

An Interview With Jane Sugidono!

Westview Church is a beautiful treasure with a beautiful history of being a family of people who seek God, support each other in good times and bad, and serving the community. The church is the people. Amen!

Jane Sugidono is one of those treasures of our church. She will be 87 soon, and just moved into Valley Heights. I got the joy of interviewing her recently. May you be blessed by her courage in the face of difficulty.



Jane shared, “Louise (age 105!) and Ray Sako grew strawberries with my parents. They were sharecroppers with Driscolls, Louise treated me like her daughter. You see, I did not have a mother. My mom died in a tragic accident in Avila beach being hit by a large wave during a Picnic with me and my sister (Jane was 5 yrs old at the time).” They were just sitting and reading. “The water came up high and there were logs tossing in the surf, mom was laying reading a book. As she was dying her last words were our [Japanese] names: Fumiko Estuko.” So Jane’s dad raised them all by himself. “In those days men were involved in Buddhist church and dad was popular there. Dad was Buddhist. Good friends of dad helped him, as he raised us children on his own. He worked all day then came home to laundry, and cook, and fix our shoe laces.” Jane said he did not want them to be laughed at. He grew Strawberries near San Andreas road, as a transition worker, working wherever there was work. “Dad had hard life,” she said. Jane remembers Dr Miura (age 108 in June!) took her tonsils out when she was little.

“When The War broke out they shipped dad to snow country (North Dakota) because they thought he was a spy.” He was forced to go there, but he told his daughters he went there to “work.” Jane was 5 and her mom had just died. “We stayed at a children’s village, an orphanage, in Manzanar [an incarceration camp] in the middle of the California desert.” She recalled, “Those in the adult camp had to wait in line to eat, but in the children’s village we did not. We had a Caucasian cook who made us anything we wanted. He made cake for each of us on our birthday.” (I respect her resilience in that she could see some of this in a positive light.) She remembers that they could not go to the store because stores said “no Japanese allowed here.” Jane has pictures of when she was little there, at Manzanar, from when a photographer came to the camp. “After the war dad came to pick us sisters up, but we did not know who he was, it had been so long! He said, ‘I am your dad.’” The Japanese woman in charge of the orphanage adopted one of the girls and the girl eventually became mayor of SF—how wonderful! “It feels like nobody knows about Manzanar!” said Jane.

Before the war they were living in Fresno and that’s where they returned after the war. They worked all over, as their dad found work. “Then dad became foreman for Minami, a lettuce family. And we no longer had to move all over to find work! The Minami family treated dad well.” Then her dad heard Watsonville was a good, prosperous strawberry place and then settled there with Driscolls, when Jane was 8 or 10. “I was raised a Buddhist. Then I went to the Lutheran church with my friends in Fresno.” She asked her dad, “Should I not go there since you are Buddhist?” He replied, “Do not worry go where you want.” When she came to Watsonville her friends went to Westview, so she went with them.

She got Married 1956 to Jiro at the Westview chapel. Jiro was a Watsonville native. He was farming strawberries, helping her father and that is how they met. Jane will be 87 soon and has four children: Doug, Steven, Lori and Ron. She is proud of her children and grandchildren.

Jiro and his brother Ichiro Sugidono, while being interned (incarcerated) for being Japanese, both volunteered to fight for the United States in WWII serving in the most decorated unit in U.S. military history, the 442nd, a fighting unit composed almost entirely of second-generation American soldiers of Japanese ancestry (Nisei). (Thank you for your service!)

“Jiro used to coach boys’ basketball at Westview. The Buddhist people asked him to keep score, then he eventually coached.” Kids said to him later, “It is because of you I got on my school team.” “I really loved Westview and am glad my kids got to go there and grow up in the church.” When asked about the church now she said, “You are doing a wonderful job. I hear a lot of good things about Westview currently. Diane Mio is wonderful and has been so helpful me.”

You are a wonderful Westview family with a rich history, of very resilient, gracious, hard-working people of integrity, that goes all the way back to 1898. It is a delight to be worshipping again in person with you all, for you are such a warm family! God bless you, and bless us, as we continue to draw near to God’s love and help others draw near as well.

-Pastor Dan