



# Dear Gloria: Homesick for America in Wartime Japan

*Toneko Kimura Hirai, Taro Kimura*

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Dear Gloria is the diary of a Japanese teenager, Toneko Kimura, written in the form of letters to her childhood best friend Gloria Goodman. Toneko started the diary after leaving America, where she had been living since she was five years old. The impending war led many Japanese nationals to return "home," although it was a barely remembered home for Toneko. She could speak only elementary Japanese, preferred Western clothing, and wrote her diary in English. She thought like an American, spoke like an American, and behaved like an American. Along with other returnees, Toneko was forced to go to a special school that reintegrated children into Japanese culture, language, and society.

Her fluency in English was first scorned, but became a sought-after skill in wartime Japan. At seventeen she was recruited to act in Japanese propaganda radio programs transmitted in English to American forces in the Pacific, much like the infamous "Tokyo Rose." She used the opportunity to reach out to America again, hoping that Gloria was somehow listening across the sea.

After the bombing of Hiroshima and the Emperor's surrender, Toneko felt torn by her divided loyalties. Japan was no longer at war with America, but for the first time Toneko felt she was betraying her country by harboring love for America. She stopped addressing her diary entries to Gloria and began to write exclusively in Japanese. Soon after, Toneko's bilingual abilities were called upon again, this time by the American army of occupation to serve as an interpreter for the Yokohama War Crimes Trials. Still just a teenager, Toneko sat in the courtroom with the accused Japanese officers and translated the proceedings and verdicts to them. Working for U.S. forces and flirting with handsome GIs, Toneko felt the pull of American culture once again. In a tempestuous time, Toneko's diary captures the fascinating love triangle between a teenage girl and two nations at war.

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