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## [Documentary to Tell Story of Mother and Daughter Who Helped Internees](#)

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Ruth Mix at age 15, one week before starting work at Gila.

SACRAMENTO — Claire Mix, an elementary school music teacher and choral director in Elk Grove, is producing a documentary about her mother's experience working in an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II.

In the fall of 1942, Ruth Mix began volunteering on weekends as a nurse's aide at Butte Camp Hospital at Gila River Relocation Center in Arizona. During the summer months, she volunteered full-time and lived on-site in a barrack with her mother.

Ruth's mother, Frida Mix, was employed as a school teacher for the Japanese American children. Frida was incensed by the internment and gave up a teaching position in Washington to help make life more bearable at Gila River.

"We must make right a terrible wrong," Frida told Ruth as they rode a military bus into the prison camp for Ruth's first day at the hospital.

Ruth was the only Caucasian nurse's aide among an all-Japanese American staff. She learned Japanese in order to communicate with her Issei patients.

Ruth, stood 5 feet, 8 inches tall with bright red hair and was often referred to in Japanese as "The tall girl whose hair touches the sun," as well as "The girl with hair like the sun."

Despite the rule that Caucasians were forbidden to fraternize with the internees, Ruth secretly made many friends.

### **New Life — and Death**

Primarily assigned to the Maternity Unit, Ruth found herself in the receiving position numerous times as she assisted in the birthing of babies. Some survived; many did not.

In the Women's Medical Unit, Ruth bonded to one patient in particular, who was fighting an infection. Ruth adored her, never leaving her side. They spoke with one another for hours, long after Ruth's shift ended, about life, love and family. Four weeks later, the woman died.

During Ruth's first year at Gila River, she saw the deplorable living condition. Wanting to help in any way she could, she started to smuggle basic amenities such as soap into camp. She also brought in film for cameras, which was considered contraband at the time.

Eventually, her mother, as well as many other Caucasian employees, joined in Ruth's effort and helped many families.

What makes Ruth's story so unique is the fact that she was only 15 years old at the time.

Before the war ended, Ruth was sent away from Gila against her will. Because of the very dusty environment, she suffered a dangerous lung infection that almost took her life.

Frida continued their work and stayed until the last Japanese American was freed.

Claire Mix has written a screenplay about her mother's experience entitled "The Girl With Hair Like the Sun." She is currently penning a book with greater detail that couldn't be included in the script.

### **A Secret and a Surprise**

Claire was unaware of her mother's experience until the early 1970s. Together, they attended a lecture in San Jose by actor George Takei, who currently appears in the hit TV show "Heroes." Takei and his family were interned at Rohwer in Arkansas.

At first Claire was under the impression that her mother was taking her to meet her favorite actor, who played Mr. Sulu on "Star Trek." But she quickly learned that this was no science-fiction convention.

After the lecture, Takei and Ruth spoke privately for quite some time about the internment. It was that talk that released Ruth's memories of Gila — memories she had blocked out because of her guilt that she could not do more.

Ruth had asked that Claire not write about her experiences until, in 2005, Ruth was diagnosed with breast cancer for the third time. Ruth asked Claire to try to find people who were at Gila River that might remember her and her mother, Frida.

Claire has already contacted some individuals, but any Gila River internee, relative of an internee or relative of one of the teachers in the camp school is asked to contact her at [thesolo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:thesolo@sbcglobal.net).

### **Re-enactment in Sacramento**

The local Asian American community is coming together to help Mix film re-enactments of camp life for a documentary titled "Gila River and Mama." Shooting begins on Dec. 29 at the California Museum, which has a replica of internment camp barracks.

"I just wanted to paint a more clear picture of my mother's and grandmother's experiences," she explained.

Mix, who spoke at Franklin High School this week, told the Hokubei Mainichi that she was touched by the "outpouring of love" from the community.

She noted that Asian American kids were not only excited to appear in the film as internees but were also talking about holding some kind of fundraiser. "I feel like I'm going to cry," she said.

Mix stressed that Asian Americans of all ethnicities, such as Korean, Chinese and Hmong, were as passionate about the project as Japanese Americans are.

She added that Caucasian kids are also doing everything they can to help out, although in some cases that means playing people who supported the internment.

Mix is pleased that today's young generations can be "so involved in something that happened 60 years ago."

For information on donating to the project and to see video from the documentary, visit the website at <http://ruthmix.claireremix.com/>.

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