

## BOOK NEWS

Submitted by Jennifer Streisand

My mother, Gloria Streisand, and my grandparents, Edythe and Sam Goodman, are featured in a recently published book entitled *Dear Gloria: Homesick for America in Wartime Japan*, by Toneko Kimura Hirai and Taro Kimura, edited by Gregg Ramshaw, and published by Carnegie Mellon University Press.



During my childhood, my mother told me a few stories about her own childhood, and one of the stories she consistently told was about her neighbor and best friend in Forest Hills, New York, who was Japanese, and who moved back to Japan shortly before Pearl Harbor. She told me the story often, and that is why I remember it.

Her neighbor's name was Toneko (Tone for short) Kimura, and about eight months ago, my sister, Nina Sher from Albany, New York, was contacted by a researcher, Maki Fukasaku, who was working with Tone and her brother, Taro Kimura, on a memoir about Toneko's life. When Toneko returned to Japan before WWII, she began to write my mother letters, always beginning with "Dear Gloria." Most of the letters were not sent, but they became Tone's outlet for expression and took the form of diary entries. In recent years, when her brother Taro, was helping to care for Tone after she was hospitalized with a stroke, he found many of the letters in a box—old and worn—but still intact. He thought the letters told a compelling story that should take the form of a book, and the end result is the book, *Dear Gloria*.

The memoir style narrative has many facets: It is a coming of age story about a teenager, Toneko Kimura, and the unsettling feeling of moving to her native country, which didn't feel native to her at all. Then it is also the story of the friendship between my mother, Gloria, and Tone, and how the war abruptly ended what would have been a life-long relationship. Finally, as Taro Kimura wrote in the postscript of the book, "it's a precious record of the history of our times." Toneko's diary entries, and the text in between the entries, provide a first-hand account of how the war impacted ordinary Japanese citizens over a prolonged period of time, and specifically gave vivid details of the incendiary bombs that bombarded Tokyo.

As a reader I found it to be a beautifully crafted book that was fully engaging with a lot of suspense. The narrative included a strong sense of place, referring both to the Forest Hills of my mother's youth, my grandparents neighborhood, and wartime Tokyo. The narrative draws no conclusions, nor does it make any judgment about the war, but leaves those tasks for the reader to decide. Finally, I learned more about my family's history, what their lives were like during a tumultuous time. I would recommend the book as a "great read" of important historical value, even if my mother and grandparents were not written about so prominently.

My mother Gloria, passed away in 2008, and with great sadness, is not here to feel reunited with her friend Toneko. My family is grateful to Mr. Taro Kimura and his sister, Toneko Kimura Hirai, for writing *Dear Gloria*.