

# Isabel Kimoto

A long journey to Ucluelet

## War

### The War Begins

On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbour was bombed by the Japanese. The Canadian government worried that Japanese people living in Canada, even those born here, might try to help Japan's war effort. Immediately officials went to all Japanese/Canadian homes and took away their radios and telephones so they couldn't communicate. Soon after, they were given three days' notice that they had to move to inland internment camps.

They were allowed only one box each, into which they packed their clothing, photos and dishes. As well Isabel had to carry her three-month-old baby. The women and children went by boat to an internment camp in Hastings Park, Vancouver. The men had to take their fishing boats around to the Fraser River, where they were seized by the government. Houses, land and possessions left behind were also seized. Then the men under 30 were sent to an internment camp in Schriber, Ontario, where they faced a bitter winter.

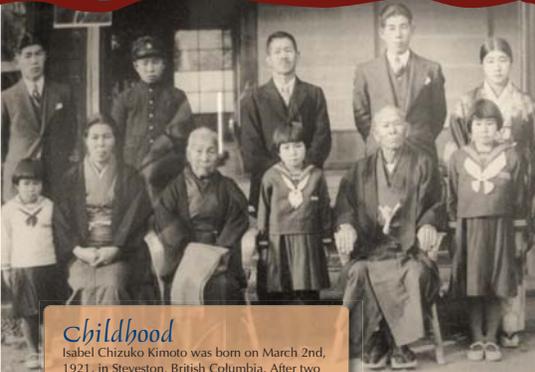
### Internment camps

In Hastings Park, thousands of Japanese people were crammed into two buildings, women and children in one and men in the other.

Their rooms were separated only by curtains; they had only straw mattresses to sleep on. Isabel's baby Ellen slept in a baby carriage provided by her family in Vancouver. Every day Isabel would stand in line holding a tin plate, waiting to be served her food. To do laundry and wash herself she often had to wake up late at night because the washing place was so busy during the day. They could also ask for a special permit to visit family and friends in the city and do the washing there. In camp the women cared for themselves and their children; the men mostly worked in factories doing hard labour.

They had lived in the internment camp for three months when the government decided to move them even farther from the coast. They had a choice to either go to Japan or become self-supporting. Isabel and her husband didn't know Japan so they, along with many other Japanese, moved to Bridge River, an Indian Reserve in the B.C. interior. This camp had no stores, so people had to be self-sufficient. Robert Kimoto was a good fisherman, and formed a co-operative for sharing fish from the local lake. While living there Isabel gave birth to her son Ted Tadashi.

After four years in Bridge River, the government once more decided to move the Japanese families. Again they were given the choice to go to Japan or relocate. The Kimotos went to Hamilton, Ontario, where they had family. There Bob worked at a factory pouring hot iron, and Isabel gave birth to her second daughter, Nina Nobumi. During their seven years in Hamilton the war ended, but the ban on their return to the West Coast was not lifted until 1949. Hoping to return to fishing, the family finally moved west, only to find that the village of Tofino was not allowing Japanese people to return. Their next choice was Ucluelet.



Kimoto family in Japan. Isabel is on the far right, back row.

### Childhood

Isabel Chizuko Kimoto was born on March 2nd, 1921, in Steveston, British Columbia. After two or three years her family moved to Tofino, where they settled in Storm Bay (now called Elk Bay), a short distance from the village. There she attended regular school, as well as Japanese school, in a one-room schoolhouse. Her father worked as a fisherman to support the family. Every day he went out fishing by himself and returned in the evening.

Everything went well until one evening, when Isabel was about 13, her father didn't return from fishing. All night the family worried. The next morning several fishermen went searching and found his boat adrift, with her father still alive but lying helplessly on the floor. They rushed him back to shore and took him to Mrs. Igarashi, who served as the village nurse, midwife and often doctor. She diagnosed him as having had a stroke.

There were better medical facilities in Japan, so once Isabel's father could walk again they moved there. The three oldest brothers stayed behind in Tofino. In Japan Isabel finished school and then attended sewing school, where she made kimonos.

### Early adult life

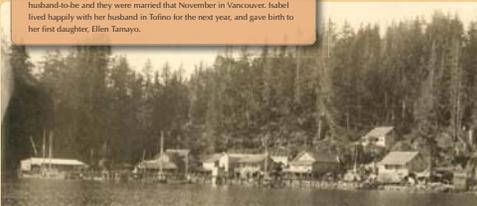
When Isabel was 19 her family decided she should move back to Tofino to have an easier life. They arranged for her to be married to

Robert Kimoto, a young fisherman in the area. Her aunt came to Japan to pick her up and they returned on a 15-day voyage. In Tofino she met her husband-to-be and they were married that November in Vancouver. Isabel lived happily with her husband in Tofino for the next year, and gave birth to her first daughter, Ellen Tamayo.

Early Years



Wedding gift tea set



Storm Bay Tofino before World War II.



Leaving Yokohama Japan, aboard the Heian Maru in 1940. Isabel is fifth from the left, next to her Aunt.



Ucluelet

### Settling in Ucluelet

BC Packers sponsored 15 Japanese families in re-establishing their lives on the sea. When the Kimotos arrived in 1951 Ucluelet had few roads and no electricity.

The family decided to buy land in Spring Cove, where other family members had also bought property. On the land were several buildings that had been used in the war, and the old first and building became the family home. There had been used in the war, and the old first and building became the family home. There had been used in the war, and the old first and building became the family home.

There was no running water so they had a well and an outdoor. In summer the well would dry up so they carried water in containers from town. Isabel's children walked two kilometers on a plank road, rain or shine, to attend school. They often encountered wild cows on their walks. Isabel started going to PTA meetings to become involved in the community and meet other parents. The meetings were at night so she had to carry a lantern to light the way. One stormy night she battled her way home against a S.E. gale to discover that her husband had not returned from fishing. Robert's boat had capsized in the waves and he had to swim to shore clinging to a hatch cover. He was rescued the next day by a fisherman.

### Living in Ucluelet

When her eldest daughter was in high school, Isabel got a job as a cook at the Ucluelet Lodge. She walked to work every day until roads were built, and then learned to drive at age 40. She worked at the Lodge for 20 years until she left to care for her husband, who had a chronic illness. Robert died in 1982, aged 67. A year later, Isabel built a new house in Spring Cove, where she peacefully tended her garden and cared for her animals. She has cherished her happy life with her children and grandchildren.

In 1988 Prime Minister Brian Mulroney finally issued a formal apology to the Japanese Canadian families displaced during the war, and offered \$21,000 in compensation for all their lost possessions and the terrible upheaval to their lives.

### Armerina Ludlow's UES History Fair Project

"This all started when I was assigned a project for Ucluelet Elementary School's history fair. I like to read about the war and how it affected people. As I researched I realized that I could do my project on the Japanese people who lived right here in Ucluelet. I realized that to do my project on all of Ucluelet during the war would be too big of a topic. That is when I decided to narrow my topic down to just being about Isabel.

I was very fortunate to be able to talk to Isabel in person, I learned a lot and I am glad that I chose to do my project on her. I think it is very important that her story is told and made a part of history. I am sure there are many people who will find her life as fascinating as I did." — Armerina Ludlow 2008

This sign was sponsored by the Ucluelet and Area Historical Society with financial support from the Province of BC and the BC Museums Association through the BC 150 Celebrating Influential Women, Seniors and Elders program. Images and historical information are care of the Kimoto family.

Graphics by Schramm Design, Ucluelet



# 生活史

Translation: Life story