



May Ikemi was born on April 5, 1925 in Rosamond, California. She was the fourth child Shojiro and Kiri Matsubara. They already had two girls, Naoko and Yoneko and a boy Shiyoichi also known as George. The older siblings were born in Montebello, California. May was born after the family had moved to the Lancaster area to start an alfalfa farm. Another son, Shoji, and a daughter Rose followed May.

May attended Rogers Elementary School. Rogers is gone now. It burned down. She then went to Antelope Valley Joint Union High School. The appearance of this school has changed. It has lost its second floor.

May recalled that life in Lancaster was hard. It was windy at times and dry. There was some rain, but irrigation water had to be pumped. She and her brothers and sisters helped on the alfalfa farm after school. They used horses for much of the work because there was very little machinery available and it was costly. She said that she and her brothers and sisters took turns riding the one bicycle that they shared. They grew some fruits and vegetables. What little they grew was good. Her father Shojiro died in Lancaster before the start of the war.

She was in her junior year of high school when World War II broke out. The Matsubara family was removed to the internment camp in Poston Arizona. May recently wrote, “As the years went by –in 1942 the war came. The government put us in camp. I guess they were afraid we might do something. although we always stood for U.S. We had to ride a bus all the way—Poston, Arizona. Another hot and dusty place. At times we would get dust storm plus sand with it. We assign to barracks—had to fill the mattress with straw so we could sleep on better than just a spring . We all ate in the mess hall. One thing I remember was lamb stew with lots of curry powder.”

She finished high school in camp with the class of 1943. The Bureau of Indian Affairs issued her diploma. She worked for the camp elementary school office. Then, she left camp with a couple of friends to work in a home in Peoria, Illinois. After that she moved to Chicago to join her mother and younger sister who had moved there from Camp. By that time, her brothers were already serving in the Army.

When they were allowed to return to California, May’s family chose to live in Los Angeles because her older brother George was already there. After the return to California, May met her future husband Kozo. She had never seen him in Camp. A few years later in 1950, May and Kozo went to Las Vegas to be married. During the first years of her married life, May worked odd jobs as Kozo started to build up his business rebuilding engines.

In 1952, May and Kozo had their first child Roberta. Douglas followed in 1954. Robin, the baby of the family, was born in 1959. May then devoted her life to raising her children.

When Robin was in the 4th or 5th grade, May began working at Rowan Avenue School, first as an educational aide then as an office worker. Robin always reminds Doug and Roberta how tough it was to have a mother on campus who demanded more homework for her child and was constantly monitoring her school activities.



On Christmas 1982, May became gravely ill with a virus that paralyzed her. She was hospitalized for 49 days, never knowing if she would be able to take of herself and her family again. She had to go through rehabilitation to relearn all of her normal activities including taking care of herself and her family. Over 20 years later, she still felt the nerve damage that affected her beautiful handwriting and other movements.

When May retired from working at Rowan Avenue School, May and Kozo were inseparable. She rode behind him on his motorcycles. She went fishing with him. May even learned how to play golf to keep Kozo company on the greens where they rarely kept score and skipped the holes that they did not like.

When Kozo died on January 3, 2004 she lost the love of her life. However, she continued to worry and provide guidance for her children whether or not they were listening. This year she was very happy with her successful cataract surgeries. She enjoyed riding to her appointments viewing all of the changes in Los Angeles. On June 20th, the summer solstice, May suffered a massive stroke. She succumbed to the effects of the stroke on the evening of June 21. Yet, she is not gone. She left a legacy of memories and wisdom.

Roberta's Memories

My most vivid memories come from my high school years. I hated high school, because the school seemed more interested in keeping students docile and compliant. My mother was the perfect antidote to this problem. There was no teacher or administrator too big or too tough to make accountable for my education. She cornered numerous counselors until they complied with her demands for college preparatory classes. Whenever I said I would call my mom, most administrators would try to avoid that consequence. But, she was not indulging my whims. She made sure that I attended tutoring when I was struggling in chemistry. She made sure that I took the SAT on time so I would be able to apply for college. There were no excuses. I was not allowed to say, "I can't." In this day and age, my mom would have been classified as a terrorist.

Around my 25th wedding anniversary, my mother said, "I have to say that Kozo and I thought your marriage wouldn't last more than five years." Yes, she was always honest, sometimes brutally honest.

I learned how to shoot rubber bands, shoot paperclips and paper planes at poor unsuspecting teachers, catch lizards, and kill spiders from my mom. Like a ninja, she could grab an annoying fly out of the air.

From both of my parents, I have learned to be a fighter, to stand up for my rights and those of anyone who cannot advocate for him or herself. I have learned from them to be honest in my reflections about my conduct and moral thinking. I am now trying to pass on this legacy to all of my students. Thank you, Mom and Dad. You made me who I am. I am humbled by what you have done for me, yet puzzled by who you were.

Doug's Memories:

Mom was always willing to sacrifice everything for her kids. I'll always remember how



she skipped buying a dress so she could get me a birthday present. In retrospect I don't understand how she put up with some of the things we did.

I was amazed at how many people in the neighborhood thought well of her and asked after her health.

She may have been misguided and misinformed at times, or quite often, but she always made a positive impression on people.

My father said she was a good woman, but pathologically jealous. He said that I was a fool to try arguing with her.

Up to the end she had a bright smile whenever she enjoyed something, like a Del Taco bean burrito (much better than Taco Bell in her opinion) or a blended coffee drink.

She loved bananas and tried to force me to eat them. Shortly before the end she decided that she didn't like bananas anymore. She made great salmon patties.

She liked hummingbirds and detested pigeons.

She discovered Thai food late in life and wished that Dad had had a chance to try it, too. She dearly loved her brothers and sisters and missed them very much. She was sad that her only grandchildren were dogs. Dogs loved her.

She wished that she had paid better attention in school.

She didn't seem to understand that drinking water is necessary for survival. She ended up going to the hospital more than once due to dehydration. I don't know how she survived growing up in Lancaster. A few years ago I got her to show me the location of the farm where she grew up. It looked like Tatooine from Star Wars. She said it had been green and beautiful when her parents had worked it.

She said I had too many motorcycles, but thought that the latest addition to my stable was kind of cute since it was small (I didn't explain to her that it was the fastest one). She never tried to stop me from doing anything (including flying and scuba diving) and always said we should go out and try everything and meet different people. She thought the worst and best of people.

She never believed anything I told her, and wouldn't follow my advice, which shows that she wasn't that stupid. She did learn to drink Gatoraid.

She expected you to read her mind. She never complained when she should have.

She hated her hearing aids and walking sticks, but learned to live with her walker. She preferred to have it repaired rather than replaced when it wore out. She couldn't understand satellite TV nor DVD players. She dearly loved the little portable radio she found at Fry's.

She told me I planted too many roses, but liked the flowers. She had advice for everything, including subjects about which she knew nothing.

She had a sense of humor and could take a joke and return one.

She used to enjoy beating Porsches off the line with the Chevy she inherited from her brother George. I never realized how much she enjoyed driving until now. She never learned how to drive a stick.

There are still so many things I'd like to ask her.

Robin's Memories:

My mother was vivacious, witty, honest, fun, and very devoted to her family. The time



I'd spent with my mother while growing up was very special. Although she preferred doing other things besides housework, she'd take the time out to bake . One of my fondest memories includes the time she took to bake from scratch Christmas-tree shaped sugar cookies for my classmates when I was in elementary school at Rowan Ave. It was quite a process - she'd make and roll out the dough, I'd help her cut the cookies out with a cookie cutter and after they were baked, we'd ice and decorate them. Then each cookie would be neatly wrapped in a wax-paper bag and they'd all be placed in a big box so I could carry them to school to share with my classmates. My mother also taught me to how to make paper airplanes, how to shoot rubber bands with one hand, took me to the symphony, to museums, and would play catch with me. We'd also go shopping together in downtown L.A., in the days before malls. I remember how she'd get dressed up on a Saturday morning and we'd venture to downtown L.A. where we'd crisscross streets, going from May Company to Ohrbach's, to Broadway and other department stores where she'd go searching for bargains. My mother was quite a wiz with the sewing machine and would make my clothes. She made cute dresses and outfits that I wore to school. My mother always supported me, was always there for me, got mad at me when I needed it, especially in my teen-age years, and gave me *mostly* unconditional love.

The greatest lessons I'd learned from my mother (and father) were to always be kind and respectful of people and that there are no limits as to what you can do as long as you apply yourself.

It would take a lifetime to describe her complex, contradictory being with any precision.