

HIDDEN HISTORY

A Record of the Nagano Family and Their Upbringings in Morro Bay

The Nagano story in Morro Bay is one of immigration, internment, and success, and is a wonderful example of a community helping one of its members during hard times. Their journey starts in Japan, where Yoshio Eto was born in 1888. Yoshio lived in Mexico and California for about 10 years before returning to Japan to marry in 1916. There he married Kanaru Tsunoda, and the couple took the last name Nagano. Yoshio and Kanaru had five children soon after their arrival to Morro Bay.



Yoshio "George" 1912



George, Nellie, Ellen, Patrick, and William



Photo from SLO Railroad Museum



Photo of Nellie with Doris Aiso 1930

In 1917, the Naganos settled in Morro Bay and started a farm. Their crops mainly consisted of lettuce, brussel sprouts, and artichokes; they occasionally grew flowers, broccoli, and peas (pea crates shown below) as well.¹



Being in California, the Nagano family took on some American pastimes.² Patrick recalled in an interview in 1996 that his father Yoshio enjoyed golf, hunting, fishing, and that the family celebrated holidays such as Memorial Day and Thanksgiving.



Nonetheless the family maintained their Japanese ways such as Buddhism, Shintoism and Japanese cuisine. Besides 'regular' school, children attended Japanese School at the Eto farm the Los Osos.



George's son Kent believes that at this point, "the family has been away from Japan for over 100 years, so we are real Americans: third and fourth generation Californians now."³ In 1942 the family was forced to leave Morro Bay due to Executive Order 9066. This order was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt and came after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.⁴ The document ordered the relocation of Japanese immigrants (as well as some Italian and German Americans), no matter their citizenship status. Yoshio Nagano was relocated to the internment camp in Bismarck, North Dakota, and then sent to Santa Fe, New Mexico. William was drafted into the military. Kanaru evacuated to Reedley, California with Nellie and George before being sent to the Poston Relocation Center in Arizona later that year. Ellen was taken to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming with her husband. Patrick briefly stayed in Morro Bay to settle family affairs before going to Reedley. Luckily for the Naganos, the farm was taken good care of while they were gone. Patrick mentions in the 1996 interview that a Swiss family bought the property next to the Nagano's in the 1920s.⁵ He recalls them being very nice and says that they were dairymen. They were especially supportive and caring during this time, and they slept every night at the Nagano farm because they were afraid of vandalism.



Ann & Patrick Nagano with Karen

Patrick shares that “when the war ended, we came back. The place was spic-and-span. Everything was just like we left it. If they had not chosen to come and stay here, I’m sure that there would have been some vandalism. They’re special people.” In addition to the next door dairymen, there was help from a man named Mr. Vollmer. According to Patrick, Mr. Vollmer was a well-known businessman in San Luis Obispo who had a lot of respect for the Nagano family and especially liked Yoshio. He handled the business side of the farm from 1942 to 1945.

The Nagano’s connection with the neighbors did not end after they returned to Morro Bay. After the war, Patrick was partners with Lucille, the daughter of the neighboring Swiss family in a couple of business endeavors. Yoshio moved to his property in Los Angeles, while Pat, Bill, and Nellie moved back to the farm. George went to Cal Berkeley for his degree in Architecture.⁶ After finishing his degree he moved back to the farm to practice architecture while farming. Bill farmed the land until 1976, after which they converted the farmland to estates. Pat also became a school board member for twenty years, for both the Morro Elementary and San Luis Coastal Unified School Districts. He also ran a restaurant called “Roses Landing” from 1967-1988. Patrick ends an article he wrote with this quote: “In retrospect, in what might have been a very mundane life, the war and evacuation was a bitter sweet interlude.”⁷

Although Yoshio and Kanaru’s five children have all passed away, the Nagano name lives on. Karen Nagano, Patrick’s daughter, is an artist in Napa Valley and married to fellow artist Rick Deragon.⁸ She offers art and creativity workshops each summer with Rick in southern France. Kent Nagano graduated from UC Santa Cruz and double majored in sociology and music.⁹ He is now a highly respected and popular conductor of symphonies and operas in Hamburg, Germany and Montreal, Canada. Kent is married to pianist Mari Kodama and his family legacy continues with his daughter Karin Kei Nagano, who is currently a world class pianist at the age of 21. Nancy Nagano lives in Morro Bay and plays cello in the San Luis Obispo Symphony and directs the SLO Youth Symphony.¹⁰

FOOTNOTES

1 Castle, Roger, et al. *Morro Bay*. Arcadia Pub., 2010.

2 Nagano, Patrick. “An Interview with Pat Nagano, Cal Poly Senior Project,” by Johnson, Dorris L, 28 May 1996, pp. 1–68. Accessed 30 Apr. 2019.

3 Nagano, Kent. “To Morro Bay.” *To Morro Bay*, 2019, kentnagano.com/to-morro-bay.

4 “FDR Orders Japanese Americans into Internment Camps.” *HISTORY*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Nov. 2009, www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fdr-signs-executive-order-9066.

5 “An interview with Pat Nagano”

6 “An interview with Pat Nagano”

7 Nagano, Pat. “Japanese Relocation and Evacuation on the Central Coast in 1942.” *The Pat Nagano Story*, Old Morro Bay, www.oldmorrobay.com/nagano.html.

8 Nagano, Karen. “KAREN NAGANO • ART.” *KAREN NAGANO • ART*, www.karennagano.com/.

9 Linn, Sarah. “6 Pianos, 4 Homes, Scores of Followers. How He Went from Surfer to World-Class Conductor.” *Sanluisobispo*, San Luis Obispo Tribune, 10 Nov. 2017, www.sanluisobispo.com/entertainment/music-newsreviews/article183720996.html.

10 Team Shasta. “Nagano History Interview With Glenn.” 2 May 2019.

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Filipino and Japanese farm workers loading pea crates : Nagano Farm, Morro Bay. 1925. Calisphere, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/c8j67fq0/?query=nagano&brand=calisphere>.

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Mr. Nakamura, Sam Rokutani, Mr. Nakamura and Patrick Nagano at Camp Savage, MN. 1942. Calisphere, <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/c8f47mx4/>.

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