

Where Tod Was Coming From (Mikuriya Family Values)

Adapted by Mary Jane Mikuriya from a reminiscence filmed by Lincoln Godfrey for a documentary about Tod's life and work. This very informative and moving film can be viewed at <http://drtod.org/>. You don't have to be a psychiatrist to recognize how certain attitudes and themes in Tod's life stem from the Mikuriya family's experience and values.

Mary Jane Mikuriya: Mom and dad got married in 1929. Dad was working for U.S. Steel.

Dad was brought over to the United States by the Lutheran sponsors. When he was five years old he went to a Lutheran missionary school in Japan and was one of their first missionary students. Unlike other people, he didn't come to the USA to become a citizen. He had come to go to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania, where dad and mom met.

Dad had previously graduated from the MIT of Japan and served in the Japanese army in Borneo. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1925, and he married mother in 1929. That was a time when both were working and saving money in the bank.

Dad and mom received a letter from Japan saying that dad's father was very ill with a weak heart and advising dad to come home. As the oldest son of a Samurai family, it was his duty to light the funeral pyre under his father. Dad had been raised all his life to know that that was his duty. Thus it was that after dad and mother got married, they went to live in Japan.

Dad had a good job in Yokohama as an engineer. However, while in Japan, there was a stock market crash in the USA and they learned their money was in banks that had "failed."

Mother, who had left home when 14, worked her way through school, college and graduate school. Mother was getting acquainted with her new Japanese family. She said she wanted to learn Japanese manners. She asked "What do I call my husband (in Japanese)?" They told her the Japanese words and she asked "What does that mean?" My father translated "That means 'my lord and master.'" Mom's surprised reaction was "I'm not going to call him that! Why would I call him my lord and master? I'm never going to do that!"

This was the first indication of the kind of woman that the oldest son of this Samurai family had married.

If grandma Mikuriya thought she was going to have a nice daughter-in-law who she could direct, it soon became clear that mother would not be that person. Grandma Mikuriya was deeply disappointed that her oldest son's wife would not be there to do her bidding as was the Japanese custom. This was quite a shock to this strong matriarch of the Mikuriya family.

Mother taught English, and she tried to fit in. It was very hard for her to fit in. Being five feet ten and a half inches tall,



TOD AT TWO with parents and sister Mary Jane.

nothing fit. They had to have a special futon made for her because she was too tall. The standard-sized *zoris* didn't fit her, her feet were too big. The *kimonos* which can be shortened or lengthened under the broad belt *obi* were not available in her size. Everything had to be especially designed and made for mom.

Mom and dad had their own house in Yokohama and were adjusting to a Japanese life together. After Grandpa Mikuriya died and after mom became pregnant with Tod, mom and dad saw the war coming and decided they didn't want to be in Japan during the war. Dad had already done his military service. Government officials were trying to recruit him for some war project. Dad could see the handwriting on the wall and together he and mom decided to return to the USA for Tod to be born. They felt the great displeasure of the Japanese officials even as they boarded the boat to leave.

Mom and dad had to borrow the



TADAFUMI AND ANNA (SCHWENK) MIKURIYA c. 1930 with family friends in Yokohama.

money to come back to this country in 1933 —the year that Tod was born. The depression was on and it was difficult for a non-citizens to get a job. The Immigration Act of 1924, which included the Asian Exclusion Act, made it so dad could not become a citizen. The family of three relied on the kindness of our mother's family. Our parents moved from place to place as my father looked for engineering work.

When mother was very pregnant with me she begged an uncle —the brother of her American mother who administered the Works Project Administration in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—to help her husband get a job. Dad was given an engineering job in the WPA along with other unemployed engineers.

Mother, who loved reading had found a used book on how a family of four can live on two acres, grow all its vegetables



THE MIKURIYAS' HOUSE in Fallsington, Pennsylvania, as seen from the yard.

Mother, who loved reading had found a used book on how a family of four can live on two acres, grow all its vegetables and raise chickens and be self sufficient.

and raise chickens and be self sufficient. She studied every word and those ideas became our family's blueprint for the next 15 years. This was the dream for the family of four when Dad was transferred as an engineer to the American Bridge Company in Trenton, New Jersey.

Right across the Delaware River from Trenton was Pennsylvania. The historic town of Fallsington (population 500) was where in 1938 our parents bought a run-down, 200-year-old split-log farmhouse on two acres for \$4,000. I was four and Tod was five.

There was no heating system and no running water when we moved into our new log cabin house. I remember dad in his rubber boots digging out the cellar. Mother had made a deal with Sears and Roebuck. Sears lent us a wood-burning stove on the promise to buy a forced-air furnace from Sears when a cellar was dug. Mother and dad spent every evening digging out the basement to hold a forced-air furnace and a room to hold the coke (coal) for the furnace.

I remember we pumped the handle of the pump and the water flowed into a big bucket. Mother put the bucket of water on the Sears woodburning stove where it was heated. The hot water was poured into a great big round tub. We'd take turns having our bath in the large tub. That was the Japanese-style bath we used in Fallsington.

Dad was raised as a Sumarai but learned how to work with his hands. And he learned how to do construction work including roofing, painting, plumbing and electrical.

Dad had a family project every weekend for all four of us. Tod and I were always part of the family work crew. We learned how to mix cement and build foundations, feed and water 500 chickens, weed and tend the garden, help with plumbing to install a kitchen and bathroom. I can remember lifting

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stones up onto the windowsill that dad was using to make a fireplace. We began as helpers and eventually became skilled members of the family weekend work crew.

Dad and mother together became a great team. They learned how to be Americans together. They learned to be home builders. By reading Department of Agriculture publications, they became chicken farmers with 18 goats and eight hives of bees. They were environmentally aware, organic fruit and vegetable farmers.

Mother was a trained scientist and researcher. She would expect her children to be keen observers and resourceful individuals. Our Dad would use the dinner table conversations to challenge our thinking, asking questions for which there were no right or wrong answers.

Mother's American mother said that a person could not be heard by society unless they had perfect manners and perfect English with an extensive vocabulary. Mother used the *Reader's Digest* to develop Tod's vocabulary. Perfect English usage was essential to her. Tod was a handful as he became outspoken for the rights of others, articulate, a good researcher in studying everything and trying/testing everything.

The day everything changed

The radio announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor and that's the day that changed my life forever.

We were in a community where we felt the propaganda of the second world war. It was "Hate the Germans, hate the Japanese." And there we were in person. There was dad, the only Oriental anyone had ever met, and he happened to be Japanese. And they'd call us "Jap," all the time. They'd make fun of us, shun and intimidate us.

Mother's maiden name was Schwenk. She had a German father and remembered being discriminated against during the First World War because of her German background. So she knew what was going to happen to her children. Mother would go to the German grandparents who lived through the First World War and plead with them to discourage their grandchildren from continually beating up Tod and me. But their children did not feel German and their grandchildren were Americans now. There was nothing our parents could do to protect us from the harassment and bullying encouraged by the hate mongering war propaganda that was on the radio, in print, in schools, and in action in the community.

Tod always said that if you can overcome your difficulties, you become a stronger person better able to deal with problems in life.



SISTER BEVERLY had joined the crew and Tod was a Cub Scout when this picture was made in 1944.

