board the ship. You were meeting your father already in the States.

Is it too late now to tell you that I think I would have admired you, I would have loved to hear you tell me your stories, to have felt your burly, husky arms around me in a bear hug. My *ojiisan*, I could have said. Even now, the words sound foreign on my lips, because I never had one when I was born, only bits and pieces of ideas of what a grandfather would have been to me.

Would you have said that you dreamed of touching the stars and that's why you left Japan on a ship bound for the infinite east? That you watched your mama running along the wooden planks of the dock in her zoris with your baby brother bound on her back and she is waving good bye and crying, "I will remember you, Shinjiro. Good luck and fare well, my son."

Would you have said you planned to return to Japan after making your riches, enough to dress your mother in the finest kimonos and cover her pantry with multiple sacks of rice? And you and your father would have wrestled the gold off the California sun and pursed it in your belongings to send home. Instead, Shunjiro, were you prepared for what lay ahead? Long days as a farm laborer, a piece meal worker, many homes come and gone, war, internment, loss, drinking, gambling, card games, and even no electricity, just outhouses.

I imagine you smiled big on that ship, feeling the brisk salt air on your face, the sun on your shoulders. So young and daring, you were, my *ojiisan*. Your height does not equate with largeness, but when I think of you, I think of a big so huge, I cannot put my arms around it, I cannot grasp the all of you, the boldness of you, with the heartrending kind of feelings that might have accompanied leaving your mother—forever—I must imagine. And you made a go of life here in California, like the rest of the emigrants soon to populate the state. Dreams dreamed, some reached, some squelched in disappointment, some forgotten, hardened into the bitter alkaline crust of a beaten dirt road.

Shunjiro, why is it that I want to know you? It must be that you left too soon, in a fit of disappointment, in a reactionary state of being. Oh, I cannot disguise my own disappointment.

But there you are in the ship's registry; there you cannot hide from a curious historian's eyes. Though it gives me but sparse information, I feel that I am wrapping my arms around you, my *ojiisan*, my hero, my adventurer, my inspiration. Oh beloved departed, I wish you could hear me.

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