

Story of Japanese-American civil-rights pioneer shared at South San Francisco High assembly

By Neil Gonzales
ngonzales@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: 05/11/2011 04:22:08 PM PDT

Updated: 05/11/2011 11:40:49 PM PDT

Karen Korematsu urged students at South San Francisco High School on Wednesday to speak up and fight against injustice.

That's what her father, Fred Korematsu, did when the U.S. government forced his and other Japanese-American families into internment camps during World War II.

"Prejudice is ignorance," said Karen Korematsu, 60, of San Rafael. "That's why it's important "... to share your stories and share stories you've heard."

Karen Korematsu discussed her father's story during a student assembly, bringing to life part of Asian-American civil-rights history. Her visit coincided with Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, which is recognized in May.

"Fred Korematsu's story is part of the social studies curriculum," South San Francisco High teacher Ashley Gray noted. "To be able to have (his daughter) as a guest speaker brings history alive for the students."

In 1942, Oakland-born Fred Korematsu, then 23, refused to go to the internment camps. He was arrested and convicted of defying the government's order. He ended up being sent to the camps anyway but appealed his case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The high court ruled against him in 1944, however, finding that the incarceration was justified because of military necessity. Decades later, a legal team of mostly Japanese-American lawyers reopened his

case on the basis of government misconduct. In November 1983, a federal court in San Francisco

overturned his conviction.

"He felt like what the government did was wrong," Karen Korematsu said of the internment. "He thought it was unconstitutional. He thought what he did was right. He ended up with a felony record all those years. I could see the pain in his eyes."

After being vindicated, Fred Korematsu dedicated himself to educating others about the internment camps and helped raise civil-rights awareness by giving speeches at schools, his daughter said.

"He felt like in order for (internment) to never happen again, education is really the key," Karen Korematsu told the students. "It's the best weapon we have."

Fred Korematsu remained a civil-rights activist throughout his life. In 1998, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom -- the nation's highest civilian honor -- by President Bill Clinton.

Fred Korematsu's struggles and triumphs inspired the students at South San Francisco High.

Victor Fung, a 17-year-old senior, said the civil-rights hero was valiant. "In a country that expected him to fall, he chose to stand back up," the teen said.

Fellow senior Kathleen Vidallo, 18, said Karen Korematsu's talk was "inspirational and

Get a FREE ADT-Monitored Home Security System.*

(With \$99 customer installation and purchase of ADT alarm monitoring services. See important terms and conditions below.)

Call Now! 1-877-835-8373

SECURITY CHOICE 
ADT Authorized Company

*\$99.00 Customer Installation Charge. 36-Month Monitoring Agreement required at \$35.99 per month (\$1,295.64). Form of payment must be by credit card or electronic charge to your checking or savings account. Offer applies to homeowners only. Local permit fees may be required. Satisfactory credit history required. Certain restrictions apply. Offer valid for new Security Choice - An ADT Authorized Dealer customers only and not on purchases from ADT Security Services, Inc. Other rate plans available. Cannot be combined with any other offer. **\$100 VISA® Gift Card Offer: \$100 VISA Gift Card is provided by Security Choice and is not sponsored by ADT Security Services. Requires mail-in redemption. Call 1-888-407-2338 for complete restrictions and redemption requirements.

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

encouraging."

South San Francisco Unified board member Liza Normandy, who initiated the effort to bring Karen Korematsu to the school, said she hopes the event helps the students find the "strength to follow the laws and the courage to protest against the unjust."

Contact Neil Gonzales at 650-348-4338.



Send flowers
for any occasion
Bouquets
from **\$19.99**
+s/h

ProFlowers[®]
Offer ONLY available at:
proflowers.com/happy
or call 1.877.804.1133

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™